Empowering At-Risk Students Through Self-Advocacy

MAKING INDEPENDENCE ACCESSIBLE

ACCESSIBLE ACADEMICS

About Us

Anne Showers, EdM (She/Her/Hers):

- Nine years experience providing services to college students with disabilities
- Graduate student researcher & instructor at University at Buffalo on supporting diverse undergraduate and graduate students for their academic retention and success
- Founder/CEO of Accessible Academics

Barbara Boese, BA (She/Her/Hers):

- 25+ years in state service administration; and as the State of Delaware Vocational Rehabilitation Contracts Administrator, developed, implemented and evaluated Pre-Employment Transition Services, Job Placement, Supported Employment and Supported Education services to students, youth, and adults with disabilities.

- Accessible Academics Transition Coordinator

Accessible Academics

Nonprofit dedicated to providing services to post-secondary students with disabilities

- Academic Coaching
- Life Coaching
- Career Coaching
- Job Placement
- Tutoring
- Case Management

Funded via ACCES-VR & Medicaid Self-Direction

Big Ideas

Students come to class with a diverse range of experiences, cultural backgrounds, and challenges that affect how they learn and engage on campus.

Teaching self-advocacy strategies to every student can help prevent disengagement when challenges arise.

Key Terms

- Underrepresentation
- At-risk students
- Disengagement
- Self-Advocacy
- Disclosure

Questions

- What is your student composition?

- What is your faculty & staff composition?

- What are the top three student challenges that you have seen?

- What is an outlier student issue that you have seen?

- Is there a relationship between these questions? Why/why not?

"Underrepresentation" vs. "Minorities"

Underrepresentation:

- Any demographic that is underrepresented in a particular context or environment
- How is this different than "minority"?
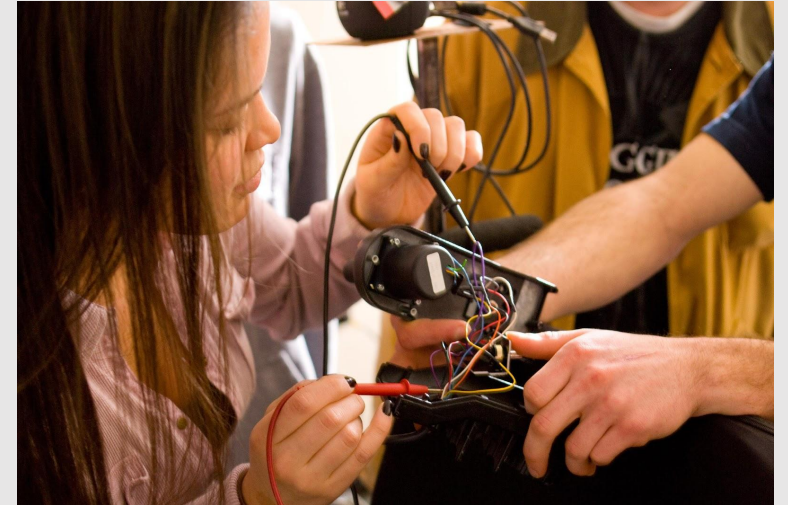
Underrepresentation - Challenges

- Belonging anxiety
- Imposter Syndrome
- Overt racism, sexism, discrimination
- Microaggressions
- Stereotype threat

Student Challenges

- Gender differences
- First generation
- Transfer students
- Financial struggles
- Language barriers
- Cultural differences
- Disabilities

At-Risk Students

- Who is an at-risk student?
  - Students with skills, motivation, knowledge, and/or academic ability that are significantly below those of typical students

- Students most likely to be at risk:
  - Underrepresented
  - First generation
  - Transfer students
  - Low income
  - Students with disabilities
  - International students

Student Disengagement Process

Climate Perception	Student Identity	Challenge	Disengagement
Student perceives climate to be unwelcoming or "closed" → is unaware of resources or doesn't find them helpful	Student does not identify as a college student or as belonging in that major, on campus, etc.	Student encounters a problem or challenge that impacts academic success → Sees it as evidence of not belonging	Student does not communicate about challenges and disengages from college → change major, drop out, etc.

Where Does Disengagement Begin?

- First semester & Year
  - Course climate → perception of professors, class structure, other students
  - Availability of resources → what they are, how to find them, when to use them
  - Campus Climate → clubs & associations, administrative staff, advisement
  - Culture Shock & Communication → new environment, how to ask for help?

- How to address this?
  - Improve communication and availability of information → centralize when possible
  - Teach **self-advocacy** skills to all students

Importance of Teaching Self-Advocacy to ALL

Every student will encounter a challenge that impacts learning

Underrepresented students are less likely to seek help and self-advocate

We don't know who these underrepresented students are!

Teaching self-advocacy skills during **all** first-year advising sessions *empowers* students to seek help **before** disengaging

What is Self-Advocacy?

Operational Definition of Advocacy: The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal (from Dr. Steven Shore and The ARC of Philadelphia).

Self-Advocacy is the act of supporting, lobbying, asking, or representing oneself to get needs and/or wants met.

Note: The efforts to outcome may vary. Think serendipity.

But…….

Additional Resources on Self-Advocacy

https://www.neurodiversityarcphl.com/

Neurodiversity in the Workplace

…. What does Self-Advocacy Mean?

- Self-advocacy involves knowing when and how to approach others to negotiate desired goals and build mutual understanding

- Self-advocacy is the act or condition of representing oneself, making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions

- The key to developing self-advocacy skills is learning to assess the situation:
  - Student should learn their strengths and challenges
  - Scan the situation – what is going on and what tools are available?
  - Reflect and learn from situations to improve for next time

"It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves." – William Shakespeare

Dr. Stephen Shore talks about self-advocacy as follows:

❖ In order to properly advocate for oneself one must know themselves.

