Supporting the Development of Academic Enablers in College Students with an Intellectual Disability

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined supports in inclusive postsecondary education programs (IPSE) that facilitate the development of academic-related behaviors, or academic enabling behaviors (AEB; i.e., interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills). The researchers interviewed 10 IPSE staff using semi-structured interviews and analyzed data using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR). AEB supports existed at the individual, IPSE program, and university levels. Some supports addressed a single academic enabling behavior, and some addressed multiple areas. Six types of support spanned two or more academic enablers: (a) support from peer mentors; (b) support provided by IPSE and other university staff; (c) support related to courses/instruction; (d) opportunities for practice, reinforcement; (e) support related to social/emotional supports; and (f) executive function support. IPSE students can compensate for academic challenges by developing their enabling behaviors, and strong academic enabling behaviors can result in improved academic performance and assist IPSE students in employment and throughout life.

Keywords: inclusive postsecondary education, academic enabler, intellectual disability, interpersonal skills, study skills

There is a growing body of research to guide inclusion and academic instruction for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in K-12 educational contexts. In part, this trend reflects current and historic federal legislation (e.g., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB]), which mandated access to the general education curriculum for elementary and secondary school students with disabilities (Roach et al., 2009). Researchers, educators, and family members historically presumed content-focused instruction for students with ID would end at the conclusion of high school. While IDEA included a provision for educational services until the age of 22 for some students, these extended education programs generally focused on non-academic skills needed for a successful transition to adulthood (e.g., employment readiness, financial literacy, independent living). Until recently, there were limited opportunities for students with ID to access academic coursework in inclusive higher education (Papay & Bambara, 2011). As a result, research is still emerging to inform the successful inclusion for students with ID in higher education classrooms (Becht et al., 2020; Roberts & Roach, 2018).

Inclusive Postsecondary Education

Individuals with disabilities have historically experienced inequities in accessing education in both K-12 settings and higher educational contexts. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and its revisions (i.e., IDEA) ensured equal access to free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities, but only in K-12 settings. Despite protections in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibited the exclusion of people with disabilities in nearly all programs receiving federal

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funding (e.g., colleges and universities), individuals with disabilities remained underrepresented in higher education (Leake & Stodden, 2014). The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 further expanded protections for individuals with disabilities in higher education yet individuals with disabilities, especially students with ID, often had limited access to postsecondary educational opportunities (Lipscomb et al., 2017).

Early efforts to expand postsecondary educational programs for individuals with ID were primarily supported by grassroots advocacy from nonprofit organizations and families seeking specific legislative provisions and targeted federal funding (Grigal et al., 2011). This legislative support was provided through the passage of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) in 2008, which expanded access to postsecondary education for individuals with ID (Lee et al., 2018). The HEOA provided funding to establish projects and programs designed to promote effective teaching practices and educational accessibility for students with ID in postsecondary settings. These grants, known as the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TIPSID) grants, facilitated academic and social inclusion of students with ID at two- and four-year colleges (Madaus et al., 2012). The HEOA also provided a pathway to accessing federal financial aid (e.g., Pell grants, federal work-study) for students in these programs (IPSE; Madaus et al., 2012).

The HEOA also facilitated the creation of a national coordinating center, Think College at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Think College provides technical assistance, training, and evaluations of a network of IPSE programs (Grigal et al., 2011). Today, approximately 300 colleges and universities across the United States offer IPSE programs (Grigal & Papay, 2018). Graduates from these programs experience positive outcomes, such as an increased likelihood of paid employment and independent living, compared to individuals with ID who do not participate in these programs (Grigal et al., 2021). Thus, it appears access to these educational opportunities promotes more equitable academic, career, and social outcomes for individuals with ID.

Academic Enabling Behaviors: Application to Higher Education Contexts

For students with ID, academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics) and content-area knowledge are potential barriers to success in inclusive postsecondary settings. Adolescents and young adults with ID generally demonstrate reading, writing, and mathematics achievement below their same-age peers (Barker et al., 2013; Polo-Blanco et al., 2021). Moreover, students with ID may be inconsistently included in high school social studies and science classes, resulting in missing background knowledge to support their comprehension of college-level academic content (Gilmour et al., 2019). Interventions that remediate these knowledge and skills gaps may be (a) time- and resource-intensive and (b) delivered in ways that limit opportunities for the inclusion of students with ID with their college-aged peers (e.g., separate or segregated coursework). Instead, IPSE programs must focus on building academic-related dispositions, behaviors, and skills that students with ID can leverage to support their success within typical college courses, thereby increasing opportunities for inclusion and future success (Grigal et al., 2022). DiPerna and Elliott's (1999) Academic Competence framework may be useful for meeting these objectives.

