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There are many aspects of my role within the SALT Center that make it an honor to lead this organization. The most extraordinary part of coming to my office each day is knowing that learning, in so many forms, is occurring within our community and throughout our building. It is almost as if there are banners, text messages, or tweets that radiate throughout the SALT Center that echo, “Learning Lives Here!”

Learning is not something that is easy to put your finger on but you know it when you see it, feel it, or experience that “aha” moment when the light goes on. For students, it may happen while independently reading their textbook in our quiet study area. Maybe a concept is connected to a real-life event as a result of a learning strategy they applied. Or it happens in our computer resource lab while reviewing an assignment and realizing a way to use technology to increase understanding. Learning is also likely to take place during individual meetings with a Strategic Learning Specialist or a tutor. In this case, students are actively involved with another person constructing knowledge around academic content or a strategy for learning. Each of these scenarios occurs within the SALT Center community everyday and although I don’t get to witness them all, I know we are changing the lives of students with every interaction.

As our students come to the University of Arizona and the SALT Center with so many accomplishments in their lives, it is not surprising to me and our professional staff that they reach their goal of college graduation. Some might assume the presence of learning and attention challenges would keep our students from being successful in higher education, but our growing SALT alumni base indicates otherwise. Our alumni, almost 2,000 at this time, are outspoken about the impact the SALT Center has made on their personal and professional lives.

As we embark on our 30th year of delivering innovative academic support services, our commitment to empowering individuals is unwavering. I want to thank all of our many constituents for your continued support of the SALT Center’s mission and our collaborative work with our students.

Warmest regards,

Jeff Orgera, PhD
The SALT Center’s commitment to Arizona Assurance and RoadMap to College, along with an extensive Arizona travel schedule has resulted in SALT Admissions nearly meeting their diversity and Arizona enrollment targets for fall 2010. SALT’s strategic plan called for 17.5% of the incoming class to be underrepresented minorities and for 20% of the incoming class to be Arizona residents.

As of mid August, 15% of SALT’s incoming class identifies as underrepresented minorities and 19% are Arizona residents. These numbers represent significant progress when you consider that in 2007 only 7.3% of SALT’s incoming students identified as underrepresented minorities and Arizona residents.

SALT’s commitment to Arizona Assurance has proven successful as well. Four incoming SALT students have been identified as 2010 Arizona Assurance Scholars. We have had only one SALT student in the past two Arizona Assurance classes. All four incoming Arizona Assurance Scholars are the first in their family to attend college. In addition to the Arizona Assurance Scholars, 16 other incoming SALT students are first-generation college students.

As we approach a new recruiting year, the SALT Admissions staff will continue to work toward our long term goal of the SALT population mirroring that of the overall UA student population.
Over the years, the SALT Center has seen an increase in the number of students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) enrolling in our program. During the past academic year alone, 50% of our new incoming students and 44% of our continuing students had the diagnosis of ADHD. As many of these students struggle to achieve their academic goals, SALT staff recognized the need to support these students in new ways.

As the SALT Center enters 30 years of offering academic support services to students with learning and attention challenges at the University of Arizona, we’re proud to officially incorporate ADHD coaching, its philosophies, and theories into our programs and services.

ADHD is “a neurological syndrome whose classic defining triad of symptoms includes impulsivity, distractibility, and hyperactivity or excess energy…. ADHD is not a learning disability or a language disability or dyslexia, and it is not associated with low intelligence.” (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994, p. 6)

There are many executive function challenges that affect students with ADHD in life in general, but particularly in the demanding environment of higher education. Executive function disorders “are a set of processes that all have to do with managing oneself and one’s resources in order to achieve a goal. It is an umbrella term for the neurologically-based skills involving mental control and self-regulation.” (Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel, 2008, p.10) Areas of executive functioning include: inhibition, shift, emotional control, initiation, working memory, planning/organization, organization of materials, and self-monitoring.

The seed for ADHD coaching was put in place in the early 1990s when Drs. Hallowell and Ratey (1994) coined the acronym H.O.P.E. as a strategy for coaches to use with individuals with ADHD. H.O.P.E. stands for Help, Obligations, Plans, and Encouragement. By asking students with ADHD questions about the help they need, about their upcoming obligations, and about their ongoing plans, coaches can provide the encouragement students need to keep them focused on the task at hand.

Since that time, services in the private sector for ADHD coaching have grown by leaps and bounds as many individuals from around the country have started their own businesses as ADHD coaches. Many SALT students have used these private ADHD coaching services throughout high school to assist in their preparation for college.

