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**THE DILEMMA OF DISCLOSURE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS  
WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER**

by

TERESA L. SPOULOS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education  
University of San Diego

May 2006

Dissertation Committee

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## Abstract

Many college campuses are striving to recruit and retain a diverse student population, and one population making its presence known are students with disabilities. As a result of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, students with disabilities are ensured equal access to education through the removal of architectural barriers and the provision of reasonable accommodations. Despite the existence of these laws, however, many students with attention deficit disorder (ADD) choose not to request classroom accommodations from professors. Students choose not to disclose out of fear of having inaccurate labels placed on them, being accused of faking their disability to obtain an unfair advantage in school, and experiencing non-supportive classroom settings where professors appear cold toward students with disability needs.

To help understand why some students choose to disclose while others do not, this study explored student comfort levels and self-advocacy skills in requesting classroom accommodations among students with ADD at a large public four-year university in the southwestern United States. Four specific research questions guided this investigation: (1) What has been the student's comfort level in sharing confidential information with faculty? (2) What is the student's knowledge about ADD and does it appear to be sufficient for the student to self-advocate for classroom accommodations? (3) Do students find the campus environment supportive in providing academic accommodations? (4) How does a student's comfort level, self-advocacy skills, and satisfaction with the campus environment, together with student demographics, influence disclosure?

To answer these questions, this study applied both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to survey data collected from 97 students with ADD. The results of the analysis suggest that students with ADD disclose on a need-to-know basis; however before making the decision to disclose, students usually evaluate the classroom environment. Furthermore, students are not very familiar with Federal laws that ensure them reasonable accommodations, and not surprisingly, are not very effective in describing their ADD to professors. However, students have found professors fairly willing to provide classroom accommodations, even though they are only somewhat knowledgeable on disability issues.

## Dedication

*To Robert Montana*

*my loving husband*

*who believed in my journey.*

## Acknowledgments

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the guidance, expertise, and support of a number of people. First and foremost I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to my dissertation committee: Dr. Fred Galloway for serving as my dissertation chair and providing endless hours of direction, support and statistical expertise which I needed to succeed; Dr. Robert Donmoyer for serving as a committee member and providing guidance and qualitative expertise for my study; and Dr. Bobbie Atkins of San Diego State University for serving as an outside committee member and providing subject expertise and just being there to see me through the dissertation process.

I would like to thank Dr. Fred McFarlane, professor and chair of the Department of Administration, Rehabilitation, and Postsecondary Education at San Diego State University for believing in me. In October 1989, Dr. McFarlane suggested I consider pursuing a doctorate degree. Throughout my doctoral program, Dr. McFarlane has always been a phone-call away for support and words of encouragement.

At the university where the study was conducted, I would like to acknowledge Mary Shojai, Director of Disabled Student Services. This study was made possible through Ms. Shojai, by her endorsement and permission to survey and interview students with attention deficit disorder who were registered with her program. This same acknowledgment and debt of gratitude goes to the staff of the office of Disabled Student Services. Their patience and support throughout the study was a source of strength for me. I would also like to thank the students who made a contribution to the field by participating in the study.

I greatly appreciate all my friends and family for being patient with me. They were always very understanding and cooperative when I told them I needed to study or write a paper. I especially want to thank my husband Robert Montana, Mari Guillermo, Betty Strickland, Margo Behr, and Lynn Jenkins-Feinberg for continuously being there when I needed words of encouragement, and to help celebrate my milestones.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my parents, Marion and Pansy Spoulos, for instilling in me the value of education. As long as I can remember my parents encouraged me to attend college. This is very important because I am legally blind and my parents felt that I could lead a normal life, even though I have a disability. Thank you mom and dad for stressing the importance of a college education.



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## Chapter 1

### *Background to the Study*

Most college campuses are striving to recruit and retain a diverse student population. One population contributing to diversity on American campuses is students with disabilities. In Fall 2000, approximately 6% of first-time, full-time freshmen at four-year institutions reported having a disability (Henderson, 2001).

College students with disabilities are protected against discrimination and ensured equal access to higher education under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These federal laws provide equal access to education for students with disabilities by removing architectural barriers and requiring the institution to provide reasonable academic accommodations. A reasonable accommodation might include extra time for exams, note takers for class lectures, or books in an electronic format.

In order to receive academic accommodations a student must have a disability that has been verified by a physician, psychologist or some other licensed professional (Grossman, 2001; Simon, 2000). The disability must affect a major life activity, which is referred to as a functional limitation, in the area of learning in an educational setting. Examples of functional limitations might be vision impairments that affect reading, dexterity impairments like carpal tunnel that affect writing, or cognitive impairments that affect concentration and short-term memory.

Academic accommodations are contingent upon a student's disclosure of a qualifying disability. A student, in short, has the responsibility to provide documentation of his or her disability to the institution (Grossman, 2001; Lynch and Gussel, 1996;

Simon, 2000). On most college campuses, this documentation is given to the Office for Students with Disabilities, which is the office that usually coordinates classroom accommodations. However, in order for classroom accommodations to occur, the student has a further obligation to disclose the existence of a disability to the classroom professor. Rocco (2001) asserts that, “self-disclosure is the act of providing personal information to another person” (p. 10). Students who choose not to self-disclose, of course, do not receive academic accommodations or protection under the laws. Interestingly, many students with so-called invisible disabilities choose not to self-disclose.

An invisible disability is a disability that, unlike blindness or orthopedic conditions, cannot be easily observed. This study focused on Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, which will be referred to as attention deficit disorder (ADD) since there are different types of attention disorders. ADD is an invisible disability that impacts learning through the inability to concentrate for extended periods of time. ADD is described as “a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that is more frequently displayed and more severe than is typically observed in individuals at a comparable level of development” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 85). Students with ADD are identified to have one of three types of attention deficit disorders. The first type includes individuals who have a combination of inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity. The second type is composed of individuals who are predominantly inattentive. The last type is made up of individuals who are predominantly hyperactive-impulsive (American Psychiatric Association, p. 87).



The Attention Deficit Disorder Association website reports that ADD “is very likely caused by biological factors which influence neurotransmitter activity in certain parts of the brain, and which have a strong genetic basis” (<http://www.add.org/articles/-ABCs/factsheet.html>). Retrieved 9/27/2004, What the Research Shows About AD/HD, para. 2). Scientists, however, have not pinpointed the exact biological link to the cognitive deficit. The ADD association website also asserts that this condition usually persists throughout a person’s lifespan, and notes that about 4% to 6% of the U.S. population has ADD. Students with ADD often have one or more of the following characteristics: They are easily distracted; have difficulty controlling their impulsiveness; exhibit hyperactivity or physical restlessness; and have a low stress tolerance (<http://www.add.org/articles/ABCs/factsheet.html>; Latham, 1995; Richard, 1995).

Students with invisible disabilities choose not to self-disclose for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons discussed in the literature for not disclosing include: fear of having inaccurate labels placed on the student after disclosure (Barga, 1996); fear of being accused of faking their disability to gain an unfair advantage in school (Beilke & Yssel, 1999; Hebel, 2001); and fear of having campus officials misuse confidential information by sharing the information with unauthorized personnel, which then might lead to discrimination (Granger, 2000; National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Education, n.d.). This study focused on some of the barriers to disclosure for students who have ADD while attending college.

### *Statement of the Problem*

A review of the literature indicates that there were some inadequacies in the research on individuals with invisible disabilities, regardless of whether they chose to engage in self-disclosure or not. The key descriptors used for identifying articles on invisible disabilities and disclosure included the following combinations: higher education, disability, and student; disability and disclosure; disability, faculty, and attitudes; disability and student. The descriptors stigma and disability was used, but it led to articles on disclosure and individuals with physical or psychiatric conditions. The databases used were Academic Search Elite and REHABDATA from San Diego State University, and Academic Search Premier and ERIC from the University of San Diego.

A review of the electronic databases listed above identified twelve studies on the topic of disability and disclosure. The studies on disclosure were conducted in a higher education setting or employment setting, with five of the studies conducted in a higher education context. Eleven of the twelve studies used qualitative methods, with eight of the eleven qualitative studies having a sample size of 25 or less. Only one quantitative study, which was conducted in the employment arena, was found and that study focused on individuals with learning disabilities and their experiences in disclosing their disability for requesting workplace accommodations.

Lastly, participants in these studies were either individuals with learning disabilities, individuals with psychological disorders, or individuals from the general disabled population. This means that the researcher was unable to locate any systemic study of students with attention deficit disorder in a higher education setting. A search was conducted that used attention deficit disorder as the descriptor. Literature was found

on ADD, but most of the literature on ADD dealt with diagnosis, medication therapy, or behavioral management techniques. Furthermore, as noted above, there has been limited research of large samples of students with any sort of invisible disabilities in higher education. Thus, there was a major need to explore why some students with ADD were willing to disclose to the Office for Students with Disabilities by providing medical documentation, but hesitant to disclose to professors and other campus officials.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to gather information from students with ADD about their experiences in having or disclosing an invisible disability in a higher education setting. This was first done by surveying students with ADD and then interviewing a small number of volunteer students who completed the survey. Specifically, the study explored student's comfort level in disclosing in order to obtain academic accommodations or opting not to disclose their disability even though a failure to disclose resulted in the forfeiture of legal rights to reasonable accommodations. The study attempted to obtain the disabled students' perspectives on how supportive the faculty and campus environment were in providing classroom accommodations, which can also be a factor in a student's decision on whether or not to disclose. Lastly, the study wanted to discover if students with ADD know enough about the disorder in general to request appropriate accommodations.

### *Research Questions*

The following questions guided the study:

1. What has been the student's comfort level in sharing confidential information with faculty?
2. What is the student's knowledge about ADD and does it appear to be sufficient for the student to self-advocate for classroom accommodations?
3. Do students find the campus environment supportive in providing academic accommodations?
4. How does a student's comfort level, self-advocacy skills, and satisfaction with the campus environment, together with student demographics, influence disclosure?

## Chapter 2

### *Review of the Literature*

Many college campuses are striving to foster a diverse student population. Diversity teaches tolerance towards other groups of people and it allows us to view the world from a different lens. One population making their presence felt on college campuses is students with disabilities. In fall 2000, approximately 6% of full time, first time freshmen entering four-year public and private colleges disclosed that they had a disability (Henderson, 2001). The make-up of these students were as follows: learning disabled 40%, vision impairment 16%, hearing impairment 8.6%, speech impairment 2.9%, orthopedic impairment 7.1%, health related impairment 15.4%, and other 16.9%. It should be noted that attention deficit disorder (ADD), which is a common disability found on college campuses, did not have a separate disability category in the Henderson study, so it is not clear whether this disability was placed under learning disabled or other. At the university that was studied, students with ADD are categorized as other.

