

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

4-16-2020

## College students with disabilities' perceptions of an academic coaching program provided by Disability Resources

Benjamin Zachariah Wilner  
*Rowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wilner, Benjamin Zachariah, "College students with disabilities' perceptions of an academic coaching program provided by Disability Resources" (2020). *Theses and Dissertations*. 2778.  
<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2778>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [graduateresearch@rowan.edu](mailto:graduateresearch@rowan.edu).

**COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' PERCEPTIONS OF AN  
ACADEMIC COACHING PROGRAM PROVIDED BY DISABILITY  
RESOURCES**

by  
Benjamin Z. Wilner

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Higher Education  
at  
Rowan University  
March 18, 2020

Thesis Chair: Andrew S. Tinnin, Ed.D.

© 2020 Benjamin Z. Wilner

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family who supported me throughout my years of education.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to my professor, Dr. Drew Tinnin for all of his support and guidance throughout this entire process. I would also like to thank my internship supervisor, Dr. John Woodruff for your guidance and allowing me to do the interviews at the Academic Success Center. Finally, I would like to thank Chiara Latimer, Autism PATH Coordinator at the Career Services, for helping me with the questions for the interviews.

## Abstract

Benjamin Z. Wilner  
COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' PERCEPTIONS OF AN ACADEMIC  
COACHING PROGRAM PROVIDED BY DISABILITY RESOURCES  
2019-2020  
Drew Tinnin, Ed.D.  
Master of Arts in Higher Education

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of academic coaching for students with disabilities based on their majors. Based on the research question, this study was to identify how the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University helps students become integrated into their majors. The participants in this study were five undergraduate students between 18-22 years old, who are registered with the Disability Resources Office, and have previously participated in the Academic Coaching Program. In this study, I conducted one semi-structured interview towards each student. Data was collected using an interview protocol, which consists of 11 questions. Key findings show that Academic Coaches do help students with disabilities become integrated into their *courses* related to their majors, but not so much towards *career opportunities*. The most significant themes were (a) experiences with coaching, (b) referral by coach, (c) coaching and majors, (d) coaching and careers, and (e) relationships with coach. Recommendations include (a) Academic Coaches doing research on student's majors, (b) collaboration between Academic Coaching Program and Office of Career Advancement at Rowan University, (c) additional studies that focuses on *career guidance* towards Students with Disabilities, and (d) conducting study that focuses on Academic Coaches and their knowledge of their students' majors.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
List of Tables .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Overview.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Significance of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Assumptions and Limitations .....	4
Operational Definition of Terms.....	5
Research Question .....	6
Organization of the Remaining Chapters of the Thesis .....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Introduction.....	8
Academic Coaching Programs and Their Outcomes.....	8
Major Integration of Students with Disabilities.....	10
Students with Disabilities and Their Success in Careers .....	11
Support Systems for Students with Disabilities.....	12
Attitudes Towards and From Students with Disabilities .....	14
Transitioning to Postsecondary Education.....	16
Postsecondary Education Programs and Their Impact .....	18
Faculty Perspectives Towards Students with Disabilities .....	19
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	21

## Table of Contents (Continued)

Context of the Study .....	21
Methodological Approach and Design .....	22
Data Collection Strategy .....	23
Population and Sample Selection.....	24
Instrumentation .....	26
Data Gathering Procedures .....	28
Data Analysis That is Performed .....	28
Chapter 4: Findings.....	29
Context of the Study .....	29
Profile of the Population/Sample .....	30
Analysis of the Data.....	32
Experiences of Coaching .....	34
Referral by Coach .....	35
Coaching and Majors .....	36
Coaching and Careers .....	39
Relationships with Coach .....	41
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	44
Summary of the Study .....	44
Answer to the Research Question.....	45
Discussion of Findings.....	48
Research Question .....	48
Limitations and Conclusions Based on Findings.....	50



**Table of Contents (Continued)**

Recommendations for Practice .....52

Recommendations for Futher Research .....52

References.....54

Appendix A: Recruitment E-Mail.....59

Appendix B: Consent Form .....60

Appendix C: Instrument.....66

## List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. Themes From The Interviews .....	33

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Overview**

With the high numbers of students who are seeking higher education, there is a need to research their success in the university. This includes students who are registered with their university's disability resources office where they are given access to a variety of resources and/or accommodations that support them in transitioning to and succeeding in, the college environment. One of the resources that may be offered is academic success coaching. Academic coaching focuses on the process of student learning (The Regents of University of Michigan, 2019). Academic coaching often involves one-on-one sessions where a coach helps the student with a disability adjust to the college environment. Some skills taught in academic coaching include social skills, organization skills, and skills to help student succeed in class.

Since the development of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), more and more college students with disabilities have transitioned from high school to postsecondary activities (Milsom, 2007; Stodden & Whelley, 2004). Since the development of these acts, inclusion amongst college students with disabilities has improved. College programs that provide inclusion will help students with disabilities succeed in the college environment (Hendrickson, Carson, Woods-Groves, Mendenhall, & Scheidecker, 2013; Papay & Bambara, 2011; Stodden & Whelley, 2004; Westling, Kelley, Cain, & Prohn, 2013). With additional resources provided in the college environment (i.e. Disability Resources), students with disabilities are provided with

additional support (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Qian, Johnson, Smith, & Papay, 2018; Westling et al., 2013; Zafft, Hart, and Zimbrich, 2004). Students who transition successfully from high school to college, often have successful careers.

Founded in 1923, Rowan University is a research-based university that evolved from a teacher preparation college to a regional university (Rowan University, 2019). The University's mission statement is that it will become a new model for higher education by being (1) *Inclusive*, (2) *Agile*, and (3) *Responsive* (Rowan University, 2019). This means that the University strives to offer diverse educational experiences to meet students' needs and succeed at the University. As of the 2018-2019 academic year, there are 19,465 students enrolled at Rowan University (Rowan University, 2018). That includes 16,120 (82.8%) undergraduates.

There are over 1,900 students with disabilities registered with Rowan University's Disability Resources Office (J. Woodruff, personal communication, April 2019). Eighty-five percent of these students obtain academic coaching per semester (J. Woodruff, personal communication, April 2019). Also, the types of students with disabilities who register with the Disability Resources office include those with depression and anxiety, and students the Autism Spectrum. Unfortunately, the Disability Resources office does not regularly track these students' majors and other demographics. The Disability Resources office is hoping to improve tracking of this student information in the near future.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Graduating from college and finding a job is important for students with or without disabilities. Academic Coaching Programs provide valuable successful skills

such as social skills, organization skills, and skills to help students succeed in their classrooms. Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Disabilities are important because they are *student-centered*: these programs help these students know the resources that are provided by them; offer support from peers, mentors, and teachers; and offer professional opportunities during the college experience (i.e. internships) (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Papay & Bambara, 2011; Stodden & Whelley, 2004; Westling et al., 2013). However, academic coaching programs rarely provide career guidance because there are other resources (i.e. career services offices) that provide this aspect of support to students (Qian, Clary, Johnson, & Echternacht, 2018). The main goal of this research was to determine if an academic coaching program helps students with disabilities become integrated into their majors.

### **Significance of the Problem**

The main focus of the Academic Coaching Program was *student satisfaction*. It is important to make sure that the student is satisfied with the Academic Coaching Program. In addition, it is important to make sure that an academic coaching program provides *career guidance* towards students with disabilities (Qian et al., 2018a). There is very limited research on the success of students with disabilities based on their majors. It is important to evaluate the students' success in their majors because academic coaching often addresses generalized success practices in the classroom. If these students are only learning general success skills, then they may not get the attention they need in their area of study. Student success within a major is what may contribute to success in their future careers. Understanding how academic coaches get these students integrated into their majors, which includes getting involved in extracurricular activities based on their major,

can help disability-related programs such as the Academic Coaching Program improve their practices (Tinto, 1993; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Integration can be defined as how much the student is involved and engaged in their majors.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of academic coaching for students with disabilities based on their majors. Xueqin Qian, Emily Clary, David R. Johnson, and Jean K. Echternacht (2018a) did a similar study where they did a phenomenological study on college students with intellectual disabilities' perceptions of an academic coaching program in a community college. A majority of their questions such as Academic Support and Social Participation are similar to this investigation because these can provide student outcomes data about an academic coaching program. Part of Qian et al.'s (2018a) study was to explore if their academic coaches gave these students career guidance. Qian et al.'s (2018a) study was very important to my investigation because it raised concerns on how academic coaching helps students with disabilities obtain career opportunities after graduation. Erica Lynn Richman, Kristen N. Rademacher, and Theresa Laurie Maitland (2014) did a mixed-methods study where they investigated student outcomes on academic coaching. Richman et al.'s (2014) study is also similar to my investigation because it presents how students with disabilities view outcomes of an academic coaching program.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This study has assumed that students who participate in this study will be honest in their answers and answer to the best of their ability. The population that will be

selected will be based on (1) students who are currently registered with the Disability Resources Office, and (2) those who previously participated in the Academic Coaching Program.

One limitation in this study is that the sampling of students will only come from one University so it might not be generalizable to other Universities. Another limitation is that some of these students (mainly those with Intellectual Disabilities) might have limited communication skills (APA, 2013). These students may have a hard time answering questions due to the speed of their communication and word choices. One major drawback in the study is that some participants had to self-disclose themselves to register for these services and they might be hesitant to answer the questions. Another limitation is that college students with disabilities that are freshmen and sophomores who are in Exploratory Studies will not be able to fully reflect on connection with their major as they have not yet declared an academic major.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

1. Academic Coaching: academic coaching focuses on the process of student learning (The Regents of University of Michigan, 2019). Academic coaching often involves one-on-one sessions where a coach helps the student with a disability adjust to the college environment. Some skills taught in academic coaching include social skills, organization skills, and skills to help student succeed in class.
2. Americans with Disabilities Act (1990): provides public accommodations for individuals with disabilities (National Network: Information, Guidance, and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act, 2017).

