

# Evidenced Based Student Advocacy: Stress, Coping, and Academic Success

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## Your Presenters



Dr. Valerie Lemmon  
PsyD in Clinical Psychology  
PCOM



Dr. Jennifer Thomson  
PhD in Neurobiology  
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill

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## Background and Disclosures of Valerie Lemmon

- ▶ Professor of Psychology; Assistant Dean of the School of Arts, Culture, and Society; Director of Assessment of Student Learning at Messiah University
- ▶ Psychologist at Upturn LLC
- ▶ Member of PPA Ethics Committee and Proposal Selection Committee
- ▶ I recuse myself from reviewing my own PPA workshop proposals
- ▶ I have no other disclosures



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### Background and Disclosures of Jennifer Thomson

- ▶ Professor of Biopsychology; Chair of Institutional Review Board at Messiah University
- ▶ I recuse myself from reviewing IRB proposals of my own research projects
- ▶ I have no other disclosures



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### Protection of Vulnerable People

- ▶ Identity of students/clients has been protected by the use of composite characters
- ▶ This workshop includes representation of various diverse people groups, but focuses on research participants who primarily identify as religious/spiritual



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### Objectives

- Participants will identify adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies often used by certain college students.
- Participants will describe effective coping strategies for college students experiencing academic and social stressors.
- Participants will develop micro-advocacy plans for themselves and their students.

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## Study #1 Rationale

### Lemmon

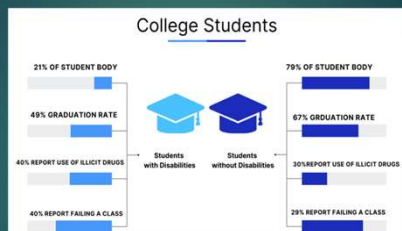
- ▶ Observations
  - ▶ Students' increased struggles with emotional dysregulation
  - ▶ Students with increased disclosure of mental illness, psychotropic medications, etc.
- ▶ Background
  - ▶ Coping
  - ▶ Attachment

### Thomson

- ▶ Observations
  - ▶ Students' increased requests for academic accommodations
  - ▶ Students' increased anxiety around test taking and 'perfection'
- ▶ Background
  - ▶ Grit
  - ▶ Self-efficacy

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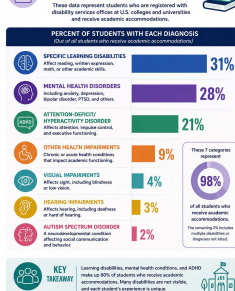
## Our Population



National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Fast Facts: Students with Disabilities.

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## MOST COMMON DIAGNOSES OF STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS



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## Our Population

## Our Population

Academic Accommodations may include:

- Academic coaching
- Disability accommodation advising
- Exam proctoring
- Note taking
- Extended time on exams
- Testing in a quiet environment
- Large print materials



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## Background: Students with Disabilities

### Learning

Students with disabilities report lower levels of classroom engagement and sense of belonging (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015).

Students with ADHD and learning disabilities report greater difficulties with organization, time management, and assignment completion (DuPaul et al., 2009).

### Mental Health

Students with disabilities report higher rates of anxiety and depression than their peers without disabilities (Garcia et al., 2024).

Students with disabilities report greater stress and feelings of being overwhelmed by academic demands than their peers without disabilities (American College Health Association, 2023).

### Physical Health

Students with disabilities report greater barriers to participating fully in campus life, including academic, social, and physical aspects of the college experience (GAO, 2024).

Students with disabilities are more likely to experience food and housing insecurity than their peers without disabilities (Pano et al., 2020).