ADD is a condition that affects learning and behavior. Students with ADD have one of three types, they are predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive and impulsive, or have a combination of inattentive and hyperactive-impulsiveness. ADD has been around for years, but has been called a variety of terms such as, minimal brain damage, minimal brain dysfunction, and hyperkinetic reaction (Latham, 1995; Nadeau, 1995). In the 1970s the medical profession realized that ADD is a lifelong disorder. ADD was originally thought to be a childhood disorder because at puberty many children grow out of their hyperactivity, but we now know that inattentiveness continues into adulthood (Latham; Nadeau). In 1991, the U.S. Department of Education officially recognized

ADD, as a disability that affects learning and that these students are eligible for academic accommodations (Latham).

Many students with ADD need academic accommodations to help them succeed in college. This means each semester, students are faced with the decision on whether to meet with a professor or not, to obtain classroom accommodations. The student's past experiences in requesting classroom accommodations, and the student's comfort level in discussing their disability plays an important role in the decision to disclose. To explore the dilemma of disclosure this section will discuss ADD and disclosure, the classroom environment, Universal Design for Instruction, personal perceptions about disclosing a disability, and self-advocacy.

### *ADD and Disclosure*

Attention deficit disorder affects the ability to concentrate and stay focused for extended periods of time. Having ADD is like being in a rainstorm with poor windshield wipers and instead of slowing down one goes faster. Other times you are supercharged like a race car and one keeps starting new tasks but never seems to finish any of them due to impulsiveness and disorganization. Time becomes a black hole where everything happens at once, which creates an inner turmoil or panic (Hallowell, 1992; Hallowell & Ratey, 2005).

Even though the field of psychiatry recognizes these behaviors of inattentiveness as a bona-fide disability, there are many myths and misunderstandings that the American culture holds about ADD that can influence disclosure. There are at least three myths that affect disclosure, first ADD is a childhood disorder that children grow out of; second, that

the condition does not really exist; and third, children with ADD are learning to make excuses and not take responsibility for their actions (Booth et al., Retrieved 9/27/2004; Ellison, Retrieved 12/3/2004; Fumento, 2003). Additionally, the public perceives ADD to be a condition of poor parenting, and that psychiatrists and pharmaceutical companies created ADD “to drum up business for private practices and to increase profits for drug companies” (Ellison, myth #1, para. 1). Students with ADD are aware of these myths and sometimes find it hard to disclose their condition due to this credibility issue.

### *Classroom Environment*

Many students with invisible disabilities find the classroom environment to be on the “chilly side” (Beilke & Yssel, 1999). Professors are providing accommodations, but they do not always believe that the disability exists and because they cannot see the impairment they question its legitimacy (Beilke & Yssel). Hebel (2001) notes that “some college officials across the nation worry that some students and their parents might be ‘gaming the system’ to gain extra time and an edge on tests” (p. A25). Faculty fear that students are faking it to get preferential treatment such as extended time for exams or course substitutions for required classes.

A chilly classroom climate is not healthy for students with invisible disabilities, because it can affect the student’s confidence in requesting accommodations (Beilke & Yssel, 1999). Hartman-Hall and Haaga (2002) support this concept that the environment influences a student’s decision to disclose. The Hartman-Hall and Haaga study confirmed that after students with learning disabilities read both a negative and positive vignette

about professor's willingness to provide academic help, that the more negative a response was from a professor, the less likely the student would request help.

While interviewing students with psychological disabilities Megivern, Pellerito, and Mowbray (2003) study showed that students would not disclose or pursue assistance from the campus counseling office or disabled student service program. The reason students were reluctant to disclose their condition dealt with the attitudes of faculty and administrators. These campus officials felt "that students with psychiatric disabilities are disruptive, incompetent, or dangerous" (Megivern et al., p. 227). Students with psychiatric conditions, as well as students with ADD do encounter problems in school, but their challenges are usually due to medical or other personal reasons, and not due to inappropriate behavior, as some faculty would like to believe.

For the climate to improve, faculty need to feel supported by both the department and the campus community. Bourke, Strehorn, & Silver (2000) found that accommodations are more likely to be provided if the faculty's own academic department encourages the use of accommodations. Faculty are more receptive to providing accommodations if they feel that they are being supported by the Office for Students with Disabilities. And, professors are willing to provide accommodations, if they believe that the accommodations are efficacious and important in the classroom.

Studies have shown that professors are willing to provide classroom accommodations (Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992; Jensen, McCrary, Krampe, & Cooper, 2004; Leyser, Vogel, Wyland, & Brulle, 1998; Vogel, Leyser, Wyland, & Brulle, 1999). Professors are fairly comfortable in providing additional time for exams, and the use of a cassette recorder for taping class lectures. Professors are less



comfortable in providing an alternative test format, for example, essay versus multiple choice, or additional extra credit assignments (Sweener, Kundert, May, & Quinn, 2002; Vogel et al.).

Even though professors are willing to provide academic accommodations, they are only somewhat knowledgeable on what is considered a reasonable accommodation. Fagin (2005) states that, professors know “the names of the laws and the general intent of the laws,” but they “don’t have enough knowledge when it comes to applying them to situations at work” (p. 4). Benham (1997), Dona and Edmister (2001), Jensen et al. (2004), Leyser et al. (1998), and Thompson and Bethea (1997) studies agreed with Fagin’s statement. These studies showed that faculty had more knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act than Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, even though both acts are equally as important in providing access and accommodations to students with disabilities in higher education. At minimum, faculty know that they cannot discriminate against individuals with disabilities and that they need to provide reasonable accommodations. These studies revealed that faculty need training on topics such as, how is ADD assessed, what is considered a reasonable accommodation, the student’s role in requesting accommodations, and the institutions responsibility in providing academic accommodations. These studies also indicated that faculty wanted information on these topics in a written format that would be easy to access, either via the web or by pamphlets and brochures.

### *Universal Design for Instruction*

The chilly climate is changing through a paradigm shift in the manner in which students are being taught. The University of Connecticut is exploring the concept of Universal Design for Instruction. Universal Design for Instruction is modeled after the architectural philosophy of Universal Design for buildings and public space. Architects assert that “they have a responsibility to proactively consider human diversity in the design of public spaces so that resulting environments and products are usable by the intended audience: the diverse public.” Under the Universal Design concept adaptations to the environment are “built-in rather than added on as an afterthought” (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003, p. 41; Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2003, p. 371). For instance, a ramp is an accommodation that provides building access for individuals who use wheelchairs. This same ramp will benefit parents pushing a baby stroller or a person pulling a briefcase on wheels (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003; Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2003).

On today’s college campuses students are more diverse; many students are older, other students have disabilities, and some students’ primary language is not English. Instead of professors making exceptions for these differences, they take a more proactive role in developing and presenting course material in a way that would benefit the class as a whole. Under Universal Design for Instruction professors could do the following:

- Put lecture notes online. Comprehensive notes would benefit students whose first language is not English, students who are poor note takers, and students who miss auditory information due to a hearing impairment or learning disability.
- Use a flexible teaching style, e.g., lecture with powerpoint or conduct group activities, which provides students with different ways of experiencing knowledge.

- Use textbooks that are available in both a hardcopy, and an electronic format. In that manner, a student would have a choice of reading the text or listening to the book on the computer.
- On long-term projects, allow students to turn in components of the project for feedback before the due date.
- Allow students to use a word processor for essay exams. This would benefit students who have messy handwriting or dexterity problems, or students with ADD who have difficulties with organization.

Universal Design for Instruction will not eliminate the need for accommodations such as, extra time for exams, but it will provide faculty with a more welcoming and inclusive teaching style. It will also help students with ADD feel like they blend-in with the class and experience a friendlier campus environment (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003; Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2003).

#### *Personal Perceptions about Disclosing a Disability*

In this society, individuals with disabilities often speak with a different voice than is commonly heard in the dominant culture. It is a voice that has experienced prejudice, devaluation, and discrimination from the dominant culture. When asked, many students with invisible disabilities describe their disorder in terms of functional limitations, or by strengths and weaknesses and not by a clinical label (Olney & Kim, 2001; Price, Gerber, & Mulligan, 2003). For example, a student with an attention deficit disorder might say I am a poor reader, or I have trouble organizing my thoughts. Olney and Brockelman (2003) found that “individuals viewed their disabilities as context-dependent” (p. 39).

Students saw themselves as competent and capable, but they acknowledged that they had weaknesses such as a short attention span that would sometimes interfere with the performance of a task. Many students do not view their disability as bad, however they are mindful that society places them in a negative light, and also places labels on them such as lazy, spacey, complainer, or stupid (Olney & Brockelman).

In the college environment, professionals who work with students who have disabilities encourage students to disclose to their classroom professors during the first week of school and in the privacy of the professor's office (Lynch & Gussel, 1996). However, disclosure is not mandatory, so many students choose not to disclose, or do it on a 'need-to-know' basis (Allen & Carlson, 2003; Barga, 1996; Buchanan, n.d.; Gerber & Price, 2003; Olney & Brockelman, 2003; Roberts & Rotteveel, 1995). Students only disclose if there is a benefit for them (Madaus, Foley, McGuire, & Ruban, 2002; Ralph, 2002; Roberts & Rotteveel; Rocco, 2001). Benefits might include extra time for exams, or the use of a cassette recorder for taping class lectures.

Students with invisible disabilities want to control personal information and many times choose not to disclose because they are concerned with the labels associated with being disabled. Labels can be positive when it provides meaning to a student as to why they are struggling in college e.g., when a student realizes that he or she is not dumb, rather they process new information at a slower pace due to a learning challenge. Labels can also be positive when they provide academic help such as, extra time for exams or course related tutoring. However, labels are considered negative when it leads to being treated differently from their peers (Barga, 1996; Richard, 1995; Rocco, 2001).

Students fear that if they disclose to a professor, they will be discriminated against in the college environment (Granger, 2000; Madaus et al., 2002; Ralph, 2002; Rocco, 2001). One concern is that professors will misuse confidential information about a student's disability by sharing private information with fellow students and professors, without the student's consent. Faculty members sometimes make inappropriate remarks in public places, for example, at a party or over lunch, about a person being lazy or faking the disability to obtain an unfair advantage in school (Granger; National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Education, n.d.). Finally, faculty members sometimes make judgments based on labels rather than on observed academic performance, which places limitations on the student (Ralph; Rocco). As an example, an undergraduate advisor might discourage a person with ADD from majoring in engineering because of the math component, when in fact the learning difficulty is in reading comprehension and not in performing math calculations.

