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BARRIERS TO SEEKING AND OBTAINING ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS IN COLLEGE CLASSROOMS FOR FIRST- AND MULTI-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY

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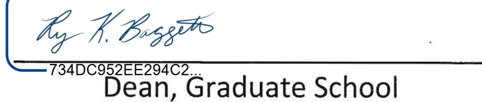

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BARRIERS TO SEEKING AND OBTAINING ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS IN COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

BY

CLINT PINION, JR., DRPH, MA, MPH, BA

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

2022

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Timothy, my spouse and favorite educator. You transform lives not only through your use of high-impact pedagogical practices in your classroom but through your empathetic, loving, and giving nature. Your students will never truly comprehend the depths of your love for them nor your passion for instilling relevant skills that they will use throughout their lives. Through adversity, you have persevered and maintained your focus on the well-being of your students and community. For the rest of my days, I will remain enamored by your creativity and capacity to make every day better for everyone around you.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored barriers to seeking and obtaining academic accommodations for college students with identified learning disabilities attending a regional university in a Midwestern state in the United States of America. A biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education, developed by Hewett, Douglas, McLinden, and Keil (2016), was used as a guiding framework for the study. Semi-structured interviews, guided by a framework presented by Galleta (2013), were used to understand better the accommodation experiences of college students with identified learning disabilities. Thematic analysis was used to analyze transcribed data. Five themes emerged from the interviews conducted with the five participants (i.e., Lisa, Natalie, Kim, Andrew, and Sam). Three of the students (i.e., Lisa, Natalie, and Sam) identified as first-generation college students. Three of the identified themes were explicitly associated with the learners' specific academic needs and characteristics which affected their educational outcomes: (1) insufficient knowledge, (2) identity issues, and (3) lack of self-sufficiency. The learner is at the center of the inclusive higher education model. Two themes dealt with barriers at the microsystem level, which are interrelated systems that surround the learner and affect how the student learns: (4) desire to avoid adverse social reactions; and (5) negative experiences with faculty.

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I. Introduction

Students with learning, mental, and physical disabilities were segregated from their peers in alternative classrooms or schools or institutionalized in state-operated mental health facilities before the late 1960s (Spring, 2018). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), passed in 1975, changed the treatment of students with disabilities in schools across the United States. A student population once deemed uneducable and untrainable gained equitable access to public education with the passing of EAHCA. Such access was earned through synergistic efforts of local, state, and national lobbying groups (e.g., Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children and the National Association for Retarded Children). Lobbying groups nationwide used the judicial system to seek much-needed educational reform.

The United States government amended EAHCA and renamed it in 1990 to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). IDEA requires primary and secondary schools to provide all children, regardless of disability status, access to an equitable education at their district-assigned school (Spring, 2018; The Arc, 2019). School administrators must work with teachers and guardians of students with disabilities to evaluate the student’s needs, create individualized education plans (IEP), and ensure the student learns in an atmosphere of inclusion. Parents, teachers, and administrators serve as advocates for students with disabilities. Such advocacy helps provide students with disabilities with services appropriate to their identified disability.

Unfortunately, students with disabilities do not have the same advocacy level when transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education. Although the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ensure equitable access to higher education for students with disabilities, the two acts do not provide the same level of advocacy as the IDEA. Higher education institutions cannot discriminate based on disability in offered activities. Access to services, benefits and learning aids must be equal and effective between students with and without disabilities. Such access should provide students with disabilities an opportunity to achieve the same academic outcomes as their peers.

Students with disabilities often require accommodations (i.e., academic support) to flourish in the same environment as their peers (Lyman et al.2016). Accommodations can include adaptive technologies, note-takers, tutors, and extended time on exams. The availability and quality of accommodations can be barriers to retaining and graduating students with disabilities. During their post-secondary experience, 86 percent of students with disabilities will encounter accommodation implementation barriers (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Students with disabilities face difficulties accessing and understanding academic materials. Such issues arise when faculty fail to implement academic accommodations, disability services on campus do not provide appropriate accommodations, or the student fails to self-advocate for accommodations.

Colleges and universities across the United States serve higher numbers of first-generation college students (Lombardi et al., 2012). As such, they are beginning to see more students who identify as having a learning disability and as a First-generation college student. Compared to multi-generation college students, first-generation college students have lower college acceptance, persistence, and graduation rates. Similar to students with disabilities, first-generation students struggle to adapt to college life. Potentiation of the struggle may be due to financial, cultural, social, or familial challenges faced by first-generation students. The likelihood of retention and degree completion lessens when students identify as first-generation college students and have a physical, mental, or learning disability (Lombardi et al., 2012).

Problem Statement

Students with disabilities continue to lag behind their peers in successfully transitioning to college from high school, transitioning from their first to the second year of college, and completing a college degree (Petty, 2014). Such deficiencies exist even though: (1) national law (i.e., the Americans with Disabilities Act and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973) requires that colleges and universities provide equitable access to programs and services for students with disabilities; and (2) colleges and universities across the nation have implemented early alert programs to identify students who are struggling academically.

The number of students with disabilities enrolled at a regional university in a Midwestern state in the United States of America mimics the national trend of 1 in 10

U.S. college students having a mental, physical, or learning disability (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Fichten et al., 2014; Fleming et al., 2017; O'Neil & Markward, 2012). Additionally, first-generation students account for 37 percent (n=5,192) of the student body of the University (EKU Office of Institutional Research, 2021). Individuals with learning disabilities who also identify as first-generation college students may face unique academic and social challenges on college and university campuses.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative case study explored barriers to seeking and obtaining classroom accommodations for college students with identified learning disabilities attending a regional university in a Midwestern state in the United States of America. Two of the study participants identified as multi-generational college students. Three of the study participants identified as first-generation college students.

Students with identified learning disabilities were generally defined as: college students attending the University who had a physical or mental impairment that substantially limited one or more major life activity; had a record of such an impairment on file with the Center for Student Accessibility at the University; or were regarded as having such an impairment. First-generation college students were defined as individuals attending college whose parents did not attend college. Multi-generation college students were defined as individuals attending college with at least one guardian who had completed a bachelor's degree (Evans et al., 2020).

Research Question

This study attempted to answer the following research question:

RQ1: What barriers exist for college students with disabilities seeking and obtaining academic accommodations on the campus of the university?

Methods and Methodology

A biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education (Hewett et al., 2016) was used to explore the experiences of college students from central Appalachia while seeking and obtaining academic accommodations on the campus of a university in a mid-western State in the United States. The model was developed by Hewett et al. (2017) to assess how environmental actors impact the higher education experience of students with disabilities. The biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education is reviewed in chapter three of this dissertation.

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the experiences of college students with disabilities in higher education. The interview questions were developed, and interviews were conducted using a framework presented in Galleta (2013) as a guideline. General background, specific investigatory and probing questions were used to ascertain the participants' experience. Each interview was recorded via Zoom. The interviews were transcribed, and the transcriptions were thematically analyzed. The thematic analysis process was completed following guidance noted in Galleta (2013). A full description of the methods used in this dissertation is noted in chapter three.

Definitions

- Academic Accommodations – Accommodations that are "designed to improve students' chances of successfully completing their course work" (Deckoff-Jones and Duell, 2018, p.2).
- Accessibility Accommodations – Accommodations, "that are designed to improve students' access to the campus and classroom" (Deckoff-Jones and Duell, 2018, p.2).
- First-generation Students – A student attending college whose parents did not attend college (Mamiseishvili and Koch, 2011).
- Invisible Disability – An observer can look at a person with a disability and cannot see any obvious manifestation of the disability" (Deckoff-Jones and Duell, 2018, p.3).
- Modifiable Accommodation Barriers – Barriers to accommodation implementation, which can be modified in targeted interventions. Examples include paid employment, study habits, attitudes of professors or students, course load, level of motivation, accessibility, financial situation, managing time effectively, making friends, and the opportunity to participate in school extracurricular activities (Fichten et al., 2014).
- Multi-generation College Students – Individuals attending college with at least one guardian who has completed a bachelor's degree (Evans et al., 2020).

- Qualified Student - An individual that: (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment (Spring, 2018).
- Self-efficacy – “Confidence that one can successfully execute a task or behavior necessary to reach a desired result” (Fichten et al., 2014, p.2).
- Visible Disability – “An observer can notice an obvious sign of the disability, such as a mobility aid” (Deckoff-Jones and Duell, 2018, p.3).

Organization of the Study

An overview of the dissertation research study was presented in this chapter. A review of the contemporary literature regarding students’ experiences with seeking and obtaining academic accommodations is provided in Chapter Two. A literature review of academic barriers faced by first-generation students was also included in Chapter Two, because three of the study’s participants identified as first-generation college students. The guiding theoretical framework and the methodology employed in the dissertation research study are discussed in Chapter Three. An introduction to the participants, as well as an in-depth review of identified themes from the analyzed data, are discussed in Chapter Four. The five themes reviewed in Chapter Four are grounded in contemporary literature in Chapter Five. Finally, the significant findings from the study are highlighted in Chapter Six.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining the Priority Population

The Americans with Disability Act of 2008 defined disability as a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such an individual” (ADA Amendments Act of 2008). ADA (2008) differentiated between two categories of major life activities (i.e., in general and primary bodily functions). The ‘in general’ category referred to speaking, breathing, seeing, hearing, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, eating, sleeping, learning, thinking, working, communicating, reading, and bending. Primary bodily functions referred to normal cell growth, operations of the immune system, and abnormal functioning of major organs or systems (i.e., digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive).

Disability, as noted by Shaewitz and Crandall (2020), is inclusive, encompassing students from every socioeconomic status, age group, culture, sexual orientation, gender, geographic region, and race. Shaewitz and Crandall (2020) suggested that approximately 25 percent of adults report at least one identified disability. Disabilities include difficulties with self-care (8%); independent living (16%); vision (22%); cognition (29%); hearing (31%) and ambulation (34%). Estimates indicated that 11-19% of undergraduate and 12% of graduate students have unidentified or identified disabilities (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018).

Approximately 11% of undergraduate students disclose having a mental, physical, or learning disability (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Fichten et al., 2014; Fleming et al., 2017; O'Neil & Markward, 2012). Dekoff-Jones and Duell (2018) and Fleming et al. (2017) reported that more than 34% of Americans without disabilities complete an undergraduate degree. Comparatively, roughly seventeen percent of students with disabilities completed a bachelor's degree. Retaining students with disabilities is an issue faced by post-secondary institutions across the globe. According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2), approximately 41% of students with disabilities who enrolled in a post-secondary institution matriculated to graduation (Daly-Cano, Vaccaro, & Newman, 2015).

Specific sub-populations of individuals with disabilities are less likely to enroll in an institution of post-secondary education (e.g., individuals with emotional disturbances, intellectual disabilities, or multiple disabilities (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Individuals with hearing, visual, and speech/language impairments are the sub-populations of persons with disabilities to enroll in post-secondary education institutions. The socio-economic status of students with disabilities can affect college enrollment. Students with disabilities from families earning less than $25,000 are less likely to attend a post-secondary institution than students from families earning more than $50,000 per year (Daly-Cano, Vaccaro, & Newman, 2015).

Young adults with disabilities are less likely to enter the workforce than individuals who lack a disability (Fleming et al., 2017). A college degree can catalyze

young individuals with disabilities to enter the workforce. A positive correlation exists between employment rates and four-year degree attainment (O'Neil & Markward, 2012). A correlation also exists between poverty and disability status (Fleming et al., 2017). The cause for this correlation may be the difficulty individuals with disabilities face competing for jobs with non-disabled individuals (O'Neil & Markward, 2012). The inability to compete for jobs can lead to an inability for self-financial solidity. Individuals with a bachelor's degree earn more income than individuals without a bachelor's degree (Fleming et al., 2017). Specific sub-populations of the disability community experience higher unemployment rates than the disability community. Unemployment rates can be as high as 90% for individuals with psychiatric disabilities (Koch et al., 2014)

Academic Performance, College Retention, and Graduation

Students with disabilities are more at risk than individuals lacking a disability for poor academic performance while enrolled in college (Fleming et al., 2017). Alarmingly, students who identify as both having a disability and as first-generation college students and come from a low socioeconomic status background are more likely to struggle academically (Fleming et al., 2017). Fleming and Fairweather (2012) found that positive academic performance is predicted by higher family socioeconomic status and parent education.

Due to poor academic performance, students with disabilities are more likely to withdraw and leave college without graduating (Fleming et al., 2017). Non-persistence

is more prevalent among students with disabilities than nondisabled students (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011). Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) noted that delaying college entrance, off-campus living, being older, and being a first-generation student contribute to higher attrition among students with disabilities. Students most at risk for attrition included students with physical impairments, mobility issues, brain injuries, speech and language impairments, and developmental disabilities (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011).

The failure of American colleges to retain students with disabilities may be linked to a lack of interventions to increase socialization and the sense of belonging for the students (Fleming et al., 2017). Students with disabilities are more likely to report psychological or emotional distress and thus a poorer quality of collegiate life (Fleming et al., 2017). Factors facilitating collegiate persistence, academic development, and student learning include educational and social inclusion, course self-efficacy, and environmental facilitators (e.g., positive attitudes of faculty and peers and good schedule) (Fichten et al., 2014; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011). Academic inclusion encompasses identification and use of academic accommodations, interaction with faculty, and participation in educational activities (e.g., tutoring or study groups). Social inclusion pertains to creating a circle of friends on campus, living in a residential hall, participating in university-led social events, and feeling a sense of belonging. Integration and graduation are promoted through first-year seminar classes,

faculty/mentor programs, student learning communities, and academic cohorts (Yssel et al., 2016).

Research examining academic success among college students with disabilities often focuses on individual aspects which cannot be modified. For example, age, high school grades, and even demographics are often considered when evaluating if a student with disabilities will be successful (Fichten et al., 2014). Fichten et al. (2014) argued that interventions to improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities should target modifiable accommodation barriers, as defined later.

