Introduction

- In postsecondary educational institutions, learning disabilities were reported for approximately 31 percent of reported disabilities.
- Mentorship has been shown to assist students in the transition from secondary institutions to postsecondary institutions and increase retention rates.

Purpose

The objective of this study is to examine the perceptions and experiences of mentorship for undergraduates with LD enrolled in a project to design a model of campus-based supports for both academics and health/well-being for students with LD. This model of support is referred to as the Comprehensive Support for Students with Learning Disabilities (CS\(3\)LD).

Methods

Participants: Fifty-two undergraduates were drawn from the larger study and included in this analysis. Data from project year 2 and year 3 were used in this analysis. During this time frame, 42 undergraduates were enrolled in the study of which 25 contributed to the discussion on mentorship (9 male; age 20.1 ± 3.66 years).

Design: Qualitative analysis was conducted using data from a larger prospective descriptive cohort study to inform understanding of mentorship and potential impacts on undergraduate students with LD.

Data/instruments: Data consists of de-identified transcripts of monthly group discussions regarding LD-related experiences. NVivo version 10 qualitative data software was used to assist with the identification of passages specific to mentorship from the transcripts of discussions held during year 2 and year 3 of project data. Five of 22 transcripts contained information regarding mentorship.

Analysis: Axial and process coding was used to examine the text for context and gerund words to describe the undergraduates’ perception of their mentorship experience.

Background on CS\(3\)LD

- CS\(3\)LD is a four-year study to build, refine, and test a multi-level model of professional support, academic, and health/wellness supports to assist undergraduates with learning disorders pursuing a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) major.
- Undergraduates attend group discussions throughout the semester and are paired with one mentor in their field of study for assistance with professional development. The undergraduates are required to meet with their mentor on an every other week basis.
- Inclusion criteria included: (1) undergraduates at the University of Florida, (2) enrolled in a STEM major, (3) registered with the campus disability office, and (4) eligible for LD accommodations.

Results

- Primary themes of Basics of Mentorship and Talking LD emerged from the transcripts.
- Basics of Mentorship refers to the foundational characteristics a mentor and mentee relationship should have in order for the undergraduates to receive the additional benefits of mentorship.

Student 1: “I enjoyed having a mentor who is knowledgeable within my major. She is able to help me out with everything.”

- Talking LD describes the scholars being able to or not being able to articulate their LD with their mentors. The undergraduates who discussed their LD with their mentor described developing a connection with their mentor in spite of their mentor having little prior knowledge about their LD.

Student 2: “I think it’s been really good learning situation on both ends where I’ve learned more about my learning disability because, like I said, no one really wanted to talk about it or understand it where I came from…."

Conclusion

This exploratory study describes some of the ways mentorship can help undergraduates feel connected to their college campuses and understand their LD. Findings can contribute to health professionals’ knowledge about ways of assisting students with LD to succeed in their career, academic, and personal goals.

References


Acknowledgements

This research is based upon work supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation under Grant Number (HRD-1246587). This work is also supported in part by the NIH/NCATS Clinical and Translational Science Award to the University of Florida (UL1 TR000064) and the NIH National Center Medical Rehabilitation Research (MCRR) and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (K12 HD055929). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation or the National Institutes of Health.