

Learning Disabilities: The S.A.D. Truth

Screening
Assessment
Diagnosis

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Objectives

- Discuss what a Learning Disability is and is not
- Discuss assessment and diagnostic considerations
- Discuss screening methods for a Learning Disability
- Discuss how you can help your student-athletes

Learning Disabilities

- Individual's achievement in reading, mathematics, or written expression is substantially (significantly) below what would be expected given measured intelligence
- Must be differentiated from expected variations in academic achievement
- Significantly interferes with academic functioning
- Must be able to rule out lack of opportunity, poor schooling, physical/medical impairments, & cultural factors
 - Difficult due to inadequate information regarding student's educational background
- Neurological in nature

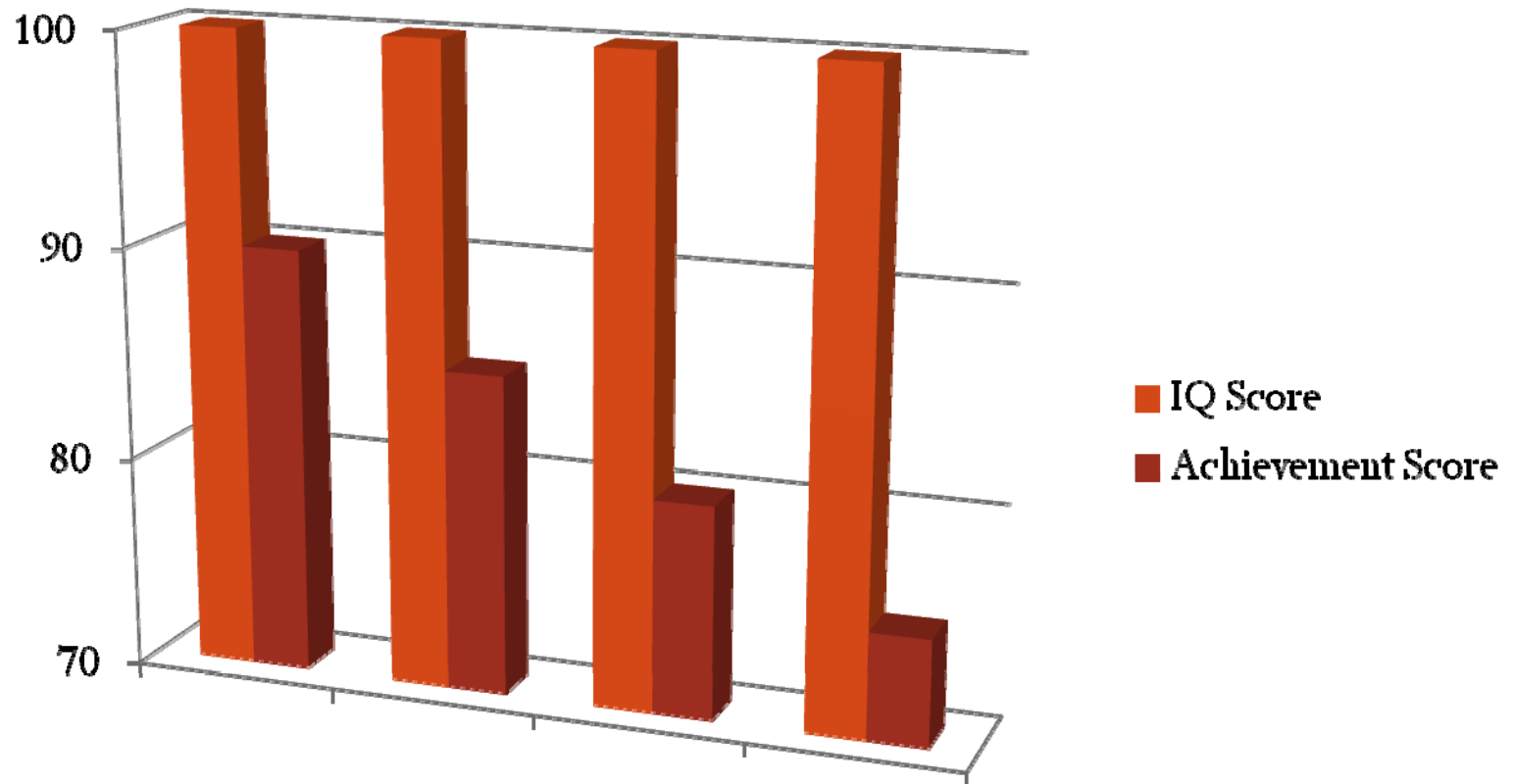
Learning Disabilities

- Prevalence rate is ~5% (ranges from 2% - 10%)
- Low Socio Economic Status (SES) is a risk factor
 - Prevalence rates for student-athletes may be higher than general population
 - The discrepancy may be subtle but “getting passed through” may create deficiency