Poor high school preparation, poor college adjustment, and an inability to self-advocate led to poor academic performance among students with disabilities (Fleming et al., 2017). College grade point average (GPA), high school grades, time spent studying, and socio-economic status are graduation indicators among students with disabilities (Fichten et al., 2017; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011). Fleming et al. (2017) noted that self-advocacy and age are significant predictors for higher grade point averages among students with disabilities. A correlation exists between a student's academic self-efficacy and grade point average. Lombardi et al (2012) argued that increases in a student's self-efficacy yields a higher grade point average (Lombardi et al., 2012). Literature offers conflicting reports examining whether accommodation support correlates to grade point averages. Troiano et al. (2010) found that using accommodation services positively correlates to higher grade point averages for students with disabilities (Troiano et al.2010). Lombardi et al. (2012) reported that

grade point average is unrelated to gender, accommodation services, peer or family support, or financial stress. Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) noted the following barriers for students with disabilities seeking degree completion: lack of skills in self-advocacy and self-determination; unawareness of the availability of academic supports and reasonable accommodations; inconsistencies in the provision of educational supports; financial problems associated with paying for education in addition to disability-related expenses; the resistance from faculty members who lack general knowledge about students with disabilities and their rights; and reluctance to disclose their need for disability-related supports because of stigma and the potential of adverse or discriminatory reactions from others.

Seeking Disability Services

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires primary and secondary schools to identify, assess, and develop educational plans for students with identified disabilities (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Transitioning to a post-secondary institution requires students with a disability to "self-identify and provide appropriate documentation and is financially responsible for the expense of an evaluation for eligibility" (Davis, 2016, p. 32). Self-identifying with a disability is also known as self-disclosure. Eckes and Ochoa (2005) noted that students must self-disclose their disability and needed academic accommodations promptly to ensure the accommodation can be honored. Each educational institution has established timelines regarding when a student should seek academic accommodations.

Nevertheless, self-disclosure timeliness ultimately depends on when a student identifies a need for accommodation. Palmer and Roessler (2000) highlighted the importance of accommodation and disability awareness in students seeking accommodations. They stated that students will learn to self-disclose and apply for needed accommodations as they hone their accommodation and disability awareness.

Toutain (2019) stated that a lack of awareness regarding available services offered by an accessibility office is a barrier for students seeking accommodations. Some students simply do not realize a center for student accessibility exists or that accommodations are available to them (Lyman et al., 2016). These students become aware of the accessibility office and available accommodation following poor classroom performance. Toutain (2019) suggested that faculty inform poor-performing students of available resources after the students consistently perform poorly on exams or assignments. Lyman et al. (2016) offered that some students still lack awareness of available services following the reactive approach of a faculty referral. Toutain (2019) added that a proactive approach to identifying students needing academic accommodations is imperative for students with less identifiable disabilities.

Unfortunately, college accessibility offices across the country note that students with a disability do not provide documentation with the required information to ensure accommodation decisions can be made (O'Neill et al., 2012). Davis (2016) noted that Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires documentation that includes: (1) a diagnosis of a current disability; (2) methods used to determine

diagnosis; (3) date of the diagnosis; credentials of the professional providing the diagnosis; (4) an overview of how major life activities are impacted by the disability; and how academic performance is impacted by the disability. Davis (2016) further explained that professionals completing diagnoses fail to include diagnosis assessment data used to make recommendations concerning the impacts of the disability on major life activities. In some instances, students presented assessment documentation that did not note the credentials of the professional completing the assessment. Although college students presented assessment documents that were typically signed, many did not include the credentials of the individual conducting the evaluation. As a result, the value of the records could not be determined (Sparks & Lovett, 2014). Lastly, documentation submitted by students with a disability did not highlight the use of accommodations during high school nor how accommodations in college would enable students to achieve equitable academic success (Troiano et al., 2010).

Student Self-advocacy

Students must request needed services from disability offices. Such requests should be made promptly (Bourke et al., 2000). Students must be capable of traversing the process of identifying the disability, documenting the disability with the disability services office, and requesting appropriate accommodations (Yssel et al., 2016). Newman et al (2011), stated that students with a disability often do not engage in the basic self-advocacy skills of disclosing their disability status, seeking academic accommodations, or requesting special services. The National Longitudinal Transition

Study-2 (NLTS2) found that 87% of their study participants received academic accommodation during secondary school. Only 19% of the participants that received accommodations in secondary school sought accommodations in college. A link exists between a student's ability to request accommodations and several outcomes, which are vital in retaining and graduating students with disabilities. Those outcomes include academic performance, persistence, college adaptation, and collegiate experience satisfaction (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Fleming et al., 2017). Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) stated that student persistence predictors include attending college full-time, a higher first-year grade point average, and living on campus in a residential hall.

Students with disabilities are often not required to self-advocate in high school (White et al., 2014). Parents, teachers, and administrators advocate for students during primary and secondary school. Self-advocacy is "the ability to communicate one's needs and wants and to make decisions about the supports needed to achieve them" (Daly-Cano et al., 2015, p. 214). Kartovicky (2020) noted that self- advocacy includes four dimensions: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication skills, and (4) leadership skills. Upon entering college, students with disabilities are responsible for the first time in their lives to self-advocate for needed services (Fleming et al., 2017). Literature suggests that students are often misinformed regarding their disability needs, such as "how it impacts their education, their strengths, rights, and responsibilities" (Katrovicky, 2020). Unfortunately, students with disabilities often enter college with rudimentary self-advocacy and communication

skills, which hinders their capacity to express their educational needs (Kartovicky, 2020). Students must become self-aware by defining their disabilities and how their disabilities impact their ability to perform in and out of the classroom. Self-awareness increases the student's understanding of when they require academic accommodation. Such understanding requires students to be mindful of their academic strengths and weaknesses.

Michael and Zidan (2018) discussed the importance of students being aware of their legal rights regarding academic accommodations. They stated that being aware of legal rights enables students to identify instances in which their rights have been violated and subsequently advocate for reconciliation of the issue. Advocating for reconciliation requires the student to possess non-verbal and verbal communication skills and emotional intelligence (Kartovicky, 2020). Students must be capable of voicing their concerns "without appearing as aggressive" (Kartovicky, 2020, p. 240). Communication and self-advocacy skills should be practiced at a young age to ensure the student can seek and obtain needed accommodation services in college. Kleinert et al. (2010) noted that students with disability awareness, self-awareness, and proficient self-advocacy and communication skills achieve higher academic success in college compared to students lacking such understanding and skill honing.

Increased capacity for self-advocacy is associated with higher levels of college adaptation (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Successful self-advocacy includes students forming relationships with instructors and faculty, seeking services through campus disability

services, gaining awareness of self-needs, and building an on-campus support system. Erickson et al. (2015) noted that self-determination combined with self-advocacy are needed for students with disabilities to be successful in college. Academic performance and self-determination correlate positively (Erickson et al., 2015). Students with disabilities often are unable to practice self-determination skills in high school due to accommodation advocacy being controlled by adults (Fleming et al., 2017). A lack of self-determination practice can lead to students with disability lacking needed skills and confidence in self-advocating for required services.

Literature notes the importance of family, educators, and peers in students with disabilities learning self-advocacy skills (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Self-advocacy is developed during adolescence through support and encouragement from family members. Overprotective guardians that doubt their child's ability to maneuver educational or life experiences successfully can be detrimental to the development of self-advocacy skills among children with disabilities. Students with disabilities attribute their academic success and transition from high school to college through witnessing their guardians advocate on their behalf with school administrators (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Further, these students highlight the importance of being held accountable and receiving familial support as attributors to persisting in school (Murray et al., 2014). Students with disabilities note that they learn self-advocacy skills from observing and discussing college with their peers that do not have a disability (Daly-Cano, Vaccaro, & Newman, 2015). Primary and secondary level educators can assist a student with

disabilities in building self-advocacy skills by involving them in discussions regarding their individual learning plans (Kartovicky, 2020). Educators should ensure that students with disabilities understand the diagnosis of their disability, how the diagnosis impacts their learning outcomes, and what accommodations are required to address their learning needs. Such involvement will increase the student's capacity to self-advocate for needed accommodations during college.

Students with disabilities fear being marginalized and negatively stereotyped by faculty and peers when self-disclosing disability status (Banks, 2014). When students with disabilities gain enough confidence to self-disclose disability status, they often cannot clearly discuss their disabilities and associated accommodations (Fleming et al., 2017). Fleming et al. (2017) suggested that high school teachers and parents should model appropriate advocacy behaviors and skills instead of fully advocating for students with disabilities. Students should be encouraged to practice decision-making and problem-solving skills under the tutelage of trained teachers and administrators. Research illustrates that students who have prepared for self-advocacy and self-determination still encounter unexpected circumstances (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Thus, students must be trained in changing their advocacy approach to ensure they receive needed services.

Campus attitudes and behaviors can stifle the self-advocacy of students with disabilities (Fleming et al., 2017). Students with disabilities report feeling defeated when faculty and peers make disparaging remarks about disabilities, faculty refuse to

implement assigned accommodations, and faculty believe a disability decreases the student's abilities (Banks, 2014; Baker et al., 2012). Students with disability note that poor experiences with faculty altered their self-advocacy capacity and approach (Terras et al., 2015). Students with disabilities may withhold accommodations until they are needed to actively participate in a class or perform on assignments at the same level as their peers. The inability to disclose accommodation status may cause faculty to resent the student, delay accommodation implementation, or be suspicious of the student's actual need for accommodation (Terras et al., 2015).

Academic Accommodations

O'Neil and Markward (2012) noted that disabilities are either cognitive, physical, or mental disorders. Accommodations can include alternative format tests and assignments; accessible classrooms; classroom assistants; assistive technologies; extended test time; course waivers or substitutions; distraction-reduced testing; interpreting services; physical therapy/functional training; flexibility in assignment and test dates; learning strategies/study skills assistance; note-taking services; support groups/individual counseling; transportation; and residence halls specialized in accommodating students with physical disabilities. Of all accommodations, five were used by at least 20% of students with disabilities: extended test time (80%); note-taking services (44%); distraction-reduced tests (29%); assistive technology (24%); and flexibility in due dates (20%). Availability of readers, scribes, classroom note takers,

and course substitutions are positively associated with the collegiate persistence of students with disabilities (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011).

Students often struggle to identify the accommodations they need to succeed academically (Toutain, 2019). Research conducted by Salzer et al. (2008) revealed that one-third of study participants (i.e., college students with an identified disability) struggled to identify needed accommodations or resources. Students with disabilities also report being required by their center for student accessibility to self-select accommodations and resources. Self-selection of accommodations would require improved self-advocacy skills among students with disabilities (Toutain, 2019).

Universal Design

Dell et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of college professors using Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a framework for “designing course instruction, materials, and content to benefit people of all learning styles” (Dell et al., 2015). UDL does not require retrofitting or adapting course materials or instruction because the instructor designs the course with differences in how learners receive and analyze information, plan, and execute course assignments and materials, and learning priorities. There are ten steps involved in implementing universal design: (1) create content first; (2) provide user-friendly and consistent online-course navigation; (3) post an accommodation statement in the online course; (4) select a content management system tool that meets the needs of your students; (5) instruct students on netiquette; (6) only use color photos when needed; (7) provide all assignments and course content

such as lectures in accessible document formats; (8) choose reader-friendly fonts such as Arial; (9) convert PowerPoint presentations to HTML pages; (10) provide visual content in an auditory format and auditory format in a visual mode.

Reaction from Peers and Faculty

Disability type may dictate barrier types that a student will face (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018). Such barriers can correlate with a hierarchy of stigma (Smart, 2016; Fleming et al., 2017). According to the hierarchy, individuals with psychiatric disabilities tend to experience more stigma from their peers than individuals with cognitive or physical disabilities. Individuals with physical disabilities experience the least stigma from peers lacking disabilities. Biases and stigma from peers, faculty, and academic administrators may prevent students with disabilities from accessing needed accommodations (Fleming et al., 2017). The ease of attaining an accommodation is linked to the visibility of a disability (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018). Peers and faculty see individuals with physical disabilities, such as seeing a student who requires full-time use of a wheelchair. Seeing the disability increases support from professors and peers for implementing an accommodation (e.g., wheelchair ramps). Professors and peers question the legitimacy of accommodations for individuals with cognitive impairments. The inability to see the individual's disability begets questioning of the accommodation need.

Deckoff and Jones (2018) illustrated the importance of visibility by surveying students (n=25) from a large northeastern public university. The survey results showed

that university students reported higher accommodation appropriateness ratings for individuals with visible, physical disabilities seeking accessibility and academic accommodations. Contrastingly, university students reported the lowest accommodation appropriateness ratings for individuals with learning disabilities seeking accessibility and academic accommodations. Such ratings are indicative of significant societal issues. University students, much like society, have incorrect assumptions regarding disability visibility and accommodation appropriateness. Such beliefs can lead to attitudinal barriers that impede accommodation access for students with cognitive, psychiatric, and invisible physical disabilities.

Fear of Being Ostracized

Students with disabilities report being worried they will experience discrimination, isolation, or stigma from self-disclosing disability status (Lindsay et al., 2018). Students with disabilities report feeling different from their counterparts lacking disabilities (Fleming et al., 2017). Such feelings are unwelcome (Lindsay et al., 2018). Students with disabilities fear ostracization from peers and faculty (Deckoff-Jones et al., 2018). Fears of being ostracized motivate students with disabilities to not seek academic accommodations in college. Many students who receive accommodations in primary and secondary school do not have accommodations in college. Ostracization can also occur because of a phenomenon known as the spread. Kartovicky (2020) defined spread as "the idea that an individual's disability impacts others' perception of them, causing others to infer the individual has additional

disabilities" (p.244). The author noted the following example: faculty and peers view a student as having a cognitive disability because the student has an identified physical disability. Students with physical disabilities may forego accommodations to prevent misperceptions of their academic abilities.

Students without disabilities often judge a peer's disability using a 'need rule.' The 'need rule' refers to how a person lacking a disability analyzes if accommodation is appropriate for a given disability. Physical disabilities, which are accommodated with mobility aids, tend to be viewed as acceptable by students lacking a disability. Contrastingly, students with cognitive impairments are harshly judged for using physical accessibility aides (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018). Students without disabilities use an equity rule to compare the situation of a student with a disability to their own. Students without disabilities view accommodations as inequitable if the accommodation appears to make assignments or tasks easier to complete for the accommodated student (Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018).

Faculty Attitudes

Faculty often underestimate the abilities of a student with a physical, mental, or learning disability (Lindsay et al., 2018). Developing support systems, designing instruction, and ensuring instruction delivery is appropriate to students' needs are aspects of academic accommodations which fall on the shoulders of faculty (Yssel et al., 2016). Beyond the systems required to accommodate students, faculty must also forge and nurture mentoring relationships with students with identified disabilities.

The role of faculty in implementing academic accommodations is paramount in retaining and graduating students with disabilities. The role of faculty is so crucial that poor faculty attitudes may be a significant barrier to accommodation implementation.

