

# Inclusion

## Academic Enabling Behavior Strengths of Students with ID in IPSE Programs

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ACADEMIC ENABLING BEHAVIOR STRENGTHS IN IPSEs

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IPSE Programs**

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**Abstract**

Participation in inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) programs yields benefits for students with ID, yet little is known about their classroom-related, non-academic thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, sometimes referred to as academic enabling behaviors (AEBs). AEBs include academic engagement, interpersonal skills, motivation, and study skills. The research team explored IPSE staff's understandings of IPSE students' AEB strengths. Ten staff from IPSE programs participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Consensual Qualitative Research. Results suggest students have strengths that span multiple AEBs and that these strengths can be leveraged to support strengths-based assessment and intervention.

*Keywords:* Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE), Intellectual Disability, Higher Education, Interpersonal Skills, Academic Engagement, Motivation, Study Skills, Academic Enabling Behavior

**Academic Enabling Behavior Strengths of Students with an Intellectual Disability in IPSE****Programs****Introduction**

Individuals with disabilities have been and too often continue to be marginalized members of society, lacking access to services individuals without disabilities can obtain with minimal difficulty or resistance. This is true across a variety of life domains, including education. It was not until the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA) was passed that students with disabilities gained access to K-12 public education (Yell et al., 1998). With the passage of EAHCA, students with disabilities were assured access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE; Jacob et al., 2011), which made excluding them from compulsory education illegal.

The EAHCA required that all students, including students with disabilities, be provided a FAPE, but problems with access and opportunity persisted and post-school outcomes for individuals with disabilities remained bleak. Compared to many other disability categories, programming and outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) were particularly poor. Whereas students without disabilities (and those with “high-incidence” disabilities) received career and technical education through vocational schools, apprenticeships, or college, these opportunities generally were unavailable to individuals with an ID (Hardman & Dawson, 2010).

In 1987, a groundbreaking program was developed at the University of Alberta. Parents and allies worked with the university to create the first inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) program where students with an ID could participate in the college experience (Wintle, 2015). The program sought to expand the options available to individuals with ID after they exited from

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high school (Wintle, 2015). In the years that followed, additional institutions of higher education (IHE) developed similar programs, but IPSE programs remained relatively rare.

Today, however, things have changed. The US Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education awarded \$10.5 million to 27 grantees in 2010 and \$9.8 million to an additional 25 grantees in 2015. Between 2010, the initial year, and 2019, grant-funded Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs) have supported almost 4,000 individuals with ID in 31 states on over 100 campuses (Grigal et al., 2020). In a recent TPSID cohort, 981 students with ID participated in 59 programs on 57 college and university campuses (Think College, 2020). With this expansion has come additional data demonstrating positive outcomes of IPSE programs. For example, graduates of IPSE programs have higher rates of employment compared to those who did not attend IPSE programs (Grigal et al., 2019), experienced increased independence (Ross et al., 2013), and experienced benefits to their social (Sheppard-Jones et al., 2018) and physical well-being (Roberts et al., 2018; Sheppard-Jones et al., 2018). Considering how beneficial participating in IPSEs can be, it is important to understand factors that lead to IPSE students' success, including success in the college classroom.

### **Academic Enabling Behaviors**

As part of their IPSE programs, students with ID enroll and participate in a series of college courses outlined in their program of study. Success in these college courses requires academic competency, which is comprised of academic skills (e.g., reading, writing) as well as other non-academic thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for academic success (DiPerna & Elliot, 1999). These non-academic thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors are sometimes referred to as *academic enabling behaviors*, or *academic enablers* (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999). There are four

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broad categories of academic enablers: interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills (DiPerna & Elliott (1999).

As part of their academic enabler framework, DiPerna and Elliott (1999) defined interpersonal skills as the behaviors needed to communicate and interact with others in the academic setting. Examples of interpersonal skills include initiating conversation, requesting help, and working in groups (DiPerna & Elliott, 2001). Students' interpersonal skill abilities impact the quality of their social interactions in academic contexts, including interactions with their typically matriculating classmates, fellow IPSE students, peer mentors, IPSE staff, and college faculty.

Academic engagement was another domain of academic enabling behavior identified by DiPerna and Elliott (1999). Students in IPSE programs can become engaged in the college context in many ways. They can be engaged socially (e.g., getting invited to gatherings or informal social engagements) or academically (e.g. becoming engaged in their program of study by participating in study sessions with peers or advisement with faculty). They also can demonstrate engagement during class discussions or group project meetings. As defined by DiPerna and Elliott (1999), academic engagement refers to this last form of engagement – a student's participation in classroom instruction and activities.