Students tend to be sensitive about having a disability, and move cautiously to reduce the possibility of negative reactions by faculty. Many students will assess the professor's attitude and the class environment before deciding whether to disclose. The student is afraid of thoughtless jokes, or hurtful remarks, such as being called "spacey" if they are easily distracted due to an attention deficit disorder (Allen & Carlson, 2003; Dalgin & Gilbride, 2003; MacDonald-Wilson & Whitman, 1995; Ralph, 2002; Roberts & Rotteveel, 1995; Rocco, 2001). To reduce any embarrassing encounters students conceal their disability through a technique called "passing" (Barga, 1996). Passing is the use of "nontraditional methods in order to successfully compete in the academic environment" (Olney & Brockelman, 2003, p. 45). Barga asserts that passing serves "the main function

of enabling the students to overcome academic and social barriers and fit in with the mainstream” (p. 418). Techniques used in passing include: humor to cover mistakes; for poor readers, excusing oneself when it is their turn to read out loud in class; manipulation of others to help the student with homework; reliance on friends to help with cheating.

It should be mentioned that some students do not need to disclose, because they learn strategies that complement their disability. For example, a student who is easily distracted due to an attention deficit disorder, would perform better in a 50-minute class that meets three times a week rather than a three-hour class that meets once a week. Or, the student selects professors who provide online notes since many individuals with ADD are mediocre note takers due to poor organizational skills. Students also select majors or classes that complement their abilities, such as when a student’s strengths are in math, math holds that student’s attention so they declare finance as their major (Dalgin & Gilbride, 2003; Fuller, Healey, Bradley, & Hall, 2004; Granger, 2000).

It also needs to be mentioned that a lot of the literature on ADD focuses on negative behaviors such as, disorganized, impulsive, impatient, disruptive, flaky, and lazy. However, individuals with ADD have a creative side to them, which is often overlooked. Hallowell (1992) has found that individuals have a very imaginative and intuitive side if they can learn to manage their distractibility. “These are the people who learn and know and do and go by touch and feel” (Hallowell, para. 12). Latham (1995) describes students with ADD as being creative, having high energy, and being intense about their interest.

Hallowell and Ratey (2005, p. 37) describe the “seven habits of highly effective ADD adults” as:

1. “Do what you are good at. Don’t spend too much time trying to get good at what you’re bad at. (You did enough of that in school.)
2. Delegate what you’re bad at to others, as often as possible.
3. Connect your energy to a creative outlet.
4. Get well enough organized to achieve your goals. The key here is ‘well enough.’ That doesn’t mean you have to be very well organized at all—just well enough organized to achieve your goals.
5. Ask for and heed advice from people you trust-and ignore, as best you can, the dream-breakers and finger-waggers.
6. Make sure you keep up regular contact with a few close friends.
7. Go with your positive side. Even though you have a negative side, make decisions and run your life with your positive side.”

Individuals with ADD tend to be very energetic and enthusiastic about life, which makes them great entrepreneurs.

### *Self-Advocacy*

Up to this point we have looked at how the campus environment can influence the student’s decision on whether to request academic accommodations or not. We have also explored student perceptions and how they can influence a student’s comfort level in disclosing a disability to faculty. Another area that needs investigating is self-advocacy skills and a student’s ability to articulate their academic needs. Self-advocacy exists when

the student can “(a) demonstrate understanding of their disability, (b) are aware of their legal rights, and (c) demonstrate competence in communicating rights and needs to those in positions of authority” (Skinner, 1998, *Self-Advocacy: An Operational Definition*, para. 1). Milsom and Hartley (2005) note that nearly 70% of students with learning disabilities rely on parents, teachers, or other school officials to communicate their academic needs to others.

One-reason students with attention deficit disorder might not know how to self-advocate deals with Federal legislation, specifically Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that primary and secondary school systems identify and assess any child who has a disability. The school is also responsible for developing student education plans, monitoring student progress, and arranging classroom accommodations. In postsecondary education, the Office for Students with Disabilities is responsible for arranging accommodations after the student provides medical documentation of his or her disability, and discloses that they need academic support. Additionally, in postsecondary education, students are responsible for selecting their courses and managing their educational progress (Beale, 2005; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Madaus, 2005; Madaus & Shaw, 2004).

Another difference in the transition from high school to college is that students are treated as adults in higher education. A different language is used with them, which they are not usually familiar with. A college student “is no longer a ‘disabled child,’ but is a ‘student with a disability.’ The disability is a part, not the whole, of the student” (Madaus, 2005, p. 35). Students are used to having parents, teachers, and school



counselors communicate for them. This suggests that students have not developed the advocacy skills for requesting accommodations.

Literature indicates that many college students with disabilities do not fully understand their disability, nor know how to communicate their academic needs (Lynch & Gussel, 1996; Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Quinn, 1994; Skinner, 2004; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Students with ADD would benefit from training on self-advocacy skills. The literature asserts that students need to understand what his or her strengths and weaknesses are, with respect to learning. Students need to become knowledgeable about the academic accommodations that work for them such as, a quiet room for exams, textbooks on tape, and a day planner for organizing time. Students need to be aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that they are receiving appropriate accommodations once the student self-discloses and asks for assistance. Lastly, students need coaching on ways to properly communicate with faculty. Hughes and Graham (1994) recommend that students “be honest, straightforward, and factual” about his or her disability. Students should “talk with assurance,” and stay positive (p. 3). These communication skills require some thought and planning which students with ADD do not always have, due to their disorganization and impulsiveness.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, professors are willing to provide academic accommodations to students with attention deficit disorder, but they do not always believe that the condition exists, even though ADD is recognized in the field of psychiatry. Professors would

benefit from training on the characteristics of ADD, how this disability is diagnosed, and appropriate academic accommodations for this disorder. Increasing professor's knowledge on this disorder would help professors better serve this population.

Students with ADD disclose on a need-to-know basis. There are many negative labels attached to this disorder, so students disclose cautiously. Before deciding to disclose, students will observe the classroom environment to determine their comfort level in disclosing, or approaching the professor about his or her academic needs. Students would benefit from training on self-advocacy skills, so they can better describe their disorder and the necessary classroom accommodations to the professor.

### Chapter 3

#### *Methodology*

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the student's degrees of comfort in requesting academic accommodations, and his or her ability to advocate for disability related needs. This section describes the research procedures that were used to achieve these goals. Specifically, this section will discuss the sample selection procedures, the instrumentation, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis process.

#### *Sample Selection*

This study was conducted at a public four-year institution in the southwestern United States. Roughly 32,000 students attended the university in question, and approximately 1,050 of these students were registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities. Out of the 1,050 students with disabilities who had self-identified, 393 students had ADD and were enrolled in spring semester 2005 at the university in question.

What follows is a description of the survey participants and the procedures for selecting them, followed by the interview participants and the selection procedures.

*Survey participants.* Participants were students with ADD who were registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities and enrolled in spring semester 2005 at the university that was selected for this study. Participants were identified through an Office for Students with Disabilities database, which codes students by his or her primary disability. The director of the Office for Students with Disabilities sent surveys to the

entire ADD population of 393 students by way of the students internet addresses. Two weeks, six weeks, and twelve weeks after the survey was emailed, all participants received reminder emails asking the student to please complete the survey, if they had not done so already. To protect privacy and confidentiality, all survey responses were anonymous and all survey correspondence was sent to all participants. See Appendices A, B, D, E, and F.

*Interview participants.* Once the survey responses were analyzed, interesting or anomalous findings were identified that needed further investigating. The survey results showed that younger students who were diagnosed with their ADD while attending college, and were either juniors or seniors, disclosed less frequently. Six interviewees were selected based on these findings. Each interviewee indicated on the last question of the survey that they were willing to be interviewed.

### *Instrumentation*

*Survey instrument.* The survey instrument used was designed specifically for this study. The survey instrument consisted of three sections which included: (a) student experiences with disclosure of disability, (b) student perceptions of the campus environment, and (c) demographics. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix C.

To ensure the appropriateness of the survey, it went through a pretest process (Dillman, 2000, pp. 140-147). First, the survey questions were critiqued by four educational specialists who assess students for learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, two psychologists who work with college students who have ADD, a physician who specializes in ADD and adolescent medicine, a professor from the Rehabilitation

Counselor field, and two counselors from the Office for Students with Disabilities. Next, after professionals from the field critiqued the instrument, seven students with ADD from a private college in Southern California piloted the survey in April 2005. Lastly, four staff members, plus the student advisory board, for the Office for Students with Disabilities at the university studied reviewed the survey as a final check for accuracy.

*Interview guide.* Once the survey data were analyzed and findings that needed further investigation were identified, the interview questions were constructed. The interview questions, which can be found in Appendix I, asked the interviewees about the conditions and circumstances for which they request classroom accommodations. An interview guide approach was used for conducting the interviews (Patton, 2002, pp. 343-344). This style was selected, because the interview guide approach allows for an outline of questions to guide the interview with the encounter being semi-flexible so that questions could be asked in more of a conversational manner.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

*Web-based survey.* Once the survey participants were identified, their email addresses were verified through a general student database. Each participant was sent an email inviting him or her to participate in a web-based survey on SurveyMonkey, an online survey service that assists researchers in administering surveys. A web-based survey was selected because the university's entire financial aid and registration process is paperless and conducted on the campus' web site, so students were accustomed to web-based transactions.

The participants first received a prenotice email asking the student to participate in a survey on ADD and disclosure, and that the survey would be sent to them in a few days via email (see Appendix A). The participants then received the email inviting them to participate in the survey and briefly described the study, as well as indicated that participants may request a summary of the findings at a later date. The invitation email asked participants to complete each question, because incomplete surveys reduced the usability of the data. The invitation emphasized that although a summary would be written up on the findings, all individual answers would be kept confidential and that information would be presented only in an aggregate form (see Appendix B). Lastly, reminder notices were sent out at two weeks, six weeks, and twelve weeks after the survey was emailed, inviting non-responders to complete the survey (see Appendices D, E, and F).

*Interviews.* Once the interview participants were identified each student was emailed and invited to participate in the qualitative portion of this study. The participants were given the option of being interviewed in the researcher's office or in a quiet public place such as a coffee shop. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes and all the interviews occurred in the researcher's office. Before the interviews began, each participant read an informed consent letter indicating that information would be kept confidential and their participation was voluntary (see Appendix H). All interviews were tape-recorded and the researcher transcribed the tapes. Each transcript was sent via email to the respective interviewee for their review and feedback to ensure accuracy.

### *Data Analysis*

As noted above, this study used a mixed methodology to investigate the factors that influence a student with ADD on whether to disclose or not for obtaining academic accommodations. The data collected from the surveys and interviews were analyzed as follows.

*Survey analysis.* The respondent answers to the survey questions were entered into SPSS 13, a statistical software program. Descriptive statistics were first compiled for the demographic variables to determine range, mean, and standard deviation of the sample. The demographic variables for this study included: when was the disability diagnosed (question 15), year in school (question 16), age (question 17), gender (question 18), and ethnicity (question 19).