Today, ADHD coaching still embodies the original ideas of H.O.P.E., but it has also grown significantly in the area of supporting and guiding students through their life changes and experiences as a college student. As this is central to how our Strategic Learning Specialists work with SALT students, SALT has made it a priority to train specific staff in ADHD coaching techniques through nationally recognized ADHD and Life Coaching programs.

ADHD coaching activities may include daily life management, accountability, self-confidence, resiliency, taking the initiative to face new challenges, celebrating successes, and the building of positive relationships to foster their social and academic performance.

And as with coaching, it is the SALT Center’s ultimate goal to help guide our students through the University of Arizona system and on to graduation.

REFERENCES:
Of the 218 students who completed the survey, 133 students self-identified as having an LD as one of their diagnoses and 82 students sought treatment. Of these, 47 students were solely diagnosed with an LD, 69 of them were diagnosed with ADHD and LD, 4 were diagnosed with Anxiety and LD and 13 of them were diagnosed with all the three (ADHD, LD and Anxiety). Of all the participants, 130 students were diagnosed with ADHD as one of their diagnoses and 102 sought treatment. Of these, 41 were solely diagnosed with ADHD and 69 were diagnosed with both an LD and ADHD.

Number of Unique Students with Diagnosis Pattern of LD, ADHD, and Anxiety

Of the 218 students who completed the survey, 133 students self-identified as having an LD as one of their diagnoses and 82 students sought treatment. Of these, 47 students were solely diagnosed with an LD, 69 of them were diagnosed with ADHD and LD, 4 were diagnosed with Anxiety and LD and 13 of them were diagnosed with all the three (ADHD, LD and Anxiety). Of all the participants, 130 students were diagnosed with ADHD as one of their diagnoses and 102 sought treatment. Of these, 41 were solely diagnosed with ADHD and 69 were diagnosed with both an LD and ADHD.

Number of Students with Diagnosis

The majority of students were diagnosed with a learning or attention challenge sometime between kindergarten and the fifth grade (57%). Seventy-five percent of the students could name their diagnosis and 20 percent of the students said they had a diagnosis but did not know what it was. Although students were diagnosed, not all students received treatment before entering college.
Mixed Methods:

Over the past few years SALT Admissions has seen a steady rise in the number of students who apply to SALT with ADHD as their primary diagnosis. Since 2005, there has also been an increase in freshmen diagnosed with ADHD who earned less than a 2.0 GPA during their first semester at the University of Arizona. This has resulted in increased numbers of freshmen on academic probation. When combined, these statistics raise questions about why and how these trends are occurring.

In response to the above situation, SALT’s student assessment practices have evolved to better understand the complex nature of student success at the University of Arizona. Due to changing student demographics, advances in the field of learning and attention challenges in higher education, as well as increased knowledge of research techniques, a comprehensive research agenda was designed to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Our research has contributed to current SALT practices. Equally as important, we believe this mixed methods approach can contribute to the body of learning outcomes research and be a value to other campus colleagues, peer programs, and the general academic community.
Now in its second year of data collection, the Learning Outcomes Research Project is the tool that provides SALT with a quantitative snapshot of our students’ profiles prior to engaging in the UA and SALT communities. For the past two years, incoming SALT students have completed a new student survey during SALT orientation. By asking students to complete the survey, SALT is able to collect baseline data about our students’ perceptions of themselves and the strengths, skills, and weaknesses they bring to higher education. In addition we collect departmental data on how students utilize our services in an effort to better understand how our students grow and change in response to our interventions.

The quantitative analysis of students on academic probation was inconclusive, which led the SALT research committee to incorporate qualitative research techniques in our research portfolio. A case study format was chosen to further investigate the causes and effects of students struggling academically and more importantly, to learn about the techniques students used to get off academic probation. Our pilot case study centered around one student who found herself on academic probation after her first semester, but proved to be resilient enough to eventually raise her cumulative GPA to above 2.0 by her fourth semester at the UA. The findings yielded six themes including experience with learning and attention challenges, culture and family, connection to community, use of support resources, distinctive turning points (see right), and use of academic strategies.

The pilot case study provided a glimpse into how students demonstrate resilience and it also reinforced the appropriateness of mixing both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies when assessing student outcomes and academic performance. Although this study came about due to academic probation rates among students with ADHD, the reality is that these results gave enough evidence to suggest a more comprehensive inquiry into how SALT can improve retention rates program-wide.