Based on a review of empirical research, DiPerna and Elliott (1999, 2001) operationalized academic competence as a multidimensional construct that includes critical skills and behaviors needed to succeed in educational contexts. Through their measurement development and validation efforts, DiPerna and Elliott identified various factors contributing to individuals' academic competence, including academic skills, interpersonal skills, academic engagement, academic motivation, and study skills. Only one of these areas, academic skills, directly reflected students' reading, writing, and mathematics skills and content-area knowledge. The remaining four factors—interpersonal skills, academic engagement, academic motivation, and study skills—were collectively called *academic enablers*. According to DiPerna and Elliott (1999), academic enablers consist of a set of "skills, attitudes, and behaviors that are related to academic achievement but are not academic skills per se" (p. 223).

Across a series of investigations, DiPerna and Elliott (2001) developed and refined a multi-informant assessment tool, the *Academic Competence and Evaluation Scales* (ACES), for gathering information on students' academic skills and enabling behaviors. The *ACES-College* was developed as an upward extension of the original ACES rating scale for use with college-age individuals. DiPerna and Elliott (2001) examined the relationship between *ACES-College* ratings and college students' (n = 288) current semester and overall grade point averages (GPAs). Scores on the ACES-College Academic Enablers scale demonstrated stronger correlations to current semester GPA (r = .38) and overall GPA (r = .31) than the Academic Skills scale (current semester, r = .22; overall GPA, r = .26). While DiPerna and Elliott (2001) found col-

lege students without a disability had higher levels of academic skills compared to students with a learning disability (LD), levels of academic enabling behavior were comparable across the two groups. Based on these results, DiPerna and Elliott (2001) asserted, "Students with disabilities who have well-developed enablers…appear most likely to enter and stay in college. For students with disabilities to be successful at the college level, they need academic enabling behaviors that are similar to their peers" (p. 65).

Although previous research on the A*CES-College* scale focused on students with LD, there is reason to believe the observed results generalize to students in IPSE programs. In other words, while most students in IPSE programs will have less developed reading, writing, and mathematics skills than their college-age peers, their academic enabling behaviors may be similar to their classmates without disabilities. Moreover, as observed in DiPerna and Elliott's (2001) research, their academic enabling behaviors may be more predictive of their performance in college coursework than their academic skills. As such, interventions that can improve IPSE students' academic enablers (i.e., interpersonal skills, academic motivation, engagement, and study skills) may facilitate their successful inclusion in general education college coursework.

Interventions and Supports for Academic Enabling Behaviors in IPSE Students

To date, there is a paucity of research examining interventions and supports for developing academic enabling skills in students with ID in IPSE programs. McLendon et al. (2023) conducted an exploratory literature review on supports for academic enabling behaviors in IPSE programs. The researchers found little peer-reviewed research on enhancing enabling behaviors in IPSE students. A handful of studies were identified that examined supports for academic enabling behaviors in IPSE programs; these studies provide limited but promising evidence for the effectiveness of this approach. An overview of these studies is provided below.

Within the domain of interpersonal skills, previous research suggests the quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships are critical for promoting the success of IPSE students (Kubiak, 2015; Rillotta et al., 2020). Specifically, support from family, peers, and IPSE staff (particularly learning-related discussions) promoted interpersonal skills growth in IPSE students (Kubiak et al., 2015). Supporting IPSE students' interactions with classmates and providing contexts for relationship building also may enhance interpersonal skills (Rillotta et al., 2020).

Facilitating IPSE students' academic engagement was also important for enabling their success in these programs. Previous research indicated IPSE students generally engage in similar academic activities (e.g., responding to class questions, delivering presentations, and engaging in collaborative assignments) compared to undergraduate peers without ID (Hendrickson et al., 2015). Providing IPSE students equal access to academic opportunities may be critical for developing academic engagement behaviors (Kubiak et al., 2017). While access to opportunity was important, behavior-tracking technology (e.g., ClassDojo, Tootling) also demonstrated its utility in enhancing academic engagement in inclusive settings (Lipscomb et al., 2018).

Fostering motivation in IPSE students may help promote their academic success. In a qualitative study that interviewed IPSE students, Rillotta and colleagues (2020) found that IPSE students may initially be overwhelmed by the demands of higher education. However, support for promoting their motivation facilitated IPSE students' long-term success. Specifically, helping IPSE students understand the importance of breaking larger goals into more manageable, smaller goals appeared to help them stay motivated and persist in their coursework (Rillotta et al., 2020).

In previous studies, IPSE programs cultivated and expanded students' study skills in various ways. Specifically, explicit instruction on effective notetaking strategies appeared to improve students' notetaking abilities and quality of notes (Guist & Valle-Riestra, 2017; Reed et al., 2016). Additionally, previous studies indicated helping IPSE students identify effective study strategies increased retention of information (Kubiak, 2015, 2017). Kubiak (2015) also suggested that providing explicit teaching instruction on technology tools and self-regulated learning strategies also appeared important for IPSE students' academic success (Kubiak, 2017).