Research indicates that faculty self-report being willing to honor and implement student academic accommodations (Bourke et al., 2000). Faculty admit that they struggle to balance students' needs and ethical concerns of maintaining the integrity of coursework, programs of studies, and universities.

Faculty are more likely to understand the need for academic accommodations when they believe a selected accommodation enables the accommodated student to achieve academic success (Bourke et al., 2000). Implementing academic accommodations, such as extended exam and assignment time, is easier for faculty who understand the necessity of academic accommodations (Bourke et al., 2000). Faculty’s understanding of the necessity of academic accommodations increases when they perceive that their university disabilities office is supportive and attentive (Bourke et al., 2000). Compared to tenure track faculty, non-tenure track faculty: report more confidence in academic accommodations enabling students with learning disabilities complete assignments and success in classes (Bourke et al., 2000); report having adequate resources for implementing accommodations listed on academic accommodation letters (Bourke et al., 2000); and were more likely to understand the need for academic accommodations (Bourke et al., 2000). Humanities and Art faculty

are more likely than math and sciences faculty to provide alternative assignment and exam forms (Bourke et al., 2000).

Faculty report resources as inadequate when the number of students with identified disabilities in their classroom increases (Bourke et al., 2000). Faculty report difficulties in designing alternative exams and assignments when the number of students with disabilities in their classroom increases (Bourke et al., 2000). Disability service offices play a crucial role in educating faculty on the need for and purpose of academic accommodations (Bourke et al., 2000).

First-Generation College Students

As noted in Chapter One, identifying as a first-generation college student may be a compounding factor for the academic success of individuals with learning disabilities. Understanding the unique barriers and facilitators of first-generation college students persisting to college graduation is important in examining the intersectionality of having a learning disability and being the first person in your immediate family to complete a college degree. In this section, the term 'first-generation college student' was defined, and demographic information was explored. The following barriers were explored: lack of familial knowledge regarding college, financial burden, failure to use college resources, lack of involvement on campus, and stress-induced health issues and coping mechanisms. The following facilitators were explored: familial support, high school community resources, college resources, and resiliency.

Defining First-Generation College Students

Petty (2014) estimated that more than 4.5 million college students across the United States identify as first-generation. Ives and Castillo-Montoya (2020) reported that more than one-third of the national college population identifies as first-generation. Definitions for first-generation include: 'first person in their family to attend college' or 'an individual who has parents that have not obtained a college degree' (Petty, 2014). Research notes that first-generation college students are more likely to be: (1) married, (2) older, (3) less involved in college activities, (4) part-time students, (5) employed, and (6) have children (Petty, 2014). They are more likely to identify with one or more underrepresented minority groups (Evans et al., 2020). The racial and ethnic breakdown of first-generation college students is as follows: 13.2% Caucasian, 19% Asian, 16.8% Native American, 22.6% African American, and 38.2% Hispanic (Alvarado et al., 2017). Hicks (2006) noted that when compared to multi-generation college students, first-generation college students lacked self-esteem, more financial constraints, different college expectations, a lack of social preparation, and poorer academic abilities.

Barriers and Facilitators of First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students often face social and academic challenges which prevent college completion (Petty, 2014). The college attendance rate of first-generation college students is lower than that of multi-generation college students (Brookover et al., 2021). Multi-generation college students are individuals attending

college with at least one guardian who has completed a bachelor’s degree (Evans et al., 2020). As reported by Evans et al. (2020) college attendance for first-generation students is 24 percent; the college attendance rate for multi-generation college students is 42 percent. Brookover et al. (2021) stated that less than 30 percent of first-generation college students will complete coursework and matriculate to college graduation. Research indicated that between 43 and 89 percent of first-generation college students leave college without obtaining a degree (Alvarado et al., 2017; Petty, 2014). First-generation college students are four times more likely to withdraw from college than multi-generation college students (Petty, 2014). Alvarado et al. (2017) noted that the grade point average of first-generation students increases when the students are retained to their third year of college. Unfortunately, 48.6 percent of first-generation college students are labeled academically ineligible during their first two semesters of college. Academic distress among first-generation college students may stem from: a lack of awareness of available college resources; obligations to their family; a lack of high school academic preparation; minimal guidance from guardian(s); financial issues; being a caregiver to a guardian or other family member; and poor mental health (Alvarado et al., 2017).

Lack of Familial Knowledge of College

The barriers faced by first-generation college students begin at home. The first-generation students' parents, family, and friends (i.e., a sphere of influence) are typically unable to provide crucial information to the student (Brookover et al., 2021;

Evans et al., 2020). For example, the student's sphere of influence cannot assist with completing college admission, financial aid, or housing applications. Overall, parents of first-generation college students cannot provide the necessary intervention, support, or guidance their children need to prepare for and ultimately attend college (Evans et al., 2020). The parents of multi-generational college students can provide their children with guidance regarding the college application process, financial support, and other resources needed to complete a college degree (Alvarado et al., 2017). Alvarado et al. (2017) noted that first-generation college students "lack appropriate information, resources, guidelines, and other important tools to help them navigate the college arena" (p.2). Lower academic performance and college attrition among first-generation college students may be attributed to family norms not being aligned with college culture and expectations (Evans et al., 2020).

Familial Support

Even with limited college-focused knowledge, parents of first-generation college students should still be involved in nurturing their child's career goals and college planning process (Brookover et al., 2021). Such involvement is noted as a positive influence on a first-generation college student's self-determination.

Research by Brookerover et al. (2021) indicated that parents of first-generation college students provide heightened emotional support to their children (Brookover et al., 2021). Parents encourage their children to set and obtain collegiate goals and often begin the encouragement process while they are young. Parents establish

expectations regarding college attendance during their children’s adolescence to ensure academic success in primary and secondary school and prepare their children with the skills needed to navigate college successfully. First-generation college students self-reported having the same level of support and motivation from their guardians as multi-generational college students (Unverferth et al., 2012).

High School Community Resources

When faced with a lack of information regarding the college process, first-generation college students seek guidance from school administrators, teachers, and counselors (Brookover et al., 2021). Griffin et al. (2011) offered that 41.9% of first-generation college students reported having sought college information from their school counselors; moreover, 30 percent of first-generation students noted that school counselors were the most helpful resource when completing college applications. Griffin et al. (2011) also pointed out that the average high school student seeks college information from a minimum of four sources. The sources included: college employees, family members, peers, community members, and high school teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators.

Brookover et al. (2021) found that first-generation students who successfully applied to and attended college were encouraged in their endeavors by multiple teachers, administrators, and counselors. Students highlighted counselors' vital role in helping them define their career goals and search for scholarships. Counselors are highlighted as the first person to discuss college with many first-generation college

students. Participants in the study conducted by Brookover et al. (2021) stated they turned to their counselors when the college application process was overwhelming. Their visits to a school counselor's office often numbered two or three times per week during their senior year of high school.

College Resources

Evans et al. (2020) found that the experiences of first-generation students with college support services differ based on institution type (i.e., Community College versus University). First-generation students at universities perceive that they receive less assistance in college regarding scholarships, career pathways, majors, and course advisement than in high school. The findings contradict past studies, such as Pascarella et al. (2004), that reported lower usage rates of college support services among first-generation college students. Participants from community colleges attributed their collegiate success to the resources and support services afforded to them by their college (Evans et al., 2020). The community college students highlighted the importance of advisors in helping them persist to graduation. The community college students listed financial aid, career services, peer tutoring, and academic advising as services that helped them endure and graduate.

Academic Preparation and Expectations

First-generation students are often less academically prepared to enter college than their peers (Schelbe et al., 2019). The lack of preparation and skills can lead to a first-generation student not understanding the coursework expectations of the

collegiate level. Unlike their multi-generation college peers, first-generation students do not have the social support to "provide context to the challenges of rigorous coursework and developing strong study habits" (Schelbe et al., 2019, p. 62). Further, first-generation students fail to seek assignment clarification or contact faculty or teaching assistants for assistance.

Financial Burden of College

First-generation college students are often labeled 'low socioeconomic status' (Petty, 2014). Their families, who often have minimal earning potential, fail to comprehend the benefits gained from completing a college degree. First-generation students are more likely to be financially independent (i.e., receiving little to no monies from their familial unit) than multi-generation college students (Evans et al., 2020). First-generation students often work to fund their college studies, provide housing and food, and assist with their family's household bills. Unlike multi-generation college students, first-generation students spend more time working and devote less time to studying (Schelbe et al., 2019). In addition to working, first-generation students depend more on student loans than their multi-generation college peers (Schelbe et al., 2019). A lack of financial security leads to first-generation students withdrawing from college.

Lack of Involvement on Campus

The lack of familial financial support can lead to first-generation students being unengaged in diverse college experiences (Evans et al., 2020). They simply lack time to

commit to social activities on campus. Schelbe et al. (2019) offered that first-generation students may forego living on campus to save money. Doing so forced them to commute to and from campus, leaving minimal time for campus involvement. For example, first-generation students are typically less involved in student organizations, such as fraternities or sororities, compared to their multi-generation college peers. The lack of campus involvement by first-generation students created a feeling of isolation from campus culture and their peers (Evans et al., 2020). Unfortunately, engagement by first-year students is positively correlated with college persistence; thus, first-generation college students may not persist in college due to their lack of campus involvement. Further, social support from peers and faculty is identified as a protective factor in retaining first-generation college students to graduation (Schelbe et al., 2019).

University students reporting success in the study conducted by Evans et al. (2020) reported increased involvement in campus activities. Specifically, they noted the importance of participating in fraternities, clubs/organizations, recreational sports, and social gatherings. Community college participants in the study conducted by Evans et al. (2020) noted the importance of social interaction in their decision to stay in college. Overall, student involvement in college campus activities enables them to visualize being at college and persisting to graduation.

Stress-induced Health Issues and Coping Mechanisms

Helmbrecht and Ayars (2021) noted that first-generation college students experience higher stress levels during the college application and collegiate process. Stressors include a lack of social or familial support, poor academic progress, and financial strain. Helmbrecht and Ayars noted that chronic stress could lead to the student experiencing physical and psychological health issues. These issues can include headaches, anxiety, gastrointestinal, and depression. Increased stress is associated with increased suicide attempts, incidences of depression, thoughts of suicide, and self-harm. The formation of harmful coping mechanisms is associated with chronic stress. Negative coping mechanisms noted by Helmbrecht and Ayars included substance use, poor diet, poor sleep patterns, and lack of exercise.

Helmbrecht and Ayars (2021) found that a student's perception of stress is associated with locus of control, self-esteem, coping strategies, and perceived social support. Students reporting increased levels of self-esteem also report lower levels of stress. A student's self-reported self-esteem grows as they progress through their collegiate studies. Unfortunately, a lack of resources, unfamiliarity with navigating the college application and collegiate processes, and a low usage rate of campus support services may produce lower self-esteem among first-generation college students (Helmbrecht and Ayars, 2021).

Lower levels of perceived stress were also associated with emotional support-seeking behaviors among first-generation college students (Helmbrecht and Ayars,

2021). Freire et al. (2016) noted that emotional support-seeking behaviors are problem-oriented in nature. “Problem-focused coping strategies involved seeking support, positive reappraisal, and planning” (Helmbrecht and Ayars, 2021, p.222). Overall, mental health wellness increases when first-generation college students employ problem-focused coping strategies.

The Resilience of First-Generation Students

Multiple authors noted the resilience of first-generation college students who overcome academic, financial, and social obstacles to complete a bachelor’s degree. Alvarado et al. (2017) stated that “resilient individuals are better prepared to deal with stressors in a constantly changing environment” (p.3). Resilient individuals are often defined by their stability when faced with adversity and their ability to welcome the dynamic nature of life. Research by Alvarado et al. (2017) indicated that first-generation college students are more resilient than multi-generation college students. First-generation college students begin college with less confidence than their multi-generation peers (Schelbe et al., 2019). The life events that serve as obstacles to college attendance for first-generation college students also prepare them to cope with stressors they face in college and have academic persistence. Brookover et al. (2021) sought to understand the individual, familial, school, and community influences on a first-generation college student’s college preparedness and readiness. Five themes emerged from their study: student agency fostering resilience, cultural values, friend and family involvement, school community synergy, and the perspectives of

college readiness for first-generation students among school community members. The first theme (i.e., student agency fostering resilience) pertained to the student's capacity to persevere from the many stressors presented while preparing for college attendance (Brookover et al., 2021).

The resilience of first-generation students can be attributed to the self-determination of each student to apply and attend college. Students participating in the study conducted by Brookover et al. (2021) noted that they had to "stay determined, organized, and self-motivated" while completing college applications and determining a viable means to finance college to ensure their postsecondary dream became a reality (p.50). Resilience is defined by two types of motivation (i.e., extrinsic, and intrinsic). Intrinsic motivation is defined by personal reasons, independent of external gains, a first-generation college student notes for attending college. For example, a student may be motivated by their status as the first person in their family to attend college. Extrinsic motivation is defined by the external benefits and factors that a first-generation college student notes as driving their desire to attend college. For example, students may note the monetary incentive associated with completing a degree and securing a career. Evans et al. (2020) findings matched those of Brookover et al. (2021). Evans et al. (2020) noted that successful first-generation students self-report elevated levels of self-motivation and independence. Participants in the study conducted by Evans et al. (202) reported having to overcome the "challenges of being self-sufficient, working, and balancing school with other commitments'' (p. 18). They

drew upon intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors to persist; through self-reflection, participants from community colleges noted their strong work ethic, self-determination, stubbornness, and commitment to setting and attaining goals.

Summary

First-generation students experience many barriers that may prevent them from accessing and completing a college degree. A lack of social support, familial knowledge, academic preparation, and even financial burden can serve as obstacles too daunting to tackle for first-generation students. Fortunately, first-generation college students are resilient; they can draw upon the many life stressors they have faced to overcome their barriers and thrive in college. College administrators should be mindful of the many obstacles first-generation college students face when designing support programs and services on campus.

Deficiencies with Past Literature

Existing studies explore barriers and facilitators of implementing academic accommodations in classrooms on private college campuses, larger universities in metropolitan areas, and in public universities with affluent student populations. Current literature also examines first-generation college students' academic readiness, college retention, and degree attainment. Literature focusing on academic accommodations for students from Appalachia is noticeably lacking. The unique academic challenges of college students with disabilities warrant an exploratory study of this group's barriers and facilitators of implementing academic accommodations.