3. Disability Resources: Disability Resources at Rowan University provides accommodations and assistance to students with a variety of documented disabilities according to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (Rowan University, 2019c).
4. Intellectual Disabilities: An intellectual disability is a disability described as limitations to learning, problem solving and social skills (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2019).
5. Peer Mentors: Peer mentors help college students with disabilities improve academic performance and social experiences (Lombardi, Murray, & Gerdes, 2012).
6. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive financial support (Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, 1997).

### **Research Question**

The Research Question for this study is: Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?

### **Organization of the Remaining Chapters of the Thesis**

Chapter II of this investigation includes the literature review of college students with disabilities based on (1) academic coaching programs and their outcomes, (2) major integration of students with disabilities, (3) students with disabilities and their success of careers, (4) attitudes towards and from students with disabilities, (5) support systems for students with disabilities, (6) transition into postsecondary education, (7) postsecondary



education programs and their impact, and (8) faculty perspectives towards students with disabilities.

Chapter III describes the methodology used in the study. This section focuses on (1) the purpose statement, (2) research question, (3) overall context of the study, (4) methodological approach, (5) population and selection, (6) instrumentation used in the study, (7) how data is collected, and (8) how data is analyzed.

Chapter IV discusses findings of the study in table and narrative form. This chapter provides data to answer the research questions.

Chapter V summarizes the study, and discusses the findings that are compared to the literature in Chapter II. Recommendations for further practice and research are also evoked in this chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The focus of this study was to determine what students view as outcomes of an academic coaching program and if academic coaching programs help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors. In this chapter, we focus on (1) academic coaching programs and their outcomes, (2) major integration of students with disabilities, (3) students with disabilities and their success of careers, (4) attitudes towards and from students with disabilities, (5) support systems for students with disabilities, (6) transition into postsecondary education, (7) postsecondary education programs and their impact, and (8) faculty perspectives towards students with disabilities. Despite the amount of research on college students with disabilities and academic coaching programs, more research is needed at Rowan University to measure what these students perceive as outcomes and how these outcomes help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors.

#### Academic Coaching Programs and Their Outcomes

Academic coaching programs helps promote student retention of students with disabilities (Mitchell, & Gansemer-Topf, 2016; Qian et al., 2018a; Richman, Rademacher & Maitland, 2014). An academic coaching program helps students with disabilities with (1) time management skills, (2) organization skills, (3) communication & writing skills, (4) studying skills, and (5) self-awareness and self-esteem. One type of *time-management skill* that academic coaches provide to students with disabilities includes keeping an agenda book or a calendar and writing down important reminders such as (a) due dates,

(b) time slots on when to work on an assignment, and (c) events related to school and personal life. One type of *organization skill* that coaches provide to students with disabilities includes binder/folder organization. This skill is where coaches make sure that students learn how to organizing their binders with dividers and journal paper.

The different types of *communication & writing skills* include (a) essay writing, (b) email writing, (c) questioning, and (d) active listening (Skills You Need, 2011). Academic Coaches help guide students with disabilities on learning how to write emails and essays based on content and the structure. Based on communication skills, it is important to be an active listener in order to be able to question or comment properly on different topics. The types of *studying skills* that academic coaches teach students with disabilities includes (a) flashcard writing, and (b) writing notes from study guides. Academic coaches also help these students promote *self-awareness* and *self-esteem* (Mitchell, & Gansemer-Topf, 2016; Richman et al., 2014). Academic coaches help students with disabilities become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, values, and their interests. As a result of finding out their strengths and weaknesses, students with disabilities increase their self-esteem in obtaining the resources and keeping track of their schedules to make sure they succeed in the college environment.

College Students with Disabilities' use of academic coaching services results in *positive outcomes* (Bellman, Burgstahler, & Hinke, 2015; Parker & Boutelle, 2009; Qian et al., 2018a). The types of positives outcomes and benefits of academic coaching programs include (a) improved academic performance, (b) improved self-awareness, and (c) increased motivation and engagement. The use of academic coaching helps students with disabilities improve academic performance by providing different types of studying

skills and writing techniques to be used. Another benefit of academic coaching is improved self-awareness. With the use of academic coaching services and the resources provided to them, it helps these students increase their self-awareness of their values, strengths and weaknesses, and confidence in overcoming their challenges in the college environment. Academic coaches help increase students with disabilities' motivation and engagement in the college environment by providing the resources (i.e. testing, tutoring) that are available to them when needed.

Even if there are many positive outcomes of the use of academic coaching services, there are some *limitations* of using these services (Parker & Boutelle, 2009; Richman et al., 2014). One limitation includes logistics (i.e. time). The majority of students and coaches only spend 30-60 minutes for coaching. Students and coaches might end sessions early due to very limited amount of topics discussed in each session. Another limitation to academic coaching is preparation for life transition. Students with disabilities who participate in the academic coaching program do not know how the skills they gained helped them for their future. As mentioned earlier, academic coaching programs do not provided career guidance towards students with disabilities (Qian et al., 2018a). In order to obtain career guidance, academic coaches must provide career services to students with disabilities for these answers.

### **Major Integration of Students with Disabilities**

A majority of students with disabilities become integrated into their majors when they (a) are fully committed into getting their degrees, and (b) communicate with their advisors, professors, and other professionals in an university about getting involved in their majors (Hong, 2015; Stern & Dubois, 1994). Students with disabilities get fully

committed into obtaining their degrees by obtaining a high GPA and having connections with their professors and advisors. Talking to an advisor helps these students figure out which courses to take for the following semester and for the whole entire program. In addition, talking to other professionals in an university helps these students get involved in activities related into their majors.

However, a minimum amount of students with disabilities have often lack integration into their academics, social communication and their majors (Hong, 2015; Shepler & Wooley, 2012). Students with disabilities have lacked communication with their professors because they may feel as if something is wrong with them. They may also feel that advisors are not helping them with picking classes towards their majors. As a result, they would pick courses independently. When students do that, they end up dropping the course due to obtaining bad grades.

### **Students with Disabilities and Their Success in Careers**

Students with Disabilities can be successful in college and therefore, can have a successful career (Gibbons, Hyfantis, Cihak, Wright, & Mynatt, 2015b; Qian, Johnson, Smith, Papay, 2018b; Zafft et al., 2004). All college students, in general, who graduate from college are more able to obtain a professional job. Students with disabilities who participate in postsecondary education are more likely to secure competitive and inclusive employment (Qian et al., 2018b; Zafft et al., 2004).

These students have an understanding of the difference between jobs seeking in competitive levels vs. dependent levels (Zafft et al., 2004). Competitive levels of job seeking come after college. These students with disabilities who are able to seek competitive jobs have utilized the accommodations and resources available in the college

setting. In addition, these students with disabilities are able to identify strengths and weaknesses and are able to control life issues (Gibbons et al., 2015b). Dependent levels of job seeking happen to high school students who do not attend postsecondary education and/or dropout of high school. Students with disabilities who have not entered postsecondary education only secure full-time jobs with few benefits. They are not able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and have little knowledge and understanding of the resources that will be provided to them.

One problem for students with disabilities who participate in postsecondary education is that they earn fewer hours a week, and/or earn below minimum wage (Gibbons et al., 2015b; Qian et al., 2018b). Due to a busy schedule, all college students only have limited time to work if they can organize their schedule with their schoolwork and classes. However, working in paid employment, even if it's small number of hours a week, helps gain professional experience towards students with disabilities.

### **Support Systems for Students with Disabilities**

College Students with Disabilities are being offered peer mentors from programs within Disability Services in school settings (Griffin, Wendel, Day, & McMillan, 2016; Lombardi et al., 2012). Because those who mentor students with intellectual disabilities have a positive outlook, mentoring can be very helpful. There are many roles that peer supports can play in the college environment including (1) academic tutor, (2) daily planner, (3) lunch partner, and (4) exercise planner. As an academic tutor, peers are helping students with disabilities with their studying techniques and assignments in their classes. As a daily planner, peers help the students stay organized and set goals for the day or week. As a lunch partner, peers spend some quality time with these students,

making them feel welcomed. As an exercise partner, peers motivate and encourage the students when leading by example to lead a healthy lifestyle, as well as, participating in an exercise group.

Peer mentors help College Students with Disabilities gain better academic performance and social experiences (Lombardi et al., 2012). Students with Disabilities gain better academic performance due to the skills (organizational and studying) that were provided to them by peers, as well as, the resources that are provided to them. For example, peer mentors advise these students to utilize agenda books to figure out what time of the day they can do a reading for a Chemistry class. In addition, they advise these students to study for upcoming tests by using different methods of studying (i.e. flashcards, skimming through readings). Also, students with disabilities are taught to use resources such as Tutoring Centers whenever they need help on assignments.

Peer Mentors help Students with Disabilities gain better social skills by becoming their friend. They welcome students to socialize with them during lunch and in events (i.e. music, sports, etc.) in the Disability Service programs. They also invite students to join social groups that the mentor is currently in to develop more social connections with others. The social skills that are taught to and utilized by Students with Disabilities will help them gain more friends and get involved in social groups as much as they can. Peer Mentors also have positive attitudes towards Students with Disabilities (Kowalsky & Fresko, 2002). Their work brings these students' academic performance and social skills to higher levels of development. These positive attitudes also helped them gain professional development when working with students with disabilities.

An Inclusive Postsecondary Education Program is very helpful to students with disabilities because it provides equity to these students, helps students develop the whole self, and gains employment opportunities for these students (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Qian et al., 2018b; Westling et al., 2013; Zafft et al., 2004). This type of college program helps provide equity to the student with a disability through peers and teachers' invitations into discussions and projects in the classroom. In addition, the use of letters of accommodation, given to college professors, can help the students obtain equity in the college classroom environment. Letters of Accommodation are used for these students with extra time on tests, notes from class, audio lectures, etc. Also, students with disabilities go to college to find who they are as humans based on their interests, values, abilities, characteristics, etc. Their relationships with peers from high school and family members change. When these students develop the whole self, it can lead to a successful postsecondary education, which can lead to a successful career.