Research indicates higher levels of academic enabling behaviors are associated with greater academic success among college students in general (DiPerna, 2004). Thus, promoting the development of the subcomponents of academic enabling behaviors (i.e., interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills) might reasonably be expected to foster the academic success of IPSE students as well. This study aimed to investigate supports on college campuses that facilitate the development and enactment of IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors (i.e., interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills). The guiding research question was: "What instruction and supports are IPSE program staff providing to promote students' development of academic enabling behaviors?"

Methods

This study was a component of a larger mixed-method investigation that examined the academic enabling behaviors of students with ID in IPSE programs. The more extensive research study explored IPSE students' academic enabling behavior strengths and weaknesses from both IPSE students' and IPSE staffs' perspectives and the supports in place to facilitate IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors.

Participants

Researchers interviewed staff members at multiple IPSE programs in one southeastern state. These staff were familiar with DiPerna and Elliott's Academic Competence framework because the *ACES-College* rating scale was administered annually to their students as part of a TPSID grant awarded to a state-level consortium of IPSE programs. A non-random purposeful sampling procedure was used to recruit interview participants. One of the study's authors sent a recruitment email to IPSE program directors in one southeastern state. Program directors were asked to share the recruitment email with staff who met the inclusion criteria and might be interested in participating in the study. Staff interested in participating in the study were instructed to email the primary author. Staff members were eligible to participate in the study if they had experience supporting IPSE students in academic courses for at least one year. Ten IPSE staff from five IHEs were interviewed. Interviewees worked in colleges and technical colleges with IPSE programs in urban and rural communities (see Table 1). Interviewees held various positions at their respective programs (see Table 2).

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via an online meeting platform, with each interviewee answering questions developed based on the aforementioned larger study's research questions and the academic enabler framework developed by DiPerna and Elliott (2001). Only one interview question in the larger study's interview protocol was directly applicable to the current investigation. Interviewees were instructed to think about their experiences with IPSE students, and for each academic enabling area, they were asked: "What supports are in place to help students with <insert academic enabling behavior>?"

The first and second authors developed the broader study's interview protocol, and the first author conducted pilot interviews with former IPSE staff (who were not included in the study) to help refine it. The first author conducted all the interviews. Interviews ranged from approximately 45 to 90 minutes and had a mean length of 54 minutes. No incentives or compensation were offered.

Data Analysis

The researchers used Otter.ai to transcribe the interviews and Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel for coding. The Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methodology was used for data analysis (Hill & Knox, 2021). First, researchers met as a group, read each transcript together, determined the length of text blocks to be coded together, and identified a topic area (i.e., domains) based on the text block together. The domains (i.e., topic areas) from all the transcripts were compiled into a domain list. Next, each team member independently assigned one or more domains from the domain list to a text block. Each team member then explained why he/she believed the text should be assigned to the specific domain(s). The team discussed differences in opinion and reached a consensus on what domain(s) best fit the data. The research team then worked together to generate core ideas. Core ideas are statements that concisely summarize the essence of a block of text. After this, researchers created a list of core ideas organized by domain. These reorganized core ideas were used to create categories and subcategories, traditionally known as themes. An example of the CQR coding method as applied to a text block is in Table 3. Additional information about the CQR Methodology may be found in Hill and Knox's book *Essentials of Consensual Qualitative Research* (2021), published by the American Psychological Association.

The main feature of CQR is that it uses multiple data analysts who collectively reach unanimous decisions, or consensus, about coding. This is compared to more traditional data analysis methods, where researchers work independently and then establish reliability. The research team was comprised of two doctoral candidates and an auditor, who was the student's doctoral advisor and a tenured faculty member with significant experience with IPSE programs.

Trustworthiness

Researcher reflexivity and an external auditor were utilized to establish credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the research process, the researchers reflected on their assumptions and values as they sought to develop an honest narrative description of the resulting themes (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, while researchers were establishing core ideas, they reflected on whether the core ideas succinctly communicated the interviewees' thoughts and ideas. An auditor was also engaged during the analysis. The

Table 1

Interviewee's Colleges and Universities

Institution	Number of Interviewees	Location	Projected Time for IPSE Program Completion	Undergraduate Enrollment
Program 1	4	Urban County	2 years	30,000-40,000
Program 2	2	Urban County	4 years	40,000-50,000
Program 3	2	Urban County	2 years	20,000-30,000
Program 4	1	Urban County	2 years	40,000-50,000
Program 5	1	Rural County	2 years	Less than 10,000

Table 2

Interviewees' Experiences at IPSEs

Current or Most Recent Job/ Roles	Hours per week	Number of students seen per week	Number of years affiliated with IPSE programs
Administrative Assistant	10-20	Focused on 1 or 2 students, but spent time with 6-8	4
Career Development Advisor	15	12-20	About 20
Program Director	40	7	1
Program Associate Director and Director of Academic Development	25-30	9	5
Program Coordinator	10-12	About 10	4.5
Lecturer/Career Development Coordinator	20	20-22	4
Employment Coordinator	10-40	6	4
Executive Director	2	2	1
Program Director	28-30	9	6
Lead Peer Mentor	3	6	4