DiPerna and Elliott's third category of academic enabling behavior was motivation, defined as the student's "initiative and persistence regarding academic subjects; it includes items that reflect responsibility, preferences for challenging tasks, and goal-directed behaviors" (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999, p. 6). Previous research has indicated student motivation is an important, if not the most important, individual characteristic considered by IPSE staff when making admissions decisions (McEathron et al. 2013).

Lastly, study skills were defined as behaviors that facilitate learning new material in the classroom, including taking notes, remaining organized, and preparing for class (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999). In-class peer mentors often support IPSE students' study skills. Study skills often require coordination of other related competencies, such as organization and remembering and synthesizing information (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).

Even though academic enabling behaviors can facilitate academic success, little is known about the academic enablers of students with an ID in IPSE programs. Based on the results of an exploratory review about academic enablers and students with an ID conducted by Author et al., (2023), the researchers only found two studies that investigated interpersonal skills, three articles that addressed academic engagement, two studies that discussed motivation, and six studies that addressed study skills. Given that four articles addressed more than one area, the authors only identified seven articles that addressed at least one academic enabling behavior (Author et al., 2023). There is a paucity of information about academic enabling behaviors of students with ID in IPSE programs.

### **Strengths-Based Assessment**

When considering students' academic enabling behaviors, educators may default to focusing on identifying and remediating the students' weaknesses and skill deficits (Buntinx, 2013). However, a growing number of researchers and policymakers have advocated for utilizing a strengths-based (instead of a deficit-oriented) approach to assessment and intervention (Buntinx, 2013; Jimerson, 2004). Strength-based approaches emphasize an individual's skills, competencies, and interests as assets for supporting their success across a number of life domains (Jimerson, 2004).

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A long-term goal of students in IPSE programs is to develop skills and dispositions necessary for future employment. Students often select their employment path, and thus their programs of study, based on their interests. Further, people's interests and strengths frequently align. In strength-based environments, students are invited to and are supported as they leverage and build on their strengths and interests to facilitate growth (Carter et al., 2015). To build on an individual's strengths, however, existing skills and competencies must first be identified. Identifying and understanding IPSE students' strengths requires input from the IPSE students themselves as well as others who know them (Carter et al., 2015).

The academic enabling behavior framework can be applied as part of strength-based assessment and intervention efforts. Students and IPSE staff can identify strengths that are not traditional academic skills (e.g., reading comprehension, mathematic problem-solving) but are nonetheless necessary for classroom success (i.e., academic enabling behaviors). After IPSE students' academic enabling behavior strengths are identified, these assets can be foundational to additional skill development, and students can learn how to use their strengths and competencies to their advantage.

### **Present Study**

This study aimed to learn more about the academic enabling behavior strengths of students in IPSE programs from the perspective of IPSE staff. Although IPSE student input is vital, IPSE staff can provide a multi-level perspective that includes insight into individual student strengths and information about an institution's IPSE program. Consequently, the research question we sought to answer is "What do IPSE staff understand the strengths of IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors to be?"

This manuscript was a component of a larger mixed-method study that investigated IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors from both IPSE students' and IPSE staff's perspectives. The larger study explored IPSE students' academic enabling behavioral strengths and weaknesses, supports in IPSE programs and on college campuses that help develop academic enabling behaviors, and whether IPSE staff believe any additional academic enabling behaviors may be specific to IPSE students.

### **Method**

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to learn more about IPSE students' strengths in interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills. Ten staff representing five different IPSE programs were interviewed.

### **Participants**

The authors used a non-random purposeful sampling process to recruit interested IPSE staff. To be eligible to participate, a prospective interviewee needed to have experience supporting students' access to and performance in academic courses for at least one academic year. Ten IPSE staff from programs at five colleges and universities were interviewed (see Table 1). This sample size was based on previous recommendations from Guest et al. (2006), Hennick et al. (2016), and Hill and Knox (2021). Interviews ranged from approximately 45 to nearly 90 minutes, with an average interview length of 54 minutes. No compensation or incentives were offered.

### **Interview Protocol**

Prior to conducting the interviews, an IPSE staff person who was not eligible to participate and a recent peer mentor were both asked to review the interview protocol and participate in a mock interview. Based on this review, the first author made semantic adjustments

to the questions to enhance clarity. All staff interviews occurred during the 2020-2021 academic year via video conferencing. (See Figure 1 for the study's interview protocol.). The primary researcher also conducted the interviews.

