



Northern Illinois University

Analyzing Academic Equity Gaps Among Undergraduate Students with Disabilities

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Introduction

- ❖ Academic equity gaps in college have been examined based on demographic variables such as race/ethnicity, first-generation, etc.
 - ❖ These studies prompted the current study.
- ❖ In Fall 2016, a comparison of students with disabilities (SWDs) and students without disabilities (SWODs) found that performance gaps existed in specific undergraduate courses, as well as persistence.
 - ❖ Course success was defined as receiving an A, B, or C grade.
- ❖ Fall 2015-Fall 2016, 27% of SWODs and 40% of SWDs (new freshmen) did not return for their sophomore year. 13% gap in persistence.

- ❖ Fall 2016, SWDs in the following undergraduate subjects were found to be underperforming compared to SWODs: Accounting, English, Family Studies, Classical Studies, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Statistics
- ❖ Limited literature on the topic of academic equity gaps. Factors may include:
 - ❖ Impact of disability
 - ❖ Disability support services (DSS)
 - ❖ Other institutional services
 - ❖ Course instructors
 - ❖ Academic accommodations
 - ❖ Learning Management Systems (Blackboard)

Research Questions

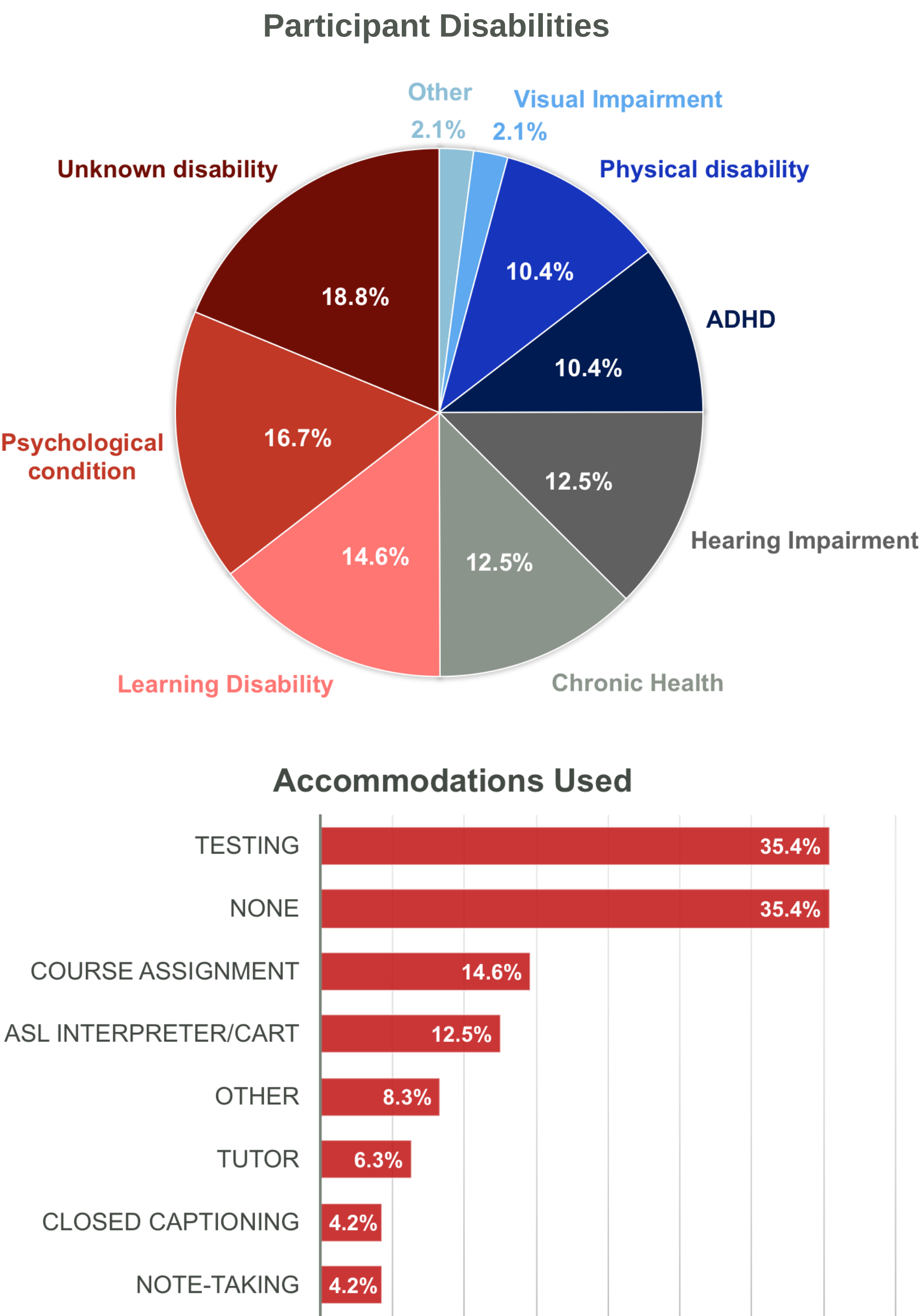
1. What are potential factors influencing academic performance gaps among college SWDs?
2. What are the potential factors influencing freshman SWDs not to return for their sophomore year?