Starting in the Fall 2010, a follow-up longitudinal case study will investigate how students perceive their academic growth. To accomplish this, a small group of participants will work with their Strategic Learning Specialist individually to build academic portfolios. Portfolios are likely to include the learning outcomes survey results, collegiate writing samples, copies of exams, and a reflective letter that is written and sealed by the student at the beginning of each term. Our goal is to make students’ academic growth as transparent as possible and to raise students’ awareness of how they are developing as persons.

National interest in SALT assessment techniques has been encouraging. A recent proposal, “Hindsight is 20/20: The Speed Bumps when Developing a Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan for Students with Learning Disabilities in Higher Education,” was accepted for presentation at the 2011 Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) national conference in Jacksonville, Florida.

1. Declared a major. This gave the student an incentive and a target GPA to work toward.

2. Met her current boyfriend in the second semester. He happened to practice studious behaviors.

3. Became more organized, resourceful and found value in open communication.

4. Adapted her approaches to school depending on the class and style of the instructor.

5. Learned to be more confident in herself as a student and a person.

6. Utilized all of the resources available to her and sought them out when needed.

7. Changed her opinion about using resources. She no longer viewed using services as being “weak,” instead they were signs of being “mature.”

8. Learned that ignoring a problem does not make it go away, but usually makes it worse. Problems need to be addressed head on to try to find a solution.
Each semester, SALT hosts a graduation luncheon where students, family and staff come together to celebrate what many might consider the ultimate of accomplishments – Graduation! The graduates featured here, and in the video on the SALT website (salt.arizona.edu), are a few of the graduates who participated in the Friday, May 14, 2010 event. Forty-five SALT students graduated last May, many of whom attended the luncheon.

For those of you who have not had the privilege to attend a SALT graduation luncheon, let me tell you a bit about our program agenda. Each graduate in attendance is surrounded by proud family members and is introduced by their Strategic Learning Specialist. Because Strategic Learning Specialists and their students develop close relationships, this is a touching moment, with the Learning Specialist sharing unique insights into the student’s growth and development, and the challenges the student has overcome to make it to graduation day. Each graduate has an opportunity to speak and express their gratitude, and this is usually when parents and SALT staff become teary-eyed!

As much as this is a time for celebration, commencement is also a time for reflection. When asked to reflect on their time at the UA, students mention many factors but most often praise our services and SALT staff for their support. Students often share memorable stories about turning points in their academic careers when they not only felt as if everything was coming together academically, but that their experiences were helping define who they were becoming as people.

When asked, each graduate had their own variation of the SALT story. It goes along the lines of something like this: I arrived, I overcame, and now I’m off to my next great adventure. To the right are responses from our graduates who were asked to answer a few reflective questions as a way to share their insight with future generations of SALT students.
HOW DID YOU BENEFIT FROM SALT?

Ben Bartlett, from San Diego, CA who majored in Regional Development and minored in Business, said, “SALT and the UA, especially SALT, have given me the tools that I need to succeed … and have taught me a great deal of independence and persistence.”

Amy Menezes, a former SALT Ambassador and a champion of students with learning and attention challenges in her own right, was asked what she got out of SALT. She eloquently stated, “The biggest thing I’ve gained from SALT is being my own self-advocate.”

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AFTER GRADUATION?

Like most groups of graduating seniors, the emphasis for the day was not on their “plans,” but instead on celebrating the fulfillment of the plan that they laid out for themselves to graduate from the University of Arizona. As you’ll read below, students’ plans varied.

Kiki Moriguchi, an aspiring scientist and health care practitioner stated, “I’m looking forward to going home, spending time with my family, recouping after the past four years, and applying to dental school.”

David Cogen, familiar with what it means to be successful in ‘the Business’ of Hollywood shares, “I’m looking forward to moving back to L.A., looking for a job somewhere in the entertainment industry, doing something to get on my feet, and working to get into the real world.”

Randall Cook, a statistician and a young man who holds his culture close to his heart comments, “This summer, I will be traveling to Israel with the Birth Right Program, where I’m able to learn about my Jewish heritage.”

Sam Glicken, a determined former student who thrives on real life experience and the ability to plan ahead tells us, “Now that I’m graduating, I’m looking forward to the two month internship that I have in L.A. this summer.”

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

It was refreshing to hear the responses to this question, as many of the students suggested that as long as they were doing something they loved, that would make them happy, and in turn suggesting that success to them meant doing something that was near and dear to their hearts.

Randall Cook said it the best, “[Success] means doing something that’s worthwhile, that you do professionally, that you take pride in, commitment, dedication and responsibility for.”