In addressing the research questions, the next step was to create an index for each student that described their comfort level, ability to self-advocate, and satisfaction with the campus environment. Once the indices were created, a regression analysis was conducted to see to what extent a student's demographics, comfort level, self-advocacy skills, and satisfaction with the campus environment influenced their likelihood of disclosure. Below describes how the data was analyzed for each research question. The survey can be found in Appendix C.

1. What has been the student's comfort level in sharing confidential information with faculty? In determining a student's comfort level in disclosing, the scores from survey questions 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were added up and then divided by seven to determine the average. Each question used a 5 point Likert scale with 1 representing "not comfortable" and 5 representing "extremely comfortable."

Questions 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were worded in a negative way, so the scoring scale was reversed. The average of these seven questions became the measure of comfort.

2. What is the student's knowledge about ADD and does it appear to be sufficient for the student to self-advocate for classroom accommodations? In determining a student's ability to self-advocate, the scores from survey questions 2, 5, and 6 were added up and then divided by three to determine the average. Each question used a 5 point Likert scale with 1 representing "does not know how to self-advocate" and 5 representing "excellent self-advocacy skills." The average of these three questions became the measure of a student's ability to self-advocate.
3. Do students find the campus environment supportive in providing academic accommodations? In determining the student's satisfaction with the campus environment, the scores for survey questions 11, 12, 13, and 14 were added up and then divided by four to determine the average. Each question used a 5 point Likert scale with 1 representing "not satisfied with the campus environment," and 5 representing "extremely satisfied with the campus environment." The average of these four questions became the measure of a student's satisfaction with the campus environment in providing classroom accommodations.
4. How does a student's comfort level, self-advocacy skills, and satisfaction with the campus environment, together with student demographics, influence disclosure? A regression analysis, using stepwise, was used to explain why some individuals with ADD are more likely to disclose to professors than others. Each survey question, except for demographic questions, was used as the dependent variable to



determine which independent variables were significant for each multiple regression model.

In the multiple regression analysis, both F and t tests were used to determine the statistical significance of groups of variables, as well as individual variables in helping to explain variation in the likelihood of disclosure among students. All tests were conducted at the  $p = .05$  level of significance to minimize the probability of a type 1 error. In addition, both the R square and adjusted R square were examined to measure the goodness-of-fit of the regression line itself.

Questions 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, and 14 had missing variables. For those questions the average score for each question was used for any missing variables in that question. All demographic information was provided.

*Interview analysis.* Each case was coded individually, and then a cross case analysis was used to look for emerging patterns and themes between the cases. The topics from the interview guide were used as the initial coding categories. Coding categories included: frequency in requesting classroom accommodations, conditions for disclosing to professors, comfort level with disclosing, self-advocacy skills, and professor's willingness to provide accommodations. In addition to the coding, observations made during the interviews were a part of the analysis process.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There are some limitations to this study that need acknowledging. One limitation deals with location. This study was conducted at a large four-year public institution in the southwestern United States. Studies conducted on a smaller campus and/or studies

conducted in other regions of this country might produce different findings. In addition, the topic of adults with ADD is being discussed in popular press, and as the topic receives more media attention, future survey results may produce different findings.

Another concern dealt with students assuming that the email linking them to the survey was spam. To increase the chance of students opening the email, the director of the Office for Students with Disabilities sent out the survey on her campus email address. Additionally, students with ADD are easily distracted and do not always follow through with tasks due to their inattentiveness to details. To increase survey participation, each participant received a prenotice announcing the survey, an invitation to complete the survey, and three reminder emails to complete the survey if they had not done so already (Dillman, 2000, pp. 367-368). Each email stressed the contribution the student would be making to the field by completing the survey.

The timing of the survey could be a limitation to the study with respect to grade level. This survey should have been sent out in early May 2005 before the spring semester ended, but due to unforeseen factors such as, the Institutional Review Board taking eight weeks to approve the study, the survey was emailed out on June 27, 2005. This is being mentioned because only one student identified himself as a freshman. The university in question is not a lock step program, so it cannot be assumed that the grade levels reported reflect the student's actual grade level in spring semester 2005.

There were some concerns with the interview process. The investigator brought subjectivity to the study in that she was a counselor in the Office for Students with Disabilities, and utilized her knowledge and experience in this field. However, the investigator monitored her subjectivity to reduce any biases she brought to the study

while interpreting the data (Glesne, 1999, pp. 105-110). Since the research was conducted in the investigator's backyard (Glesne, pp. 26-28), one of the interviewees could have had prior contact with her. This prior contact might limit the amount of information shared, because the interviewee might assume that the investigator already knew about his or her experiences and not talk as openly with her.

Finally, this study can only attempt to gather information on ADD and disclosure from students who are registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities. There are students on this campus that have a diagnosis of ADD but have not disclosed to anyone, which includes the Office for Students with Disabilities. This is an important voice that needs tapping into, but was not heard in this study.

### *Significance of the Study*

The study results will be used to provide guidance in creating a more positive learning environment for students with invisible disabilities by determining which factors influence students with ADD to disclose or not to disclose. The findings can also be used in developing disability awareness training for both faculty and students. For faculty, this would include sensitivity training about ways to communicate with a student who has a disability on providing academic accommodations. For students, this may include self-advocacy training on ways to request classroom accommodations from professors.

## Chapter 4

### *Analysis of the Data*

The purpose of this study was to learn more about students' degrees of comfort in requesting academic accommodations on a college campus, and their ability to advocate for disability related needs. Participants of this study were students who were registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities, had an attention deficit disorder (ADD), and were enrolled in spring semester 2005 at a large public university in the southwestern United States. Following approval of the Institutional Review Boards at the University of San Diego and at the university in question, 393 students were invited to participate in a survey on ADD and disclosure. After the survey data was analyzed, six students participated in follow-up interviews.

This chapter will review study procedures and analysis of the survey data and interview responses. The study participants first completed a 20 question Likert scale survey, which can be found in Appendix C. The survey instrument consisted of three sections which included: (a) student experiences with disclosure of disability, (b) student perceptions of the campus environment, and (c) demographics. Once the survey was completed, the survey responses were entered into SPSS 13, a statistical software program. From there, descriptive statistics were compiled on all the demographic variables, and frequency distributions examined for each survey question. After that, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which demographic variables explained variation in the individual survey responses. In addition, three indices were constructed from the survey questions—a comfort level index, a self-advocacy index, and a campus environment index—that were used as dependent variables in the

regression analysis. The results of the survey analysis were then used to form the following coding categories for analyzing the interview responses: frequency in requesting classroom accommodations, conditions for disclosing to professors, comfort level with disclosing, self-advocacy skills, and professor's willingness to provide accommodations. The interview results were then placed within the context of the findings surrounding the individual indices. This chapter ends with an overall conclusion of the survey and interview findings.

### *Study Procedures*

This survey was conducted on SurveyMonkey, an online service that assists researchers in administering surveys. On June 27, 2005, the director of the Office for Students with Disabilities emailed a message inviting 393 students with attention deficit disorder to participate in an online survey about disclosure and attention deficit disorder. Eight emails were returned and new email addresses could not be found. Reminder notices were sent out at two weeks, six weeks, and twelve weeks asking students to complete the survey if they had not done so already. A total of 97 surveys were completed for a response rate of 25%.

The survey responses were analyzed in fall semester 2005. The results of this analysis, which suggested that younger students, students who's ADD was diagnosed while attending college, and upper class students had a harder time requesting classroom accommodations, were then used for identifying students for the follow-up qualitative interviews. Specifically, six students who were under 25 years old, were either juniors or seniors in college, and had their ADD diagnosed while attending college were then

interviewed about their experiences in disclosing their disability so they could obtain classroom accommodations. The interviews occurred between March 1 and March 9, 2006, with each interview lasting approximately 20 minutes.

### *Demographics*

*Quantitative participants.* The survey participants consisted of 58 females and 39 males. As shown in Table 1, the dominant ethnic group was Caucasians (66%), followed by Latino/Latinas (18.6%), and then all other ethnic groups (15.4%). As shown in Figure 1, the participant ages ranged from 19 to 58, with a mean age of 25.6, a median age of 23, and a modal age of 21. In this study 89.7% of the participants were either upper classmen or graduate students, with 46.4% of the participants being seniors. This information is described in greater detail in Table 2. Lastly, 34 students were diagnosed with an attention deficit disorder before attending college, while the remaining 63 students were diagnosed with attention deficit disorder while in college.

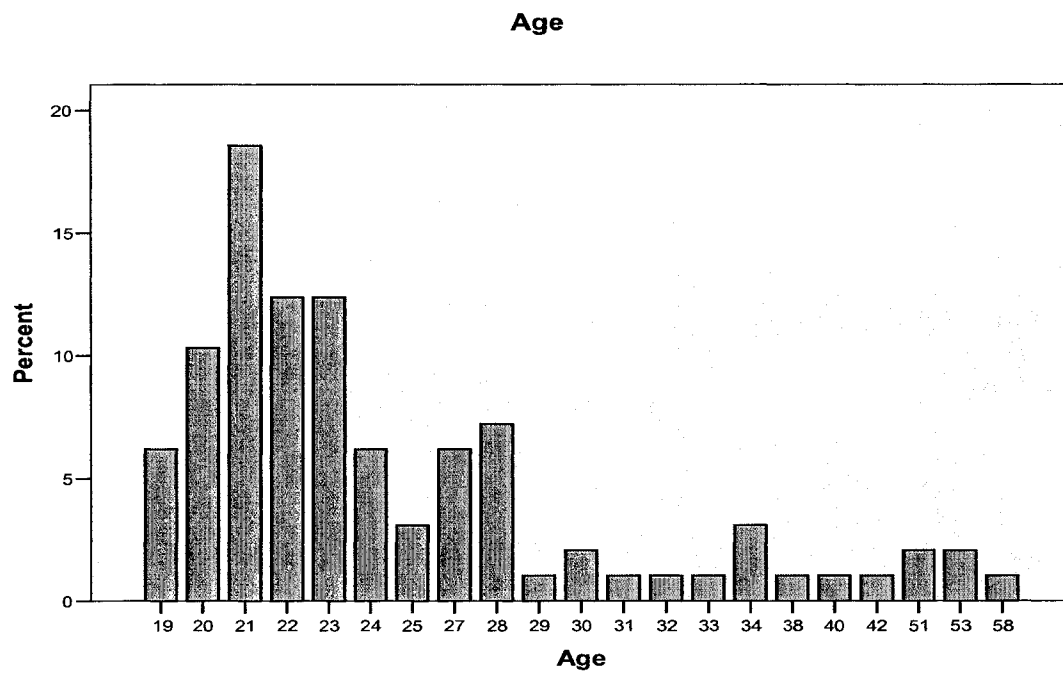
Table 3 shows the demographics for both the population and sample. The population consisted of 393 students with ADD, which was fairly similar to the sample group. For example, the population consisted of 205 females (52.2%) and 188 males (47.8%); however, the sample had slightly more females at 59.8%. Regarding ethnicity, the population consisted of 233 Caucasians (59.3%), 65 Latino/Latinas (16.5%), 39 no response (9.9%), and the remaining 56 were all the other ethnic groups (14.3%). However, in the sample there were more Caucasians (66%), more Latino/Latinas (18.6%), and more other ethnic groups (15.4%). Concerning class level, in the population, the majority of the students (303) were upper class or a graduate student

(77.1%), with 191 of the students being seniors (48.6%). In the sample, slightly fewer seniors participated (46.4%), but majority of the participants (89.7%) were either upper class or graduate students. The age range for the population was between 18 and 60, where the sample was between 19 and 58. The population age mean was 23.7, and the sample age mean was almost 2 years older at 25.6.