Methods

- ❖ A mixed methods online survey was e-mailed to 232 undergraduate students registered with disability support services (DSS) at a 4-year public university.
 - ❖ 48 students completed the survey. 20% response rate.
- ❖ Quantitative Data was compiled into SPSS and analyzed using descriptive, correlational, and linear regression analysis.
- ❖ 2 students provided additional information by participating in a focus group.
 - ❖ After analyzing qualitative data, significant statements were included in the results.

Results Demographics

- ❖ Participants (N=48) were 66.7% female, 14.6% male, 18.8% unknown sex
- ❖ 52.1% White non-Hispanic, 16.7% Black non-Hispanic, 8.3% Hispanic, 2.1% Two or more races, 2.1% Non-resident alien, 18.8% unknown race/ethnicity
- ❖ 37.5% were freshman, 25% sophomore, 8.3% junior, 10.4% senior, 18.8% unknown class
- ❖ Average letter grade earned (n=35) = “B”

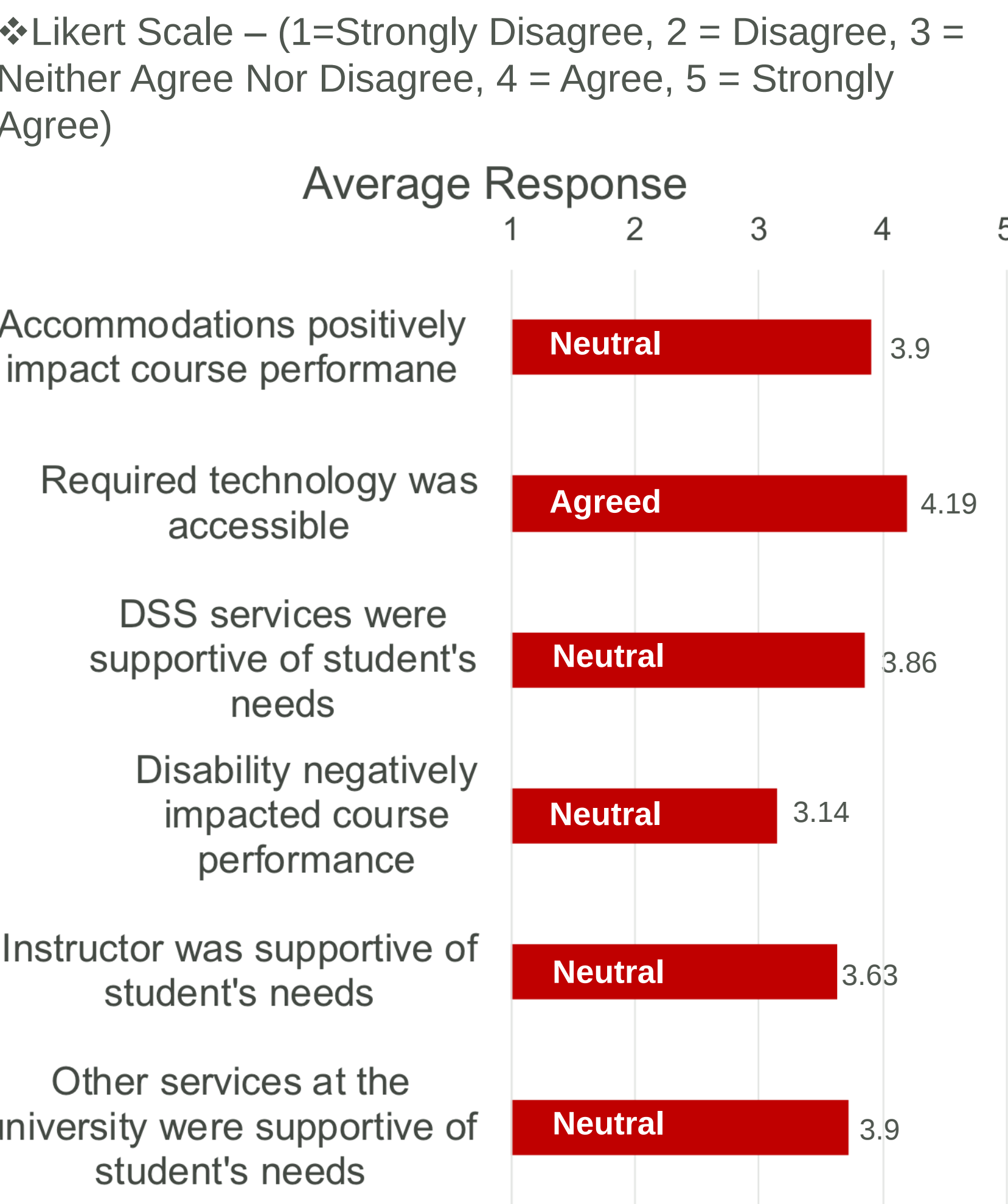


“They need to be understanding of mental illness in particular, because physical disabilities—you can see them—so you can accommodate them easily, but I felt like my mental illness was overlooked and questioned.”

Results

Research Question #1

Descriptive Statistics



Correlational and Linear Regression Analysis

- ❖ Use of various accommodations and services not significantly correlated with grade achieved.
- ❖ For every 1 unit increase in belief that **accommodations** positively impacted course performance, predicted a 1.84 unit increase in grade achieved. (n=21)
- ❖ For every 1 unit increase in belief that **instructor** has been supportive, predicted a 0.85 unit decrease in grade achieved. (n=21)
- ❖ On average, Freshman (n=18) *agreed* (M=4.18) they would return for Spring 2018 semester.
 - ❖ 88% did return for Spring semester

Research Question #2