III. Methodologies

Theoretical Framework from Literature

A biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education, developed by Hewett et al. (2017), was used to explore the academic and social challenges of college students with disabilities on a college campus in a Mid-western state in the U.S. Anderson et al. (2014) developed the first biological model of inclusive education to examine the impact of environments and other influential factors affecting a student's participation in primary education. Hewett et al. (2017) adapted the model to investigate the effects of environmental factors on college students with disabilities' experiences in higher education.

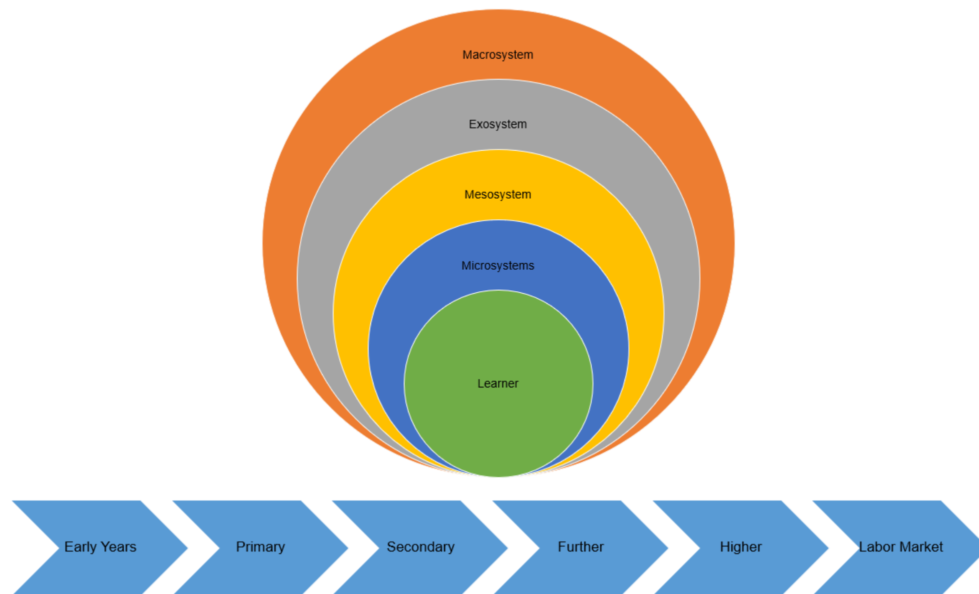

Figure 1. Biological model of inclusive higher education

As shown in Figure 1, the learner is the center of the Biological Model of Inclusive Higher Education. The learner has specific academic needs and characteristics which affect their educational outcomes. Surrounding the learner are interrelated systems, which further impact their college experience. The microsystem includes aspects of college directly affecting how the student learns. For example, this study will explore the impact of experiences of accommodated students with faculty, staff, and students in classrooms, residence halls, and even the Center for Student Accessibility staff. The mesosystem accounts for the interacting nature of the different microsystems influencing the student's college experience. For example, this study explored how issues faced in social spaces, such as the Center for Student Accessibility, affect the student's experience in the classroom. The exosystem explores factors indirectly impacting the student's college experience, such as funding for adaptive services or a campus inclusion policy. The macrosystem considers factors beyond the university campus, which can impact the exo-, meso-, and microsystems (e.g., federal policies on inclusion). This study did not explore exosystem and macrosystem levels. Finally, the biological model of inclusive higher education includes a chronosystem. A chronosystem accounts for the development of the student throughout their lifespan and how such development impacts their college experiences. This study explored the accommodation experiences of the participants while in primary and secondary school.

Using the Biological Model of Inclusive Higher Education as a guiding framework and typical case sampling (i.e., participants were purposely selected due to characteristics considered typical for a targeted population), this qualitative study explored barriers to using academic accommodation on the campus of a regional university in a Mid-western state in the U.S. among college students with identified disabilities.

Setting

This qualitative study took place on a regional university campus in a Mid-western state in the U.S. The university was located in a small town with a population of 36,000 and had approximately 15,000 enrolled students. The university awarded associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. The university was governed by a Board of Regents, which the state governor appointed.

Participants

Individuals meeting established inclusion criteria were recruited via email. Students were sent an email inviting them to take part in the study. Students electing to participate contacted the principal investigator to schedule an interview time. The recruitment email ensured students knew that participation was voluntary; thus, participants could forgo involvement at any time. Inclusion criteria included: current or former students enrolled at the University; individuals aged 18-99 years; current or former students who were registered with the Center for Student Accessibility for

academic accommodations; and students identifying as first- or multi-generation college students.

Interviews

Interviews, a popular qualitative methodology for collecting data, can be conducted using different communication channels (Lichtman, 2013). For example, interviews can be conducted in person, via web-based communication tools, e.g., Skype and Facebook chat, or by phone. Interviews require planning on the part of the researcher. Before interviewing, researchers select 5-10 questions covering topics of interest (Lichtman, 2013). The questions may be personal, concrete, or based on feelings. Interviews usually begin with warm-up questions and are followed by a grand tour question, follow-up questions, and a closing question. When possible, qualitative researchers can use focus group interviewing to illicit ideas through group interaction, which might not have evolved during an individual qualitative interview (Lichtman, 2013).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to understand better the accommodation experiences of college students with identified disabilities. Semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to incorporate open-ended and theoretically founded questions to envelop the participants “more fully into the topic under study” (Galleta, 2013, p.66). The variety and intentionality of each question included in the semi-structured interview allowed the interviewer to collect data that

were "grounded in the experience of the participant" and data that aligned with theoretical constructs derived from the scientific literature. Semi-structured interviews allow for probing questions that engage the participant in clarifying statements, critical reflection, and meaning making of the studied phenomenon (Galleta, 2013). Ultimately, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to collect more emergent and rich data (Lichtman, 2013).

The semi-structured interviews were guided by a framework presented by Galleta (2013). The Principal Investigator (PI) (i.e., interviewer) began each interview by stating the purpose of the research and thanking the participant for their involvement in the study (Galleta, 2013). The Principal Investigator then read the informed introduction paragraph, provided at the beginning of the semi-structured interview guide. Participants were then be asked, "Do you want to proceed with this interview"? Participants stating "yes" were asked if they consented to being audio recorded.

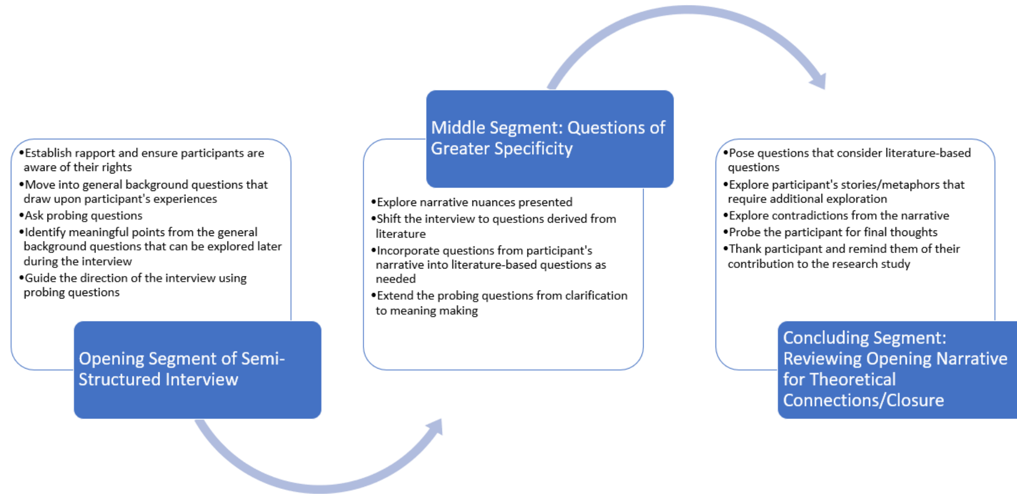

Figure 2. Process for creating interview questions (Galleta, 2013)

Interview questions were created by following guidelines presented by Galleta (2013), as shown in Figure 2 above. The interviews began with general background questions to help build rapport with the participant. The general background questions let the participants discuss their personal and academic backgrounds. The general background questions were open-ended to "create space for participants to narrate their experiences." Important to note is the intentionality of the general background interview questions; these questions were tied to the research questions and allowed the participant to describe personal "details, events, observations, insights, and emotions" experienced while seeking and obtaining academic accommodations during their primary, secondary, and post-secondary educational careers (Galleta, 2013, p.68).

The general background questions gave way to specific investigatory questions regarding student experiences seeking and implementing academic accommodations during their primary, secondary, and post-secondary educational careers. The questions were presented with chronological experiences in mind (i.e., beginning with past experiences in primary and secondary school and moving to the present and their experiences in the post-secondary educational setting). Other questions examined the treatment of the participants in social spaces on their post-secondary academic campus. Probing questions were used to clarify statements from the participants and for a more in-depth exploration of the participants' narratives. The Principal Investigator took notes of each participant's responses to posed questions. The interviews were recorded.

Thematic analysis of captured data was completed to ascertain barriers to accommodation implementation. Data were analyzed per guidance provided by Galleta (2013). The researcher began analyses by completing post-interview reflections. Post-interview reflections engaged the researcher in capturing ideas and questions that arose during and immediately after the interviews concluded. Galleta (2013) noted that post-interview reflections are considered reflexive writings that will assist the researcher during data analysis because "they introduce important ideas that shed light on the research question and the research process" (p.153). The researcher stored audio recordings of the completed interviews on a secure drive to ensure the confidentiality of the participant's narratives. Each recording was saved

under a pseudonym selected by the participants. Interviews were then transcribed, with the transcriptions checked for accuracy (Galleta, 2013). Checking the accuracy of the transcriptions builds confidence in the analysis process and the findings that were derived.

The researcher noted themes that arose and pertained to the research question (Galleta, 2013). The researcher worked to locate and label patterns that emerged from the transcribed data. Galleta (2013) notes that the emerging ideas "represent a core level of meaning and are often referred to as codes" (p.154). Codes were identified and documented in researcher memos. Memos enabled the researcher to make meaning of the codes and to highlight changes in the direction of the analysis. Researchers are encouraged to refrain from making connections between data and theory. Instead, the researcher,

> "Remain[ed] most faithful to the lived experience of study participants by immersing [himself] in the data themselves: the stories, images, metaphors, pauses, and emotions narrated by the participants, as well as the interactions between the researcher and the participant" (p.154)

The record for each emerging code included: (1) code name; (2) meaning of the code; (3) examples of the code from the participants' narratives; (4) relationship of the code to other codes in the study; and (5) status of the unique code in the analysis of the data (Galleta, 2013). The researcher ensured that each identified code pertained to the study's research questions. The researcher documented why codes were or were

not included in the final list of codes considered as patterns or clusters identified. Finally, the researcher synthesized the research themes that emerged from identified patterns or groups and grounded them in available scientific literature.

Research Assumptions

Qualitative research uses inductive reasoning to examine a phenomenon through a theoretical lens (Creswell, 2007; Yilmaz, 2013). Inductive reasoning required the researcher to craft themes, categories, or patterns from the bottom-up, which means that the researcher creates broad and abstract reasoning from individual themes. A qualitative researcher is "concerned with process, context, interpretation, meaning or understanding" instead of making generalizations or establishing causal relationships (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313). The researcher in this study was interested in better understanding the perceptions of academic accommodation implementation in classrooms on the university's campus in a Mid-western state (Creswell, 2007). The researcher acknowledged that findings from this study were not generalizable to other institutions beyond the University from which the participants were recruited.

The researcher used maximum variation sampling, which requires the qualitative researcher to select a participant pool that provides the most variation in participant demographics. As Hoepfl (1997) noted, common patterns which emerge when a qualitative scientist uses maximum variation sampling are helpful in understanding "the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program" (p. 52). The researcher assumed that the inclusion and exclusion criteria

were appropriate to yield variation in participant demographics and to provide a better understanding of the shared perspectives (i.e., themes) on the phenomenon of interest amongst students with disabilities.

Qualitative researchers emphasize being authentic investigators and providing detailed reports from interviews or observations (Hoepfl, 1997). Readers of the detailed reports of qualitative research must determine if the findings of the study make sense (i.e., coherence) and if the findings have instrumental utility (i.e., data help understand a phenomenon). The process of digesting qualitative results and then evaluating how well the findings fit the studied phenomenon is critiqued using four criteria: transferability, credibility, dependability, and data confirmability.

Qualitative research depends heavily on research credibility (Hoepfl, 1997). Credibility centers around the richness of information collected via interviews or observations and the inductive abilities of the scientist. The researcher assumed that the selected methodology (i.e., semi-structured interviews) would yield credible data. Further, the researcher conducted interviews until saturation of data was achieved. Saturation is achieved when the researcher cannot identify new ideas from the collected data set (Lichtman, 2013).

Readers of qualitative research reports review information provided by the researcher and determine the transferability of the data. Transferability refers to how well readers believe qualitative findings can be extrapolated to another social phenomenon. The researcher provided detailed reports of the interview process,

including questions asked of the participants and themes derived from the recorded data.

Qualitative researchers must also note changes that occur during the research study and how such changes could impact the study findings (Lichtman, 2013). The process mentioned above is a review of the dependability of study findings and is needed to increase the study's credibility (Hoepfl, 1997). The researcher maintained a log of changes made during the process. For example, an updated semi-structured interview guide was added to questions that organically evolve during the first interview that are added to subsequent interviews. Keeping thorough notes of changes allows future researchers to replicate methodologies.

The final criterion used to critique qualitative studies is confirmability, or the ability of the researcher to prove neutrality throughout the research process. Conformability is typically confirmed by establishing an auditable research trail. According to Hoepfl (1997), a qualitative researcher should maintain the following: “raw data; analysis notes; reconstruction and synthesis products; process notes; personal notes; and preliminary developmental information” (p. 60). The researcher assumed that the notes taken during interviews, analysis, and synthesis would suffice as an auditable research trail, thus confirming this study's reliability.

Positionality Statement

Reflexivity and Biases

The researcher had experience conducting semi-structured interviews and subsequent thematic analyses pertaining to workplace health promotion (Taylor, Horan, Pinion, and Liehr, 2014). Such knowledge helped conduct this study using the biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education to ascertain the barriers and facilitators experienced by students with disabilities as they sought and obtained academic accommodations throughout their educational experience. The researcher recognized his role as this qualitative study's primary data collection and analysis instrument (Yilmaz, 2013). The researcher acknowledged that all collected data are influenced by his background, skillset, knowledge, and experiences (Lichtman, 2013). Reflexivity is a term some qualitative researchers use when describing how they deal with their assumptions about a studied topic. Reflexivity is "self-examination primarily informed by the thoughts and actions of the researcher" (Lichtman, 2013, p.164). Some researchers will use a bracketing approach to place perceived ideas about a given phenomenon into buckets for review following observations or interviews. The researcher in this study used multiple approaches to minimize biases arising from personal views and beliefs.