### **Data analysis**

Otter.ai was used to transcribe the interviews and Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel were used to facilitate coding. The Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method guided the data analysis procedures (Hill & Knox, 2021). One of CQR's primary features is its emphasis on reaching consensus during data analysis, with consensus being defined as "an unforced unanimous decision" (Hill & Knox, 2021, p. 10). Table 2 provides a description of each CQR stage, including an example of how each stage was applied to a text block excerpted from a transcript from one of the study's interviews. Because the CQR coding method was utilized, coding decisions were not made independently, and interrater reliability was not calculated.

The initial step in the CQR method was to generate domains from the transcripts. Domains are broad subject areas identified in each interview (Hill & Knox, 2021). The research team segmented interview transcripts into blocks of text, with one general topic corresponding to one text block. After the text blocks were created, team members alternated reading transcript excerpts out loud and discussed and agreed on a domain (i.e., broad subject area) to represent that block of text. Although a list of domains was generated, each block of text was not yet assigned to a specific domain at this stage.

The purpose of this initial coding stage was to generate and refine a list of domains present across the interviews, thus the domain-generation process was iterative; only when the domains were finalized were excerpts of text from each transcript assigned to domains. To accomplish this step of domain generation, two transcripts were read and reviewed by the entire

research team – two primary coders and the auditor. The remaining 8 transcripts were reviewed by two primary coders. The auditor reviewed the tentative domain assignments after the first three transcripts were coded by the two primary coders, and a second review (or “audit”) was conducted after the final five transcripts were coded. The first and second coders then reviewed the auditor’s feedback and decided what changes to make to the domains. (This auditing process was completed for each phase of the coding process.) As mentioned above, a list of domains was created in this stage but text blocks were not yet assigned to a domain. Following the previously described consensus-based procedure, the next stage of the CQR method consisted of assigning the blocks of text to one or more domains.

After text was assigned to a domain, core ideas were generated for each block of text. A core idea is a summary that concisely captures the essence of all or part of a text block (Hill & Knox, 2021). Again, the entire research team, including the auditor, read and reviewed the first two transcripts. The two primary coders reviewed the remaining 8 transcripts. There was an audit after the first three transcripts coded by the two primary coders were completed and again after the final five transcripts were coded. As before, the first and second coders discussed the auditor’s feedback and decided what changes to make to the core ideas.

Next, the core ideas were organized by domain and used to create categories and subcategories. Categories are phrases that capture common elements across core ideas, and subcategories further capture similarities within categories (Hill & Knox, 2021). For this phase, the first two domains and their corresponding core ideas were reviewed and coded by the entire research team, including the auditor. The first two coders created the categories for the remaining domains and core ideas. Another audit was conducted after the first two coders reviewed the next three domains. Then the last audit occurred after categories and subcategories were generated for

the final core domains. After this step, the research team developed a list of categories and subcategories. The lead author and the auditor worked together to finalize the final list of categories and subcategories, returning to both the transcripts and core ideas as needed.

Hill and Knox (2021) suggest researchers label categories based on how many interviewees mentioned that specific category. We applied this labeling system to the subcategories, as opposed to the categories. A subcategory is labeled “General” if all 10 interviewees mentioned the idea. If more than half (but less than all) of the participants mentioned a subcategory (i.e., 6-9 interviewees), it is labeled “Typical.” “Variant” subcategories are ideas that were mentioned by at least two (but less than half the) participants (i.e., 2-5 interviewees). Lastly, “Rare” subcategories were those that only one interviewee mentioned. The results section primarily includes information about subcategories described as general, typical, and variant. Including these categories may help reduce the inclination to overinterpret a single response.

The research team comprised two primary coders, both doctoral candidates, and an auditor, the doctoral candidates’ faculty advisor. The two doctoral candidates had experience working in the k-12 public education setting with students with various disabilities but did not have experience working with students in IPSE programs. The auditor was a school psychology faculty member and the senior faculty affiliate for an IPSE program in Georgia. In addition, he served as a co-investigator and evaluation team member for the state’s TPSID grant.

### **Rigor**

Researcher reflexivity and an auditor were utilized to establish credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researchers reflected on their assumptions and values throughout the research process as they strived to develop an honest narrative description

of the themes (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, as previously explained, the auditor was involved in the beginning of each stage of the CQR process and during each stage (Hill & Knox, 2021).