Table 1

*Ethnicities of Survey Participants*

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
African American	1	1.0
Asian	4	4.1
Latino/Latina	18	18.6
Native American	1	1.0
Caucasian	64	66.0
Other	9	9.3
Total	97	100.0



*Figure 1. Ages of survey participants.*

**Table 2**

*Grade Level of Survey Participants*

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage
Freshmen	1	1.0
Sophomore	9	9.3
Junior	22	22.7
Senior	45	46.4
Graduate Student	20	20.6
Total	97	100.0



Table 3

*Demographics of Population and Sample*

	Population		Sample	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	205	52.2	58	59.8
Male	188	47.8	39	40.2
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
African American	16	4.1	1	1.0
Asian	19	4.8	4	4.1
Latino/Latina	65	16.5	18	18.6
Native American	3	0.8	1	1.0
Caucasian	233	59.3	64	66.0
Other	18	4.6	9	9.3
No Response	39	9.9	0	0.0
<b>Class Level</b>				
Freshmen	29	7.4	1	1.0
Sophomores	61	15.5	9	9.3
Juniors	88	22.4	22	22.7
Seniors	191	48.6	45	46.4
Graduate Student	24	6.1	20	20.6
<b>Age</b>				
Mean	23.7		25.6	
Median	22		23	
Modal	22		21	
Range	18 - 60		19 - 58	

*Qualitative participants.* Six students who completed the survey, also agreed to be interviewed about their experiences requesting classroom accommodations. Here is a brief profile on each interview participant.

- Adam was a 20-year-old Caucasian male from Missouri. He was a very chatty junior, studying theatre arts. He was scattered in the interview, and this was after he had rescheduled the interview appointment three times due to other commitments. Adam shared that his acting classes were helping him with his distractibility. He indicated that he tried Ritalin but currently was not using medication. He was reconsidering the use of medication because it did help him focus, however, he was concerned with the stigma of Ritalin being labeled “crack for kids.”
- Daisy was a 23-year-old Latina. She was a senior studying sociology. During the interview, Daisy appeared quiet and cautious in responding to the questions.
- Gigz was a graduating senior. He was a 22-year-old Latino, majoring in journalism. Gigz has a disc jockey timeslot on the campus radio station. He stated that he wants to be a freelance writer, because covering daily news stories is too structured for him. Gigz reported that he is extremely concerned about children with ADD and how they are being taught. He felt that these children were very intelligent and would benefit from alternative learning methods.
- Thomas was a 24-year-old Latino. He was a senior studying theatre arts. During the interview he was very soft spoken. He also indicated more than once that he was very appreciative of the services offered through the Office for Students with Disabilities. It should be noted that Thomas’ ADD was diagnosed in spring 2003, while at the verge of going on academic probation.

- Tracy was a 24-year-old Caucasian female who was born in Europe and came to the United States at age ten. She graduated in December 2005 with her baccalaureate degree in philosophy. She is now considering a career in the education field. Tracy was diagnosed with her ADD after being academically disqualified from college. During the interview Tracy had high energy. She was concerned about some of the negative labels attached to ADD, because she has been teased about being hyper and easily distractible.
- Tyler was a 21-year-old Caucasian female. She was a junior who recently declared her major as English. Like Daisy, during the interview Tyler was very quiet and cautious with her answers. She only volunteered information after considerable probing.

### *Constructing the Indices*

After compiling descriptive statistics for all of the demographic variables, the mean and standard deviation was determined for each survey question. For each of the survey questions, regression analysis was then used to determine to the extent to which the demographic information collected explained variation in the responses to the questions. Throughout this analysis, both F and t tests were used to determine the statistical significance of groups of variables, as well as individual variables at the  $p = .05$  level of significance. From there, three indices were created for each individual by taking the average response to each of the questions that make up the index. The first index deals with the students' comfort level in disclosing their ADD to professors, and consists of survey questions 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The next index addresses the students' ability

to self-advocate for classroom accommodations, and consists of survey questions 2, 5, and 6. The last index is the students' satisfaction with the campus environment, and consists of questions 11, 12, 13, and 14.

Tables 4, 6, and 8 describe each index, as well as the mean and standard deviation for each of the questions that make up the index. Tables 5, 7, and 9 shows the regression analysis associated with each of the questions that make up that particular index, and identify which demographic variables were significant at the  $p = .05$  level or less.

### *Comfort Level Index*

*Quantitative findings.* As shown in Table 4, the means for questions 7, 8, and 9, suggest that denial of accommodations, retaliation, and being accused of faking a disability were minimal at the institution under study. Additionally, the means for questions 3 and 10 revealed that students were fairly embarrassed about having ADD and found it somewhat stressful to request classroom accommodations, even though faculty rarely denied them accommodations. Question 4 indicates that students occasionally disclose to professors that they have ADD, which means they disclose on a need-to-know basis. Based on the responses to question 1, once the student makes a decision to disclose their disability, they occasionally-to-fairly often request classroom accommodations.

The results of the regression analysis displayed in Table 5 show student's comfort in disclosing their disability and requesting accommodations. For example, when faculty appears sensitive towards disability issues and more willing to accommodate, students feel about 5% less stressed and embarrassed about disclosing. Similarly, if students know how to advocate for themselves, they were also about 5% more willing to disclose their

disability. In addition, when students believed that Student Affairs was more involved in creating a positive learning environment that encourages faculty to accommodate student needs, students were about 5% less stressed towards disclosing.

Table 4

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Comfort Level Survey Question*

Comfort Level	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. How often do you request classroom accommodations, such as extra time for exams, a note taker, or a computer in the High Tech Center?	2.54	1.08
3. How stressful do you find it to request classroom accommodations from professors?	3.57	1.19
4. How frequently do you disclose your disability to professors?	2.30	0.96
7. How many times has a professor refused to approve an accommodation you requested, such as extra time for an exam, or a tape recorder for lecture notes?	4.57	0.90
8. How often have you experienced retaliation from a professor after disclosing?	4.62	0.76
9. How many times has a professor accused you of faking your disability?	4.64	0.84
10. How often do you feel embarrassed about having an Attention Deficit Disorder in an academic setting?	3.16	1.18

Age, ethnicity, and year in college were also factors on comfort and disclosure. This study found that minorities requested accommodations about 9% more frequently than Caucasians, however, they were also about 9% more embarrassed in having ADD than any other group. Furthermore, older students were slightly less stressed at about 1%

Table 5

*Estimated Coefficients and Levels of Significance for the Variables in the Final*

*Regression Models for the Comfort Level Index*

*(Only Statistically Significant Estimated Coefficients Shown)*

Independent Variables	Request Class Accom	Stress in Request Accom	Frequency Disclose ADD	Refusal of Accom	Exper Retal-iation	Accused Faking ADD	Embarras About ADD	Comfort Level Average
RequestAccom			.32**					
Stressfulness					.20**		.36**	
Disclose ADD	.42**						.30**	
EffectDesADD								.14**
Accuse Faking				.60**	.38**			
Retaliation		.57**				.36**		
Refuse Accom						.44**		
Embarrassed			.18*					
Fac Sensitivity		.26*						.14**
Prof Willing	.25*							
Prof Knowldg				.19*				
Student Affairs		.23*						
Advocacy Ave			.26*					
All Minorities	.46*						-.46*	
Age		-.03*						
Juniors		-.50*						
Seniors					-.33**			
R <sup>2</sup>	.27	.42	.26	.38	.41	.44	.23	.23
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.24	.38	.24	.37	.39	.43	.20	.21

*Note.* \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

in asking for accommodations, while juniors found it 10% more stressful to request classroom accommodations than any other group. And finally, seniors were about 7% more likely to experience retaliation after disclosing.

*Qualitative findings.* The interviews revealed that the primary accommodation that students request is extra time for exams. After asking for additional time for exams, none of the students reported that they experienced retaliation, denial of an accommodation, nor were they accused of faking their disability once they disclosed. However, all students stated that they request classroom accommodations on a need-to-know basis. For instance, Daisy who was studying sociology requests additional time for math exams, but not essay exams because writing holds her attention and she stays focused more easily. Tracy, a philosophy major, requests extra time for multiple-choice exams, because it takes her longer to interpret the questions. And Gigz, who wants to be a freelance writer and walks to the beat of his own drum, uses testing accommodations when he really cares about a class and needs to focus. Gigz is highly distractible and asserts that he “needs earplugs, glasses, and Ritalin just to read something.”

As shown by Daisy, Tracy, and Gigz requesting classroom accommodations is situational, but how the professors present themselves in class also influences the decision to disclose. Tracy and Tyler both take the first exam in the class to become comfortable with the professor’s teaching and testing style. If a professor appears unapproachable neither student will disclose. On the flip side, Adam, Daisy, and Tyler shared the insight that many professors make an announcement or put a statement on their syllabus that if a student has a disability and needs accommodations to please see

them in their office. Students feel very comfortable in disclosing their ADD to these professors.

The interviews indicated that the ADD label also influences a student's comfort level on whether they will disclose or not. Tracy felt that faculty and peers think she is faking her disability. Tracy stated that before she was assessed for ADD and started using medication, she could not sit still in class and was academically disqualified from college. She can now focus in class but her classmates have made comments about her being spacey, so she uses humor to deal with these types of uncomfortable remarks. Daisy who was very reserved throughout the interview was also mindful about disclosing, because it made her feel different and "she does not like it, because you get picked on and stuff." Adam felt the same sentiments as Daisy. He said that, I "fear now of being different than everyone else in the class, so I'm just trying to battle through it." Thomas, who was assessed for his ADD while at risk of going on academic probation, had a different view of the ADD label. He asserted that "just knowing that I had ADD helped me quite substantially, in terms of I can see where my weak points are with attention." Now he sits in the front row of his classes and uses extra time for exams, which helps reduce his distractibility.