### **Attitudes Towards and From Students with Disabilities**

A majority of college students without disabilities have positive outlooks towards those with disabilities from inclusive college programs (Griffin, Summer, McMillan, Day, & Hodapp, 2012; Kowalsky & Fresko, 2002; Nevill, & White, 2011; Westling et al., 2013). Because those who are in classrooms with students with disabilities have a positive outlook, the inclusion in regular classroom settings can have a positive impact on students with disabilities' success in the college environment. This majority is more likely to learn about and helps provide for the needs of students with disabilities.

Those without disabilities are supporting the majority of college students with disabilities and those without disabilities find inclusion to be a good thing (Griffin et al.,



2012; Westling et al., 2013). The positive outlook towards these students limits the amount of isolation from others. Students without disabilities who have a positive outlook towards those with disabilities are able to have conversations with them. Students without disabilities with positive attitudes are also welcoming towards students in activities outside the classroom. The problem with the small number of students without disabilities who have negative outlooks towards those with disabilities is that they have no experience interacting and working with them. In addition, they have little to no knowledge and understanding of the disability (i.e. Autism Spectrum) (Nevill & White, 2011). They are uncomfortable around students with disabilities due to their behaviors and/or physical appearance.

It was also found that the majority of the college students without disabilities who are helping those with intellectual disabilities are females (Griffin et al., 2012; Westling et al., 2013). Students with disabilities are most often and more comfortable working with female students because they are often caring and empathetic towards them. Female students who work with students with disabilities are often either academic coaches/tutors in a Disability Resources office, majoring in specific areas (i.e. special education), and/or volunteer.

Students with Disabilities have positive attitudes in the college environment when they are included in classrooms, gaining peer support, and obtaining the resources that are available to them (Gibbons, Cihak, Mynatt, & Wilhoit, 2015a; Griffin et al., 2012, Kowalsky & Fresko, 2012; Lombardi et al., 2012, Westling et al., 2013). When students with disabilities are being included in a college classroom, it reduces their isolation and makes them feel welcomed. It helps them concentrate and participate in classroom

discussions. Obtaining peer support (i.e. peer mentors, success coaches) helps students with disabilities feel very comfortable due to the positive attitudes of peer supports.

College Students with Disabilities' attitudes impact on their knowledge and understanding of resources that are provided to them. Without the knowledge of resources provided to them, students with disabilities can increase negative attitudes in the college environment. These attitudes increase levels of stress and anxiety and can increase risk for potential dropout of a university. Research shows that First-generation students who have disabilities are at-risk for dropping out of college due to lower GPA, financial struggles, and the lack of understanding of college resources provided to them (Lombardi et al., 2012). However, the research was not specific and did not mention students with other specific disabilities. Low knowledge levels of college support can increase their levels of stress, anxiety and anger.

### **Transitioning to Postsecondary Education**

More College Students with Disabilities are transitioning to postsecondary education to develop independence, self-determination skills, self-advocacy skills, self-awareness skills, and to obtain a successful career (Amerman & Janmarie Carr-Jones, 2006; Gibbons et al., 2015b; Milsom, 2007; Papay & Bambara, 2011; Stodden & Whelley, 2004; Zafft et al., 2004). They should be provided with opportunities to develop their whole selves. Self-Determination is where individuals control their own lives. Self-Advocacy is where individuals learn how to advocate for themselves, based on their interests and values. Self-Awareness is where individuals become aware of whom they are.

There are some events that help students with disabilities learn how to develop self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-awareness skills (Amerman & Carr-Jones, 2006; Gibbons et al., 2015b; Milsom, 2007). In these events, students with disabilities learn about topics such as the differences between High School and College and the resources that are provided to them during the transition. In high school, students with disabilities utilize Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). In addition, high school students with disabilities are dependent on external sources (i.e. family members and teachers). In college, students with disabilities utilize accommodations, according into the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. In addition, college students with disabilities learn how to become independent.

Transition opportunities for college students with disabilities lead to successful college experiences and career opportunities (Aberman & Carr-Jones, 2006; Gibbons et al., 2015a; Milsom, 2007). One of the transition opportunities in the college environment includes Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVR). These services provide support (i.e. financial) for postsecondary education or career opportunities to individuals with disabilities (i.e. college students). In addition, with the use of career services from a variety of universities, DVR helps these students prepare for job search. These services provide equity to all students, including those with disabilities. Some topics in these kinds of services include resume writing, interviewing practices, and job seeking. As a result of utilizing these services, students gain better skills in obtaining career opportunities and a better understanding of the self.

## **Postsecondary Education Programs and Their Impact**

Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Disabilities are important because they are *student-centered*: these programs help these students know the resources that are provided by them, offers support from peers, mentors, and teachers, and offer professional opportunities during the college experience (i.e. internships) (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Papay & Bambara, 2011; Stodden & Whelley, 2004; Westling et al., 2013). Programs providing resources to students with disabilities, help students gain additional help when they run into situations. Due to the positive attitudes that are provided by peers, mentors, and professors, students with disabilities feel welcomed into the college environment. With the personal and professional relationships built upon these students towards professors and mentors, it helps them gain professional and volunteer experience.

One major problem regarding programs is that some of them provide little to no opportunities to develop the whole student. There are three types of program models used in college settings: *Separate, Mixed, and Individualized (Inclusive)* (Hart, Mele-McCarthy, Pasternack, Zimbrich, & Parker, 2004; Papay & Bambara; 2011; Stodden & Whelley, 2004). Although they provide opportunities for vocational training and job opportunities, Separate Model Postsecondary Programs do not provide opportunities for inclusion for students with disabilities. As a result, students with disabilities might be at risk of dropping out of postsecondary education. Mixed Model Postsecondary Programs provide some opportunities for inclusion in college classes but separate programs that help students with disabilities develop life-skills. Individualized Postsecondary Education programs provide support and services that combines all aspects of the college

experience. Students with disabilities are being included in college classrooms and are developing similar life-skills as everyone else in the college environment.

### **Faculty Perspectives Towards Students with Disabilities**

Most faculty members who teach students with disabilities believe that they should be provided with campus resources (i.e. Library, Rec Center) (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Gibbons et al., 2015a). Faculty members understand that students with physical and mental disabilities need to have access to college resources to succeed in the college environment. It helps these students gain equity in the college environment. Also, faculty members understand that they need to change their teaching styles to make their classrooms inclusive towards students with disabilities (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Gibbons et al., 2015a). When faculty members change their teaching styles for college students with disabilities, it helps these students get a sense of comfort in the classroom. Also, faculty members say that students with disabilities should be allowed to interact not only with students with similar disabilities but with students without disabilities (Gibbons et al., 2015a). Interacting with students without disabilities helps students feel included in the regular classroom environment.

On the positive side, the majority of faculty members have received documented accommodations from students with disabilities in their classrooms (Becker & Palladino, 2016). On the negative side, only a few number of faculty members in the college setting have training in the knowledge of accommodations for students with disabilities (Becker & Palladino, 2016). Without the knowledge of accommodations for students with disabilities, faculty members are at-risk of having these students drop from their courses or from the university.

There is much information regarding the success of students with disabilities (Griffin et al., 2012; Kowalsky & Fresko, 2002; Nevill, & White, 2011; Westling et al., 2013). However, there is little research regarding success of college students with disabilities based on their majors (i.e. music, biology). The purpose of this study was to better understand the differences in success of students with disabilities based on their majors so that college faculty and departments can create more successful transitions from college to the work world.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Context of the Study

Founded in 1923, Rowan University is a research-based university where it evolved from a teacher preparation college to a regional university (Rowan University, 2019). The University's Mission Statement is that it will become a new model for higher education by being (1) *Inclusive*, (2) *Agile*, and (3) *Responsive* (Rowan University Board of Trustees, 2019). This means that the University makes sure that all students are offered diverse educational experiences to meet their needs and succeed at the University. As of the 2018-2019 academic year, there were 19,465 students enrolled at Rowan University (Rowan University, 2018). That included 16,120 (82.8%) undergraduates.

Also, there are over 1,900 students with disabilities registered with Rowan University's Disability Resources Office. Eighty-five percent of these students obtain academic coaching per semester. Also, the types of students with disabilities who register with the Disability Resources office include: those with depression and anxiety, and those on the Autism Spectrum. The Disability Resources office has received many new registrations over the past few years. Unfortunately, the Disability Resources office does not have any information regarding these students' majors and demographics. The office is hoping to do this study in the near future.

There is so much information regarding the success of Students with Disabilities (physical, mental, and intellectual). However, there is little research regarding the success of college students with disabilities based on their majors (i.e. music, and education). The purpose of the research was to assess the effectiveness of coaching students with

disabilities in their respective departments. The specific Research Question for this study was: Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?

### **Methodological Approach and Design**

The type of research design that I conducted was a Qualitative Research Design (McMillan, 2016). The specific design that I used in this study was a Phenomenological Qualitative Research Design. These types of studies “describe, clarify, and interpret the everyday life experiences of individuals” (McMillan, 2016, p. 317). As mentioned above, the main research question that I answered was a “does/how” question, which was appropriate to answer through qualitative research. Based on the research question, the current study was to identify how the academic coaching program at Rowan University helps students become integrated into their majors. I used some of the qualitative research techniques that were appropriate for exploring their perceptions of academic coaching at Rowan University.

Because I am registered with the Disability Resources office and the Academic Coaching program, I was attentive to my own reactions and decisions during the study, and maintained a researcher journal to monitor my subjectivity (McMillan, 2016). I had to make sure that I was not giving my own opinions on each participant and made sure that everything in each interview was neutral. As mentioned above, in the current study, I conducted semi-structured interviews. I conducted this type of qualitative design so that I could go deeper into these students’ views and perceptions of academic coaching.

Although quantitative research based on students with disabilities has increased over the years, there has been limited amount of qualitative research on students with



disabilities in academic coaching programs. There are many factors when conducting qualitative research with students with disabilities (Beail & Williams, 2014; Qian et al., 2018a). One factor is some of these students need to have adequate verbal abilities (Gibbons et al., 2015b). That means students with mental disabilities (i.e. Intellectual) should be able to communicate without a problem. Another factor is that the types of questions asked to these students should be simple and concrete (Gibbons et al., 2015b). That means that the questions should be understandable for these students to be able to answer these questions. Another factor is that the questions should be open-ended questions that are concrete in format. That means that the questions should not only be concrete questions but are open-ended for these students to explain their answers.