Table 3

An Example of CQR Coding Process

Term	Description	Example
Transcript Excerpt	A block of text from that focuses on one idea	*Researcher:* How effective do you think those supports are? *Interviewee:* I feel like for the most part, they're pretty effective. I think definitely social coaching is helpful because I feel like if we just had the class by itself without any follow up students would probably forget what they learned in class, because I know they're not always paying attention or if they are they can just still forget. So, I think the reinforcement of afterwards like, "Okay, here's what we're learning. But then here's the real life application" So I think that is helpful, and then definitely in the presence of someone there to help them through it.
Domain	The broad subject area	Interpersonal skills
Core Idea	A summary that concisely captures the essence of the text block	Interpersonal skills supports are "pretty effective," especially coaching to reinforce learned social skills.
Category	Phrases that capture common elements across core ideas	Effectiveness of supports
Subcategory	A phrase that further captures similarities within categories	Social coaching was effective

Table 4

Supports for Interpersonal Skills

Opportunities for practice/engagement
Peer mentors as teachers, real-time coaches (e.g., cueing, teaching, reminding)
Peer mentors as models
Classes/meetings about topics related to interpersonal skills (e.g., friendships, having a conversation, dating, teamwork)
Coaching from staff
Manualized social skills curriculum (e.g., PEERS)

auditor was involved at the beginning of each stage of the CQR process (i.e., creating domains, assigning text blocks to domains, creating core ideas, and establishing categories and subcategories). The auditor also provided multiple reviews during each stage of the coding process (Hill & Knox, 2021).

Results

As previously mentioned, research suggests that higher levels of academic enabling behaviors are associated with greater academic success among college students in general (DiPerna, 2004). Consequently, IPSE students may benefit from improving their academic enabling behaviors. One approach to facilitating the growth of IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors is to provide support and interventions that specifically address these behaviors. The following section explores interviewees' thoughts about supports that influence the development of IPSE students' interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills.

Supports for Interpersonal Skills

IPSE staff were asked about the supports that helped IPSE students develop their interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills were defined as the skills necessary for interacting and communicating with others in academic settings (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999). The researchers identified six themes, described below (see Table 4).

Many interviewees shared that having opportunities to practice social skills is vital and that students had ample practice opportunities. For instance, one interviewee shared that IPSE students' access to the college campus was a key factor in improving interpersonal skills: "I really think it's because of that exposure to college campus, that being around people, and just us [IPSE staff] helping them through. That is what does it." Another interviewee spoke about how attending classes provided interpersonal skills practice: "By the time [students] finish our program, they've had opportunities to do public speaking and to be in groups in leadership roles."

Staff also reported that peer mentors are vital to IPSE students' interpersonal skill development. Interviewees indicated peer mentors served as teachers, real-time coaches, and models. One IPSE staff member, who was a peer mentor while in college, shared about supporting students' interpersonal skills development during class:

> I think that the main support I did as far as interpersonal skills was that initial initiation and saying, "I'm not sure what you're supposed to do... what is the syllabus saying? Maybe go ask 'Jim', who's sitting over here." And then after that initial connection was made, [the IPSE student] was more comfortable asking 'Jim' a question later.

Peer mentors modeled appropriate interpersonal behaviors. For example, they modeled how to meet people, when to engage in conversation, and how to use classroom opportunities to make friends. One interviewee shared:

> We have peer mentors in the classroom who model or say, "Hey, come on. Let's go introduce ourselves to the professor," Or, "Let's go talk to your group members," "Even though you're not working in a group today let's go say 'Hi!'" or "Make sure you have their phone number, so you can contact them later," (that) kind of stuff.

Some IPSE students also learned about interpersonal skills in IPSE program-specific classes. One interviewee who taught classes exclusively for IPSE students said: "I spend a lot of time in classes talking a lot about interpersonal skills and ways to build up their soft skills." Two other staff members talked about classes specifically designed to address IPSE students' interpersonal skills. One shared, "We taught friendships and dating and some of these relationship classes that [were] supposed to help with the personal component in the classroom."

Another interviewee discussed a specific research-based social skills program they implemented with students:

> We have something called PEERS group…It's a social-behavioral training program. And we offer that class to all our first-year students. It really talks about social skills, how to make friends, what to say and what not to say, that kind of stuff. And so, we hope that they take what they learned from those classes and actually implement it.

According to staff, peer mentors helped support students as they generalized skills learned during manualized social skill training programs. One interviewee indicated they tried to connect what students were learning in program-specific social skills classes to everyday life:

> [We] tried to implement that social-behavioral training while we were with the student and when we were out and about. So, if the student does or says something that might be socially incorrect,

> we'll probably draw them aside or explain later, "Hey, maybe in that situation you could have said this or not have said that."

Supports for Academic Engagement

Academic engagement is a composite of classroom behaviors associated with class participation (DiPerna & Elliott, 2001). IPSE staff shared that IPSE students needed assistance with academic engagement and shared examples of support available at their respective IHEs. Eight themes were identified (see Table 5).