❖ Where in the (college) environment do you see potential challenges?

❖ A plan for self-advocacy should be considered when personal challenges significantly impact a relationship or a situation.

❖ Self-advocacy efforts must be done in a way someone else can understand and support.

Self-Advocacy & Disclosure

Operational Definition: Disclosure- to make known or public

- Student challenges create vulnerability – assuring confidentiality is key

- Discuss with the student how much they should disclose:
  - Disclosing is sharing the reason why they need support
  - Disclose only necessary information
  - What they disclose must make sense to the person they are sharing it with

- Your guidance on teaching appropriate disclosure is a life lesson to carry forward

Disclosure Plan Steps: 1,2,3

1. Survey- Drill down on the challenge(s) what is causing the issue?

   Sensory: What is going on around the student?

   Cognitive: How do they think?

   Socio-emotional: Cues and how they feel?

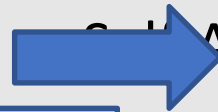2. Advocate- Identify and explain the need so that others understand.

3. Disclose- Share the reason why so that others can better understand.

Steps to Self-Advocacy and Disclosure

The steps are the same with any new challenge that arises.

Self-Awareness → Self-Advocacy → Disclosure

1. Know yourself! Become aware of your personal strengths and challenges.

2. When unique challenges significantly impact a situation or relationship, start a self-advocacy plan.

3. Making your needs known in a way that others can understand and provide support in mutual agreement.

4. Full or partial disclosure; sharing with others the reason for the need.

Self-Advocacy Action Plan

Scan

- Build student's self-awareness of personal strengths and challenges
- Have them scan for a challenge: What is causing the difficulty?
- Create a Self-Advocacy Action Plan

Advocate

- Encourage them to make their needs known in a way that others can understand and support
- Identify resources that can help them with a particular challenge

Disclosure

- Teach partial vs. full Disclosure: Informing other(s) of why there is a need
  - Partial: The specific characteristic affecting this situation only
  - Full: Personal story or diagnosis

Pinning Down Your Strengths

"One key aspect to success in being able to pin down a strength and an interest - which are one and the same.." -Dr. Stephen Shore

Developing a Self-Advocacy Plan

Challenge Areas

Strengths		Challenges
	• Sensory (difficulties with visual, auditory, physical environment, etc.)	
1.	• Social skills or problems	1.
	• Staying Focused	
2.	• Organization	2.
	• Stress, anxiety, depression, etc.	
3.	• Communication	3.
	• Work/School balance	
	• Other	
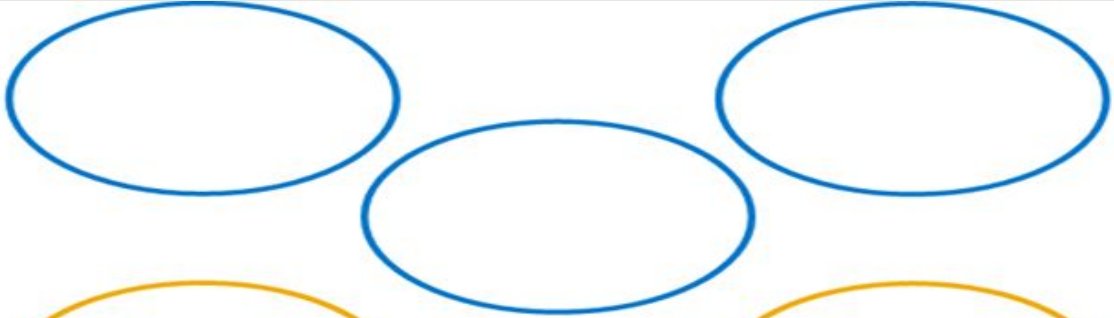
Sample Action Plan Goal:

Action Plan → Planning for Potential Practice Opportunities

Goals Check!

Are you making progress towards having the self-advocacy skills that support success in college?

- I have identified at least two strengths and two challenges
- I have identified at least one challenge that may pose a barrier to successful completion of my degree
- I am starting to understand how I can use my personal strengths/interests to create solutions to potential academic challenges.

As a result, you have learned to utilize your strengths and interests to develop a self-advocacy action plan that supports your success in college!

Let's Practice!

1. Model Scenario
2. Independent Practice

Let's Practice! Model Scenario

This student works 30 hours a week to cover his expenses while in school. He just realized that during his midterm and finals week he will have four exams, each 2-3 hours long that will conflict with his work schedule. He is stressed that he won't be able to manage the full course load along with his work schedule.

1. Scan

This student works 30 hours a week to cover his expenses while in school. He just realized that during his midterm and finals week he will have four exams, each 2-3 hours long that will conflict with his work schedule. He is stressed that he won't be able to manage the full course load along with his job.

What is an example of how you might help the student scan the situation?

2. Advocate

This student works 30 hours a week to cover his expenses while in school. He just realized that during his midterm and finals week he will have four exams, each 2-3 hours long that will conflict with his work schedule. He is stressed that he won't be able to manage the full course load along with his job.

What is an example of how you might help the student advocate in this situation?

3. Disclose

This student works 30 hours a week to cover his expenses while in school. He just realized that during his midterm and finals week he will have four exams, each 2-3 hours long that will conflict with his work schedule. He is stressed that he won't be able to manage the full course load along with his job.

What is an example of how you might help the student disclose in this situation?

What resources would you suggest the student seek out?

Let's Practice! Create your own scenario

In a small group - think of 1 or 2 scenario(s) to go through a self-advocacy plan – Pretend you are advising a student

Use the handouts to guide you

→ Scan

→ Advocate

→ Disclose

Prepare to share with the group (with your voices)!

Q&A