### *Self-Advocacy Index*

*Quantitative findings.* This study found that students do not know how to advocate for themselves. As shown in Table 6 (in the responses to question 2) students were unfamiliar-to-somewhat familiar with the Federal legislation that provides reasonable accommodations. In addition, students were somewhat-to-fairly effective in



describing their disability to professors as shown in the responses to question 5. And finally, responses to question 6 revealed that students were only somewhat familiar with the creation of action plans for requesting classroom assistance.

Table 6

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Self-Advocacy Survey Question*

Self-Advocacy	Mean	Standard Deviation
2. How familiar are you with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which are Federal laws that ensure classroom accommodations?	1.89	1.09
5. When requesting classroom accommodations, how effective are you in describing your disability to a professor in terms of limitations, for example, poor memory or concentration?	2.34	1.10
6. When requesting classroom accommodations, how often do you create a plan of action before talking to a professor?	2.51	1.38

Gender, age, ethnicity, and class level were not factors in determining who does or does not self-advocate. The findings from Table 7 indicated that when Student Affairs was involved in educating the campus community on disability issues, students were about 4% more familiar with Federal legislation. Additionally, students were about 5% more effective in describing their disability if professors appear sensitive to the idea of providing accommodations, and students were about 6% less stressed towards requesting accommodations. Lastly, students who created action plans requested classroom accommodations almost 6% more often than students who did not create such plans.

Table 7

*Estimated Coefficients and Levels of Significance for the Variables in the Final*

*Regression Models for the Self-Advocacy Index*

*(Only Statistically Significant Estimated Coefficients Shown)*

Independent Variables	Familiar with Laws	Effectiveness in Describe ADD	Create Action Plan	Advocacy Average
Request Accom			.29*	
Disclose ADD		.34**		.19*
Stressfulness		.28**		
Fac Sensitivity		.26*		.18*
Student Affairs	.21*			
R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.31	.05	.15
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.29	.04	.13

*Note.* \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

*Qualitative findings.* The interviews supported the survey findings in that all the students assumed that they could describe their disability to a professor. None of the students indicated that they ever had to say more than, “I have ADD and I need extra time for exams” to a professor. However, the interviews also suggested that the Office for Students with Disabilities provided information to students on ways to communicate with professors about their academic needs. For example, Tyler shared that the Office for Students with Disabilities does a new student orientation and that they give tips on ways to talk to professors about your disability and she uses these tips because she is very private about her disorder. Tracy and Thomas pointed out that the Office for Students with Disabilities provides an “authorized accommodations form” that states they have a

certified disability and describes the accommodations they are eligible to use. Tracy said that this form “makes it easier that way actually, because it’s less talk that I have to do and it makes me a little more comfortable in that since, because they just know and you don’t have to get into details if you don’t feel like it. Especially with colder professors, like if they are not very receptive.” Tracy and Thomas both use the authorized accommodations form as an icebreaker for talking to professors, and they acknowledged that once they show this form, professors usually cooperate.

### *Campus Environment Index*

*Quantitative findings.* Based on the means shown in Table 8, faculty appeared fairly willing and sensitive about providing academic accommodations, but professors are not always very knowledgeable about disability issues. Additionally, students found Student Affairs to be somewhat-to-fairly responsive in serving the needs of students with disabilities.

Based on the regression results displayed in Table 9, students found professors’ sensitivity towards providing accommodations and their willingness to accommodate were important factors in the decision on whether to disclose or opt not to disclose. If a student felt a professor would permit a requested accommodation, the student was about 3% less likely to feel embarrassed about disclosing their ADD. In addition, students were 6% more willing to request an accommodation if Student Affairs created an environment that supports the campus community in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

In dealing with the campus environment, age, gender, and class level clearly matter. For example, older students found professors slightly (1%) more willing to

accommodate than younger students, but also found professors (1%) less knowledgeable on classroom accommodations. In addition, males found professors to be 9% more knowledgeable on disability issues than females, and seniors found professors to be about 7% less willing to accommodate. However, younger students found Student Affairs slightly (1%) more helpful in meeting academic needs, and juniors found the campus environment 9% more positive. Finally, students who were diagnosed with ADD in college found the campus environment 6% less friendly than those who were diagnosed before college, and professors 12% less knowledgeable about providing classroom accommodations.

Table 8

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Campus Environment Survey Question*

Campus Environment	Mean	Standard Deviation
11. How sensitive do the faculty and staff of this university appear to be towards disability needs?	2.60	1.01
12. How willing are your professors to provide classroom accommodations, such as extra time for exams, or priority seating?	2.97	1.00
13. How responsive do you find Student Affairs offices such as Financial Aid, or Career Services in meeting the needs of students with disabilities?	2.65	1.10
14. How knowledgeable are professors in providing academic accommodations?	2.30	0.88

Table 9

*Estimated Coefficients and Levels of Significance for the Variables in the Final*

*Regression Models for the Campus Environment Index*

*(Only Statistically Significant Estimated Coefficients Shown)*

Independent Variables	Faculty Sensitivity	Professor Willingness	Responsive of Student Affairs	Professor Knowledge	Campus Env Average
EffectDesADD	.16*				.16**
Disclose ADD		.19*	-.32**		
Familiar Laws					.13*
Stressfulness					.13*
Request Accom					.13*
Refuse Accom					.14*
Embarrassed	.17*				
Fac Sensitivity		.46**			
Prof Willingness	.52**		.47**	.35**	
Student Affairs		.31**			
Prof Knowledge			.30*		
Diagnosed				-.62**	-.28*
Age		.03**	-.02*	-.03**	
Gender				.45**	
Juniors					.45**
Seniors		-.36*			
Lower Class				-.67**	
R <sup>2</sup>	.43	.53	.36	.40	.43
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.41	.51	.33	.37	.38

Note. \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

*Qualitative findings.* Simply stated, the interview responses were in agreement with the survey findings. For example, all the students indicated that professors were willing to provide accommodations if the student asked. In fact, Thomas who was very approachable about discussing his ADD, shared that professors who have known about some of his learning difficulties followed-up with him to confirm that he would be using additional time for upcoming exams. Tracy had a professor who offered to proctor the exams in her office, instead of going through the Office for Students with Disabilities to receive the service.

The interviews revealed that the bigger issue for these students was not the professor's willingness to provide the accommodation, but the coldness of the classroom. For example, Daisy who was cautious about disclosing her ADD, rarely requests accommodations in classes when she feels like a number rather than a student, because she found these professors less empathic about student needs. Adam, Thomas, Tracy, and Tyler will evaluate the class size, class material, professor's teaching style, and test format before requesting accommodations. If the professor does not appear to be receptive, these students will more closely weigh the benefits of disclosing before making a disclosure decision.

### *Overall Conclusions*

Students are fairly comfortable with disclosing and they were reasonably comfortable with the campus environment, but as shown in Table 10 they do not know how to advocate or communicate their needs. However, the more frequently a student discloses and the more effective they are at describing their ADD to professors, the better

their advocacy skills. Additionally, students who were diagnosed with their ADD while in college found the campus less friendly, and faculty not as knowledgeable on classroom accommodations.

When the average scores from the three indices were compared, Table 9 shows that there was a one-point difference between the Comfort Level Average and Campus Environment Average, indicating that students typically disclose on a need-to-know basis. Knowing that, a student will take into consideration the classroom climate and the professor's willingness to provide accommodations when making the decision on whether to disclose or not.

Table 10

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Index Average*

Indices	Mean	Standard Deviation
Comfort Level Average	3.63	0.52
Campus Environment Average	2.63	0.75
Self-Advocacy Average	2.24	0.72

From a demographic perspective, age was an important factor in the disclosure decision for students. For example, older students appear more self reliant in disclosing compared to younger students, and appear less stressed and embarrassed about disclosing. Furthermore, older students also found professors more willing to accommodate their needs, but they do not always find professors knowledgeable about disability issues.

From a class level perspective, juniors found it more stressful to request accommodations, but they find the campus environment to be more positive. Whereas, seniors found professors less willing to accommodate, but males found professors more knowledgeable in providing accommodations. Lastly, minority students requested accommodations more frequently, but they were more embarrassed about having ADD than Caucasians.

These findings were supported by the interview data, which confirmed that students disclose on a need-to-know basis. Before disclosing however, students evaluate the classroom environment. For example, they take into consideration the class size, test format, and professor's teaching style. Furthermore, when requesting classroom accommodations, students assumed that they could describe their ADD, but none of them have been challenged by a professor to explain their circumstance.

Students have found professors willing to provide accommodations. Even in a chilly classroom climate, none of the students experienced retaliation, denial of an accommodation, or were ever accused of faking their disability once they disclosed. Students do find a kinder environment when faculty make announcements or put statements on their syllabus inviting students to come to their office hours if they have a disability and need classroom accommodations.



## Chapter 5

As more students with attention deficit disorder (ADD) enter higher education, college campuses will need to increase their efforts in creating a more welcoming and supportive environment. However, many students remain hesitant about disclosing their ADD to faculty in order to obtain classroom accommodations. Some of the reasons students have chosen not to disclose deal with experiencing a chilly classroom climate, professors treating students differently due to having a disability, and the misuse of confidential information once the student discloses. Based on the student concerns, this study investigated the experiences of students with ADD and their comfort level in disclosing their disability to access accommodations. This study also explored the campus environment and student self-advocacy skills as factors that influence disclosure. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings in context with the literature, policy recommendations for the institution in question, and recommendations for future studies.

### *Discussion of the Findings*

*Comfort with disclosing.* In the college environment, students with attention deficit disorder are encouraged by the Office for Students with Disabilities to disclose their disability to professors during the first couple of weeks of each semester, in order to obtain classroom accommodations. The students interviewed all know that disclosure is not mandatory, so they only disclose if there is a benefit for them (Allen & Carlson, 2003; Barga, 1996; Buchanan, n.d; Gerber & Price, 2003; Olney & Brockelman, 2003; Roberts & Rotteveel, 1995). Olney and Brockelman found disclosure to be context dependent. The interviewees all indicated that they evaluate the class in terms of class

size, test format, and professor's teaching style, before making the decision to request classroom accommodations. Gigz pointed out in his interview that he only requests extra time for exams when the class is important to him. Otherwise he is satisfied with earning Cs on his exams.

The literature indicated that students assess the classroom environment and the professor's attitude before disclosing their disability to faculty (Allen & Carlson, 2003; Dalgin & Gilbride, 2003; MacDonald-Wilson & Whitman, 1995; Ralph, 2002; Roberts & Rotteveel, 1995; Rocco, 2001), which was confirmed by all of the interviewees. Students are concerned about professors saying thoughtless remarks or being treated differently. This study showed through the survey findings and interview responses that after disclosing, students rarely experienced retaliation, the denial of requested accommodations, or accusations of faking their ADD.