Peer mentors provided in-class support related to academic engagement. For example, they redirected students' attention and behavior in real time. One interviewee, who previously served as a peer mentor, shared the following about classroom experiences:

> If I noticed that a student was drifting off or not really engaging, I would find ways to pull them back in. So, either to make a comment like, "Oh, that was cool. Did you catch that?" Or, "Uh… What did she just say?" You know, things like that - to try to bring them back in... or to connect the material to something that I already knew that they were interested in.

Another staff member (who also had been a peer mentor) shared, "Once the student sees a peer mentor getting involved, it encourages them to also get involved because that's like their buddy. So, I think just having someone present is helpful to kind of have that push."

According to interviewees, programs participated in behind-the-scenes planning and coordination to support students' academic engagement. Multiple interviewees spoke about the importance of multi-modal instruction, helping students prepare for class by pre-teaching or previewing content, and staff and peer mentors collaborating on how to teach IPSE students ways to engage in class appropriately.

First, using different pedagogical methods was viewed as an important support. Throughout the interviews, interviewees talked about multiple modes of instruction, including lectures, hands-on activities, videos, and role-playing. One interviewee shared that students were more engaged when they were kinesthetically or physically involved in learning: "I think that there's an extreme difference in what, especially what students with IDD get out of like more tactile and… physical engagement of learning than just sitting and listening."

Another interviewee emphasized the importance of previewing or pre-teaching content while also connecting it to academic engagement:

> [IPSE students] have to have some knowledge of the subject. They have to have had some exposure, some experience, good or bad, in order to engage in that academic setting. I'll take that integrated science class [for instance] …the material is being presented at such a high level that our students are really struggling with trying to get that information. And so, we go over the instruction prior to… instruction with the teacher/instructor, so that they have knowledge of it going into it. They're not experts, not even close. But they're not terrified of sitting there thinking, "I'm not going to be able to open my mouth," because participation is key. I think having prior exposure to the subject matter at hand is really allowing them the opportunity to wipe away the fear and totally listen to, to try to get a little more from that instructor.

According to staff, IPSE students sometimes would participate in class and their peer mentor would wonder whether the student was engaging appropriately. One program set aside time to specifically teach students how to participate in class when they noticed areas of concern:

> A lot of times the peer mentors would come back and say, "Hey, this student shared this in class. I'm not sure if that's the right way to go about it." So that'll be something we can talk about and bring to a bigger group of students and say, "Okay, let's practice responding to questions, or responding to discussion, or being involved in a group activity, and learn what the...appropriate boundaries (are) within that."

Supports for Motivation

In the *ACES-College*, motivation is characterized as the student's "initiative and persistence regarding academic subjects; it includes items that reflect responsibility, preference for challenging tasks, and goal-directed behaviors" (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999, p. 6). IPSE staff shared that supports were in place that encouraged students and helped them sustain motivation. Nine themes were identified, a few of which are discussed (see Table 6).

Some staff members indicated that in-class support from peer mentors helped IPSE students understand content in a way that connected to the student's interests. This had a positive effect on motivation. As one staff member observed:

> Students have different motivations depending on the content and the way that the content is being presented. This has to do both with the instructor

Table 5

Supports for Academic Engagement

Class support from peer mentors
Multimodal teaching strategies (e.g., visual and concrete representations)
Small group instruction/group projects
Building on prior knowledge/Pre-teaching and pre-viewing content
Providing social cues/redirection of behavior
Role playing participation in class discussion/group work
Staff/mentors consulting with instructors to facilitate engagement
Student comfort levels in class

Table 6

Supports for Motivation

Student comfort levels in class
Goal-setting support/guidance
In-class supports from peer mentors
Encouragement to try new things
Executive function supports (e.g., assignment planning)
Reteaching content
Strategies for anxiety management
Supports provided by other university departments (e.g., disability services, writing center)
Working with peers

> and then also with the tutor. So, the way that the tutor is able to reframe information in an interesting, engaging way changes how motivated and engaged the students are.

Interviewees also indicated IPSE students were motivated when working with classmates. One interviewee shared how her program was intentional in terms of creating peer support systems.

> We also try and pair them up with their peers…I think that there's a certain motivation that goes along with working with your peers versus working with me or working with someone else who isn't necessarily a peer…A lot of times I'll pair them up with someone who's also in that class. So, you know, that way one student is just as motivated to pass Bio 101 as another because they're both in that class, and they kind of help each other and helping support each other is really important.

In addition, IPSE staff adjusted supports when students struggled to sustain their motivation. For instance, an interviewee talked about how they tried to help students remain motivated when things were difficult:

> If the students are not motivated, then we need to get at why very, very quickly...and sometimes that's just as simple as they don't want to fail. And so, understanding if their motivation is the academics or the learning itself. Is it the grade? Is it [that] there [are] things that are intervening from them being motivated?