Diagnostic Considerations

- No national standard for diagnosing
- Many states use a 15 point discrepancy cut-off
 - Equals 1 Standard Deviation
- Response to Intervention
 - If a student is administered an intervention and responds well, there is technically not a Learning Disability
 - Difficult to measure the intervention and time consuming and costly to re-administer the assessments
- At OU, we use assessment software that calculates predicted score based on actual score
 - Reflects the theory that a lower IQ score does not require the same degree of discrepancy – related to how percentile scores are calculated

Severity Based on Degree of Discrepancy



Screening

- Wide Range Achievement Test – 4th Edition
- Assesses 4 basic areas
 - Word Reading
 - Reading Comprehension
 - Spelling
 - Mathematics
- Must be trained to administer and interpret
- 2 subtests can be administered in a group format (Spelling and Mathematics)
- 2 subtests must be done individually (Word Reading and Reading Comprehension)
- Scores are on same scales (standard scores and percentiles) as IQ and Achievement assessments typically used in a full battery
- Most college students can be assumed to have an average IQ of 100
- Based on discrepancy model, any student who scores below an 85 on one of the subtests could have a Specific Learning Disability in that area
- Any student who scores in the 70's on any of the subtest likely has a Specific Learning Disability in that area

Reading Disorder

- Most common subtype
- Typically diagnosed in childhood – athlete's status may prohibit him from standing out
- Often have developed outstanding compensatory skills to mask Disorder
- Interventions should be aimed at specific subtype – common for a student to have low skills in both
- Basic Reading Skills
 - Difficulties with phonetics and decoding
 - Reading aloud quite slow – must sound out even the simplest words
 - Avoids reading aloud
- Reading Comprehension
 - Difficulty understanding main idea or themes
 - Reads entire assignment in a timely fashion and reports not understanding the material

Mathematics Disorder

- Difficulties with basic math skills
- Numbers and quantities/amounts do not seem to have intuitive meaning
- Improbable answers to math questions are not noticed by the student
- Using paper and pencil for simple equations or counting on fingers
- Often have difficulties learning a foreign language due to difficulty sequencing and associating symbols with meaning

Disorder of Written Expression

- Oral skills are greater than written skills – deficiency in “output” system
- Difficulties with organizing, sequencing, and themes
- Punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors
- Often spell same word multiple different ways within same assignment
- Written work takes more time to compose
- Often comorbid with a Reading Disorder and/or Mathematics Disorder

Learning Disorder NOS (Not Otherwise Specified)

- Does not meet full criteria, yet difficulties are severe enough to impair academic achievement
 - Ex: Academic Fluency - have skills to do well, just not in the time constraints placed upon them
 - Ex: Listening Comprehension – difficulty attending to and understanding auditory instructions

Diagnostic Considerations

- Why the late diagnosis?
 - Increased demands in college
 - Only those who stand out get tested
 - Athletes man not be held to same academic standards

When to Refer

- Look for differences among standardized test scores and HS GPA
- High effort, yet poor grades
- Lack of information regarding student-athlete's academic background
- Marked frustration by student-athlete
- Student-athlete avoids certain areas or courses
- Student-athlete avoids reading aloud
- Lack of stimulating academic environment
- Behavioral problems when academic performance is discussed
- History of head trauma and/or concussions

Typical Accommodations through Campus – Goal is to “Level the Playing Field”

- All Learning Disabilities and ADHD
 - Note-taker during lectures
 - Extended time in distraction free environment
- Specific Learning Disabilities
 - Mathematics Disorder
 - Use of calculator
 - Disorder of Written Expression
 - Scribe to write out answers for non-English courses
 - Reading Disorder
 - Reader during exams

Other Recommended Services

- Tutors
- Learning Specialists
- Reading Specialist
- Study Skills
- Assistance in identifying strengths that make them successful athletes
- Counseling
 - Address academic anxiety and normalize feelings
 - Students with a Learning Disability are more likely to have behavioral, social, and emotional concerns

Resources

- Fletcher, J.M., Lyon, G.R., Fuchs, L.S., & Barnes, M.A. (2007). *Learning Disabilities: From Identification to Intervention*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Hamilton, L. (2009). College Student-Athletes with Learning Disabilities. In E.F. Etzel (Ed.), *Counseling and Psychological Services for College Student-Athletes*. West Virginia: Fitness Information Technology.