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# A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Strategies to Enhance Social Outcomes for College Students with Disabilities



INSTITUTE on  
COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>



# Learning Objectives

Attendees will be able to...

- Identify common services provided in colleges and universities that have undergone effectiveness research
- Identify social outcomes associated with these services
- Identify services that may be effective for a diverse group of students with disabilities



# Background

- High prevalence of college students report experiencing psychological distress (76%; American College Health Association, 2023)
  - Students need access to services to support retainment in college.
- Increase in enrollment of students with disabilities (e.g., intellectual and developmental disabilities)
  - Often need support in daily living skills
- Various sources of support provided in colleges/universities to support positive, social outcomes
  - Counseling / therapy supported by the university or through research
  - Post-secondary education programs for students with disabilities




# Gaps in research

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Currently, there is a lack of empirical knowledge regarding


1. The types of services provided in higher education to support social outcomes of college students with disabilities
2. The extent to which different services are evidence-based or promising for improving social outcomes
3. The level at which current research on services in higher education for supporting social outcomes is of high quality





# Systematic Review: Purpose

Conducted a systematic review to explore:

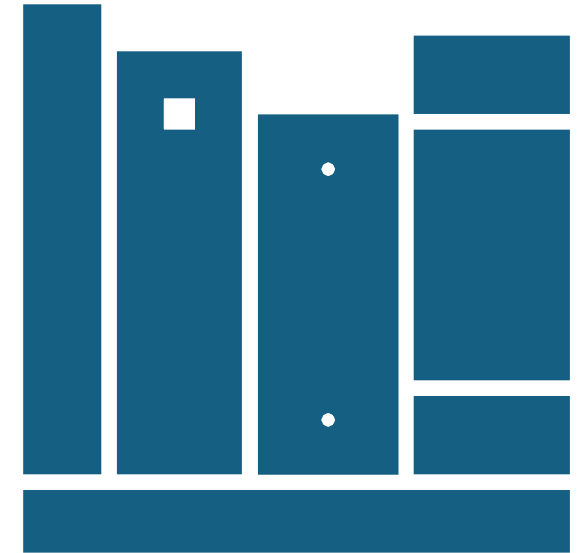
- Empirically evaluated services, supports, and interventions offered in higher education for students with disabilities aimed to improved social outcomes of students with disabilities
  - Characteristics of students who participated in the research
  - Social outcomes associated with tested services, supports, and interventions
  - Degree to which these services, supports, and interventions are empirically supported
  - Overall quality of the research
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# Research questions

- What services, supports, and interventions currently exist in the empirical literature to promote positive social outcomes of students with disabilities in higher education?
- In what type of higher education institutions are these supports being empirically explored?
- What are characteristics of the population samples?
- What social outcomes were evaluated in the research?
- What evidence base exists to support the use of currently existing supports?
- What is the quality of the current literature base?

# Method

- Extracted data from 150 U.S. studies from peer-reviewed journals (published 2015-2024)
- Extracted data included:
  - Services, supports, and intervention that have been evaluated or tested through empirical research
  - Demographics of students with disabilities involved in the research
  - Social outcomes measured
  - Settings in which the research took place
  - Impact of different supports on social outcomes





# Student Participants



- 73% of studies reported race of participants
  - White (Non-Hispanic): 70.67%
  - Black or African American: 46.67%
  - Hispanic or Latine : 43.33%
  - Asian (Hmong, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese): 40%
  - Multiracial: 29.33%
  - American Indian / Alaska Native: 12.67%
  - Pacific Islander: 11.33%
  - Middle East/North Africa: 4.67%



# Student Participants (2)

83% of studies reported age of participants

- Younger than 18 (9.6%)
- 18-22 (93.6%)
- 23-39 (58.4%)
- 30-39 (28.8%)
- 40-49 (11.2%)
- 50+ (4%)

Of the 9,506 student participants with reported sex/gender

- Female (69.83%)
- Male (29.87%)
- Non-binary (2.63%)

## Student Participants (3)

- Of the 108 studies that reported participants' year in school:
  - Freshmen (30%)
  - Sophomores (26.67%)
  - Juniors (25.33%)
  - Seniors (22%)
  - Graduate students (23.33%)
  - Undergraduate students – year unspecified(38%)
  - Junior or senior year in high school (5.33%)



Disability	Percentage of studies
Mental health challenges (e.g., depression, anxiety)	40.00%
Intellectual or developmental disability (including neurodevelopmental disability, Autism, and Asperger)	36.67%
Attention deficit disorder (ADHD)	22.00%
Specific learning disability	9.33%
Post -traumatic stress disorder	8.67%
Physical disability (e.g., cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis)	6.00%
Deafness/hearing loss	5.33%
Traumatic or acquired brain injury (TBI/ABI)	4.00%
Chronic illness	1.33%

Student  
Participants  
(4)

