

Course Abstract

For many individuals, dogs serve as constant companions and a source of comfort and happiness. Since the early 1980s, literature has documented the numerous benefits of dog companionship, including increased social opportunities, and enhanced feelings of security. Beyond promoting social communication, dogs can also reduce negative emotions such as anxiety and stress. College students may benefit from therapy dog interventions. These students often experience mental health issues (e.g., anxiety and depression), as well as high stress levels, particularly during exam periods. Exams can heighten anxiety, tension, and depression, while negatively affecting immune function, academic confidence, and overall performance. These factors can lead to diminished academic outcomes and a negative perception of the college experience. Counseling and wellness programs have sought effective methods to support students struggling with stress and mental health challenges. One consistently successful intervention involves the use of therapy dogs, especially during high-stress academic periods. Therapy dog programs provide students with emotional relief, reduce physiological stress responses, and foster social connection. Additionally, implementing therapy dog visits is convenient and cost-effective for colleges and universities. These programs require minimal resources, no specialized training for participants, and can engage large numbers of students simultaneously. Overall, integrating therapy dog interventions during exam seasons may serve as a practical and beneficial strategy to promote student well-being and academic success. The purpose of this study was to obtain speech-language pathology students' perceptions on the inclusion of therapy/service dogs in the classroom. A survey was sent to students. Data is still being collected but preliminary results suggest that students overwhelmingly feel positively about having therapy dogs in the classroom/department.

Speaker Bios

Cari Tellis, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, a professor in the Speech-Language Pathology Department at Misericordia University, has presented at state, national, and international conferences. Dr. Tellis has received grants for research in voice science and has published in peer-reviewed journals. She is an editorial reviewer for scholarly publications within her discipline.

Alexandra Long is a graduate student at Misericordia University. She has participated in research studies involving voice and presented at the state, national, and international level.

Olivia Lidle is a student at Misericordia University. She has participated in research studies involving voice.

Speaker Disclosures

Cari Tellis, Ph.D. is a Full, Tenured Professor in the Speech-Language Pathology Department at Misericordia University.

Alexandra Long is a paid research assistants in the Speech-Language Pathology Department at Misericordia University.

Olivia Lidle is a paid research assistants in the Speech-Language Pathology Department at Misericordia University.

SUPPORTING NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS IN SLP MASTER'S PROGRAMS

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REED SENTER PHD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL AND JULIE SANTORO PH.D., CCC-SLP

REED IS A FACULTY MEMBER AT DESALES UNIVERSITY, AND WILL BE REIMBURSED FOR HIS TRAVEL AND CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE. NONFINANCIAL DISCLOSURES: REED IS NEURODIVERGENT, AND HIS TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IS INFORMED BY HIS IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES.

JULIE IS A FACULTY MEMBER AT DESALES UNIVERSITY, AND WILL BE REIMBURSED FOR HER TRAVEL AND CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify strengths of the neurodiversity paradigm, including the rationale for supporting neurodivergent students in higher education
- Describe common characteristics and learning needs of neurodivergent students
- Implement a variety of strategies for instruction, assessment, supervision, and mentorship, to support the outcomes of neurodivergent students



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