## Results

This results section provides an overview of data collected via the semi-structured interviews. The findings are organized by academic enabling behavior domains.

### Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are the behaviors needed to communicate and interact with others in the academic setting. According to IPSE staff, the interpersonal skill strength most frequently observed was that students' *overall performance in this area grew over time*. Some interviewees explained how students made improvements in general, and some listed specific ways students grew. A list of the categories and subcategories, including their frequency rating and descriptive label, are in Table 3.

One interviewee shared more broadly about how she noticed growth during each semester and throughout the program:

I think that social engagement got better over time. On a small scale - in a specific class in a specific semester, and big scale - the first semester in the program through their last semester in the program. I think that there was definitely marked improvement.

Another interviewee indicated that IPSE students learned how to constructively share their opinions: "They learned how to deliver a message that can be accepted by the other person."

According to interviewees, students also had strengths in other related areas of interpersonal skills: (a) *making connections with others* and (b) *being willing to engage with others*. Staff members indicated IPSE students connected with both their undergraduate peers

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and their instructors. One interviewee shared specifically about the relationships IPSE students were able to establish with faculty and instructors: “I think a strength was that interaction with the professor. Even if there wasn't the comfort for the social interaction with other students, the professor was a more comfortable place to connect.” Conversely, another IPSE staff member explained the importance of IPSE students making connections with others and how these connections could support their academic success:

It’s also really helpful to build those connections with peers within their class.... It helps (IPSE students) feel more comfortable in the classroom, like they're a part of the classroom, which makes them more excited to go to class and then participate.

**Academic Engagement**

Academic engagement was viewed through the lens of DiPerna and Elliott’s (1999) definition, with a focus on class participation. A list of the categories and subcategories, including their frequency rating and label, are in Table 4.

Overall, some IPSE staff indicated that IPSE students were *eager to engage and participate in class*. One staff member observed: “I usually have professors coming back to me saying that our students are more engaged than their typically matriculating students.” Another interviewee shared specifically about what this engagement looked like during classes:

Most of our students are pretty engaged...And by engaged, I mean I see them raising their hands or engaging in the class discussion and trying to connect with other people in the class or connect with the teacher. If it's a group activity or something like that, they'll usually enjoy getting involved in it.

Staff also shared that IPSE students were able to *adapt to and engage during virtual learning*. This adjustment was needed following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although virtual

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learning introduced challenges, one staff member shared: “I’ve seen our students adapt. They’ll put stuff in the chat or they’ll unmute themselves and answer a teacher’s question.”

It is worth noting that when compared to DiPerna and Elliott’s (1999) definition of academic engagement (i.e., a student’s participation in classroom instruction and activities), IPSE staff had a much broader understanding of the term. Many times, responses to interview questions that specifically addressed academic engagement overlapped with the other domains of academic enabling behaviors.

**Motivation**

Interviewees indicated they believe motivation was essential for IPSE students’ success. Some strengths they observed were that students were (a) *oriented towards their goals*, (b) *actively involved in their learning*, (c) *intrinsically motivated*, and (d) *willing to put in work to succeed* (see Table 5).

According to staff members, IPSE students appeared to be *goal-oriented*. Some IPSE staff explained that students wanted to be in IPSE programs because they believe matriculation would equip them to achieve their long-term goals. For example, one staff member shared:

One of the strengths I see is that the students that are here, want to be here. No one is here just because, “Oh, I didn’t really have anything else to do so I want to shell out 30 grand a year and come to college.” ...They want to really focus on their academic area. They want to have a job when they’re done and want to learn those job skills.

Over time, IPSE staff observed that students were better able to articulate how their learning connected with their goals. Specifically, growth in this area was demonstrated in the context of students’ person-centered planning meetings.

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When we're looking at motivation and them gaining academic strengths, they're actually able to see the value -- to articulate the value. We see this a lot in our...person-centered plans. They are able to articulate why they're motivated for learning certain things, the value it's provided to them, and they take that and they're able to interpret into goals and setting new goals once they've accomplished the original goals.

Just as IPSE students were motivated to reach their goals, staff also viewed them as *eager to succeed*. One interviewee explained how motivation primed students to want to learn more, nurturing a sense of excitement and eagerness towards learning:

Motivation in academic settings... An eagerness to be there, a willingness to be there, an excitement about learning new things. Kind of like a readiness... to be like, "Okay, I want to know more." I think also many students come with the knowledge that "Hey, this is going to get me to my next thing," especially because we focus on the arts, a lot of it is literally learning skills within camera use, technology use, sculpting clay...all this. So, I think students are very motivated.