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## Research Design #1

Thirty-three undergraduate students at a private, religiously-affiliated college completed the following:

- ▶ Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004)
- ▶ Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAS; Simpson et al., 1992)
- ▶ Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007)
- ▶ Brief COPE (Carver, 1997)
- ▶ Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995)

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## Brief COPE (Carver, 1997)

- ▶ Measure of coping with stress
- ▶ 14 subscales, 2 items per subscale
  - ▶ Active Coping, Planning, Positive Reframing, Acceptance, Humor, Religion, Using Emotional Support, Using Instrumental Support, Self-distraction, Denial, Venting, Substance Use, Behavioral Disengagement, Self-blame
- ▶ Three categories:
  - ▶ Problem-focused (e.g., planning)
  - ▶ Emotion-focused (e.g., positive reframing)
  - ▶ Avoidant coping (e.g., substance use)
- ▶ 4-point frequency-based Likert scale
- ▶ Cronbach Alphas = .50 - .90 (moderately strong to very strong)

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## Try it for yourself

- ▶ Brief COPE
- ▶ [https://psytests.org/coping/copeben\\_6.html](https://psytests.org/coping/copeben_6.html)



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## Discussion

- ▶ What did you notice about your results regarding how you cope with stress, particularly related to the subscales?
- ▶ What might you imagine about your students/clients regarding how they might cope with stress?

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## Background

Buizza et al., 2022

- Male students used more active coping strategies than female students
- Self-blame is a major predictor of mental health problems

Heiman & Kariv, 2004

- Students without LD reported more work stress and more social support
- Students with LD used more emotional coping strategies

Martinez & Quiles, 2022

- Students with higher academic achievement tend to engage in problem-focused coping
- SRA engage in more avoidant coping strategies with deficits in problem-focused coping

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## Grit (Duckworth, 2009)

Measure of perseverance and passion for long-term goals

- 8-item self-report scale (Short Grit Scale; Grit-S)
- Assesses two dimensions:
  - Consistency of Interests
  - Perseverance of Effort
- Sample items:
  - "I finish whatever I begin."
  - "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one." (reverse scored)
- Uses a 5-point Likert scale
  - 1 = Not like me at all
  - 5 = Very much like me
- Higher scores indicate greater grit: persistence despite setbacks and sustained commitment to long-term goals
- Cronbach's Alphas  $\approx .73-.83$  (acceptable to strong reliability)

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## Background

Glover et al., 2021

- College students with registered disabilities reported lower total grit scores

Majeed et al., 2019

- Medical students reported a significant negative association between grit and depression

Özhan & Boyacı, 2018

- There was a negative relationship between grit and depression, anxiety, and stress in university students

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## General Self-Efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995)

- ▶ 10-item 4-point Likert scale measure of
  - ▶ Problem-solving confidence
  - ▶ Adaptability beliefs
  - ▶ Resourcefulness perception
  - ▶ Persistence motivation
  - ▶ Goal achievement confidence
- ▶ Strong to very strong alpha coefficients of .86 - .90

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## Background

Liu et al. (2023)

College students with decreasing levels of self-efficacy over four years were significantly more at risk for depression

Vuong et al. (2010)

Lower self-efficacy in the "sophomore slump" impacted GPA and persistence

Kolo et al. (2017)

Significant and positive relationships between perceived self-efficacy and academic success of senior college students

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## Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Simpson et al., 1996)

- ▶ 17-item, 7-point Likert scale measure of a person's anxious or avoidant attachment tendencies in romantic relationships
  - ▶ Anxious attachment: excessive approval and support seeking, worrying about the relationship and fearing abandonment
    - ▶ Strong alpha coefficients of .72 - .76
  - ▶ Avoidant attachment: significant discomfort with closeness, and excessive self-reliance
    - ▶ Strong alpha coefficients of .70 - .74
- ▶ Modified the AAQ from romantic relationships to any "close relationships"

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## Background

Song et al. (2024)

College students with lower human attachment and psychological stress related to love relationships had more overall stress, more at risk for anxiety and depression

Jeong et al. (2010)

College students with high anxious human attachment evidenced lower impulse control and more difficulty managing negative emotions

McDermott et al. (2015)

Significant and positive relationships between insecure anxious and avoidant human attachment and psychological distress, as well as lower hope

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## Attachment to God Inventory (Beck & McDonald, 2004)

- ▶ 28-item Likert scale measure of a person's attachment tendencies in relationship with God
  - ▶ Anxious attachment: desire for closeness, but fearful of rejection from God; seeking reassurance of God's love and availability (very strong alpha coefficient of .86)
  - ▶ Avoidant attachment: discomfort with dependence and emotional closeness in relationship with God (very strong alpha coefficient of .87)

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## Background

Parenteau et al., 2021

College students at a secular school who described an avoidant God attachment demonstrated depression and dysfunctional coping with stress