Goal setting is an important aspect of motivation. According to IPSE staff, many IPSE students received help setting and monitoring progress towards their goals:

> We have weekly one-on-one meetings. Every student, every week, has a one-on-one with a grad-

> uate assistant and a one-on-one with at least one peer mentor. We use those to help students with pacing and to help them set goals…. Goal setting is a critical part of our program…We've really used those meetings to make sure they're setting goals and they're setting themselves up for success, and that we're supporting them whenever we can support them in order for them to be successful long term and successful in their classes. So that…is a support to help them with the academic motivation.

Supports for Study Skills

Study skills are behaviors (e.g., taking notes, remaining organized, and preparing for class) that facilitate learning new material in the classroom (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999). Students utilized a variety of study skills supports, and more themes were identified related to study skills compared to the other three academic enabling behaviors. During our qualitative analyses, we identified 18 themes related to study skills support. Some of these supports included providing space and time to study, presenting information in different ways, having note-taking support from peer mentors, breaking down content and assignments, having accommodated and modified course work, and receiving help from peer mentors. Although some of the most common supports are discussed below, a comprehensive list of supports IPSE programs have in place to support students with their study skills is found in Table 7.

The most frequently mentioned support was that IPSE programs scheduled and organized study halls and that IPSE students organized their own study sessions. Some programs incorporated study time into IPSE students' weekly schedules. One interviewee shared:

> We factored in study hall for students. They had an assigned time they are supposed to come to the office and be working on assignments and asking questions…. And then we'd also encourage students to go to study halls or to office hours for teachers.

Staff indicated that, in some instances, IPSE students who took the same classes also created their own study hall opportunities. For example, one interviewee observed, "Sometimes two students that are both in the IPSE program would be in the same class. And so, they would have study hall, and they would do stuff together…. I think that that was like, really strong."

Although specific times were dedicated to studying were helpful, some IPSE students struggled to develop and apply study skills across a variety of contexts. Consequently, programs created supports to help students in these areas of weakness. One interviewee helped students create and adjust their study plans. This staff member shared:

> I think that this primary support for study skills was that scaffolding, creating a plan at the beginning of the semester, like, "How are you going to study for this class?" And then as challenges came up, making adjustments or saying, "Okay, you've got a midterm coming up, so maybe you should set up some extra studying time."

A few interviewees shared that IPSE students benefited from having information presented in different ways. This included using a variety of tools such as using study guides, using visuals/pictures, highlighting information, having the peer mentor re-teach content, or using online tools. When discussing the creation of study tools, one interviewee shared that "the written word might not help, a written word with an image might, a written word with a color. You know, sometimes they need certain keywords highlighted."

Another interviewee shared a similar observation about the need to support access to and understanding of content:

> A lot of the job of the tutors and peer mentor coordinators is to translate the content in different ways. The students are receiving information in a number of ways. They might be watching a lecture or have that information coming to them in one way, then the tutor is going to re-translate, reiterate that same content in a study hall format, and then back into a study guide.

Staff members also talked specifically about supports related to taking notes. Some programs had peer mentors who took notes for IPSE students, whereas others helped students learn how to take their own notes. One interviewee shared:

> All of our students could use help with note-taking skills. They have a hard time trying to decide the most important topic…I don't know that learning to outline is crucial but going back to identifying what the overarching concept is, and not getting tied up with all the little, the tedious, busy work and extra words and stuff.

Staff shared that another support they provided was breaking down both course content and assignments into manageable parts. One interviewee shared, "For every assignment, every task, they're getting parts of it broken down…We do a lot of reviewing and con-

Table 7

Supports for Study Skills

Study hall/study sessions
Creating and utilizing study tools and plans (e.g., previewing material, notecards, study guides, graphic organizers)
Organizing and prioritizing assignments (e.g., study plans, maintaining a calendar)
Accommodated/modified assignments and learning tasks
Chunking information/breaking content into smaller parts
IPSE staff support
Note-taking assistance by peer mentors
Presenting information in different ways/utilizing a variety of study methods
Aligning supports with student needs
Assistive technology (e.g., read-aloud accommodations)
Help identifying key topics/overarching concepts
Online tools (e.g., Quizlet, Grammarly)
Peer mentors as models
Academic advising
Anxiety management strategies
Building on prior knowledge
Campus resources (e.g., library)
Study skills courses

tent vocabulary, making graphics organizers for all of their classes."

Another staff member indicated they helped students with "being able to break down the syllabus into actionable steps, as opposed to, you know, this big thing. And then even taking broken down instructions and breaking them down even smaller."

Regarding coursework, students also received accommodations or had modified assignments. If students were auditing a class, course requirements were often modified. If students took a course for credit, they could receive accommodations, but required assignments could not be modified. One interviewee shared how modified assignments were important for students who audited classes.

> They have modified tests, or modified assignments, so that they get the full understanding of the class as much as they're able to but not feel overwhelmed. We work on modifying the challenge enough so that they're learning but not overwhelmed or shutting down and having anxiety… [and] the other things that go along with that.