In addition, IPSE staff reported many of their students had the drive and were *willing to work* even when things were difficult. One interviewee shared:

The strengths that I see...for a lot of our students is that they all are willing to do more than the minimum to learn the content. So even though they only have directed study a minimum of twice a week, they can meet with me for even longer... They're forever asking for help outside of even what we're doing a directed study. And they want to be prepared for class.

**Study Skills**

In our interviews, IPSE staff identified multiple study skill-related strengths that they observed in their students. For example, IPSE staff shared that students' strengths included (a) *identifying and using effective study tools/technology* and (b) *taking initiative and being independent in their study skills and behaviors*. A list of the categories and subcategories, including their frequency rating and label, are in Table 6.

Although it took time and effort, IPSE staff reported that *students understood what study habits worked best for them*. One interviewee shared:

It probably takes that first year (of the program) for students to understand what their own personal study habits are -- what supports work for them, what systems and routines are personally beneficial for them... Students become more aware of their own needs for studying and do a better job of studying and increasing the time or efficiency that they have as they're in the program.

Further, staff reported IPSE students did a good job of *using the study tools*, especially technology-assisted study tools. One interviewee shared:

A lot of our students are really comfortable with technology. So, they'll use either their phones, looking stuff up on Google, or using a Quizlet. Videos, sometimes...either we'll find videos for them, or they'll find videos... They'll set up or we'll set up Zooms together to meet online and do like a one-on-one tutoring thing that's helpful.

With time, students not only began to get a better grasp on which tools and strategies worked, but they also began to *take more initiative for their learning*. For example, one interviewee shared about an instance when students persevered and demonstrated more initiative

after they experienced failure. This staff member felt the students learned from this experience, adjusted their study practice, and achieved different results moving forward:

I remember you had this online class, and all the students did really bad on the first test. It was a hard test, too...And they were all really upset about it. We talked like, “Hey, this was a hard test and you guys tried your best. We're just going to try again next time.” And I saw how the students put more effort in the next time to look over the material, learn it, study it, and all of that. And they improved. They did better on the next test.

Multiple interviewees noted that, over time, IPSE students also *exhibited greater independence in study skills and study-related behaviors*. One interviewee observed:

In study skills, I see strengths of independent studying, note-taking, the ability to access information that might help them learn the material. If they're studying for a class, then they know that they've got notes that they may have taken, or they may have study guides or there may be a video that they could go back and access. They no longer ask, “Where do I find? Where do I find?” And if they do forget that they have all these things, we can just say, “You have notes. And what about your online course? Can you go there and find some?” “Oh, yeah, there was a video on it.” So, a prompt can trigger an access to materials that they personally need. And not the mentor or the staff, taking the mouse, clicking the spot, getting it open.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to learn more about IPSE students’ academic enabling behavior strengths. Using a strengths-based framework instead of a deficit-oriented one, IPSE staff can help students use their academic enabling behavior strengths as assets to help them reach their educational and employment goals. For example, if a student’s interpersonal skills are

strong, they may do particularly well utilizing study halls, peer supports, or engaging in group work. Conversely, a more reserved student may benefit from or choose to develop strategies that require less social interaction. For example, this individual may benefit from focusing on improving independent study skills (e.g., taking and reviewing class notes and memorization strategies). Thus, helping students identify academic enabling areas in which they are strongest may help equip them to utilize their strengths and assets to meet their goals.

There are several ways to identify students' academic enabling behavior strengths. One method is to consult with those who work with IPSE students, such as IPSE staff. The insights learned can then be analyzed to inform IPSE program initiatives utilizing strengths-based approaches.

### **Students' Interpersonal Skills Development is Notable**

During the interviews, most IPSE staff emphasized interpersonal skills. For example, one interview question asked IPSE staff to rank the four academic enabling behavior domains by importance. Most interviewees (70%) ranked interpersonal skills as the most important or second most important category of academic enabling behaviors (Author, 2022). Furthermore, nine out of 10 interviewees indicated that IPSE students' interpersonal skills improved with time in IPSE programs. No other category or subcategory was mentioned by this many interviewees.