The researcher identified as a cisgender, queer, white male and had been privileged to attain multiple post-secondary degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels. He understood that his experiences had the potential to bias the

collection and analysis process. The researcher believed that a semi-structured interview guide would empower the participants' narratives while minimizing the impact of the intersectionality of his identities on the research process and findings. Each participant answered the same collection of questions, with probing statements or questions used to elicit each narrative's meaning and dive deeper into concepts that the participants discussed. The questions were open-ended to help prevent friendliness (i.e., participant agrees with the researcher) and social desirability (i.e., the participant provides a response they believe is socially acceptable) biases (Shah, 2019).

The researcher used collection and analysis guidelines presented by Galleta (2013) to decrease the likelihood of confirmation bias during the research process. Shah (2019) states that confirmation bias "occurs when a researcher interprets the data to support his or her hypothesis" or when they omit data that do not support their hypothesis. The researcher also considered the order of the semi-structured interview questions and removed leading statements to minimize question-order bias (i.e., question order may influence the response of the study participant) and leading question and wording bias (questions that lead the participant to provide a desired response) (Shah, 2019).

Past Experiences with the Research Topic

The researcher has worked in higher education for eight years as an adjunct professor, associate professor, program director, and dean. He had experience working with students who sought academic accommodations and with others who

filed grievances when professors refused to implement accommodations in their classrooms. Further, he interned with the Center for Student Accessibility at the study participants' university. The researcher acknowledged the implications of students experiencing barriers that prevent them from obtaining academic accommodations that often enable them to achieve equitable educational experiences. Most notably, students may not persist in college if academic accommodations are not provided or are refused. The literature review, presented in chapter two, highlighted two critical facts regarding access and matriculation of students with identified learning disabilities: (1) more students with disabilities are attending post-secondary institutions; and (2) students who receive accommodations are more likely to persist to graduation. Further, research findings noted a positive correlation between obtaining a bachelor's degree and earning more money. The researcher hoped that the conclusions of this study (i.e., barriers and facilitators of seeking and obtaining academic accommodations) could be shared with academicians and student services personnel to promote conversation that may lead to policy and procedural changes that benefit students with disabilities.

Research Ethics, Vulnerability, and IRB Level

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) Ethical Standards guided this dissertation research. AERA presented 22 ethical considerations in its standards. Special attention was given to AERA ethical standards: avoiding harm, confidentiality, and informed consent. The proceeding paragraphs illustrate how this

study addressed liability, confidentiality, and informed consent. As reported to the Institutional Review Board of EKU, this study did not anticipate the risk to be greater than usual. The minimal risk associated with this study qualified the study to be considered a category two exempted study. Category two research is defined as "Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior" (EKU IRB, 2019).

This study ensured that the identity of the human subjects would not be readily ascertained through subject identifiers or voice recognition. Further, study participants were not expected to face any more significant risks than ordinary duties associated with their experiences on the university's campus as students. Reasonably expected risks/harms/discomforts were not expected among participants during study participation. The design of this study ensured minimal risk. The risk was minimized by not collecting personal information. Notes taken during each interview session did not include personal identifiers and were stored on a secure drive. Participants were reminded during the reading of the informed consent script that study participation could be halted or suspended at any time.

Significance

Using the biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education, developed by Hewett et al. (2017), the researcher explored the academic and social challenges of college students with disabilities on college campuses. This dissertation study examined a unique population, as participants in the sample identified as

Appalachian, first- or multi-generation college students, and a student with a disability. The intersectionality of the three identities offered a unique student perspective of the barriers to implementing accommodations in a classroom.

Students with disabilities, known as participants, who chose to participate in this study described barriers to student accommodation implementation in classrooms on the university campus. Feedback from participants will be used by the Center for Student Accessibility to improve the accommodation implementation process on campus, which will, in turn, improve the academic experience of the participants.

IV. Results

Introductory Remarks

This research study analyzed the barriers to seeking and obtaining academic accommodations at a university in a mid-western state in the United States. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants (i.e., Lisa, Natalie, Kim, Andrew, and Sam) who identified as current or past students at the University. Each student was assigned a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. Hewett et al. (2017)'s biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education was used to guide the semi-structured interviews. Specific attention was given to the learner, the model's center, and the microsystems with which the learner interacted. Participants were asked to describe their particular academic needs and interactions with faculty, students, and the Center for Accessibility (i.e., academic accommodation office). Further, the interviews included chronosystem questions to ascertain how a student's development impacted their experience seeking academic accommodations at the University.

Participants

Lisa

Lisa was a non-degree seeking student who identified as a white female and a first-generation college student. She was married with two children and lived in the university's service region. She graduated from the university with an applied health sciences degree. She aspired to attend veterinarian school and completed prerequisite

courses at the University. She noted that her inspiration for attending college was to "further [her] education" and "make a better life for [her] children." Lisa was provided accommodations by the University for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Her accommodations included extended testing time and approval to use a note-taking application (App). Lisa noted that she never required accommodations in elementary or high school. She did not need accommodations while completing her first degree. In 2021 she gave birth to her second child. Lisa stated: "Yeah, it hasn't been a lifelong issue, though I had an issue when [redacted] was born, my daughter. That caused a few more issues to worsen. So, that's when I got the accommodation". She began dealing with muscle weakness on her right side and having memory issues following her daughter's birth. Lisa described how the onset of the emerging health issues impacted her academic experience. She said:

> I have some mystery stuff going on. So, the easiest way for [the Center for Student Accessibility] to give me an accommodation was just to say, yeah, it's ADHD. So, [the University] went off of that. I noticed I was having some issues keeping up with taking notes. I was having some difficulty remembering things, and I just couldn't focus at all.

Fortunately, Lisa knew that there were students in the undergraduate program she completed at the University who had accommodations, so she was aware of the University's Center for Student Accessibility (CSA). She visited the CSA webpage to review available resources for students. She admitted that she "actually did not know

what they would do, or what they actually offered." She contacted CSA, explained her current circumstances, and inquired about available resources. She specifically asked about the extended testing time because, as she noted, she wasn't "able to even finish a lot of [her] tests." She was grateful for a quick response from a CSA employee. The employee described the available resources and the process for obtaining accommodations. Lisa noted that the CSA employee "broke it down, step by step for [her], and was really helpful."

Lisa described the ease of seeking and obtaining academic accommodations. She stated:

> So, [the university] was able to step in and yeah, after I had all the necessary documentation filled out from my doctor, they were able to step in and say okay well, you can extend your testing. We have a couple of note taking Apps that will be beneficial for you. You can use a tape recorder if you need.

Natalie

Natalie was a degree-seeking student who identified as a white female and a first-generation college student. She was single with one child and lived in the university's service region. She was pursuing an applied health sciences degree at the University. When asked why she chose to attend college, she stated, "Simply because I've had a rough past, and the more you sit and think about life, the more you sit and wonder why should I just settle. Yes, I'm doing just fine. You know? I want to be able to say yes, I love my job. Yes, I want to be this. I can be that you know and that's why.

That's why I want to be an RN.” Natalie was provided accommodations by the University for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She noted a life-long struggle with ADHD: “So it was first diagnosed when I was really little and then I got pulled out of treatment and then it was re-diagnosed…about six months ago.” Natalie noted that she had struggled with reading comprehension and memory issues since she was young. These issues led to her receiving accommodations in elementary and high school:

> As far as I can remember, I know that I had spelling when I was younger and they would pull me out of class for reading when I was in high school, um, and then we had a I had a smaller reading class. But other than that, I can't really remember much.

According to Natalie, she did not have to advocate on her behalf for accommodations while in elementary or high school. Her teachers noticed that she was not performing well and enrolled her in developmental classes for spelling and reading. She stated: “I wasn't accelerating, like the other children, and it was like well let's put her here because she's not here yet or let's put her here because she didn't make it there yet.”

Natalie tried to forego accommodations in college, but her efforts were unsuccessful. Her learning differences and text anxiety were derailing her plan of completing an applied health sciences degree:

> So, I tried it out, honestly did. I tried to ride it out like I did in high school and just tried to let it go, but when I started to not pass my exams, I was like nope. If you keep this attitude up you're for sure not going to pass and you're going to be sitting back on the old plank that you were two months ago.

She reminded herself of a promise that she made before enrolling at the University: “I made a promise to myself, and for my son when I first started, that this was going to be it. I'm 31 years old. Life comes and goes. If I don't do something now, when will I ever”?

Natalie learned about accommodations through a student success seminar required for all first-year students. The class focused on university resources available to students. She felt hopeful that the Center for Student Accessibility would be able to provide her with tools to increase her academic success. She learned that “the school has all types of different accommodations, and it helps with if you have learning disabilities and they don't turn you away.”

Natalie was apprehensive about seeking the accommodations. She noted:

> I was kind of still kind of scared. I'm not gonna lie. Because I was like if I go in there and I show them this paper that says that I have a learning disability; are they going to be like this girl's never going to make it? You know?

Although scared, she found the courage to seek accommodations:

> But when I went in there, she was, she was the sweetest person ever. She said well you know, maybe if we try getting you some read along, you know get where the book reads to you or just different things. She didn't judge me.

Ultimately, the University provided Natalie with extended testing time, readers, and approval to use a note taking application (App).

Kim

Kim was an alumnus of the institution who identified as a white female. She completed an applied health sciences degree at the University and was reared in the service region. When asked why she chose to attend college, she stated:

> Well it's what everybody else in my family did for one. But I didn't have any idea what I wanted to study. So, like I…just knew what I like learning about things, even if it's expensive, unfortunately, but I like learning about things, and so I think that is like really, really difficult to narrow down like what exactly I preferred learning about.

She initially declared as a science major but soon realized that the major would not work for her. She was on the verge of withdrawing from school until she discovered the many opportunities afforded to graduates in a particular applied health science degree field. She changed her academic major and her professional trajectory. She noted:

> I was about ready to like call it quits. I was like this isn't working out and I found [applied health sciences degree program] and I was like that's what I want to

> do with my life. Like, there's so much opportunity in the field, but there's also just opportunity to keep learning and keep growing and then every single day I do this job it's like I do something different. So, that's why I kind of decided to go to college and then not only go it's like stick with college and finish like an actual degree.

Kim received accommodations in elementary school for a speech impediment. She was unable to pronounce the letter 'R.' She did not, however, receive accommodations for other conditions that she described as impediments to her learning development. Kim battles severe social anxiety and has self-reported symptoms of ADHD and Autism. She found her condition ironic because of her desire to associate with people and join social clubs. She feels that living with social anxiety and symptoms similar to those associated with ADHD and Autism have impacted her ability to process information cognitively:

> You'll probably notice like I can't make eye contact. Like, I'll like talk to you, but like I literally look in the direction of like a wall, or like a chair, or something. So, I have kind of those things that cripple me in terms of like asking for help and asking people to slow down. Asking people to repeat what they say, because I just like I think to myself and I'm like okay everybody thinks that you're stupid like shut up. …I can't process certain things, and I have to have people repeat it or say it a different way.

Kim discussed her hardships with self-advocating in high school for needed resources to accommodate her anxiety and inability to maintain focus during classes. She felt she was pleading her case to her teachers and herself. She would engage in self-dialogue to encourage herself to seek help. For example, she would remind herself that she needed a word presented differently or ask a teacher for clarification.

> Because at the start, like all I was dealing with was more of the anxiety. Like approaching somebody being like Okay, they don't think you you're dumb. You just need it worded in a different way and, of course, other kids like didn't help. So, I would say, like it was a little bit of like self-advocating. Again, not only in terms of like teachers and it wasn't just for test either. It was for projects. It was for things like that. Like I would completely just miss the point.

Kim noted that her inability to comprehend assignment instructions provided by her instructors would lead to poor grades. She would infatuatedly spend time working on assignments but would often misinterpret the expected learning outcomes:

> I thought I did fine. Like I included certain elements. I included the pizzazz. Like, what's up and they were like well you missed the point. So, it really sucked to see things that I put effort into get looked over because I misinterpreted something and I couldn't, I didn't want to ask for clarification.

Kim revealed that she could not identify a person at her high school that she trusted and felt comfortable with asking for help. She first thought that a guidance

counselor at her school would be able to connect her with needed resources. Unfortunately, past experiences with guidance counselors at her high school had not gone well. The guidance counselors would advise her parents of her visits and disclose the details discussed. She described her feeling of hopelessness:

> I don't know I just felt like something will get back to my parents too. We don't have that great of a relationship, unfortunately, especially dealing with mental health that just didn't exist. We didn't talk about it. So even if I kind of tried to like advocate for myself, I didn't know where to go. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to say. You had a resource, maybe, but if people don't understand and acknowledge how the process works like there's no point in having the resource.

Kim attempted to traverse college without seeking accommodations. She initially relied upon strategies she developed in high school to meet the academic demands of college. She noted:

> I realized, I couldn't get away with doing, with trying to do the things I was doing in high school. Like I, I, I kind of figured out how to get by with certain things and study a certain way or test a certain way or get used to certain things. But in college it's so much different.

Kim discussed how everything was ‘bigger’ in college. She noted an increase in the number of students in each of her classes in college as compared to high school. The increase in the number of students in each of her classes would correlate to an

increase in her anxiety. She described when she made the realization that she needed assistance:

> So that was like a huge turning point for me when I was like Okay, I have to do something differently. I have to test in a different room. I have to do something. So that, when I slowly started realizing and then I got to talk to more people about like ironically, their kind of experiences. And I didn't make the decision by myself, like other people were like okay bro like you got to go do something to like help you actually study. I was like, no I'm fine. …Then, I think it was literally like junior year and I actually got access to certain things that will help me. So it's like already halfway through but I mean once that turning point hit like there was no stopping it.

Kim found motivation and reassurance to seek accommodations from her friends. She still feared, however, being judged for her learning differences.

> So, I originally, I went to the mental health counseling because I was like okay, I need what to prove that I need an accommodation? Like, I thought I didn't, I couldn't just like request it, and so I had to go do that. That sucked for me. I had to ask for the paper that was like hey she's got issues. Then I had to give it to the people at the accommodation center… They were like oh, I think you need time and a half and to be in a different room. And I was like okay that…works.