Ningrum & Kusumaningrum, 2023

Muslim college students with secure God attachment reported psychological well-being and emotional stability

Homan & Lemmon, (2014, 2015)

Christian female college students with anxious attachment to God engage in more social comparison, high body dissatisfaction and low body appreciation

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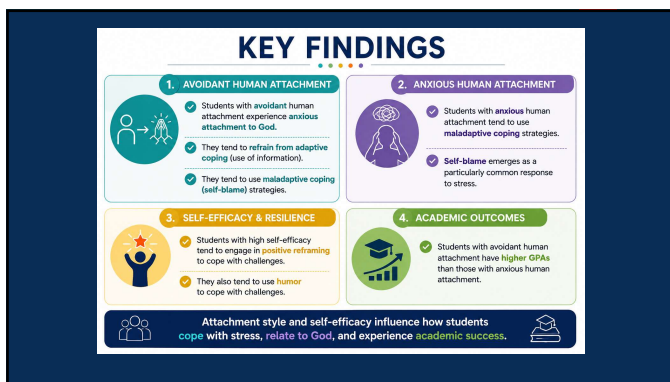
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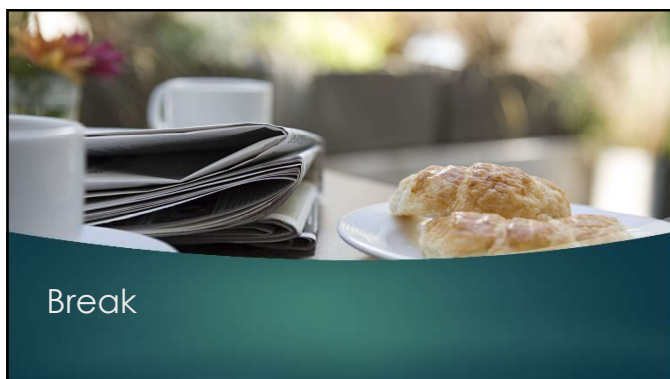
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## Study #2 Rationale

DO STUDENTS RECEIVING ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS DIFFER IN THEIR COPING STRATEGIES FROM STUDENTS WHO DO NOT RECEIVE ACCOMMODATIONS?

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## Research Design #2

Ninety (43 SRA; 47 SNRA) undergraduate students at a private, religiously-affiliated college completed the following:

- Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004)
- Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ; Simpson et al., 1992)
- Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007)
- Brief COPE (Carver et al., 1997)
- Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995)

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## KEY FINDINGS

### Significant Differences Between SRAs and SNRAs

SRA = Students Receiving Accommodations | SNRA = Students Not Receiving Accommodations

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | SRAs scored <b>lower</b> in grit and general self-efficacy.                                                                                                                                                   |  |  Compared to SNRAs                                                                                  |
|  | SRAs use humor, an adaptive coping strategy, more frequently than SNRAs do.                                                                                                                                   |  |  Humor appears to be a strength among SRAs.                                                         |
|  | SRAs engaged in more <b>maladaptive</b> coping strategies, including venting and substance use.                                                                                                               |  |  Greater reliance on strategies that may increase distress.                                         |
|  | SRAs experienced <b>higher</b> anxious/ambivalent God attachment.                                                                                                                                             |  |  May indicate a struggle with a sense of God being available and comforting.                        |
|  | SRAs reported <b>higher</b> anxious human attachment compared to anxious God attachment.                                                                                                                      |  |  Consistent with the compensatory model of attachment.                                              |
|  | SRAs reported <b>higher</b> anxious human attachment compared to anxious God attachment.                                                                                                                      |  |  May reflect the pressure that some students experience from their parents to achieve academically. |
|  | Students receiving accommodations show unique strengths and challenges in coping and attachment. Support that builds resilience, connection, and adaptive coping can promote well-being and academic success. |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                        |

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**EASTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**

## Study #3 Rationale

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### Research Design #3

#### PARTICIPANTS

**81** Participants in this study were 81 undergraduate students at a private, religiously-affiliated college.

**ALL PARTICIPANTS COMPLETED THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) (Simpson et al., 1992)
2. Attachment to God (ATG) questionnaire (Beck & McDowell, 2006)
3. Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007)
4. Brief COPE (Carver et al.)

#### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

| Diagnosis             | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------|
| No diagnosis          | 45.7%      |
| ADHD                  | 7.4%       |
| Anxiety Disorder (AD) | 8.6%       |
| ADHD + AD             | 11.1%      |
| Mood Disorder + AD    | 8.6%       |
| Other Diagnosis       | 18.5%      |

**Clinical Groups Combined: 54.3%**

Clinical Groups Combined = ADHD + AD + ADHD + AD + Mood Disorder + AD

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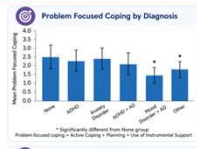
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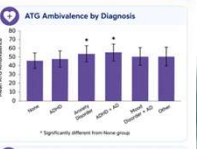
### KEY OUTCOMES BY DIAGNOSIS GROUP

#### Problem Focused Coping by Diagnosis



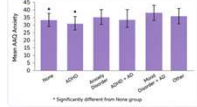
\* Significantly different from None group

#### ATG Ambivalence by Diagnosis



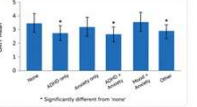
\* Significantly different from None group

#### AAQ Anxiety by Diagnosis



\* Significantly different from None group

#### GRIT by Diagnosis Group



\* Significantly different from 'None'

**What we found**

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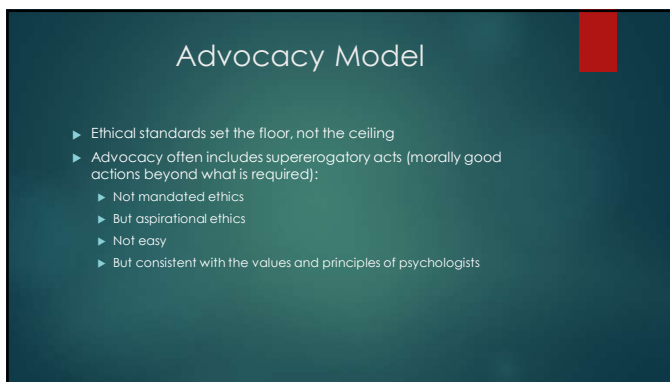
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## Examples of Level 1 Advocacy

| Supporting                                                                               | Allying                                                                                                                                           | Educating                                                                                   | Listening                                                                                                                                     | Assisting                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Supporting a student/client in their choice to use or not to use academic accommodations | Allying with the special education/academic accommodations department/office to support individuals with 504 plans, IEPs, academic accommodations | Educating students/clients how to access mental health services and academic accommodations | Listening to students/clients share their experiences (while also setting limits in academic setting) and exploring options for self-advocacy | Assisting students/clients with academic appeals processes |

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## Examples of Level 2 Advocacy

| Correcting                                                                                                            | Speaking                                                                                                   | Incorporating                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Correcting another person's misunderstanding of a student's/client's academic accommodations<br>• Fairness vs. equity | Speaking up at meetings when issues of student/client mental health and academic accommodations are raised | Incorporating universal design strategies in all written and electronic materials |

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## Examples of Level 3 Advocacy

| Writing                                                                                           | Serving                                                        | Researching                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Writing a letter to legislators regarding student/client mental health issues and social equality | Serving on a committee supporting student/client mental health | Researching what bills and legislation are already being introduced by local representatives and senators, and contacting them to support their projects |

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## Moral Courage

|            |                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Acting     | Acting ethically despite risks (e.g., personal, social, and institutional consequence) to advocate for clients, students, and communities, especially those who are vulnerable. |
| Empowering | Empowering others without imposing our agenda.                                                                                                                                  |
| Modelling  | Modelling advocacy values and behaviors.                                                                                                                                        |

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## Micro Advocacy

- ▶ Plans that
  - ▶ Focus on small steps that are easily attainable
  - ▶ Begin with level 1

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## Motivational Interviewing

On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning not important at all and 10 meaning extremely important, how important is it for you to engage in micro advocacy?

On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning not confident at all and 10 meaning extremely confident, how confident are you that you can engage in micro advocacy?

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## Developing your Micro Advocacy Plan

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## Acknowledgements and Course Evaluation

Kasi Conjack

Rou Lee

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