Many interviewees explained that students had read-aloud accommodations and benefited from other text-to-speech software features. As one interviewee observed, "They have read-aloud as an accommodation, a lot of them do. And we address that by using read-aloud software that has features like highlighting, note-taking…."

Finally, a key piece of the puzzle was that ISPE staff and other support personnel, such as peer mentors and academic coaches, were working behind the scenes to coordinate the supports students received. One staff member noted:

> Our lab coordinator is key to homework and getting assignments done. She coordinates the assignments. The students bring assignments in, and then she generates check-off list dates and times, so that there is that accountability piece and that they're not so overwhelmed because they're still in year one.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate supports that exist on college campuses that facilitate the use and development of IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors (i.e., interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills). In our interviews, IPSE staff were asked about the supports that helped students with each academic enabler domain. Their responses resulted in implications for both practice and research.

Implications for Practice

Interviewees discussed how attending IPSE programs provides students with ID opportunities to enhance their interpersonal skills through social engagement with a diverse group of college students and faculty. Indeed, college campuses offer all students the opportunity to cultivate interpersonal skills through their interactions with other students and faculty (Saavedra & Saavedra, 2011). While the range of opportunities and experiences alone offers support for interpersonal skills, IPSE students may also benefit from further supports in this domain. For example, peer mentoring may provide structured opportunities to cultivate social networks and friendships with other students, promoting interpersonal skills (Carter and McCabe, 2021). These social connections, especially when made with mentors in their own classes, might further support IPSE students' academic engagement. In addition, connections with classmates are associated with greater classroom engagement (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). To promote IPSE student interpersonal skills and academic engagement, IPSE programs might consider how they can intentionally recruit and train peer mentors to provide natural supports in both social and academic contexts (Wilt & Morningstar, 2020).

Related to motivation, interviewees discussed how peer mentors facilitated IPSE students' motivation in class, and that IPSE students sometimes reciprocally promote peer mentors' motivation as well. In addition, they noted the importance of structured person-centered planning meetings in which students work on goal setting to enhance their motivation. Explicit teaching of self-advocacy strategies may help IPSE students engage in these meetings, enabling them to set their own goals and enhance their motivation (Mazzotti et al., 2015).

Additionally, motivation and goal setting might be targeted during regular advisement meetings with IPSE staff members through formal instruction and targeted interventions. For example, students with ID might benefit from evidence-based practices for enhancing self-determination (e.g., the Self-Determined Learning Model Instruction; Pulos et al., 2023). This could involve teaching students how to set appropriate goals, take action to achieve the goal, and monitor their progress toward goal completion. By improving self-determination and goal-setting behaviors, IPSE students can acquire critical life-long skills that improve their long-term outcomes (Torres et al., 2022).

In addressing long-term outcomes (e.g., employment, independent living), IPSE staff might also consider how they can support generalizable study skills. For example, one's ability to manage their own calendar and track upcoming deadlines is equally valuable in educational and employment-related contexts. Executive functioning supports may also be an important area to target in promoting study skills. These include helping students learn how to break tasks down into more manageable chunks and organize information to promote retention.

Our study suggested that many of the above supports for academic enabling behaviors are currently implemented in the IPSE programs included in this study. While some supports were unique to a specific domain of academic enabling behaviors, other types of support were utilized across different academic enabling behaviors. For example, peer mentors were identified as a support across all four domains of academic enablers—they (a) served as teachers and real-time coaches for *interpersonal skills*, (b) provided in-class support to promote *academic engagement* and *motivation*, and (c) assisted with *study skills* like notetaking, assignment completion, and preparing for tests. Thus, one type of support (peer mentors) was utilized to support IPSE students with a variety of academic enabling behaviors.

While coding the interview transcripts, our research team noted the implementation of the same types of supports across multiple domain academic enablers. In recognition of this, we coined the term *meta category* to indicate when similar supports were used in two or more academic enabling behavior domains. Six meta categories were identified: (a) support from peer mentors, (b) support provided by IPSE and other university staff, (c) support related to courses/instruction, (d) opportunities for practice/reinforcement, (e) support related to social/emotional supports, and (f) executive function supports (see Table 8). These six meta-categories may provide a framework for IPSE staff members' planning and implementation of academic support.