Ultimately, the University provided Kim with extended testing time and allowed her to complete her exams in the testing center or through arrangements with individual professors.

Andrew

Andrew was an alumnus of the institution who identified as a white male. He completed an applied health sciences degree at the University and was reared in the service region. Andrew was involved in the gifted and talented program in elementary and high school. He felt confident in his academic abilities throughout primary and secondary school. He even noted that he "was pretty good at it." When asked why he chose to attend college, he stated:

> College was always ingrained in me and taught me that it wasn't an option, it was like a have to. So, I think that's fairly common with people my age. I think that was kind of a push on which I think high schools use it as an evaluation of how they did on whether or not the students, make it into college. So, it's kind of a mutually beneficial thing. And I as far as once I got into college, it was then a process of what do I want to do, and then that changed, you know, three or four times, so it ended up taking me longer to graduate.

Andrew was provided accommodations by the University for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). His accommodations included extended testing time and approval to use a note-taking application (App). Andrew noted that he never required accommodations in elementary or high school. He made three attempts to

complete a bachelor's degree at the University. He stated that he did not receive accommodations during his first tenure at the University. He said:

> I think it was the second or third time that I really first started to receive assistance so. My disability is kind of meh because I don't treat it really the way that some doctors would try and do it. Because I've never considered it to be an issue. It's just the way my brain works. I've got 35 things going on at a time and I have to focus on one of those things…I ended up getting with, going through the process of finding assistance, I was able to get assistance with it. [It] was really just extended test taking time because of all the things that go around in my head. …I had done fairly well, even before that diagnosis. Except for classes, I didn't care about. Which is pretty normal too, I think?

Andrew admitted that he only met with the Center for Student Accessibility because he had a friend who was recently provided accommodations; the friend was also awarded a scholarship for their specific disability. Andrew attended an information session regarding a scholarship for his struggles with Diabetes Type I. He noted that:

> In the process of doing it, they had me go through five or six different tests. All of which I did fairly well on. But when they got to like the cognitive things where they asked me, you know well how does your brain process this and I kind of identified, you know this is what's going on up here. They set me up with them a, not a psychiatrist, a psychologist, I guess. And I went and did an

> interview process where she asked me questions about the whole time I was growing up and, and all this stuff…My ADHD's very mild grade. It's not anything that I can't manage because I've made it my whole life. It's just how I am.

The psychologist suggested that Andrew take medication for his ADHD. He did not find the medication helpful, so he decided to forgo taking it. Andrew used his diagnosis of ADHD to seek academic accommodations. The Center for Student Accessibility provided him with extended testing time, an app for recording lectures, and access to instructor notes that were provided via PowerPoint.

Sam

Sam was an alumnus of the institution who identified as a white male and a first-generation college student. He completed an applied health sciences degree at the University and was raised near the service region. Sam initially completed a science degree at another regional university in the state. He did not find employment in his field of study and decided to attend the University. When asked why he attended college, Sam stated:

> My parents have always wanted me to better myself. Always wanted me to have a better life and not that, not that we can do that, I mean I had a fantastic life. My parents both worked. …My grandmother and my great grandmother …taught me how to read and write before I went to first grade. So, I was reading before I went to school. I could write my name and everything.

He added that he loved to learn because “knowledge is power as they say.” Sam did not have accommodations while in elementary or high school. He stated that “when [he] was in grade school, that didn’t really exist.” He also felt that elementary and high school classes did not challenge him; however, he struggled with college courses, such as College Algebra. Sam described how he began having issues with focus and excess energy while attending college:

> My ADHD didn’t present itself as much in high school, as it did in college, because I was a track runner, a cross country runner in high school. So, that all the energy was spent doing that, but when I was in college, and you know you become a little more sedentary and it's when it started showing itself. Typically, and that's when I started having the most problems with everything.)

Sam described how his lack of focus impacted his ability to complete exams:

> I just needed something. A non-distracting environment is what I needed the most. I just couldn't focus because of all of the loud and people talking and noises outside and you know. I’m distracted and I would be like oh look a butterfly. I’d get distracted way too easy.

Sam did not perform well academically while completing his first undergraduate degree. He noted that he was not diagnosed with ADHD at that time:

> No, I had no accommodations whatsoever and that’s why I didn’t do so good. And I mean I did okay. I could have done a lot better. …I didn't know, I mean, I just didn’t know. I was undiagnosed. I had no clue.

Sam was not diagnosed as having ADHD until his late 20s. He said that the diagnosis changed his life. He made the Center for Student Accessibility at the University aware of his diagnosis. He stated that he “went to the disability office and signed up” for accommodations. He found the CSA staff to be helpful and very understanding. The CSA provided him extended time and access to the testing center to help minimize distractions.

> She was like here's what you…can have. You can either come to our facility and test, if you have tests, or you can have an extra hour in your classrooms where you prefer, or whatever your professor wants you to do. I mean it was my choice. Sometimes I would sit in the classroom…if it was a small class. Or if it was a larger class with a lot of people, I would usually go to the testing facility.

Themes

Theme One: Insufficient Knowledge

The first theme that emerged during the interviews pertained to the participants’ knowledge of the Center for Student Accessibility and the resources that the center could provide. All five participants noted that they did not receive accommodations in high school. Andrew, Lisa, and Sam described not being challenged by their high school curricula. Andrew even took part in his high school’s gifted and talented program. Kim and Natalie did face some academic challenges while in high school. Kim discussed being self-aware that she needed assistance but often failed to seek help from her teachers due to her battles with social anxiety. A lack of

accommodations led to her struggling to comprehend assignment instructions and receiving lower assignment grades. Natalie did receive special attention for issues with below-grade-level reading comprehension. Neither Kim nor Natalie had documented accommodations while in high school, which left them unaware of available resources.

All participants discussed being unaware of resources available through the Center for Student Accessibility (CSA) upon entering college. The knowledge deficit led to the participants not having accommodation-seeking behaviors. Most participants sought help from the CSA because of peer encouragement or after reaching a point of despair. Lisa noted that she was ready to withdraw from school and forego her dream of attending a veterinarian school. Lisa “almost quit multiple times” because she “just couldn't keep up.” She attributed her inability to maintain focus and perform well academically to having a newborn daughter. She noted that, while attempting to complete prerequisite courses for veterinarian school, her daughter wasn’t sleeping, or they would have “a rough night.” She continued to make excuses for the change in her academic performance until her “daughter started sleeping 12 hours a night”. Lisa was finally able to receive some much-needed sleep. She then realized that sleep deprivation wasn’t the culprit and that she couldn’t match the needed pace for her courses. Luckily, she had friends receiving accommodations who directed her to the CSA website. She said, “if [she] hadn't went to the [CSA]website” she “would have quit.” Lisa learned that she could receive the extended testing time, and in her words, which was “really all [she] needed.”

Natalie had attempted college after graduating high school but was unsuccessful because of distractions in her life. She admittedly described being uninterested or not focused on school. She decided to return to school to support her young son and wanted this attempt to be different. Natalie learned about CSA resources during a first-year seminar course. She noted that the seminar professor reviewed all available resources on campus. She highlighted the importance of new students completing the course because it enabled her to discover the available academic accommodations and the supportive nature of CSA.

Sam discussed how he perceived the CSA to be exclusively for students with physical disabilities. He noted that he "never really asked anyone" and just assumed that the CSA was for "someone with physical disabilities" not someone with a learning difference. He investigated if he would be eligible for academic accommodations by visiting the CSA webpage. Sam described being shocked when he learned that the CSA provided services for many students with physical differences, mental health issues, and learning needs. Upon reviewing the webpage, Sam felt seen. According to Sam, his first thought was: that's me. The epiphanic moment was the catalyst for Sam to seek much-needed resources.

Kim realized she needed assistance when she "couldn't get away with" implementing the strategies she used in high school to compensate for her learning differences and social anxiety. Also, her social anxiety was especially challenging in the large college classrooms. Having reached a breaking point, she sought advice from

peers receiving academic accommodations. They encouraged her to speak with the CSA. Kim met with CSA and was provided with academic accommodations. Kim noted that she retrospectively wished that the CSA had explained all available accommodations and inquired about her specific needs. She felt the accommodations were not customized to her particular learning needs.

Lisa and Natalie both discussed the need for more advertisements by CSA to inform new and existing students of available academic accommodations and resources. Natalie suggested that the CSA work with the University to include statements about academic accommodations in the school's learning management system (LMS). She offered this advertisement solution in response to other messages she sees that the university widely broadcasts on the LMS. She thought including the advertisements may embarrass potential students but believed it was "okay to be embarrassed by something for a little amount of time if it's going to help somebody in the long term."

Theme Two: Identity Issues

Identify issues that emerged as a theme throughout the interviews. Most participants wanted to be treated like their peers. Natalie stated that she served as her impediment when thinking about seeking accommodations. She described feeling anxious and nervous about seeking accommodations because of embarrassment. She was embarrassed about her self-perception of being different from her peers. She

questioned why she required accommodations and was convinced that her peers would not understand why she received assistance from the CSA.

Others feared integrating their disability into their identities. Natalie stated that she would “love to have people around that sees [her] for [her]” and not as her mental health issue. She discussed wanting to be humanized and not treated differently because she learned differently from her peers. Kim did not want to be defined by her mental health issues or learning differences. Kim noted that one of the last things she learned from college was “being okay with having a mental health issue” that impacted her “ability to be successful in “classroom settings” and “project settings.” Kim’s struggle with accepting how her mental health issue impacted her capacity to perform academically was evident throughout her interview. She described feeling anxious about having to visit the University’s counseling center to document her diagnosis of social anxiety. She perceived the documentation as an affirmation of her having “issues.”

Participants also noted a desire to be self-sufficient and autonomous. Andrew mentioned several times during the interview that he considered his ADHD symptoms mild. He was prescribed medication to counter the symptoms but did not like how he felt while taking it. He described feeling like a ‘zombie’ while on the medicine and preferred using self-taught coping strategies to overcome any issues he faced from having ADHD. He said that for him, “it’s a pride thing.” Andrew stated, “you can do anything you set your mind to. Buckle down. You can do this.” He did not seek

accommodations during his first two attempts at college. He noted that he didn't feel as though he had a problem. He also stated that he only used accommodations in courses he deemed challenging. For example, he did not use his accommodations in his major courses. Instead, he used them in science and mathematics courses. Andrew often met with his professors to seek assistance without disclosing that he had accommodations through the CSA.

Theme Three: Lack of Self-sufficiency

Participants noted that the accommodation process was not as effective as they had hoped. Participants described appreciation for accommodations but noted that having accommodations requires students to be self-sufficient. Students must send copies of their accommodations letter, which describes what services or accommodations a student needs, to their professors. Natalie described a situation where she sent the letters during the first week of the 16-week term but forgot to send them to professors of her 8-week courses that started after midterms. She received poor grades in the 8-week class and finally remembered that she had not sent the letter describing her accommodations to her professor. The participants questioned why the onerous of distributing accommodations letters was left to them and not handled by the Center for Student Accessibility.

Andrew said that students with accommodations must be proactive, a skill he had not honed. He said, "with the extended test-taking time, you had to tell them, you know, a couple weeks before the test." Andrew wouldn't remember that he had a test

until a few days beforehand, leaving him to either take his exam with his peers or request special arrangements with his professor. Natalie echoed the sentiments shared by Andrew. Natalie stated, “If you want to take your tests at their facility, you still have to send in the paper for that. So, it's still your responsibility “. Such responsibility can be demanding for students with poor organizational or time management skills.

Kim reiterated throughout her interview that she genuinely needed to take exams alone. A few of her professors did honor her specific needs, but there were instances when she forgot to plan with her professors to take tests in a room by herself. She described a situation in which she failed to make the request, and her accommodations were ignored entirely. The professor refused to allow her to reschedule the test. The professor stated, “no, you're just gonna have to take it here because you didn't submit a request to like do it.” Kim described the testing center environment as unsuitable for her learning needs. She stated that “even when [she] did submit the request [she] still took [tests] in a room with” other students. She was distracted by the students because they “were doing other things and focusing on other things” and “taking their own exams”.

Theme Four: Desire to Avoid Adverse Social Reactions

Interview participants desired to avoid adverse social reactions regarding accommodations with faculty, staff, and peers. Natalie described being scared when she visited the CSA to commence the accommodation-seeking process. She questioned

if she went to CSA and provided proof of a learning disability, would they tell her that she would never complete college? She stated: “Are they going to be like this girl's never going to make it?” In some instances, Natalie did not inform her professors of her accommodations because of anxiety. She said she “didn’t want the other…classmates to think anything.” When she finally informed her professor of her accommodations, the professor noted, “you should have said something to me.”

Kim discussed a situation where her professor refused to allow her to take exams in the CSA’s testing center. The professor made “a big deal about it.” Kim noted that she felt belittled and decided to avoid a hostile situation with the professor by honoring his request to take the exam with her peers. Her social anxiety prevented her from reiterating her need to be accommodated. She told herself that she had to “get through this one class and then” she would “never have to deal with [him] again.”

Andrew noted that he avoided negative social interactions with professors who said no to his accommodation requests. He would not question their decision but instead, ask what accommodations the professor would accept. He described how he would ask his professors what documentation they needed from him to prove that he required accommodations. He worked hard to maintain a calm, collective demeanor and to present himself as not being ‘entitled.’ He noted that he wasn’t “gonna be the person that gets mad or argues.”

Theme Five: Negative Experiences with Faculty

The fifth theme to emerge from the interview was negative experiences with faculty. Participants noted that faculty would fail to implement an accommodation or inform students that accommodations were not needed in their classes. Kim recalled having a science professor who ignored her accommodation for testing in the CSA. The professor told her that his tests were not complex, and she would perform adequately. The professor told Kim that she could "take [the test] in [the classroom]" with her peers "or not take it." Kim attempted to clarify with the professor that she had no issues with the difficulty of the content; instead, her diagnosis of social anxiety prevented her from focusing and completing the exam on time when surrounded by her peers. Several professors, in her opinion, tried to diminish her diagnosis of social anxiety. The professors would say, "you don't have anxiety, everybody gets scared and worried, sometimes." Other professors would allow her to complete the exam at the CSA or in a classroom nearby her peers. Unfortunately, on several occasions, she had professors who did not check on her during the testing time, which led to her questions not being answered. Kim said the professor treated her "as a second-class citizen."