# Settings

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Setting	Percentage of Studies
4-year university	72%
Inclusive post-secondary education program (for students with IDD)	12.67%
Graduate program	6.67%
Community or technical college	4.67%
Separate post-secondary education program (for students with IDD)	4%
High school and/or transition program	3.33%
Non-degree granting programs/certification programs	.67%
State-Approved Alternative Programs (SAAPs)	.67%

# Supports, Services, and Intervention s

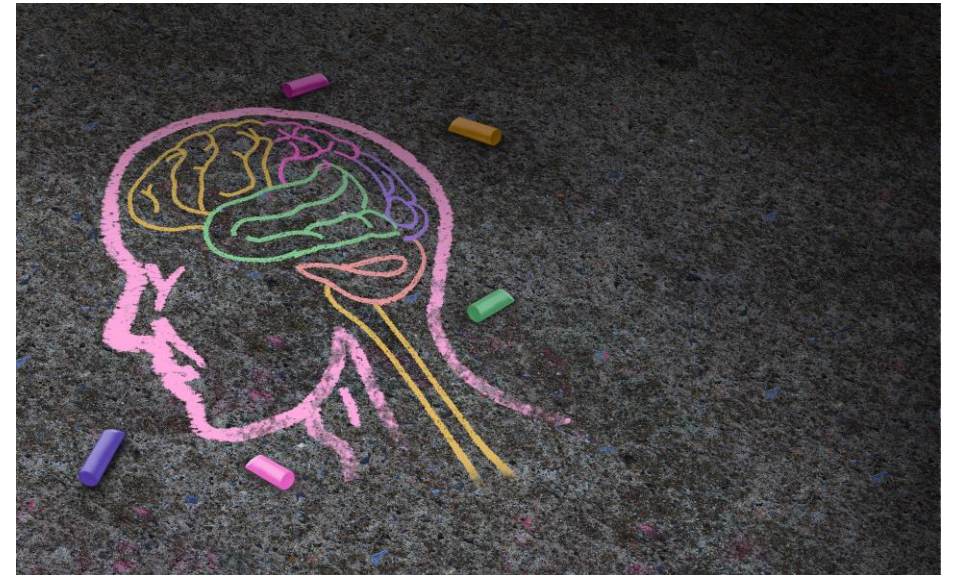
Across 150 studies...

- Neuro, cognitive, behavior-based, and other therapies (44%)
- Skill building / acquisition interventions (26%)
- Mentorship coaching, tutoring and advising programs (28.67%)
- Health and wellness programs (14.67%)
- Inclusion programs, activities, and organizations (9.33%)
- Disability/DRC services and assistive technologies (6.67%)
- Preparation for postsecondary education or employment (4%)
- Faculty / staff development program (2%)



# Outcomes

- Mental health (53.33%)
- Social/emotional wellness (33.33%)
- Social inclusion (28%)
- Independent living (14.67%)
- Self-determination (12.67%)
- Physical wellness (8.67%)





# Efficacy of Supports, Services, Interventions

- Studies demonstrating significant or positive results: 65.33%
- Studies demonstrating mixed results: 56.67%
- Studies demonstrating non-significant results or no impact: 4%



# Quality of Research / Evaluations

Scored all studies based on 6-8 different quality indicators

- Quality of research design
  - Participant representativeness of target population
  - Appropriateness of measures
  - Completeness of outcomes data
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- Percentage of studies that met the majority of indicators: 84.0%%
  - Percentage of studies that met half of the indicators 5.33%
  - Percentage of studies that met less than half of the indicators 10.67%



# Takeaways

- Services, supports, and interventions aimed to support social outcomes in college tested via empirical research primarily with students with ***(1) mental health challenges, (2) intellectual and developmental disabilities, and (3) ADHD.***
- Participants' characteristics vary in their race, age, sex/gender, and year in school.
- Greater number of participants were white and female

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# Takeaways <sup>(2)</sup>

- Research took place primary at 4-year universities with ***mental health outcomes*** and ***social emotional wellness*** being the primary focus.
- Studies primarily demonstrated significant/positive or mixed outcomes.
  - Services, supports, and interventions that have undergone effectiveness research appear to be effective or promising for promoting social outcomes among college students with disabilities
- Research overall appears to be of high quality



# Implications for Future Research

- Future research should include
  - More diverse populations of students
  - Effectiveness of supports, services, and interventions on long-term outcomes (e.g., graduation)
  - More evaluations of faculty training on how to support college students with disabilities
  - Identifying aspects of supports that results in significant/positive versus mixed outcomes





# Discussion Question

What are some common services and supports provided in your college/university that could benefit students who need support with mental health, social/emotional support, social inclusion, or independent living?

- Neuro, cognitive, behavior-based, and other therapies
  - Skill building / acquisition interventions
  - Mentorship coaching, tutoring and advising programs
  - Health and wellness programs
  - Inclusion programs, activities, and organizations Disability/DRC services and assistive technologies Preparation for postsecondary education (PSE) or employment
  - Faculty/staff development program
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