Factors Contributing to Poor Retention for Students with Learning Differences

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Beacon College Overview

- Beacon College is a regionally accredited, liberal arts institution of higher education, which uniquely serves the educational needs of students with Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and other Learning Differences.

- Students entering must have a documented learning difference with recent evaluations (psychoeducational or neuropsychological) or an IEP. Candidacy is based on student cognitive profile, academic ability, interview, quality of high school education, and willingness/ability to grow from programmatic interventions.
Beacon College’s Transition to College Programs aims to help students and their parents proactively plan for college or other post-secondary programs through the development of executive functioning, social integration, and emotional regulation skills.
The Student Experience: What May Happen to Students with Learning Differences

- Increase in students with LD attending a 2- or 4-year college
- High Chance of Admission “Melt”
- ~15% Of students with disabilities register for services
- High likelihood of transfer and inconsistent attendance
- 32-35% Of students with learning differences graduate in eight years
- 53% Of graduates are gainfully employed 6-months after school
A New Model Focused on Healthy Adjustments

- Authentic Awareness
- Implementing Executive Functioning Systems
- Experiencing & Managing Setbacks
- Autonomy & Advocacy
- Healthy Adjustment
Parents often become central role in student intervention plan, resulting in them becoming the stereotyped “helicopter parent”

Student takes a backseat to planning, often lacking an understanding of their needs or due to the magnitude of intervention, does not connect interventions with later resource requirements

Student struggles to form well-rounded, reciprocal relationships

Self-efficacy and reliance reduces, impacting executive functioning, abilities to manage setbacks, and self-advocacy skills

Difficulties appropriately identifying and expressing emotions

This dynamic becomes replicated in the secondary school model
What To Be Cognizant of: The Accommodation Process

Research the School’s Process

Fill Out Paperwork By Deadline & Submit Updating Testing

Schedule Meeting with Office of Disability Services to Discuss Needs

Attend Individual Meeting, Receive Accommodation Letter & Speak To Individual Professors

Evaluate efficacy of accommodations

Follow institutional deadlines and guidelines to receive out-of-classroom accommodations

Consistently Self-Advocate to Professors to Use Accommodations

Repeat advocacy steps each new semester, then reapply for accommodations the next year
The Impact: Issues Related to Adjustment & Eventual Attrition

For students with diagnosed learning difficulties, a study showed that nearly 80% have potential or diagnosed comorbid conditions including both internalized or externalized disorders.

The most frequently seen was an adjustment disorder.
## Screening Questions To Determine Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational History</th>
<th>Social History</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(environment, rigor, services)</td>
<td>(previous involvement, interests, motivation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Skills</td>
<td>Self-Concept &amp; Support Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(emotional awareness, distractions, distress tolerance)</td>
<td>(self-beliefs, identity, family support)</td>
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What Can Advisors Do To Mitigate Adjustment-Based Transitional Issues?

Looking at Skills Through a Discrete Evaluative Approach

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<tr>
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<th>Independent Living</th>
<th>Learning Difference Awareness</th>
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- **Executive Functioning**
  - Planning & Prioritizing
  - Thinking Flexibly
  - Shifting
  - Managing Impulses
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- **Emotional Regulation**
  - Identifying emotions
  - Understanding causation
  - Expressing to resources
  - Connecting to behaviors
  - Coping to meet goals

- **Social Skills**
  - Understanding norms
  - Establishing boundaries
  - Initiating interactions
  - Sustaining conversations
  - Developing relationships
  - Managing conflict
  - Shifting behaviors

- **Independent Living**
  - Establishing healthy routines
  - Monitoring sleep hygiene
  - Managing finances
  - Developing relationships
  - Managing conflict
  - Shifting behaviors
  - Establishing safe behaviors

- **Learning Difference Awareness**
  - Understanding diagnoses
  - Labeling accommodations
  - Recognizing modifications
  - Advocating for needs
Skill-Based Intervention

- What broad skill is causing a breakdown in student functioning?
- Is the breakdown due to a skill deficit, cognitive deficit, or psychiatric?
- Is there an identifiable sub-skill of focus?
- Who is the best resource to provide intervention at the core deficit?
Ensuring Support Is Not A Negative Consequence

Student performs task

Does not meet expectations

Pushed to specific support

Student internalizes support as punishment

Student becomes resistant to future support services
Engage With Us Further:

- Partnership Programs
  - Navigator PREP & Pre-Enrollment Programs
- Summer Programs
- College Coaching
- Professional Development
  - Individual Workshops
  - Semester-Long Training
- Virtual Learning Series

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