Another issue that came up in the interviews was that of being labeled ADD. Barga (1996) points out that labels can be good when they give a student meaning on why they act or behave in a certain way, in addition to introducing them to academic accommodations. Thomas found this to be true. Once he learned about his ADD and could identify his learning weaknesses, he started using extra time for exams and sitting in the front row of his classes to deal with his distractibility. However, labels can be negative when students feel they are being treated differently than their peers (Barga; Richard, 1995; Rocco, 2001). Adam, Daisy, and Tracy all became mindful that they were different and did not like some of the jokes and teasing that go with this difference. Tracy used a technique called "passing," which involves the student's use of nontraditional

methods to overcome academic or social barriers in order to fit in (Barga). Tracy uses humor to deal with peer comments about her ADD.

Dalgin and Gilbride (2003), Fuller et al. (2004), and Granger (2000) assert that some students do not need to disclose because they select majors that compliment their strengths. Furthermore, Hallowell (1992) and Latham (1995) have found individuals with ADD to be very creative and intuitive. This is true for three of the students who were interviewed. Thomas and Adam were both theatre art majors studying to be actors, and Gigz was a journalism major who wants to be a freelance writer. These three individuals were looking for non-traditional careers that allowed for flexibility and the use of their creative, imaginative side.

*Self-advocacy skills.* The literature pointed out that 70% of students with learning disabilities do not know how to advocate for themselves because they rely on parents, teachers, or other school officials to communicate for them (Milsom & Hartley, 2005). One reason students are lacking advocacy skills is that students do not fully understand the school's roles and responsibilities, nor their roles and responsibilities as prescribed in Federal legislation (Beale, 2005; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Madaus, 2005; Madaus & Shaw, 2004). Another reason is that students do not understand their disability, they are not cognizant of their strengths and weaknesses with respect to learning, and they are not fully aware of the specific academic accommodations that might work for them (Lynch & Gussel, 1996; Milsom & Hartley; Quinn, 1994; Skinner, 2004; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003).

The survey findings agreed with the literature in that students do not know how to advocate for themselves. The survey found that students were unfamiliar-to-somewhat

familiar with Federal legislation that provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Additionally, the survey revealed that students are somewhat-to-fairly effective in describing their disability to professors in order to obtain classroom accommodations. The students interviewed assumed that they could describe their ADD and academic needs to a professor, if asked. However, none of the interviewees had ever been challenged by a professor.

*Classroom environment.* According to the literature, the coldness of the classroom climate influences whether a student chooses to disclose or opts not to disclose (Beilke & Yssel, 1999; Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002). As Tyler and Tracy asserted in their interviews, they have adopted a strategy, which calls for them to take the first exam in the classroom. Based upon that experience and if a professor appears receptive or standoffish toward student needs, then they decide to disclose or not.

One of the themes that appeared in the literature is that professors are willing to provide academic accommodations, and that they are most comfortable in giving extra time for exams and allowing a student to use a cassette recorder for taping class lectures (Houck et al., 1992; Jensen et al., 2004; Leyser et al., 1998; Vogel et al., 1999). Even though professors are willing to provide requested accommodations, faculty are not very knowledgeable about the Federal legislation that provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities (Benham, 1997; Dona & Edmister, 2001; Jensen et al.; Leyser et al.; Thompson & Bethea, 1997). The results of this study confirm these findings in that students found professors fairly willing to provide classroom accommodations, but only somewhat knowledgeable on disability issues with respect to learning.

Finally, professors are more willing to accommodate student requests if they feel supported by their academic department and the campus community as a whole (Bourke, Strehorn, & Silver, 2000). As the survey results suggest, Student Affairs can play an important role in the creation of a positive classroom and campus environment by educating both faculty and students on disability concerns and challenges. Survey results indicated that students were less stressed about asking for accommodations and more willing to request accommodations if they perceive a warm classroom climate.

### *Policy Recommendations for the Institution*

Based on the findings from this study, the policy recommendations for students with attention deficit disorder can be divided into recommendations for faculty and recommendations for students. However, it should be noted that many of these policy suggestions would benefit students with disabilities as a whole, even though these recommendations focus only on students with ADD.

*Faculty recommendations.* Based on the survey findings, professors are fairly willing to accommodate student requests, but they are only somewhat knowledgeable on Federal legislation that ensures students with ADD equal access to higher education. Professors would benefit from training on ways to better serve students with ADD. Depending on the topic, the training could be conducted by the Office for Students with Disabilities, Student Rights and Responsibilities, or Human Resources. The training could be in a workshop format, or web-based modules since faculty frequently are time constrained.

Specifically, faculty would benefit from training on the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This training could include information on how ADD is assessed, what are reasonable accommodations for students with ADD, the students role and responsibilities in requesting classroom accommodations, and the professor and university's responsibilities in meeting student requests. Additionally, faculty would benefit from web-based resources that provide current information on the best ways to serve students with ADD. A reference website is needed, because professors do not always have students with disabilities in their classes each semester, and might need a refresher on how to accommodate disability needs.

Another area where faculty would benefit from training is with the concept of Universal Design for Instruction. Universal Design for Instruction is when a professor takes a proactive role in designing and presenting course material in a way that would be useful for all learners, regardless of learning style. This concept might teach faculty how to create a more inclusive classroom by using teaching strategies such as, providing online notes, encouraging in-class and online discussion groups, and using a textbook that can be purchased in either hardcopy or electronic format. The university could set-up a website where professors learn about different Universal Design for Instruction techniques. This website should also have a component where faculty can exchange ideas with colleagues on ways to create a warmer classroom climate.

*Student recommendations.* The survey findings revealed that students with ADD do not know how to self-advocate, and that they have minimal knowledge of Federal legislation that ensures them equal access to higher education. In addition, students are only somewhat familiar about ways to effectively describe their ADD to professors.

Students with ADD would clearly benefit from workshops on self-advocacy skills. The Office for Students with Disabilities would be the logical choice for conducting the workshops since this is the office students go to when they have a disability related problem on campus. Ideally, all students with ADD should attend a workshop on advocating for themselves. However, based on the literature and survey results, students who should be targeted for self-advocacy training are first time freshmen, younger students, and students who's ADD was diagnosed while attending college. These students appear to have the hardest time communicating their academic needs to professors.

One particularly important workshop module should focus on current legislation. Students who were diagnosed before college need to understand the differences, with respect to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, between their responsibilities as an adult attending a university versus being a minor in high school. Students who's ADD was diagnosed in college need to be introduced to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, so they can become familiar with what is considered a reasonable accommodation, their responsibility in requesting classroom accommodations, and faculty's responsibility in providing requested accommodations.

Another legal item that needs to be emphasized to these students is that they are not covered under the law until they disclose. These laws are not retroactive. This is a concern, because both Tracy and Tyler reported in their respective interviews that they take the first exam in the class and then decide if they will disclose or not. If Tracy or Tyler run out of time while taking the first exam and they have not disclosed yet, the professor is not obliged to give them an on-the-spot accommodation.

Another important workshop module would be to help students communicate their academic needs to professors. This workshop should include tips and techniques for describing their learning styles to professors and which academic accommodations work best for them. Before attending a workshop on ways to communicate with professors, the student should meet with a counselor in the Office for Students with Disabilities. The counselor and student could review the student's ADD diagnoses and talk about the student's strengths and weaknesses in a college environment. They should also review which accommodations might work best for their learning style, for example, a quiet separate room for exams and a day planner for organizing time.

Finally, students with ADD tend to be disorganized and easily distracted, so they would benefit from coaching on methods of disclosure. Whether it is one-on-one, or in a workshop setting, role-playing would help these students. These students need to learn how to talk with assurance, stay positive, and be factual about their ADD when discussing their disability with professors and others.

### *Recommendations for Future Studies*

At the four-year institution where this study occurred, many of the students who use the Office for Students with Disabilities transfer into the university as juniors. Interestingly, in this study juniors found it 10% more stressful to request classroom accommodations than any other group of students. A future study may want to ask if this stress is due to the student's ADD and the requirement to take upper division classes, or perhaps they are a transfer student with ADD and are now adjusting to a new campus environment that is causing them to feel overwhelmed.



The laws state that students with disabilities need to disclose their disability before they will receive accommodations. The students interviewed indicated that they evaluate the classroom climate, for example, professor's teaching style, test format, and the professor's handling of student issues, before deciding whether to disclose or not. Knowing that students evaluate the classroom climate before disclosing, a future study may want to investigate whether certain disability groups are more critical about the classroom environment than other groups.

In this study minorities were about 9% more willing to request classroom accommodations than Caucasians; however, they were also more embarrassed about having ADD. A future study could explore the frequency of disclosure between minorities and Caucasians, to verify if the willingness of minorities in requesting classroom accommodations is unique to this study, or if this is a true representation for those students who have ADD.

This study strictly looked at the perceptions and experiences of students with ADD. A follow-up study is needed to explore faculty experiences and perceptions of providing reasonable accommodations to students with ADD. This type of study would help identify faculty concerns toward accommodating students with ADD.

Another area that needs investigating deals with the type of institution. Since this study was conducted at a large public university, which has a population of roughly 32,000 students, the study needs to be replicated at a four-year private institution to see if there are any significant differences in the disclosure behavior of students. Additionally, a comparative study should inquire into the student experience at a community college

versus a four-year college to examine if there are any significant differences with disclosure between the two-year and four-year college systems.

Finally, in this study only 25% of eligible participants completed the survey and the majority of those students (89.7%) were upper class or graduate students. In future studies on ADD and disclosure, researchers need to strive to obtain a larger sample size, which includes a greater representation of freshmen and sophomores than appeared in this study.

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**Appendix A**  
**Prenotice Email to Survey Participants**



Email Subject Line: Survey on Disclosure

Dear Student:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study Teresa Spoulos is conducting. As you may know, Ms. Spoulos is a counselor in the Office for Students with Disabilities. She is also a doctoral student at the University of San Diego. As a doctoral student she is required to conduct a dissertation research study. Her study is entitled, "The Dilemma of Disclosure for College Students with Attention Deficit Disorder." The purpose of her study is to explore student experiences in requesting classroom accommodations on a college campus. In order to complete this project, she is asking students about their experiences in obtaining classroom accommodations. I truly believe that your opinion would be valuable to her research.

In a few days you will receive a brief survey from me at this same email address. I will greatly appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to complete the survey. By completing the survey you may provide insight into some of the concerns students have about the issues surrounding the dilemma of disclosure. It is also my hope that your responses, together with the study can be used to help create a more positive learning environment for our students.