“My teacher doesn’t have much time for people that are not comprehending the material.”

Acknowledgements

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Discussion

- ❖ Accommodations in testing were the most common.
 - ❖ 35.4% (n=17) used no accommodations.
- ❖ Students provided mostly *neutral* responses related to factors that may impact academic success.
 - ❖ **Accommodations** and **Technology** had the highest average scores.
- ❖ Students who felt they benefitted from **accommodations** were predicted to earn higher grades in courses.
 - ❖ However, **instructor** support was predictive of lower grades.
- ❖ The sample size was too small to make definitive conclusions and recommendations.

“I used the extended time on assignments so having that really combatted the symptoms of my disability.”

Limitations

- ❖ A small number of participants in both the survey (N=48) and the focus group (N=2) limit the generalization of this data.
 - ❖ Some students in the study were in multiple targeted courses and completed multiple surveys.
- ❖ Survey data was based on self-report. Students may have been hesitant to respond according to true beliefs.
- ❖ Response rate was low.
- ❖ We identified courses based on previous equity group studies. Additional courses may need to be explored.

Recommendations

- ❖ A multi-institutional study is recommended to replicate and expand the current study with a larger sample size.
- ❖ Longitudinal studies across students’ undergraduate careers are recommended to explore reasons for academic equity gaps.
- ❖ Studies are recommended that focus on why SWDs stay in school, while others leave after their freshman year.
 - ❖ Contact and follow up with students who do not return is recommended.
- ❖ Individual postsecondary DSS offices can also replicate the current study for their own institutions.