### **Data Collection Strategy**

I conducted semi-structured interviews with students with disabilities who are registered with Rowan University's Disability Resources, provided with Accommodations under ADA and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and who are in the Academic Coaching Program (Rowan University, 2019b; Rowan University, 2019c). The interviews were conducted in late January and early February of 2020. The Disability Resources Office sent an email to students who meet study criteria (registered and participating in Coaching), inviting these students to participate in a semi-structured in-person interview (see Appendix A). In addition, I promoted the interviews at the Academic Success Center. This assisted with confidentiality for students, so that I do not have access to all student names, just those who respond to the invitation to participate. I was hoping to interview 8-10 volunteers in person. I only interviewed five volunteers.

The instrument validity and reliability was based on the opinions of students who participate in the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University. I obtained Rowan University IRB approval prior to conducting interviews for data collection (McMillan, 2016). I interviewed each student with an audio recorder. I have received approval of these interviews from the institution, obtained consent from my participants (see Appendix B), and secured clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **Population and Sample Selection**

The participants in these interviews were students with disabilities that are registered with the Disability Resources office, and have previously participated in the Academic Coaching program at Rowan University in southwestern New Jersey. These students are also provided with accommodations and assistance according to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive financial support (Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, 1997). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provides public accommodations for individuals with disabilities (National Network: Information, Guidance, and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act, 2017). That means that individuals with disabilities should be granted reasonable accommodations in higher education.

The types of sampling that I conducted were (a) Criterion and (b) Maximum Variation (McMillan, 2016). Criterion sampling is where I select participants based on specific characteristics and traits for information. The following criteria for me to select college students with disabilities was that college students with disabilities: (1) receive

support services (i.e. Academic Coaching) for specific needs since the beginning of their freshmen year, (2) have a declared major, and (3) use academic coaching services every semester. Those who meet this criteria will be considered qualified to participate in the study.

The Maximum Variation sampling was where researchers, like myself, selected participants who have different perspectives on specific areas (McMillan, 2016). I selected participants based on their different perspectives of academic coaching on the Rowan University campus. As mentioned above, my research question was how does academic coaching affect students with disabilities from specific majors. Some college students with disabilities had different perspectives on academic coaching. I strived to interview students from various majors to achieve maximum variation.

The Disability Resources Office sent a recruitment email on my behalf, and I hoped to recruit 8-10 volunteers for an interview. I only interviewed five volunteers. Each participant had some similarities and little to no differences. In conducting interviews, it is important to have interpretation of findings that no difference in the criterion and the maximum variation requirements (McMillan, 2016). I have chosen to select this small amount of participants because I planned to choose each participant with a different major but have no differences in utilizing the academic coaching services. Some of the most popular majors at Rowan University are: (1) Business, Management, and Marketing, (2) Education, and (3) Psychology (US News & World Report, 2019).

With participants having different majors, I looked for the essence of these students' experiences of academic coaching related to each of their academic programs. I wanted to see if there were enough common occurrences but I also wanted to see the

differences these students face based on their majors. To protect their identities, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants (McMillan, 2016). Pseudonyms are fake names for participants in any research design.

### **Instrumentation**

As mentioned above, I conducted semi-structured interviews with students with disabilities who are registered with Rowan University's Disability Resources, provided with Accommodations under ADA and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and who participated in the Academic Coaching Program (Rowan University, 2019b; Rowan University, 2019c). The interviews took place in Savitz Hall near Academic Success Center/Disability Resources office. An initial version of the interview questions can be found in Appendix C. The first set of questions in the first version was a general question about likes and dislikes (What do you like to do on campus or for fun?). I asked these questions as an icebreaker so that they can be comfortable with me.

The second set of questions were based on the Integration Theory (Tinto, 1993; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Integration is how much the student is involved and engaged in their majors. The second set of questions were on *Academic Coaching and Integration*: (1) Guidance by Academic Coach, (i.e. "How is your coach getting involved in extracurricular activities (volunteer opportunities/student organizations) related to your major?"), (2) Knowledge of Major (i.e. "Does your coach have enough knowledge of your major to help you succeed in your field of study?"), (3) Sense of Belonging (i.e. "Do you feel you can relate to your Academic Success Coach and if so, what helps you to relate to the coach (gender, age, personality, major)?").

Additional questions that were asked in the interview includes two questions on Discussion: (a) “Have you discussed with your academic coach about courses, career opportunities, and/or student organizations related to your major?”, and (b) “Have you discussed with your academic coach about changing your major? If so, what advice have you received from your academic coach?” Another set of questions were two questions on Referral: (a) “Has your coach refer you to another coach who has a similar major as you or an academic advisor?”, and (b) “Has your coach refer you to a professional in the Office of Career Advancement center for Career Counseling?” Another question that were asked in the interview is about Awareness: “How can you make your coach aware of your specific needs based on your major?”

Another question that was asked was the Identification of Academic Coach’s Major: “What is the Academic Coach’s Major?” The final question that was asked was if the student and coach have the same majors and how the coach helps the student: “Do you have the same major as your academic coach? If so, does this help you participate in activities related to your major? If not, does your academic coach help you with career planning, and/or with your courses? Also, does this help you with your courses? Has this help you with their career planning (jobs, internships)?”

The instrument validity and reliability was based on the opinions of students who participate in the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University. The interview session took place following IRB approval (McMillan, 2016). I interviewed each student with an audio recorder. I got approval of these interviews from the institution, obtained consent from its participants, and clearance secured from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

## **Data Gathering Procedures**

Before the collection of data, an Institutional Review Board was submitted and approved. Permission was obtained from the Director of the Disability Resources for access to students in the study population. An email was sent from the Director of the Disability Resources office to students who are in the academic coaching program, requesting for participation in the interviews (see Appendix A). The volunteers/students who chose to participate were informed that their responses and opinions of the Academic Coaching Program were confidential, and the interviews were for academic reasons only. Students without disabilities were excluded from the study per the established criteria.

## **Data Analysis That is Performed**

The data was analyzed using the Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation (McMillan, 2016). I created transcriptions from each interview to collect the accurate data for the current study. The transcriptions were used for us to identify the words, phrases, and events that seem to stand out in the interviews. Before I coded the transcripts, I reviewed the analysis process, the interview protocol (questions being asked), the essence of each student's experiences of advising and coaching and my new perspectives of the research topic based on the study. I coded the transcripts based on the research question: Academic Coaching and Major Integration (Guidance, Knowledge of Major, Sense of Belonging, Discussion, Referral, Awareness, Academic Coach's Major, and Similar Majors/Assistance).

## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### Context of the Study

Founded in 1923, Rowan University is a research-based university where it evolved from a teacher preparation college to a regional university (Rowan University, 2019). The University's Mission Statement is that it will become a new model for higher education by being (1) *Inclusive*, (2) *Agile*, and (3) *Responsive* (Rowan University Board of Trustees, 2019). This means that the University makes sure that all students are offered diverse educational experiences to meet their needs and succeed at the University. As on the 2018-2019 academic year, there were 19,465 students enrolled at Rowan University (Rowan University, 2018). That included 16,120 (82.8%) undergraduates.

Also, there are over 1,900 students with disabilities registered with Rowan University's Disability Resources Office. Eighty-five percent of these students obtain academic coaching per semester. Also, the types of students with disabilities who register with the Disability Resources office include: those with depression and anxiety, and on the Autism Spectrum. The Disability Resources office has received many new registrations over the past few years. Unfortunately, the Disability Resources office does not have any information regarding these students' majors and demographics. The office is hoping to do this study in the near future.

There is so much information regarding the success of Students with Disabilities (physical, mental, and intellectual). However, there is little research regarding the success of college students with disabilities based on their majors (i.e. music, and education). The purpose of the research was to assess the effectiveness of coaching students with

disabilities in their respective departments. The Specific Research Question for this study was: Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?

### **Profile of the Population/Sample**

The participants in these interviews were students with disabilities that are registered with the Disability Resources office, and have previously participated in the Academic Coaching program at Rowan University in southwestern New Jersey. These students are also provided with accommodations and assistance according to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The types of sampling I conducted were (a) Criterion and (b) Maximum Variation (McMillan, 2016). Criterion sampling is where I select participants based on specific characteristics and traits for information. The following criteria for me to select college students with disabilities was that college students with disabilities: (1) receive support services (i.e. Academic Coaching) for specific needs since the beginning of their freshmen year, (2) have a declared major, and (3) use academic coaching services every semester. Those who meet this criteria will be considered qualified to participate in the study.

The Maximum Variation sampling was where researchers, like myself, selected participants who have different perspectives on specific areas (McMillan, 2016). I also selected participants based on their different perspectives of academic coaching on the Rowan University campus. As mentioned above, my research question was how does academic coaching affect students with disabilities from specific majors. Some college



students with disabilities had different perspectives on academic coaching. I strived to interview students from various majors to achieve maximum variation.

The Disability Resources Office sent a recruitment email on my behalf. In addition, I gave out the recruitment flyers and availability forms to students interested in participating in the interviews, and I hoped to recruit 8-10 volunteers for an interview. However, I was only able to interview five volunteers. Each participant had some similarities and little to no differences. In conducting interviews, it is important to have interpretation of findings that no difference in the criterion and the maximum variation requirements (McMillan, 2016). I have chosen to select this small amount of participants because I planned to choose each participant with a different major but have no differences in utilizing the academic coaching services. Some of the most popular majors at Rowan University are: (1) Business Management and Marketing, (2) Education, and (3) Psychology (US News & World Report, 2019).

With participants having different majors, I looked for the essence of these students' experiences of academic coaching related to each of their academic programs. I wanted to see if there were enough common occurrences but I also wanted to see the differences these students face based on their majors. To protect their identities, I wanted to assign pseudonyms to all participants (McMillan, 2016). Pseudonyms are fake names for participants in any research design. Instead, I protected their identities by referring them to Student A and Student B.