Please note: The paragraph that provides contact information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the university, staff, and students involved with this study.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Very respectfully,  
Director, Office for Students with Disabilities

Appendix B  
Cover Letter for Survey

Email Subject Line: Survey on Disclosure

Dear Student:

A few days ago I wrote to you to invite your participation in a study entitled, "The Dilemma of Disclosure for College Students with Attention Deficit Disorder." Very little research has been conducted about college students with Attention Deficit Disorder, and their experiences in requesting classroom accommodations. This study hopes to provide a clearer understanding of some of the challenges facing these students, and their decision on when or whether to disclose the existence of a disability.

To participate, please access the survey by either clicking this web link <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=162681141869> or by typing the web address into your internet browser. The survey consists of 20 questions and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Please complete each question, because incomplete surveys can reduce the usability of the data.

Due to the nature of online communications, your anonymity cannot be guaranteed. I encourage you to finish the survey in one setting and shut down the computer or browser window after you are done. Also, complete the survey in an environment where others won't view your responses.

In addition to participating in the online survey, Ms. Spoulos is seeking 5-6 students to volunteer to participate in individual interviews. In question number 20 of the survey, you are asked to indicate if you are interested in participating in an individual one-hour interview. You can consent to be contacted for an interview by indicating "yes" and providing your name and contact information. Your decision to be contacted to participate in an interview will not impact your participation in the online survey.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, your answers will be kept anonymous unless you agree to be contacted by Ms. Spoulos for an interview. All contact information collected for the purpose of interviews will be deleted/destroyed after completion of the interview. Your survey responses will be reported only as summaries in which no individual answers can be identified. The survey responses will not be coded for tracking study participants, and the survey data will be kept on a password-protected computer in Ms. Spoulos' office. Once the study is completed, a summary of the findings will be made available to you upon your request.

Please note: The paragraph that provides contact information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the university, staff, and students involved with this study.

Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Respectfully,  
Director, Office for Students with Disabilities

## Appendix C

### Survey Instrument

## **Disclosure and the Student Experience**

### **Your Experiences with Disclosure of Disability**

Please mark the box next to the answer that best describes your experiences with disclosing of Attention Deficit Disorder.

1. How often do you request classroom accommodations, such as extra time for exams, a note taker, or a computer in the High Tech Center?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Fairly Often
- ☐ Almost Always
- ☐ Always

2. How familiar are you with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which are Federal laws that ensure classroom accommodations?

- ☐ Not Familiar
- ☐ Somewhat Familiar
- ☐ Fairly Familiar
- ☐ Very Familiar
- ☐ Extremely Familiar

3. How stressful do you find it to request classroom accommodations from professors?

- ☐ Not Stressful
- ☐ Somewhat Stressful
- ☐ Fairly Stressful
- ☐ Very Stressful
- ☐ Extremely Stressful

4. How frequently do you disclose your disability to professors?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Fairly Often
- ☐ Almost Always
- ☐ Always

5. When requesting classroom accommodations, how effective are you in describing your disability to a professor in terms of limitations, for example, poor memory or concentration?

- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Fairly Effective
- ☐ Very Effective
- ☐ Extremely Effective

6. When requesting classroom accommodations, how often do you create a plan of action before talking to a professor?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Fairly Often
- ☐ Almost Always
- ☐ Always

7. How many times has a professor refused to approve an accommodation you requested, such as extra time for an exam, or a tape recorder for lecture notes?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three Times
- ☐ More Than Three Times

8. How often have you experienced retaliation from a professor after disclosing?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three Times
- ☐ More Than Three Times

9. How many times has a professor accused you of faking your disability?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three Times
- ☐ More Than Three Times

10. How often do you feel embarrassed about having an Attention Deficit Disorder in an academic setting?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Fairly Often
- ☐ Almost Always
- ☐ Always

**Your Perceptions of the Campus Environment**

Please mark the box next to the answer that best describes the institutional environment in providing academic accommodations.

11. How sensitive do the faculty and staff of this university appear to be towards disability needs?

- ☐ Not Sensitive
- ☐ Somewhat Sensitive
- ☐ Fairly Sensitive
- ☐ Very Sensitive
- ☐ Extremely Sensitive

12. How willing are your professors to provide classroom accommodations, such as extra time for exams, or priority seating?

- ☐ Not Willing
- ☐ Somewhat Willing
- ☐ Fairly Willing
- ☐ Very Willing
- ☐ Extremely Willing

13. How responsive do you find Student Affairs offices such as Financial Aid, or Career Services in meeting the needs of students with disabilities?

- ☐ Not Responsive
- ☐ Somewhat Responsive
- ☐ Fairly Responsive
- ☐ Very Responsive
- ☐ Extremely Responsive

14. How knowledgeable are professors in providing academic accommodations?

- ☐ Not Knowledgeable
- ☐ Somewhat Knowledgeable
- ☐ Fairly Knowledgeable
- ☐ Very Knowledgeable
- ☐ Extremely Knowledgeable

### **Demographics**

Please tell us about yourself.

15. When was your Attention Deficit Disorder diagnosed?

- ☐ Before Attending College
- ☐ While Attending College

16. What year of college are you in?

- ☐ Freshman (0-29 units)
- ☐ Sophomore (30-59 units)
- ☐ Junior (60-89 units)
- ☐ Senior (90 or more units)
- ☐ Graduate Student (Completed bachelor's degree)

17. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

18. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male



19. Of the following ethnicities, which one are you most likely to identify with?

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Latino/Latina
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other

20. There will be a small number of short follow-up interviews conducted on student experiences in having ADD and telling others that they have ADD on a college campus. I give permission for Ms. Spoulos to contact me regarding the participation in an individual interview?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If the survey participant marks no to question 20, SurveyMonkey skips question 21.

21. Your participation in being interviewed is voluntary. If you are interested in being contacted by Ms. Spoulos to find out more about the interview, please provide your name, email address, and phone number.

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

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Appendix D  
First Reminder Email for Completing Survey

Email Subject Line: Survey on Disclosure

Dear Student:

A couple weeks ago I emailed you a survey about ADD and the student experience in requesting classroom accommodations on a college campus. As indicated in my first email, Teresa Spoulos who is a counselor in the Office for Students with Disabilities is completing the requirements of her doctoral program and is researching some of the concerns surrounding the issue of disclosure and ADD.

If you have completed the survey, thank you for your participation. If you have not completed the survey, we hope to hear from you because I feel that you can add a unique perspective to this study. In case the web link to the questionnaire has been deleted from your email account, you may retrieve the questionnaire at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=162681141869>.

Please note: The paragraph that provides contact information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the university, staff, and students involved with this study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully,  
Director, Office for Students with Disabilities

Appendix E  
Second Reminder Email for Completing Survey

Email Subject Line: Survey on Disclosure

Dear Student:

In late June I emailed you a survey about ADD and the student experience in requesting classroom accommodations. It was called to my attention that many students were not available over the summer to complete this survey and that is why I am contacting you. As indicated in my first email, Teresa Spoulos who is a counselor in the Office for Students with Disabilities is completing the requirements of her doctoral program and is researching some of the concerns surrounding the issue of disclosure and ADD.

If you have completed the survey, thank you for your participation. If you have not completed the survey, I hope to hear from you because I feel that you can add a unique perspective to this study. You may retrieve the questionnaire at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=162681141869>.

Please note: The paragraph that provides contact information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the university, staff, and students involved with this study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully,  
Director, Office for Students with Disabilities

Appendix F  
Third Reminder Email for Completing Survey

Email Subject Line: Survey on Disclosure

Dear Student:

Over the summer I emailed you a survey about ADD and the student experience in requesting classroom accommodations. As indicated in my first email, Teresa Spoulos, a counselor here in the Office for Students with Disabilities, is completing the requirements of her doctoral program and is researching some of the concerns surrounding the issue of disclosure and ADD. Literature indicates that little research has been conducted on this important topic, and Teresa's dissertation is breaking new ground in this area. However, Teresa still needs to hear from those of you who haven't completed her survey since the strength of her findings are directly related to her response rate. And since our office is all about finding ways to serve you better, we are hoping that the results of Teresa's study will help us find new ways to create a more positive learning environment for students with ADD.

If you have completed the survey, thank you for your participation. If you have not completed the short survey, please take a few minutes to complete it since your responses will help the entire community of students here at XXX with ADD. The survey may be found at the following site: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=162681141869>.

Please note: The paragraph that provides contact information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the university, staff, and students involved with this study.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Respectfully,  
Director, Office for Students with Disabilities

## Appendix G

### Email Requesting Interview



Email Subject Line: Interview on Disclosure

Dear (Student's Name):

Last semester you completed a survey on Attention Deficit Disorder and the student experience in disclosing a disability in order to obtain classroom accommodations. The last question on the survey asked if you are interested in being interviewed on ADD and disclosure. You marked "yes" to that question. If you are still interested in being interviewed, please email me at [tspoulos@xxx.edu](mailto:tspoulos@xxx.edu) or call me at (858) 123-4567, so we can arrange a meeting place and time. If you no longer want to be interviewed, please reply to this email by indicating that you are no longer interested in being interviewed.

The participation in this interview is completely voluntary. The interview should last no more than 60 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped, but the tapes will be destroyed once the transcript is complete. All comments and responses will be confidential. A pseudonym will be used to protect your privacy.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,  
Teresa L. Spoulos  
Doctoral Student

Appendix H  
Informed Consent Letter

Dear Student:

My name is Teresa Spoulos and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Diego. As a doctoral student I am required to conduct a dissertation research study. My study is looking at college students with Attention Deficit Disorder and their experiences in requesting classroom accommodations on campus.

A survey has already been conducted to investigate some of the challenges facing students with Attention Deficit Disorder, and their decision on when or whether to disclose the existence of a disability in order to obtain classroom accommodations. The interviews will be used for clarifying some of the survey findings in hopes of learning more about the factors that influence a student to disclose or choose not to disclose a disability.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may stop your participation at any time. The interview should last no more than 60 minutes. If you choose to participate, the interview will be audiotaped, so a transcript of the interview can be used for analyzing the data. You will have an opportunity to review and revise your transcript. The audiotapes will be destroyed once the transcript is complete. All transcripts will be kept on a password-protected computer in my office. All comments and responses will be confidential, and a pseudonym will be used to protect your privacy.

Please note: The paragraph that provides contact information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the university, staff, and students involved with this study.

Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Respectfully,  
Teresa L. Spoulos  
Doctoral Student

## Appendix I

### Interview Questions

Below are the questions that were used for guiding the interviews.

- How often do you request classroom accommodations?
- How comfortable are you in asking for classroom accommodations?
- How do you determine which classes to disclose in?
- How does a professor's willingness to provide accommodations influence your decision on disclosing?
- If you could tell faculty one thing, what would you like them to know?
- Is there any other information you would like to share concerning your experiences as a college student with ADD?