David Farley, “To me, success is every day waking up and doing something positive in my life.”

Kiki Moriguchi also chimed in, “Success to me, on graduation day, means not only getting to graduation day but also being proud of the past four years and looking back and saying there are no regrets, and I’m really happy where I am.”
SALT has had many students tell us how much they have benefited from its services, but when Josh (Class of 2000) and Maggie Feldman (Class of 2002) strolled in on a Friday afternoon, it was obvious that their bond to each other, the UA, and the SALT Center was unique. Some would say it was a true love story.

“I came to UA with one of my best friends, who was also a SALT student…We were there only one week, and we knew we were on our own. We realized we needed to grow up real quick because no one else but ourselves was going to help us out,” recalls Josh. He was a bit shocked by all the responsibility of being a college student and how fast he had to mature to be ready for the first week of classes. What he didn’t know at that time was that the SALT Center and the UA would soon become a place that he would eventually describe as friendly, supportive, and a place that prepared him with real life skills.

“I met with [my Strategic Learning Specialist] each week, but I saw her more often than that. I would stop in to say hi. She and I became good friends…I remember in my senior year at SALT she helped me schedule a practice interview at Career Services on campus. I would not have been aware of these services if it weren’t for her and SALT,” says Josh.

Although SALT played a critical role in Josh’s success as an economics major, it was not the only facet of his college experience that he came to enjoy and cherish. In his second semester at the UA he met Maggie Kramer (now Feldman), a fellow SALT student who was majoring in family studies and human development. The two lived in the same off-campus housing complex and shared common interests and friends. Despite their friendship, the two lost touch with one another after graduation from UA.

In 2003, they ran into one another at a mutual friend’s birthday party in Manhattan. According to Maggie, “It had been a while since we had last seen each other so we talked and talked the whole night.” They reminisced about old times and shared stories about their Greek life and SALT experiences. The couple starting dating that year. They were engaged in 2004 and married in 2006.

After being away from Tucson for many years, the couple made a special trip to visit friends, tour the UA campus, and stop in at the SALT Center. “To be honest, I was both jealous and proud when I saw the SALT building. I was jealous because I wish we would have had the fabulous facilities when I was in SALT. But at the same time, I was proud to see that all the hard work and donations to the building became a reality! My family gave to the SALT Center when they were fundraising for the building. It’s so great to see that SALT is where it is,” Maggie explained.

Josh and Maggie’s family both have a history of supporting the UA and the SALT Center because SALT took care of them and it played a huge role in both their lives. Expecting their first child in about six weeks, Maggie shared, “Right now we’re really focused on bringing our son in the world and creating a safe and wonderful environment for him to grow up and hopefully attend the UA…Obviously, we’re not sure if he will need the SALT Center for additional assistance, but if he does, there is no doubt that we would like our son to be part of the SALT community… We benefited from it so much and we think he would too.”

This love story is about trust, hard work, and giving back. As students, Josh and Maggie put in many hours of study. Their hard work not only paid off with graduation, but helped them develop a strong work ethic. They set goals, and developed a plan to make their dreams a reality. Today, Josh’s career in finance is thriving, and Maggie is putting her degree to work by preparing their home for their son.

The Feldman’s are grateful for all the support they received from the UA and SALT because they believe that without the support, they may not have been as well prepared for life and the working world. Because they have the willingness and means, they are committed to support SALT’s future development efforts. It’s because of the loyalty and generosity of SALT alumni that future generations of students will have a similar valued experience.
The importance of development and fundraising activities cannot be overemphasized for organizations in our current economic climate. The costs of providing quality services to our students continue to rise as personnel, equipment, and campus infrastructure expenses consume larger portions of our operating budget.

Thankfully, the SALT Center has a large network of parents, alumni, and friends that consistently make contributions to support our department’s strategic directions. Our most pressing need continues to be student scholarship support as we see record numbers of admitted students applying for financial aid to offset the fees associated with the SALT Center. More of our students are qualifying for need-based scholarships than ever before, and as a result we plan to award $80,000 in scholarships this academic year.

The scholarship awards would not be possible without the generosity of our Director’s Circle members whose annual contributions directly support students’ with high financial need. Last year, our Director’s Circle and many other supporters helped the SALT Center generate almost $190,000 in gifts. We are incredibly indebted to these ambassadors of our department and will continue enhancing student opportunities through their kindness.

If you would like to learn more about the many creative ways to include the SALT Center within your philanthropy, please feel free to contact Jeff Orgera at (520) 621-1427 or via email at jorgera@u.arizona.edu.
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