The data was analyzed using the Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation (McMillan, 2016). I created transcriptions from each interview to collect the accurate data for the current study. The transcriptions were used for us to identify the words,

phrases, and events that seem to stand out in the interviews. Before I coded the transcripts, I reviewed the analysis process, the interview protocol (questions being asked), the essence of each student's experiences of advising and coaching and my new perspectives of the research topic based on the study.

Table 1 represents the common themes from the interviews. The common themes that were found in the research question "Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?" were (a) experiences with coaching, (b) referral by coach, (c) coaching and majors, (d) coaching and careers, and (d) relationships with coach.

### **Analysis of the Data**

The five interviews were held at Rowan University in Savitz Hall in the Academic Success Center. These first four interviews were conducted inside a small room (room 310) inside the Academic Success Center. The fifth interview was conducted in John Woodruff's office. The five participants included two seniors, two juniors, and one freshmen. Four of these participants have been attending Rowan University since their Freshmen Year. One participant has transferred from another institution. All five of the participants were registered with the Disability Resources Office, and have previously participated in the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University. After conducting the five interviews, common themes emerged from the transcript. Themes were grouped based on clear-cut analysis of the research question presented. The research question explored, "Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?" The common themes that were identified included:

Table 1

*Themes from the Interviews (N=5)*

	<b>Experiences with Coaching</b>	<b>Referral by Coach</b>	<b>Coaching and Majors</b>	<b>Coaching and Careers</b>	<b>Relationships with Coach</b>
	<b>Basics of Academic Coaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academics (5)</li> <li>• Time Management and Organization (5)</li> <li>• Stress Management (2)</li> <li>• Talking to Professors (2)</li> </ul>	<b>Mentioning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career Center (2)</li> </ul>	<b>Small Knowledge but Caring/Empathetic/Helpful (5)</b>	<b>Job Preparation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mock Interviewing, Resume Revision, Internships (4)</li> <li>• Formatting an Email (2)</li> </ul>	<b>Similarity/Relatable as Academic Coach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities/Major/Interests (3)</li> <li>• Personality (Being able to have a conversation) (5)</li> </ul>
33	<b>Motivation by Academic Coach (2)</b>	<b>No Referral to Academic Coach with Similar Major (5)</b>	<b>When I did change my major?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Reassurance (3)</li> </ul>	<b>Outside Career Services (3)</b>	<b>Relationships with Coach (3)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach acts like Life Coach (3)</li> </ul>
		<b>Referral</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career Center (2)</li> <li>• Academic Advising (4)</li> </ul>	<b>Coaching Helped Me Get Involved, Engaged, and Participated in my Major</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses (5)</li> </ul>	<b>Coaching Helped Me Get Involved, Engaged, and Participated in my Major</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career Opportunities (3)</li> </ul>	<b>Knowing Coach from Events and Programs (3)</b>
			<b>Different Majors as Academic Coach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar, but different majors (2)</li> </ul>		

**Experiences of coaching.** Each participant explained that their coaching experiences were mainly towards *The Basics of Academic Coaching*. The Basics of Academic Coaching include (a) academics, (b) time management and organization, (c) stress management, and (d) talking to professors. Four participants emphasized that their experiences in coaching are mainly focused towards succeeding in the college environment, and not too much on career opportunities. The other participant (Student C) explained that his academic coach helps him with not only the basics of academic coaching but with preparation for career opportunities. Student C noted,

For the past couple of semesters, I realized that I can use academic coaching to, yes, talk about my week but, also to take care of things as well. So, if I am having a hard time with writing an email to someone, whether if it's a professor or whether if it's for a job interview, they help me with that and you know, it's also studying for classes but it is also just managing my time.

In addition, Academic Coaches also help *motivate* students with disabilities to succeed in the college environment. Two students emphasized that their coach had to give some sense of reality and encouragement towards these students in order to improve their skills in the college environment. In the words of Student E,

My coach did tell me because I was struggling a lot, she was being real with me and really sitting down and giving me the real, and the real was, especially with the major, like all majors, no "ifs" "ands" or "buts", you have to be very organized, you have to be well planned, if anything, and you have to have steps and goals because it is not going to be a walk around a park, it is not going to be something that happens in the moment, you have to study and plan ahead. So, she

told me that she believes I have the brain capacity to do it but to be real with myself, if I don't get better in certain areas, and I lack, I should definitely consider changing my major, but it wasn't to discourage me but it was more so to let me know, if I don't take those steps, maybe I should consider changing my major.

**Referral by coach.** Some participants have expressed their frustration that each of their Academic Coaches have briefly *mentioned* to them about services in the Office of Career Advancement and gave them information regarding these services but did not refer them to a specific professional for guidance. As Student D explained,

They told me about the office but didn't refer me to a specific person. I was given the paperwork for the office. I was told how they do mock interviews and career tests and resume revisions, so, I was told about a lot of things that are offered there but I can't recall any specific names of like people that work in there or being told to see that specific worker.

All participants stated that they were not *referred to an Academic Coach with a similar major*. They all stated that they enjoy their current coaches they have. However, two participants emphasized that they would only switch Academic Coaches if the coach was not going to continue to work with them. As Student D noted,

The only referrals that happen was once I would finish with one coach at the end of the semester, if that coach wasn't going to continue working in the Success Center, then, they would refer me to a specific coach that they thought would help me meet my needs.

Some participants emphasized that their Academic Coach has *referred them to the Office of Career Advancement*. The only times when the students were referred to the Career

Center is for preparations for job interviews, and editing and sending out resumes. As Student B emphasized,

My coach has referred me to the Office of Career Advancement when I need to go to workshops and get my resume and curriculum CV critiqued. You gave me information on how to go about doing that through RSN and to let me know of the services that are provided by OCA. They just gave great feedback and it's just a good tool to have.

Four participants highlighted that they have been *referred to an Academic Advisor* regarding their concerns or questions towards their major. Academic Advisors always help students with coursework related to their majors. Two participants only have met with their advisor only once. Two other participants briefly mentioned that they meet with their academic advisors more than once if they have any questions regarding their major.

**Coaching and majors.** All of the participants have expressed their frustration that their academic coach have *small knowledge of their major*. However, each participant emphasized that each of their coaches' lack of knowledge of their major *did not affect the coach's work ethic*. This means that even though the participants' coaches did not have enough knowledge of their major, they work hard with their students based on their needs. Student C explained the difference of major and how his coach helped him find that common ground with him,

She has some knowledge, she is a Psychology Major, and I am a Sports Communication Major but, she tries to find that common ground with me. She really cares about like "getting to know me" and she just tries to be as invested as

she can be and I really appreciate that because I feel like the best coaches are the ones that really care and she has done a really great job with that. She really cares and tries to express that.

Student D explained how her coach helped her based on her major despite lack of knowledge of major,

We did get to do some career tests at one point, where my coach was trying to help me go through all of those tests and see which careers matched my personality and my interests, so that was very good and was very helpful because my coach printed out multiple tests and referred me to various websites so it was very thorough.

Three of my participants expressed that they have *changed their major* at some point in their college career. Two of them have changed their major while at Rowan University. The other participant has changed her major after transferring to Rowan University from another institution, which was not mentioned in the interview. When these participants mentioned that they changed their major, their academic coach helped them not only with their courses related to their new major, he or she has helped them by *reassuring that they were in the right major*. In the words of Student A,

They helped me already after I changed my major, they assisted me in with like courses that are part of my new major and transition with the old into the new. They helped me with reassurance that I am in a better major for myself. I was very nervous about changing it, especially kind of pressure from my parents to stay in it. Um, but after talking with them and my coach, we realized that it was probably better for me to switch and my coach helped me with emotional

reassurance like “It is going to be okay, everyone changes their major at some point, um and, it’s probably better for the long run” and it has been so.

All five participants have stated throughout each interview that their coach has helped them participate, get involved, and engaged in *courses related to their major*. As mentioned above, their academic coaches have helped them with the *basics of academic coaching*. Their academic coaches have helped them with their courses and how to better plan for upcoming assignments, tests, and quizzes. Student A has expressed how he and his coach worked together to figure out assignments related to their courses and how to plan them,

When it comes to my classes, I definitely gone through a lot. Every last year, every week we met, we would go over my classes for the week. What I have done as far as homeworking them. What my plans were for the following week and goals I had long and short term.

All five participants have stated that they all have different majors as their academic coach. However, their differences in major did not interfere with their collaboration with each other. Each interviewee emphasized that their collaboration with and advice from their coach has helped them improve their cognitive skills and become motivated to succeed in the college environment. In the words of Student C,

My coach is very helpful with everything that I do with my life. Even, besides career planning, just getting emailing people for job interviews or whatever it is, setting up advisor appointments, just making sure that I meet with my deadlines.

Two participants have stated that even though they have different majors as their coach, *their majors are similar*. Both participants have explained that they have similar courses



and participate in similar activities as each other. Student E stated that she is Biochemistry major and the fact that she is a Biology Major and describes that she had similar courses,

My academic coach was a Biology Major. So, that's why we geared towards the academics because she understood me with the struggles of Biology and Chemistry and she basically understood how time consuming it can be. So, she really tried to help me with that because Biology and Biochemistry is really similar majors so, she did have that understanding what I was going through as far as the workload and the rigor.

**Coaching and careers.** Four participants stated that their Academic Coach has helped each of them with some sort of *job preparation*. All four participants have stated that their coach has either helped them or referred them to services when it comes to *Mock Interviewing, Resume Revision, and Internships*. When it came to *Mock Interviewing*, all four participants stated that they have been referred to the Office of Career Advancement (OCA). When it comes to *Resume Revision*, three participants stated that they have been referred to the OCA for guidance. However, one participant (Student B) states that her coach has presented his resume to her and how it helped her get motivated on working on her resume. In addition, Student B explained that looking through her coach's resume helped her visit the career office to look over her resume,

I know going forward that what I need, my resume or CV critiqued, to go back there and have them just look over because they just gave great feedback and it's just a good tool to have.