Implications for Research

This is one of the first studies to examine the applicability of DiPerna and Elliott's (1999) academic

Table 8

Supports Associated with Each Academic Enabler Domain

Interpersonal Skills	Academic Engagement	Motivation	Study Skills
Peer Mentors Supports			
Peer mentors as teachers and real-time coaches	Class support from peer mentors	In-class supports from peer mentors	Note-taking assistance by peer mentors
Peer mentors as models	Staff/mentors consulting with instructors to facilitate engagement		Peer mentors as models
Supports Provided by IPSE and Other University Staff			
Coaching from staff	Staff/mentors consulting with instructors to facilitate engagement	Supports provided by other university departments	IPSE staff support
Supports Related to Courses/Instruction			
Classes/meetings about topics related to interpersonal skills	Small group instruction/group projects	Reteaching content	Presenting information in different ways/utilizing a variety of study methods
Manualized social skills curriculum	Multimodal teaching strategies		Help identifying key topics/ overarching concepts
	Building on prior knowledge/Pre-teaching and pre-viewing content		Building on prior knowledge
			Chunking information/breaking content into smaller parts
			Study skills courses
			Accommodated/modified assignments and learning tasks
			Assistive technology
Opportunities for Practice, Reinforcement, and/or Feedback			
Opportunities for practice/to engage	Providing social cues/redirection of behavior		Study hall/study sessions
	Role playing participation in class discussion/group work		Creating and utilizing study tools and plans
			Online study tools

(Table 8, continued)

Interpersonal Skills	Academic Engagement	Motivation	Study Skills
		Social/Emotional Supports	
	Student comfort levels in class	Student comfort levels in class	
		Strategies for anxiety management	Anxiety management strategies
		Working with peers	
		Exeutive Function Supports	
		Goal-setting support/guidance	Organizing and prioritizing assignments
		Executive function supports	
		Other	
		Encouragement to try new things	Campus resources
			Aligning supports with student needs

enabling behavior framework with college-age students with ID. Although there is preliminary research examining academic enablers in college students with and without disabilities (DiPerna, 2004; Elliott & DiPerna, 2002), these previous studies typically included participants with "high-incidence" disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities) instead of ID. As such, additional research is needed to examine the validity and utility of this framework with students in IPSE programs. Studies that use multiple methods to collect data from multiple informants can provide a more comprehensive picture of the various non-cognitive skills and behaviors that students with ID use to support their success in college classrooms.

Moreover, there is a need to examine the validity of the *ACES-College* (DiPerna & Elliott, 2001) self-report measure with college students with ID. Anecdotal feedback from IPSE staff participating in our TPSID project indicated some students were unfamiliar with various terms and concepts in the ACES rating scale items. Additional studies are needed to examine affordances (e.g., testing accommodations, item modifications, universal design features) that can be built into the administration of the *ACES-College* to facilitate the collection of meaningful and accurate information from IPSE students. Think-aloud cognitive labs (Roach & Beddow, 2011) could also be conducted to examine whether college-age students with ID comprehend *ACES-College* rating scale items and if they see academic enablers as related to their own academic performance.

Further validation of the *ACES-College* for use with IPSE students could be beneficial in two additional ways. First, the *ACES-College* represents a potentially useful measure for demonstrating the academic impact of IPSE program participation. Administering the ACES-College at various points in students' academic programs would allow IPSE staff to monitor and document student progress on a variety of academic-related behaviors. Moreover, the interpretation of *ACES-College* responses includes a "behavior classification scheme" that helps test users identify which items describe a student's academic enabling behavior strengths, performance problems, and acquisition problems (DiPerna & Elliott, 2001). Students' enabling behavior strengths might be leveraged to facilitate their success in the college classroom. Enabling behaviors that are identified as performance or acquisition problems can be targeted for intervention and support. While the ACES behavior classification scheme has been demonstrated in K-12 settings (DiPerna & Elliott, 2001), additional research is needed to demonstrate its application and utility with IPSE students.

Limitations

This study had several limitations that merit discussion. The voices of students with an ID are oftentimes excluded from research in special education, school psychology, and related disciplines (Roach et al., 2009; Roach et al., 2021). Since only IPSE staff were included in this study, student perspectives were not represented. Future studies should include interviews with IPSE students that allow for a deeper understanding of academic enabling behaviors from their perspective. For instance, students could be asked about their understanding of their academic enabling behaviors and what can be done to support them as they leverage their strengths.

Another limitation is that, as outlined previously, the academic enabling behaviors framework has not been validated with students in IPSE programs. Consequently, we did not know how well the academic enabling behaviors construct reflects the non-academic thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of IPSE students or whether any other academic enabling behaviors exist within this population that are not represented in DiPerna and Elliott's (2001) framework.

Lastly, McLendon et al. (2023) conducted an exploratory literature review on supports for academic enabling behaviors in IPSE programs. The researchers found limited peer-reviewed research on enhancing and encouraging enabling behaviors in IPSE students. Furthermore, although IPSE staff in this study talked about the supports in place that encourage the development of academic enabling behaviors, we know little about the effectiveness of the supports. Additional research should include not only continued exploration into the existing supports across a broader variety of programs, but also studies about the effectiveness of different supports.

The current literature on specific strategies and scaffolds for IPSE students' inclusion is emerging. Studying supports for students with disabilities in higher education may offer useful suggestions for supporting the development of academic enabling behaviors in IPSE students. Since research indicates that higher levels of academic enabling behaviors are associated with increased academic success among college students (DiPerna, 2004), continued research into academic enabling behaviors of students in IPSE programs may be a means of improving academic achievement and better equipping students with ID with the skills they may need post-graduation—both in the workplace and life.

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