Kim also described a situation where an applied health sciences professor mocked her friend during class. Kim's friend had dyslexia and struggled to spell scientific terms on assignments and exams correctly. The student asked the professor if he would deduct points for misspelled words. The professor said, "well, if the word is

cat, I expect you to know how to spell cat." At that moment, Kim said that many of her fears regarding accommodations were realized. She noted that "it was the exact thing that [she] was afraid of" and kept her from initially seeking diagnosis and accommodations.

Sam described a situation in which his professor refused to accept or acknowledge his accommodation. He presented his professor with his accommodation letter, and she said, "I don't want that, I don't need that." When asked if she honored his accommodations, Sam said she did not. She did not send his exams to the CSA testing center and refused to provide extended testing time. Fortunately, he was able to report the situation to the university's administrators. The administrators met with the professor and ultimately allowed Sam to repeat a course section. Sam had to complete other courses for which the same professor was the lead instructor. According to Sam, the professor accepted his accommodations in the subsequent courses but treated him differently. In fact, the professor accused him of plagiarism, leading to Sam failing in one of the subsequent courses he completed with her.

Several participants highlighted situations where the faculty did not promptly or appropriately provide course materials. Andrew's accommodations included the provision of written notes from his professors. Several professors did not provide the notes or would provide them after months of requests by Andrew. Lisa's science professor would forget that Lisa had accommodations and remove her from class for pop quizzes. She described several instances of being removed and how students

would stare and ask questions (Lisa, 2022). Lisa was not upset by being removed from class. She did note that other students with accommodations might become upset by being removed, as their anonymity could be compromised.

Chapter Conclusion

Chapter Four introduced the five participants (i.e., Lisa, Natalie, Kim, Andrew, and Sam) and provided insight into the participants' chronological experiences with academic accommodations before enrolling in and attending college. The five participants identified as white and lived in the central Appalachian region of the United States. The participants noted that they did not have academic accommodations in high school. One participant, Kim, did have speech therapy while in primary school. The participants also emphasized the catalyst for seeking academic accommodations from the Center for Student Accessibility at the University.

The second section of Chapter Four was dedicated to discussing the five themes identified following the thematic analysis of transcribed semi-structured interview data. Three themes (i.e., insufficient knowledge, identity issues, and lack of self-sufficiency) were associated with the center (i.e., student) of the Biological Model of Inclusive Higher Education. The remaining themes (i.e., desire to avoid adverse social reactions and negative experiences with faculty) dealt with the interactions between students and microsystems (i.e., faculty, staff, and peers).

V. Discussion

This research aimed to examine the barriers faced by current and former students who had registered accommodations with the Center for Student Accessibility at a University in a Midwestern state. Five themes emerged from the interviews conducted with the five participants (i.e., Lisa, Natalie, Kim, Andrew, and Sam). As Chapter III (Methodologies) explored, the Biological Model of Inclusive Higher Education was used to guide this research. Three of the identified themes were explicitly associated with the learners' specific academic needs and characteristics which affected their educational outcomes: (1) insufficient knowledge, (2) identity issues, and (3) lack of self-sufficiency. As previously illustrated, the learner is at the center of the inclusive higher education model. Two themes dealt with barriers at the microsystem level, which are interrelated systems that surround the learner and affect how the student learns: (4) desire to avoid adverse social reactions; and (5) negative experiences with faculty. The proceeding paragraphs highlight the findings from this study as they relate to current literature.

Insufficient Knowledge

The current study identified insufficient knowledge of available resources through the Center for Student Accessibility as a central theme. Participants noted being unaware of their learning differences and having entered college without receiving academic accommodations in elementary or high school. The participants performed well academically before attending college and therefore lacked knowledge

of the resources available to them through the Center for Student Accessibility (CSA). Each participant highlighted their turning point or moment in their collegiate career when they realized they needed help. Through conversations with friends or self-discovery, each participant contacted their university's CSA to discuss accommodations. The lack of knowledge regarding available resources (e.g., academic accommodations) hindered their classroom performance and academic success. Current literature highlights insufficient knowledge of centers for disability services on college campuses and the resources available through the centers as a barrier for students with diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disabilities (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Lyman et al., 2016; Toutain, 2019).

Cawthon and Cole (2010) found that students with learning disabilities are not equipped to locate disability services on campus, apply for and receive accommodations, nor advocate for needed services upon transitioning to college from high school. The findings of the current study support those reported by Cawthon and Cole. Students in the present study noted being unaware of the particular services for learning disabilities on campus. One participant, Sam, even discussed being confused by the term 'disability services,' as he perceived those services as exclusive to students with physical disabilities or impairments.

Several participants in the current study stated that their ignorance regarding available resources persisted after registering with the CSA. They attributed their lack of knowledge regarding resources to the CSA telling them which accommodations they

would receive instead of reviewing all available accommodations that matched their specific learning disability. Literature supports this finding, as Salzer et al. (2008) and Hong (2015) found that students with learning disabilities struggle to understand and identify accommodations available to them.

Literature also supports the current study's findings regarding how students are motivated to seek academic accommodations. Toutain (2019) noted that students often become aware of their learning disability after demonstrating “performance-related indications” (p.299), such as failing exams. Poor academic performance, according to literature, prompts attention from professors who provide students with contact information for disability services staff (Toutain, 2019). One participant, Natalie, of the current study, noted that she learned about academic accommodations in a first-year seminar course. The course was designed to educate new students about the available resources on campus. Natalie’s experience seems to be contraindicative of current literature and serves as a proactive example of aligning students with learning disabilities with needed accommodations. Ultimately, the findings of the present study regarding students with learning disabilities having insufficient knowledge of available resources on college campuses support those reported by Cawthon and Cole (2010), Hong (2015), Lyman et al. (2016), Salzer et al. (2008), and Toutain (2019). The current study does add to the contemporary literature regarding insufficient knowledge of available resources, as the study population attended a regional University in the central Appalachian region.

Identity Issues

The second student-centered theme to emerge was identity issues. Participants in the current study described a need to be treated like their peers. Contemporary literature (Marshak et al., 2010; Lyman et al., 2016) suggests that students with learning disabilities forgo accommodations for fear of their peers resenting them and to prevent being singled out. Further, Marshak et al., 2010 found that students with learning disabilities report being treated differently by their peers upon revealing their disability or accommodations. Students with learning disabilities fear that their peers will equate their accommodations with receiving special treatment. Lyman et al. (2016) found that students with learning disabilities did not want to be a burden on their faculty and disability services staff. They would choose not to disclose their accommodations to avoid placing "an extra burden on others" (Lyman et al., 2016, 128).

Several participants in the current study noted the importance of being self-sufficient. For example, Andrew only used accommodations in courses he deemed difficult, such as science and mathematics. Lyman et al. (2016) reported a similar theme (i.e., desire for self-sufficiency) in their study of students with learning disabilities who attended a private, religious university in the US. They found that students with learning disabilities often forgo using accommodations to maintain independence and be self-sufficient. Similar to Andrew in the current study, Lyman et al. participants attributed their need for freedom and failure to seek assistance to

being prideful. They preferred to be self-accommodating by seeking assistance directly from their professors without disclosing their accommodation status.

Participants discussed their desire not to integrate their learning disability into their identity. One participant noted the importance of not being dehumanized by her peers. She feared that her peers would only see her learning disability and not the other facets of her identity. Several participants struggled with accepting their learning disability and were apprehensive of how their peers and faculty would treat them. The current study's findings are supported by those discussed in Marshak et al. (2010). Marshak et al. reported that participants in their study did not want to integrate their learning disability into their identity because of perceived treatment from their peers. Participants in the study conducted by Marshak et al. believed that their peers would "think that having a disability is unacceptable in some way" (p.156). Lyman et al. (2016) found that students did not want to be labeled as 'disabled students' or treated as less capable, competent, or independent than their peers. Findings from the current study regarding identity issues among students with learning disabilities support those reported by Marshak et al. (2010) and Lyman et al. (2016). Additionally, the current study provides insight into identity issues students face at a regional university in central Appalachia. To date, the identity issues of this particular demographic have not been explored in current literature.

Lack of Self-sufficiency

The final theme highlighted the students' lack of self-sufficiency when managing their accommodations. Natalie discussed a situation in which she failed to send her accommodation letter to a professor during the second 8-week term. Andrew noted that the onerous of scheduling exams in the testing center was left to the accommodated student. He often forgot to work with his professors to schedule exams in the testing center. Kim noted that she failed to submit a request to complete her exam in the testing center, and her professor would not provide alternate accommodations. Students admitted that they lacked self-sufficiency and proactive habits in each scenario. Their inability to be proactive or manage the accommodation process led to their accommodations not being fully utilized. This finding contradicts theme one regarding identity issues. Participants, such as Andrew, reported a desire to be self-sufficient but also noted that he frequently failed to submit a request to take his exams in the testing center on campus. The current study's findings support those Hong (2015) reported.

Participants in the study conducted by Hong (2015) noted a "deep desire for independence and being self-reliant" (p.218). They felt adamant about proving themselves academically to their professors and peers. This desire sparked the participants in Hong's (2015) study to forgo utilizing their accommodations. They viewed the accommodations as a burden on the instructor or an impediment. Specifically, the process required for using their accommodations was burdensome

and time-consuming. They chose “expediency and self-sufficiency” by completing assignments and exams without accommodations (p.219). Ruminative in thought, the students recognized the risk of failing by not using accommodations. Unfortunately, the thrill of performing well academically without accommodations reinforced the risk-seeking behaviors among the students. Also, similar to students in the current study, Hong's (2015) participants highlighted their lack of time management skills. Deficiencies in their time management skills led to the participants failing to submit assignments or request needed accommodations.

Like Hong (2015), Cawthon and Cole (2010) also reported that 13% of participants in their study struggled with scheduling their extended tests. As was found in the current study, Lyman et al. (2016) noted that students perceived the process of utilizing their accommodations as burdensome. The burden led to some participants feeling overwhelmed and hopeless. These feelings fueled their choice not to use their accommodations and risk poor academic outcomes.

Desire to Avoid Adverse Social Interactions

The first theme highlighting a barrier faced by students while interacting with a microsystem was the students’ desire to avoid adverse social interactions regarding academic accommodations with faculty, staff, and peers. Natalie described delaying her initial visit to the Center for Student Accessibility in fear of being told she wouldn’t be successful in college. She was also afraid that her peers would treat her differently because of her accommodation status. This fear prevented her from disclosing her

accommodation status to her professors. Kim did not question her professor's decision to forego honoring her accommodations. Andrew modified his behavior to ensure he did not have an altercation with his professors when requesting accommodations. Each participant mentioned above changed their accommodation seeking or usage to avoid having a negative experience with an individual representing a microsystem (i.e., Center for Student Accessibility, faculty, and peers). These findings are consistent with those reported by Hong (2015), Marshak et al. (2010), and Lyman et al. (2016).

Participants in the study conducted by Hong (2015) reported not disclosing their accommodation status to their professors for fear of being viewed as not capable of completing the coursework. They also noted feelings of being "treated differently from a normal student" when they disclosed their accommodation status to their professors (Hong, 2015, p.214). Such experiences led to the participants feeling judged and treated with disdain. Ultimately, participants felt uncomfortable discussing their accommodations with faculty and would forego disclosing their accommodation status until weeks or even months into a semester. Disclosure of their accommodation status typically occurred following the poor academic performance.

Lyman et al. (2016) found that students receiving accommodations were conscious of how their peers and faculty viewed them for using their accommodations. Three emerging sub-themes categorized the desire to avoid adverse social reactions: judgment for receiving special treatment, not wanting to be considered or treated differently, and not wanting to be a burden (Lyman et al., 2016). Participants in the

study noted a desire for their peers to not view their accommodations as special treatment or as a means to take advantage of the educational system. Participants discussed feeling their peers were jealous or suspicious of their accommodations. Like Andrew in the current study, Lyman et al. (2016) participants did not want to be a burden to faculty or staff. Participants elected not to use their accommodations to minimize the burden on faculty. Lastly, participants in the Lyman et al. (2016) study did not want to be treated differently because of their accommodations. They feared that faculty, staff, and students would treat them as if they were "less competent or fragile" (Lyman et al., 2016, p.128).

Marshak et al. (2010) reported that participants desired to avoid adverse social reactions with their peers. Specifically, participants in Marshak's study did not want to be singled out by their peers for having an accommodation. Participants noted feeling different from their peers for having to use accommodations. Some participants questioned if interactions with their peers would change based on their accommodation status. Other participants in the Marshak et al. (2010) study feared that their peers would resent them for receiving special treatment. They reported altered interactions with peers upon self-disclosing their accommodation status.

Negative Experiences with Faculty

The final microsystem theme that emerged from this study was students having negative experiences with faculty members. Those experiences included faculty failing to implement accommodations, informing students that accommodations were

not needed in their classes, and viewing accommodations as a means to lower academic standards.

Current literature suggests that students with disabilities will not self-disclose their academic accommodation nor seek assistance from their course instructor if they perceive that a faculty member has an issue with their accommodations (Skinner, 2007; McCarron, 2020). Unfortunately, numerous studies have highlighted a failure of faculty to implement or partially implement accommodations (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009; Erten, 2011; Marshak et al., 2010). Several factors are reported as the root cause of faculty not implementing accommodations. As was found in this study, declination of academic integrity is cited in the literature as a concern by faculty when asked to accommodate students (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009; McCarron, 2020). Faculty fear that specific accommodations will provide an unfair advantage to the accommodated student (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009). For example, faculty may believe that students who complete their exams in testing centers instead of their classrooms will be able to use resource materials during the exam.

Often, faculty lack needed knowledge of disability laws, accommodation practices, and learning disabilities which can impact their capacity to accommodate students with disabilities (McCarron, 2020). Unless disclosed by the accommodated student, faculty are typically unaware of the disability for which a student receives accommodations. Wolanin and Steele (2004) suggest that faculty are less likely to

commit to and take ownership of implementing an accommodation when they are unaware of the underlying issue leading to the accommodation.

Chapter Conclusion

Chapter Five presented the five identified themes (i.e., insufficient knowledge, identity issues, lack of self-sufficiency, desire to avoid adverse social reactions, and negative experiences with faculty) in context with contemporary literature. Findings supported contemporary literature.

Themes at Learner Level

Students were unaware of their learning difference upon entering college and of the Center for Student Accessibility resources available to them. Receiving treatment similar to their peers, being self-sufficient, and not integrating their learning disability into their identity were significant concerns for the current study participants. Participants noted they lacked self-sufficiency in managing their academic accommodations. Although they often failed to utilize their accommodations fully, they felt adamant about proving themselves academically to their professors and peers.