When it came down to *Internships*, two participants have been referred to the OCA for guidance on preparing for internships. However, two other participants stated that their academic coaches have encouraged them to participate and get involved in internships. One participant (Student E), states that her coach advised her to get involved in internships and is expected to be exposed to them down the line, since she is a Freshmen,

She definitely said that I should try to get involved in internships and get close to my professors who are working towards my major so, like, I can be potentially exposed to that sooner than later.

Two participants stated that their academic coach has helped them *format an email* when they need to reach out to their professors or for job interviews. Three participants have stated that they use *outside career services* for career guidance. In addition to the OCA, one participant (Student B) has a mentor that helps her with career guidance (i.e. interview prep). Two other participants utilize other career services outside of the OCA and they do not talk to their academic coach about it. One participant (Student D) described some of the outside career services she utilized without guidance from academic coach,

I did also take the Career Development Course that was offered through this office and I did my resume and revisions through there. I did Chess Match two times to get internships and they did mock interviewing with me.

Three participants stated that their academic coaches *helped them participate, get involved, and engaged in career opportunities* related to their majors. Their academic coaches encouraged them to participate in volunteer opportunities, and part-time job

opportunities that are related to their majors as much as they can. As one participant (Student C) explained,

She told me that it is really important for me to be as engaged as I can and also to participate as much as I can. That's really good in a major because all of the activities I participate in are related to my classes.

The other two participants stated that their academic coach has not given them any career guidance related to their majors. As mentioned above, these two participants were mainly focused on academics and time organization.

**Relationships with coach.** All five participants have stated that they can *relate to their academic coaches*. The participants and their coaches have a variety of *similarities to each other*. They all said that having similarities as each other has helped them connect with each other. Three participants explained that their coaches get involved in similar activities, have similar majors, and/or interests related to their major. As mentioned above, two participants stated that their majors are similar to their coach's. In addition, one participant (Student C) emphasized that him and his academic coach are involved in similar clubs and activities as him,

My coach and I do stuff for the Rowan Television Network. She did a couple of Hockey games and I did some Hockey Games too. She wouldn't do broadcasting but she would do stuff for the camera or for graphics. I think that when it comes to learning stuff in classrooms or just learning in general, we can relate to each other.

Another similarity that was identified by all five participants is that themselves and their coaches have *similar personalities* as each other. Each participant stated that they

connected with their academic coaches very well and were able to have normal back and forth conversations. As one participant (Student D) noted,

We clicked very well in that the appointments could be more informal. I felt like I could speak freely, I felt understood. So, it didn't feel so stiff, like they were just telling me what to do, but more of a back and forth conversation.

Three participants emphasized that their *relationship with their academic coach* has been like a lifelong relationship. Based on their conversations with each other, the three participants have expressed that their coach acts like a life coach. One participant (Student C) describes how his academic coach acted like a life coach,

She has that positive attitude and she just really cares and I think I see her as a life coach rather than as an Academic Coach and that's what makes her really special. Anything that was just giving me difficulty and anything I have a hard time with, she would make me feel like "Jason, we are going to do this, we are not going to put this off. We're going to do this and you know, it's not like you can't do this because you can. You know, I will be here to support you but you go to do it". She wanted me to get into the right front.

Three students mentioned that *they knew their coach from programs and/or events* that they attended. These students who have previously participated in the Academic Coaching Program expressed that knowing the academic coach from a particular event or program on campus became a benefit for the student-coach relationship. One participant (Student A) explained his story on how he knew his coach from his dormitory and how it benefitted their coaching relationship,

I actually already know the coach. Back during freshmen year, I have moved into Holly Pointe after about a month in Oak and she was my R.A. for my time in Holly Pointe and I have to say, I love the kid, she is great, she is an amazing RA, she is a really great friend to have, and the fact she is my academic coach just added on to that. She worked very hard, she is very kind and trustworthy, um, just all around a great person and she works very hard to make sure that she is doing well.

The overall findings of all five interviews provided important information on students with disabilities at Rowan University, their academic coaching experiences, and their integration into their majors. The next section will look at connecting the current findings from the research into what further recommendations the Disability Resources and the Academic Coaching Program can use to better meet students with disabilities' demands.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of coaching students with disabilities in their respective departments. I conducted semi-structured interviews with students with disabilities who are registered with Rowan University's Disability Resources, provided with Accommodations under ADA and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and who previously participated in the Academic Coaching Program (Rowan University, 2019b; Rowan University, 2019c). The Specific Research Question for this study was: "Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?" The research in this study concluded that Academic Coaches do help students with disabilities become integrated into their *coursework* related to their major but little to no *career guidance*.

Xueqin Qian, Emily Clary, David R. Johnson, and Jean K. Echternacht (2018a) did a similar study where they did a phenomenological study on college students with intellectual disabilities' perceptions of an academic coaching program in a community college. Part of Qian et al.'s (2018a) study was to explore if their academic coaches gave these students career guidance. Qian et al.'s (2018a) study was very important to my investigation because it raised concerns on how academic coaching helps students with disabilities obtain career opportunities after graduation. This study, along with the literature review from Chapter II can provide a better understanding how students perceive the academic coaching program and if academic coaches help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors.

## **Answer to the Research Question**

The Specific Research Question for this study was: “Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?”

The research in this study concluded that Academic Coaches do help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors, mainly towards *coursework* but little to no *career guidance*. Each participant’s coaching experiences were mainly towards The Basics of Academic Coaching (i.e. Academics, Time Management). Each of their Academic Coaches have briefly mentioned about services in the Office of Career Advancement to them, and gave them information regarding these services but did not refer them to a specific professional for guidance. Some participants emphasized that their Academic Coach has referred them to the Office of Career Advancement. The only times when the students were referred to the Career Center is for preparations for job interviews, and editing and sending out resumes.

All participants were not referred to an Academic Coach with a similar major. They all stated that they enjoy their current coaches they have. Students with Disabilities in the Academic Coaching Program would only switch Academic Coaches if the coach was not going to continue to work with them. These students have been referred to an Academic Advisor regarding their concerns or questions towards their major. Two participants only have met with their advisor only once. Two other participants briefly mentioned that they meet with their academic advisors more than once if they have and questions regarding their major.

These students’ academic coaches had little knowledge of their majors. However, each of their coaches’ lack of knowledge of their major did not affect the coach’s work

ethic. This means that even though the participants' coaches did not have enough knowledge of their major, they work hard with their students based on their needs. Also, three of my participants expressed that they have changed their major at some point in their college career. Two of them have changed their major while at Rowan University. The other participant has changed her major after transferring to Rowan University from another institution, which was not mentioned in the interview. When these participants mentioned that they changed their major, their academic coach has helped them not only with their courses related to their new major, he or she has helped them with reassuring that they were in the right major.

Each student's coach has helped them participate, get involved, and engaged in courses related to their major. As mentioned above, their academic coaches have helped them with the basics of academic coaching. Their academic coaches have helped them with their courses and how to better plan for upcoming assignments, tests, and quizzes.

All five students all had different majors as their academic coach. However, their differences in major did not interfere with their collaboration with each other. Each student's collaboration with and advice from their coach has helped them improve their cognitive skills and become motivated to succeed in the college environment. Two students have stated that even though they have different majors as their coach, their majors are similar. Both students had similar courses and participate in similar activities as each other.

The majority of these students said their Academic Coaches have helped each of them with some sort of job preparation. Four students' coaches has either helped or referred them to services when it comes to Mock Interviewing, Resume Revision, and



Internships. When it came to Mock Interviewing, all four students have been referred to the Office of Career Advancement (OCA). When it comes to Resume Revision, three students have been referred to the OCA for guidance. However, one participant's (Student B) coach has presented his resume to her and how it helped her get motivated on working on her resume. When it came down to Internships, two students have been referred to the OCA for guidance on preparing for internships. However, two other students' academic coaches have encouraged them to participate and get involved in internships. Two participants stated that their academic coach has helped them format an email when they need to reach out to their professors or for job interviews.

Despite their positive relationship with their academic coach, three students use outside career services for career guidance. In addition to the OCA, one participant (Student B) has a mentor that helps her with career guidance (i.e. interview prep). Two other participants utilize other career services outside of the OCA and they do not talk to their academic coach about it. Three participants stated that their academic coaches helped them participate, get involved, and get engaged in career opportunities related to their majors. Their academic coaches encouraged them to participate in volunteer opportunities, and part-time job opportunities that are related to their majors as much as they can. The other two participants' academic coach has not given them any career guidance related to their majors and were more focused on academics and time organization.

Students with Disabilities who participate in the Academic Coaching Program can relate to their academic coaches. The participants and their coaches have a variety of similarities to each other. Having similarities as each other has helped them connect with

each other. Some students' coaches get involved in similar activities, have similar majors, and/or interests related to their major. As mentioned above, two students' majors are similar to their coach's. These students and their coaches have similar personalities as each other. Each student connected with their academic coaches very well and were able to have normal back and forth conversations. Some students' relationship with their academic coach has been like a lifelong relationship. Based on their conversations with each other, the three participants have expressed that their coach acts like a life coach.

Three students knew their coach from programs and/or events that they attended. These students who have previously participated in the Academic Coaching Program expressed that knowing the academic coach from a particular event or program on campus became a benefit for the student-coach relationship.

### **Discussion of Findings**

**Research question.** "Does academic coaching help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors? If so, how?"

Overall the study showed that Academic Coaches do help students with disabilities become integrated into their majors, mainly towards *coursework* and little to no *career guidance*. A majority of students with disabilities become integrated into their majors when they (a) are fully committed into getting their degrees, and (b) communicate with their advisors, professors, and other professionals in an university about getting involved in their majors (Hong, 2015; Stern & Dubois, 1994).

In this study, all five participants have stated throughout each interview that their coach has helped them participate, get involved, and engaged in courses related to their major. Their academic coaches have helped them with their courses and how to better

plan for upcoming assignments, tests, and quizzes. Dissimilar to these studies, these students have been *referred* to an Academic Advisor and/or a Professional in the Office of Career Advancement (OCA) in regarding their concerns or questions towards their major and/or career opportunities. In addition, academic coaching does not help these students get involved in extracurricular activities related to their majors.

Academic coaching programs helps promote retention of students with disabilities (Mitchell, & Gansemer-Topf, 2016; Qian et al., 2018a; Richman, Rademacher & Maitland, 2014). An academic coaching program helps students with disabilities with (1) time management skills, (2) organization skills, (3) communication & writing skills, (4) studying skills, and (5) self-awareness and self-esteem. All five students' coaching experiences were mainly towards these aspects of Academic Coaching (i.e. Academics, Time Management). In this study, four of the five students emphasized that their experiences in coaching are mainly focused towards succeeding in the college environment.

Students with Disabilities can be successful in college and therefore, can lead to a successful career (Gibbons, Hyfantis, Cihak, Wright, & Mynatt, 2015b; Qian, Johnson, Smith, Papay, 2018b; Zafft et al., 2004). Part of Qian et al.'s (2018a) study was to explore if their academic coaches gave these students career guidance. Similar to this study, four out of five students stated that their Academic Coach has helped each of them with some sort of job preparation. Some types of job preparation presented to these students include (a) formatting and sending out emails related to job interviews, and (b) showing sample resumes.

Dissimilar to the literature mentioned above, all four students have stated that their coach has either helped or referred them to services when it comes to Mock Interviewing, Resume Revision, and Internships. When it came to Mock Interviewing, all four students have been referred to the Office of Career Advancement (OCA). When it comes to Resume Revision, majority of the students have been referred to the OCA for guidance. When it came down to internships, two students have been referred to the OCA for guidance on preparing for internships. However, two other students' academic coaches have encouraged them to participate and get involved in internships.

College Students with Disabilities are being offered peer mentors from programs within Disability Services in school settings (Griffin, Wendel, Day, & McMillan, 2016; Lombardi et al., 2012). These students' relationship with their academic coach has been like a lifelong relationship. Based on their conversations with each other, the participants have expressed that their coach acts like a life coach. Some of the students' coaches get involved in similar activities, have similar majors, and/or interests related to their major. These students and their coaches also have similar personalities as each other. This resulted in having normal back and forth conversations.

### **Limitations and Conclusions Based on Findings**

The purpose of my qualitative research study was to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of coaching for students with disabilities in their respective departments. The study focused on (a) experiences with coaching, (b) referral by coach, (c) coaching and majors, (d) coaching and careers, and (d) relationships with coach. Based on the findings, this study suggests that students at Rowan University who are registered with the Office of Disability Services and have participated in the Academic

Coaching Program have become integrated into their majors because of their academic coaches. Academic coaches have helped these students have become integrated into their majors mainly towards their *coursework*. Each participant's coaching experiences were mainly towards The Basics of Academic Coaching (i.e. Academics, Time Management). Their academic coaches have helped them with their courses and how to better plan for upcoming assignments, tests, and quizzes. One limitation to this study is that these students and their academic coaches have different majors. However, that did not affect their academic coach's work ethic towards them.

Academic Coaches gave little to no integration into *career opportunities* towards Students with Disabilities who have participated in the Academic Coaching Program. Although, majority of the students' Academic Coaches has helped each of them with some sort of job preparation. Some types of job preparation presented to these students include (a) formatting and sending out emails related to job interviews, and (b) showing sample resumes. Each of their Academic Coaches have briefly mentioned to them about services in the Office of Career Advancement and gave them information regarding these services but did not refer them to a specific professional for guidance. Some participants emphasized that their Academic Coach has referred them to the Office of Career Advancement. The only times when the students were referred to the Career Center is for preparations for job interviews, and editing and sending out resumes. In addition, their relationships with their academic coaches were very strong where some of their coaches acted like life coaches to them.

One limitation in this study was that the sampling of students only came from one University so it might not be similar to other Universities. Another limitation was that

some of these students (mainly those with ID) had limited communication skills (APA, 2013). These students had a hard time answering questions due to the speed of their communication and word choices. One major drawback in the study was that some participants had to self-disclose themselves to register for these services and they might have a hard time answering the questions. To conclude, based on the research I conducted, there is still limited research on *career guidance* by academic coaches towards students with disabilities, which I contributed to by my thesis project.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Based upon my findings and conclusions, I recommended the following:

1. Results indicated that a high number of academic coaches had little to no knowledge of their majors. Academic Coaches should do some research on their student's courses, volunteer opportunities, student organizations, and career opportunities related to that particular major, so they can have a better understanding of and how to help them get involved in their major.
2. The Office of Disability Resources and the Academic Coaching Program should collaborate with The Office of Career Advancement (OCA) to create an Academic/Career Coaching Program. Both programs should collaborate with each other to implement ideas on how to correlate academics with career guidance in the coaching program.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based upon my findings and conclusions, I recommended the following:

1. More studies that focuses on *career guidance* towards Students with Disabilities in an university.

2. A study that focuses on Academic Coaches in an Academic Coaching Program and their knowledge of their students' majors.

To conclude, based on the research I conducted, Academic coaches have helped these students have become integrated into their majors mainly towards their *coursework*. There is still limited research on *career guidance* by academic coaches towards students with disabilities, which I contributed to by my thesis project. This research could help coaching programs, disability resources, and career offices from different institutions collaborate with each other, and implement ideas towards students with disabilities in an Academic Coaching Program. In addition, this could help academic coaches figure out how to give *career guidance* towards students with disabilities in an Academic Coaching Program.

## References

- American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (Ed.). (2019). Definition of Intellectual Disability. Retrieved September 27, 2019, from <https://aaid.org/intellectual-disability/definition>.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2002). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- American Psychiatric Association (Ed.). (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Amerman, T., & Carr-Jones, J. (2006). Dare to dream: Leadership conferences for students with disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 2(6) Article 1. Retrieved [2019] from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol2/iss6/art1>
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student Involvement: A Development Theory for Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529. Retrieved April 10, 2019.
- Beail, N., & Williams, K. (2014). Using Qualitative Methods in Research with People Who Have Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 27(2), 85-96. doi:10.1111/jar.12088
- Becker, S., & Palladino, J. (2016). Assessing faculty perspectives about teaching and working with students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 29(1), 65-82. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1107476&site=ehost-live>
- Bellman, S., Burgstahler, S., & Hinke, P. (2015). Academic coaching: Outcomes from a pilot group of postsecondary STEM students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 28(1), 103-108. Retrieved from <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1066319&site=ehost-live>
- Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund. (1997). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from <https://dredf.org/legal-advocacy/laws/section-504-of-the-rehabilitation-act-of-1973/>
- Gibbons, M. M., Cihak, D. F., Mynatt, B., & Wilhoit, B. E. (2015a). Faculty and student attitudes toward postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities and autism. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 28(2), 149-162.



- Gibbons, M., Hyfantis, J., Cihak, D., Wright, R., & Mynatt, B. (2015b). A social-cognitive exploration of the career and college understanding of young adults with intellectual disabilities. *Professional School Counseling, 19*(1), 80-91. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90014791>
- Gordon, V. N., Habley, W. R., & Grites, T. J. (2008). *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint.
- Griffin, M. M., Summer, A. H., McMillan, E. D., Day, T. L., & Hodapp, R. M. (2012). Attitudes toward including students with intellectual disabilities at college. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 9*(4), 234-239. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ988573&site=ehost-live>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12008>
- Griffin, M. M., Wendel, K. F., Day, T. L., & McMillan, E. D. (2016). Developing peer supports for college students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 29*(3), 263-269. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1123801&site=ehost-live>
- Hart, D., Mele-McCarthy, J., Pasternack, R. H., Zimbrich, K., & Parker, D. R. (2004). Community college: A pathway to success for youth with learning, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities in secondary settings. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 39*(1), 54-66.
- Hendrickson, J., Carson, R., Woods-Groves, S., Mendenhall, J., & Scheidecker, B. (2013). UI REACH: A Postsecondary Program Serving Students with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities. *Education and Treatment of Children, 36*(4), 169-194. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42900231>
- Hong, B. S. S. (2015). Qualitative Analysis of the Barriers College Students With Disabilities Experience in Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Development, 56*(3), 209–226. doi: 10.1353/csd.2015.0032
- Kowalsky, R., & Fresko, B. (2002). Peer tutoring for college students with disabilities. *Higher Education Research & Development, 21*(3), 259-271. doi:10.1080/0729436022000020760
- Lombardi, A.R. & Murray, C. & Gerdes, H. (2012). Academic Performance of First-Generation College Students with Disabilities. *Journal of College Student Development 53*(6), 811-826. John Hopkins University Press. Retrieved March 16, 2019, from Project MUSE database.