Themes at Microsystem Level

At the microsystem level, participants expressed a desire to avoid negative social interactions regarding academic accommodations with faculty, staff, and peers. Participants failed to disclose their accommodation status to avoid having difficult discussions with their peers regarding how the accommodation functions and to

prevent faculty from treating them differently (e.g., faculty viewing the participants as less competent compared to students not receiving academic accommodations). The final microsystem theme that emerged was students' negative experiences with faculty members. Those experiences included faculty failing to implement accommodations, informing students that accommodations were not needed in their classes, and viewing accommodations as a means to lower academic standards.

VI. Conclusions

Introductory Remarks

This qualitative case study aimed to explore barriers to seeking and obtaining classroom accommodations for college students with identified learning disabilities attending a regional university in a Midwestern state in the United States of America. The study addressed the following research question: what barriers exist for first-and multi-generation college students with disabilities seeking and obtaining academic accommodations on the campus of the University? A Biological Model of Inclusive Education for use in Higher Education, developed by Hewett et al. (2017), was used to explore the academic and social experiences of the participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand better the accommodation experiences of college students with identified learning disabilities. Open-ended and theoretically founded questions were used during the interviews. Interview questions were created by following guidelines presented by Galleta (2013). Transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews were completed. Thematic analysis of the transcribed interview data was completed to ascertain barriers to accommodation implementation. Data were analyzed per guidance provided by Galleta (2013).

Implications

Findings from the current study are supported by contemporary literature. The three learner-centered (i.e., insufficient knowledge, identity issues, and lack of self-sufficiency) and two microsystems (i.e., desire to avoid adverse situations; and

negative experiences with faculty) are cited in the literature as potential barriers that college students face while seeking and obtaining academic accommodations. The proceeding points highlight the major conclusions from the current study:

- Students were unaware of their learning difference upon entering college and of the Center for Student Accessibility resources available to them. These findings support the existing literature regarding students having insufficient knowledge of their learning disability and the availability of academic accommodations (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Hong, 2015; Lyman et al., 2016; Salzer et al., 2008; Toutain, 2019).
- Receiving treatment similar to their peers, being self-sufficient, and not integrating their learning disability into their identity were significant concerns for the current study participants. These findings support the existing literature regarding identity issues among students with learning disabilities (Lyman et al., 2016; Marshak et al., 2010).
- Participants noted they lacked self-sufficiency in managing their academic accommodations. Although they often failed to utilize their accommodations fully, they felt adamant about proving themselves academically to their professors and peers. These findings support the existing literature regarding a lack of self-sufficiency in managing academic accommodations (Cawthon and Cole, 2010; Hong, 2015).

- At the microsystem level, participants expressed a desire to avoid adverse social interactions regarding academic accommodations with faculty, staff, and peers. Participants failed to disclose their accommodation status to avoid having difficult discussions with their peers regarding how the accommodation functions and to prevent faculty from treating them differently (e.g., faculty viewing the participants as less competent compared to their peers). These findings support the existing literature regarding students with academic accommodations wanting to avoid adverse interactions with faculty, staff, and students (Hong, 2015; Lyman et al., 2016; Marshak et al., 2010).
- The final microsystem theme that emerged was students' negative experiences with faculty members. Those experiences included faculty failing to implement accommodations, informing students that accommodations were not needed in their classes, and viewing accommodations as a means to lower academic standards. These findings support the existing literature regarding students with academic accommodations having negative interactions with faculty (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009; Erten, 2011; Marshak et al., 2010; McCarron, 2020; Wolanin and Steele, 2004).

- The current study is the first to date that focuses on first- and multi-generational students and alumni who hail from central Appalachia and attend a regional university. Existing literature includes studies conducted at research institutions or state schools that are located outside of the central Appalachian region, such as in the US Pacific Northwest (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009), Canada (Erten, 2011), US Mid-Atlantic (Marshak et al., 2010) or US East Coast (Hong, 2015). Thus, the findings of this current study build upon contemporary literature, as perspectives of students from central Appalachia are highlighted.

Practical Implications

This section reviews practical modifications that can be made by the University, at which the study took place, to assist students in overcoming some of the identified barriers to seeking and obtaining academic accommodations. All five of the participants noted being unaware of available resources (e.g., academic accommodations and help with diagnostic testing for learning disabilities) provided by the Center for Student Accessibility (CSA). The participants offered advice on increasing awareness of resources available through CSA. Natalie and Lisa felt that advertising available resources via the University's learning management system or student services platform would help to increase visibility of the CSA and in turn educate students on available resources. Natalia also mentioned the crucial role her

first-year seminar course played in educating her on resources available through the CSA. The curriculum of the first-year seminars at the University are designed to include required topics; one of the required topics is a review of resources available through the CSA. Unfortunately, time spent covering available CSA resources will vary by instructor. The University could require all faculty who teach the first-year seminar to attend multi-day training to learn how to instruct the seminar.

Study participants noted having a lack of self-sufficiency, such as poor time management and novice advocacy kills. Additionally, they found the accommodation process to be burdensome or ineffective. The University should consider modifying the accommodation process to include coaching on personal skills (e.g., time management and self-advocacy). Currently, students are provided letters of accommodation for which they are responsible for submitting to faculty. The University's CSA could ask students how they would like their letters of accommodation to be delivered. The letters could be provided directly to students with strong self-advocacy skills, as they are more likely to be comfortable with faculty interactions. The CSA could send the letters directly to faculty on the behalf of students who lack self-advocacy skills. The CSA could then work with the student to hone their self-advocacy skills in hopes of transitioning the responsibility of delivering the letters of accommodation from the CSA to the student. Participants also noted difficulty with scheduling tests in the CSA testing center. They noted a lack of time management and organizational skills as the reason of their struggles. The CSA could work with other departments on campus to

offer time management and organizational skills training. Specific attention should be given to using syllabi and class outlines to schedule exams and quizzes in advance.

Finally, students noted that faculty failed to implement accommodations fully or properly. As noted in the literature review in Chapter Two, faculty often lack proper training on the accommodation process. The findings of this study highlight the importance of introducing faculty to the accommodation process and defining their role in assisting accommodated students. The introduction could occur during new faculty orientation, required professional development sessions, or through participation in professional learning communities. Francis et al. (2019) recommends that faculty be cognizant of different disabilities that student may have, how to provide effective accommodations, and how to mentor students on available resources through the CSA.

Future Research

The current study focused on the experiences of current and former students with disabilities who attended a regional university in a Mid-western state of the U.S. Unfortunately, the sample size was small (n=5). Future research would benefit from a larger sample size to better identify themes during thematic analysis. The sample was not exclusively first-generation students. First-generation students face unique challenges regarding access to and matriculation from college, as noted in the literature review. Future research focused primarily on first-generation students with an identified learning disability would help grow the existing literature and thus could

be impactful on processes and procedures implemented by disability services offices, such as the Center for Student Accessibility at the University noted in the current study. The study examining the experiences of first-generation college students with learning disabilities could use a similar methodological approach as the present study (i.e., a semi-structured interview process using the biological model of inclusive education for use in higher education (Hewett et al., 2016).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The Principal Investigator will read following recruitment script to each study participant:

- You are being invited to take part in a research study on Perceived Facilitators and Barriers of Implementing Student Accommodations. This study is being conducted by Dr. Clint Pinion, Jr., a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University.
- If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview. Your participation is expected to take no more than 60 minutes. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences with student accommodations on the campus of Eastern Kentucky University.
- This study is confidential. You will not be asked to provide your name or other identifying information as part of the study. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write up the results of the study, we will write about this combined information.
- The Principal Investigator does not anticipate you being exposed to risk greater than what you encounter in daily life; however, if any question posed cause unpleasant, upsetting, or otherwise objectionable feelings or emotions, please know that you can forgo participation at any time. A trained counselor will be available in the CSA office for your use during or following the interview.
- If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.
- This study has been reviewed and approved for exemption by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University as research protocol number [add protocol number from final approval]. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Clint Pinion, Jr. (clintpinion2013@gmail.com or 859-779-3143). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, please contact the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University by calling 859-622-3636.
- Do you want to proceed with this interview?

The principal investigator will begin with the following semi-structured interview guide, modified from an existing instrument noted in Lyman et al, 2016, if the participant agrees to proceed.

- Introductions and rapport building.
- Baseline and warm-up questions:
    - Tell me about your family.
    - Why did you choose to attend college?
    - What is your major?

    - Tell me how you spend your free time on campus.
- Primary and Secondary Experience Questions.
    - In which area of learning do you have an identified disability?
    - When was your learning disability diagnosed and what method was used to diagnose it?
    - Did you have learning accommodations while in elementary and/or high school? If yes, what accommodations did you have?
    - Describe barriers you experienced when seeking and obtaining accommodation(s) in elementary and/or high school.
    - Did you self-advocate for you your needed accommodations in high school? Will you describe your experiences with self-advocating for accommodations?
- Post-Secondary Experience Questions
    - Describe when you realized you needed academic accommodations as a college student.
    - Describe the process of seeking academic accommodations.
    - Describe the services and/or accommodations you have received while attending college? How do the accommodations assist you with your coursework?
    - Describe your experience working with the Center for Student Accessibility? What has been helpful? What has not been helpful?
    - Describe your experiences working with faculty regarding your accommodation(s)? About your accommodation(s): What have faculty done that you found to be helpful? What have faculty done that you found to hinder your learning experience?
    - How have your experiences with other students been regarding your accommodations?
    - Describe for me a specific experience where you didn't have access to an accommodation you felt was necessary to be successful in the classroom.
    - What additional resources do you think the university should provide for students with accommodations?
    - Describe accommodation barriers you have faced while attending college?
    - Have you ever not asked for assistance with your accommodation from faculty or staff? What prevented you from asking?
- Closing Questions
    - Is there anything that I have not asked you regarding your experience seeking and obtaining accommodations throughout your academic career?
- Potential Probing Questions
    - Describe that experience in more detail for me.

- What does that mean to you?
- What feelings did that experience evoke?
- Please provide an example of your experience.
- Tell me more.

Appendix B: Participant Consent Script

Appendix B: Participant Consent Script

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Barriers to Seeking and Obtaining Academic Accommodations in College Classrooms for First-generation College Students

EKU
Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number
4557
Approval Valid
5/3/22-2/15/25

Key Information

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This document includes important information you should know about the study. Before providing your consent to participate, please read this entire document and ask any questions you have.

Do I have to participate?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. If you decide to participate, you will be one of about 30 people in the study.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore barriers that first-generation college students face when seeking and obtaining academic accommodations in college classrooms.

Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?

The research procedures will be conducted via Zoom. You will need to participate in one interview via Zoom during the study. The interview will take about 60 minutes.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview. Your participation is expected to take no more than 60 minutes. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences with student accommodations on the campus of Eastern Kentucky University.

Are there reasons why I should not take part in this study?

Individuals identifying in the following categories should not participate in this study: (1) under the age of 18; (2) have not been enrolled at EKU; (3) have not been registered with the Center for Student Accessibility as needing academic accommodations; and (4) not a first-generation college student.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm or discomfort than you would experience in everyday life.

Although we have made every effort to minimize this, you may find some questions we ask you (or some procedures we ask you to do) to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can tell you about some people who may be able to help you with these feelings.

You may, however, experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

What are the benefits of taking part in this study?

You are not likely to get any personal benefit from taking part in this study. Your participation is expected to provide benefits to others by providing information regarding barriers that other first-generation college student face when seeking and obtaining academic accommodations.

If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

Now that you have some key information about the study, please continue reading if you are interested in participating. Other important details about the study are provided below.

Other Important Details

Who is doing the study?

The person in charge of this study is Dr. Clint Pinion, Jr, at Eastern Kentucky University. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Todd McCardle. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

What will it cost me to participate?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?

You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study.

Who will see the information I give?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about this combined information. You will not be identified in these written materials.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. Include the following statement if the data will not be recorded with identifying information: For example, your name will be kept separate from the information you give, and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key.

However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court. Also, we may be required to show information that identifies you for audit purposes.

Can my taking part in the study end early?

If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to participate. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to end your participation in the study. They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the University or agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of reasons.

What happens if I get hurt or sick during the study?

If you believe you are hurt or get sick because of something that is done during the study, you should call Dr. Clint Pinion, Jr. at 859-779-3143 immediately. It is important for you to understand that Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick while taking part in this study. Also, Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study. These costs will be your responsibility.

Usually, medical costs that result from research-related harm cannot be included as regular medical costs. Therefore, the

What else do I need to know?
You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

Consent

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Dr. Clint Pinion, Jr. at 859-779-3143 or clint_pinion@mymail.eku.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you can contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636.

If you would like to participate, please read the statement below aloud and confirm that you agree to proceed with the interview.

I am at least 18 years of age, have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Application Management

Hello Clint Pinion,

Congratulations! Using expedited review procedures, the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University (FWA00003332) has approved your study entitled, "Barriers to Seeking and Obtaining Academic Accommodations in College Classrooms for First-generation College Students." Your approval is effective immediately and will expire on 2/15/25.

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that all investigators and staff associated with this study meet the training requirements for conducting research involving human subjects, follow the approved protocol, use only the approved forms, keep appropriate research records, and comply with applicable University policies and state and federal regulations. Please read through the remainder of this notification for specific details on these requirements.

Consent Forms: If your study involves only adult subjects, a copy of your approved informed consent form is attached. If your study includes children as subjects, copies of the approved parent/guardian form and child assent form(s) are attached. Please ensure that only approved documents with the EKU IRB approval stamp are used when enrolling subjects in your study. Each subject must receive a copy of the form to keep, and signed forms must be kept securely on file in accordance with the procedures approved in your application. At any time, you may access your stamped form(s) through your InfoReady Review account by following the steps below:

1. Log in to your InfoReady Review account using your EKU credentials.
2. Click the Applications link from the top menu bar.
3. Select the project title for your study.
4. Access the approved PDF file from the list of attachments.

Adverse Events: Any adverse events that occur in conjunction with this study should reported to the IRB immediately and must be reported within ten calendar days of the occurrence.

Research Records: Accurate and detailed research records must be maintained for a minimum of three years following the completion of the study. These records are subject to audit. If you are an EKU student, you are responsible for ensuring that your records are transitioned to the custody of your faculty advisor at the end of your study. Records include your approved study protocol, approval notification, signed consent forms and/or parent/guardian permission and assent forms, completed data collection