- McMillan, J. H. (2016). *Fundamentals of educational research* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Milsom, A. (2007). Interventions to Assist Students with Disabilities Through School Transitions. *Professional School Counseling, 10*(3), 273-278. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42732520>
- Mitchell, J. J., & Gansemer-Topf, A. (2016). Academic coaching and self-regulation: Promoting the success of students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 29*(3), 249-256. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1123788&site=ehost-live>
- National Network: Information, Guidance, and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act. (2017). An Overview of the Americans With Disabilities Act. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from <https://adata.org/factsheet/ADA-overview>
- Nevill, R.E.A. & White, S.W. J Autism Dev Disord (2011) 41: 1619. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-011-1189-x>
- O'Banion, T. (1972). An academic advising model. *Junior College Journal, 42*, 62-69
- Papay, C., & Bambara, L. (2011). Postsecondary Education for Transition-Age Students with Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities: A National Survey. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 46*(1), 78-93. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/stable/23880032>
- Parker, D. R., & Boutelle, K. (2009). Executive function coaching for college students with learning disabilities and ADHD: A new approach for fostering self-determination. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 24*(4), 204-215. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ861189&site=ehost-live>; <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1540-5826.2009.00294.x>
- Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido-DiBrito, F., & Quaye, S. J. (2016). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Brand.
- Qian, X., Clary, E., Johnson, D. R., & Echternacht, J. K. (2018). The use of a coaching model to support the academic success and social inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in community and technical college settings. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 31*(3), 193-208. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1200602&site=ehost-live>

- Qian, X., Johnson, D. R., Smith, F. A., & Papay, C. K. (2018). Predictors associated with paid employment status of community and technical college students with intellectual disability. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 123*(4), 329-343. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1183774&site=ehost-live>; <https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-123.4.329>
- The Regents of the University of Michigan (Ed.). (2019). Services for Students with Disabilities. Retrieved April 30, 2019, from <https://ssd.umich.edu/article/what-academic-coaching>
- Richman, E. L., Rademacher, K. N., & Maitland, T. L. (2014). Coaching and college success. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 27*(1), 33-50. Retrieved from <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1029647&site=ehost-live>
- Rowan University. (2019a). About. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from <https://www.rowan.edu/home/about>
- Rowan University. (2019b). Academic Coaching. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from <https://sites.rowan.edu/disabilityresources/academiccoaching.html>
- Rowan University. (2019c). Disability Resources. Retrieved December 2, 2019, from <https://sites.rowan.edu/disabilityresources/index.html>.
- Rowan University. (2018d). Fast Facts. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from <https://sites.rowan.edu/fastfacts/index.html>
- Shepler, D. K., & Woosley, S. A. (2012). Understanding the early integration experiences of college students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 25*(1), 37-50. Retrieved from <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ970018&site=ehost-live>
- Stern, V., DuBois, P., American Institutes, f. R., & American Association for the Advancement, of Science. (1994). *You're in charge: A career-planning guide in science, mathematics, and engineering for college students with disabilities and the advocates and advisors who work with them. second edition* Retrieved from <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED378752&site=ehost-live>

- Stodden, R., & Whelley, T. (2004). Postsecondary Education and Persons with Intellectual Disabilities: An Introduction. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 39*(1), 6-15. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/stable/23880016>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- US News & World Report (Ed.). (2019). Rowan University | Academic Life | US News Best Colleges. Retrieved May 2, 2019, from <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rowan-university-2609/academics#MajorsDegrees>
- Westling, D., Kelley, K., Cain, B., & Prohn, S. (2013). College Students' Attitudes about an Inclusive Postsecondary Education Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disability. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 48*(3), 306-319. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23880989>
- Wolf-Wendel, L., Ward, K., & Kinzie, J. (2009). A Tangled Web of Terms: The Overlap and Unique Contribution of Involvement, Engagement, and Integration to Understanding College Student Success. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(4), 407-428. doi:10.1353/csd.0.0077
- Woods-Groves, S., Hua, Y., Therrien, W., Kaldenberg, E., Hendrickson, J., Lucas, K., & McAninch, M. (2014). An Investigation of Strategic Writing Instruction for Post-Secondary Students with Developmental Disabilities. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 49*(2), 248-262. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/stable/23880608>
- Zafft, C., Hart, D., & Zimbrich, K. (2004). College Career Connection: A Study of Youth with Intellectual Disabilities and the Impact of Postsecondary Education. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 39*(1), 45-53. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/stable/23880020>

## Appendix A

### Recruitment E-Mail

# Academic Coaching Experiences

Be part of an important qualitative research study!

**Are you interested in participating in a research study about the Academic Coaching Program?**

Since you are involved in the Rowan University Academic Coaching Program, we hope you can participate in this study. The goal for this study is to identify if the Academic Coaching Program helps you with your major.

Interviews will be approximately 60 minutes, will take place at Rowan University in Savitz Hall.

Please email me at: [wilnerb6@students.rowan.edu](mailto:wilnerb6@students.rowan.edu) to schedule an interview.

This study has been approved by Rowan University's IRB (Study # 2019000778)

Benjamin Wilner  
Higher Education Intern  
Academic Success Center/Disability Resources

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

Title: Major Integration in an Academic Coaching Program for Students with Disabilities  
PI: Dr. Drew Tinnin

#### KEY INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Major Integration in an Academic Coaching Program for Students with Disabilities

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Drew Tinnin  
**Co-Investigator (Master's Candidate):** Ben Wilner

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide key information that will help you decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study.

Please carefully read the key information provided in the questions below. The purpose behind those questions is to provide clear information about the purpose of the study, study specific information about what will happen in the course of the study, what are the anticipated risks and benefits, and what alternatives are available to you if you do not wish to participate in this research study.

The study team will explain the study to you and they will answer any question you might have before volunteering to take part in this study. It is important that you take your time to make your decision. You may take this consent form with you to ask a family member or anyone else before agreeing to participate in the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask the study team and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

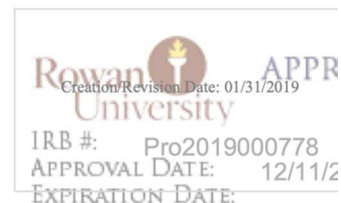
You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

The Principal Investigator, Dr. Drew Tinnin, or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent.

1

Version #: 1  
Version Date: 11/14/19



**1. What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of academic coaching for students with disabilities based on their majors. The study will be conducted by Ben Wilner, a master's student in Educational Leadership at Rowan University as part of his thesis research. The data collected in this study may be published in the final thesis.

**2. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**

Your experience has qualified you for this study. The specific experience that will qualify for participation in this study is participation in the Academic Coaching Program.

**3. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**

You will be asked to answer interview questions, such as:

What do you like to do on campus or for fun?

Have you discussed with your academic coach about courses related to your major, career opportunities, and/or student organizations related to your major?

Have you discussed with your academic coach about changing your major?

If so, what advice have you received from you academic coach?

Does your coach help you get involved in extracurricular activities (volunteer opportunities/student organizations) related to your major?

Does your coach have enough knowledge of your major to help you succeed in your field of study?

Has your coach refer you to another coach who has a similar major as you or an academic advisor?

Has your coach refer you to a professional in the Office of Career Advancement center for Career Counseling?

How can you make your coach aware of your specific needs based on your major?

Do you feel you can relate to your Academic Success Coach?

If so, what helps you to relate to the coach (age, gender, major, personality)?

What is the academic coach's major?

Do you have the same major as your academic coach?

If so, does this help you participate in activities related to your major?

If not, does your academic coach help you with career planning, and/or with your courses?

Also, does this help you with your courses?

Has this help you with their career planning (jobs, internships)?

**4. Who may take part in this research study? And who may not?**

Those who will participate in this study are students who participate in the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University's Disability Resources Office.

Those excluded from this research study are students who do not participate in the Academic Coaching Program at Rowan University's Disability Resources Office.

- 5. How long will the study take and where will the research study be conducted?**  
Your participation in this study will involve one interview. The interviews should not exceed one-hour and interviews will take place from January 21<sup>st</sup>-February 11<sup>th</sup>.
- 6. How many visits may take to complete the study?**  
The student participating in this study will only visit once.
- 7. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**  
There are no known psychological or physical risks involved in this study, and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.
- 8. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?**  
There are no exact benefits from this study. Your participation in this study may help improve the Academic Coaching program.
- 9. What are the alternatives if you do not wish to participate in the study?**  
There are no alternative treatments available. Your alternative is not to participate in the study.
- 10. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?**  
There will be 8-10 volunteers to enroll in this study.
- 11. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?**  
During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.
- 12. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?**  
There will be no cost to you to take part in this study.
- 13. Will you be paid to take part in this study?**  
You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.
- 14. Are you providing any identifiable private information as part of this research study?**  
All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on a Rowan University Google Drive. After research study is complete, we will delete all information from the Google Drive and it will not be



used in any of the future research projects or disclosed to anyone outside of the research team.

**15. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?**

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at any conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information.

Interview recordings and transcripts will be digitally stored on an password-protected personal computer accessible only by the primary researcher. Audio recordings may be made available to a transcriptionist for the purposes of transcribing interview responses only. Upon receipt of transcriptions, pseudonyms will be used to replace names used in the interview. Only the primary investigator (not the transcriptionist) will have access to the code sheet listing original names and assigned pseudonyms in a separately password-protected electronic file. Only the typed interview transcripts using your pseudonyms will be available for thesis committee members and other parties to review.

**16. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Drew Tinnin at [tinnin@rowan.edu](mailto:tinnin@rowan.edu)

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

**17. Who can you call if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about taking part in this study, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Dr. Drew Tinnin  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
856-256-4909

Or

Ben Wilner  
[wilnerb6@students.rowan.edu](mailto:wilnerb6@students.rowan.edu)  
856-994-3151

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance  
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

**18. What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?**

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

**ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM**

We are also asking for your permission to allow us to make a digital audio (sound) recording of your interview as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for transcription of feedback.

The recording(s) will include no personally identifiable information.

The recording(s) will be stored on the Rowan Google Drive. I will delete files after thesis is done.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

---

**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE**

I have read the entire information about the research study, research risks, benefits and the alternatives, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed.

All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered and I agree to volunteer to participate in the study.

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:**

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: Benjamin Wilner

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

## Appendix C

### Instrument

#### Interview Questions:

1. What do you like to do on campus or for fun?
2. Have you discussed anything regarding your major with your academic coach?
3. Have you discussed with your academic coach about changing your major?
  - a. If so, what advice have you received from you academic coach?
4. Does your coach help you get involved in extracurricular activities (volunteer opportunities/student organizations) related to you major?
5. Does your coach have enough knowledge of your major to help you succeed in your field of study?
6. Has your coach refer you to another coach who has a similar major as you or an academic advisor?
7. Has your coach refer you to a professional in the Office of Career Advancement center for Career Counseling?
8. How can you make your coach more aware of your specific needs based on your major?

9. Do you feel you can relate to your Academic Success Coach?
  - a. If so, what helps you to relate to the coach (age, gender, major, personality)?
  
10. What is the academic coach's major?
  
11. Do you have the same major as your academic coach?
  - a. If so, does this help you participate in activities related to your major?
  
  - b. If not, does your academic coach help you with career planning, and/or with your courses?
  
  - c. Also, does this help you with your courses?
  
  - d. Has this help you with their career planning (jobs, internships)?