In another study, input from IPSE students also suggested that interpersonal skills may be especially important (Author, 2022). IPSE students in a southeastern state were asked to complete the *Academic Competence Evaluation Scale-College Form* (DiPerna & Elliott, 2001) at multiple points in their programs. The analyses of students' *ACES-College* responses indicated interpersonal skills were the only domain of academic enabling behavior in which first- and

second-year IPSE students' ratings demonstrated a statistically significant difference (Author, 2022).

Moreover, our study's results align with previous research that suggested interpersonal skills are important, and IPSE programs provide unique opportunities for individuals with ID to develop social connections and interpersonal skills. In a systemic review of empirical studies, Louw et al., (2019) described key factors that support social interaction for young adults between 18- and 30- years old. Their review indicated that social interventions created more occasions for individuals with ID to connect with their peers and provided opportunities to develop mutual relationships that existed outside of the structured setting (e.g., school, work). These friendships, which exist independently of structured settings, are the interpersonal connections individuals with ID said they valued the most. Furthermore, Badia et al. (2013) found that community participation was predictive of emotional well-being, physical well-being, and quality of life among individuals with ID.

More specific to IPSE programs, parents interviewed by Miller et al. (2018) indicated that college was when their young adults with ID developed genuine friendships for the very first time. Sheppard-Jones et al. (2018) found that students who participated in IPSE programs experienced more social experiences in their daily lives (e.g., hanging out with friends, dining at a restaurant) compared to individuals with ID who did not participate in IPSE programs. Also, McKay et al. (2015) interviewed IPSE students and asked about their attitudes toward their program and their experiences in the post-secondary environment. Students shared that their participation in an IPSE program provided opportunities for social interactions that they had not experienced in the past. They also shared that their IPSE programs helped them improve their social skills, including helping them learn how to ask people to become friends and how to work

with people they did not like. Since there is a significant body of research indicating social interactions facilitate a sense of belonging and improved physical and emotional well-being, an increase in interpersonal skills is a notable and promising finding. Leveraging interpersonal skills within a strengths-based approach may be a strategic way to enhance IPSE students' academic success and general well-being.

### **Cross-Academic Enabling Behavior Student Strengths**

To understand IPSE student strengths more broadly, a list of strengths across all enabling behavior areas was generated and meta-categories (i.e., strengths that existed in more than one domain of academic enabling behaviors) were identified (see Table 7). Interviewees mentioned three meta-categories of strengths: (1) *students' willingness to become involved*, (2) *students' willingness to ask for support*, and (3) *students' goal orientation*. For example, in three of the four academic enabling behavior areas (i.e., interpersonal skills, academic engagement, and motivation), interviewees mentioned that IPSE students were willing to be involved across a variety of activities and contexts. Many of these meta-category strengths mirror what is found in the existing IPSE literature. For example, in terms of students' *willingness to become involved*, IPSE students were reported as engaging in learning-related discussions with others (Kubiak, 2015) as well collaborating in and out of class, participating in tutoring, joining in class discussions, and making presentations with their undergraduate peers without ID (Hendrickson et al., 2015).

Existing research also corroborates our finding that IPSE students are *willing to ask for support*. In a qualitative study, students explained that they felt comfortable asking questions in supportive learning environments (Kubiak, 2017). Lastly, previous research aligns with our finding that both IPSE staff perceive students as *goal-oriented*. In Rillotta et al. (2020), students

and peer mentors shared that IPSE students had the confidence to work toward their goals. Similarly, Kubiak (2015) reported IPSE students were motivated to participate in coursework because they wanted to achieve their personal goals. Knowing that these strengths span multiple academic enabler domains and are corroborated by other studies, IPSE programs may be able to anticipate and leverage these personal assets during programmatic and individual planning, including the person-centered planning process.

### **Limitations**

This study was not without its limitations. First, all information was based on IPSE staff members' perceptions of IPSE students' demonstrated academic enabling behaviors. It would be beneficial to have input from a broader range of university staff. For instance, although some IPSE staff taught IPSE-specific classes (e.g., study skills) and other IPSE staff were former peer mentors and discussed the IPSE student experiences in an inclusive classroom setting, it would be helpful to have input from individual professors and lecturers. Input from professors/lecturers could be compared with IPSE staff perceptions, which could be used to develop a more comprehensive understanding of IPSE students' academic enabling strengths.

Furthermore, to develop a more well-rounded understanding of IPSE students' strengths, it would be helpful to have input from IPSE staff who work in various states and/or geographical regions. The IPSE staff interviewed in this study were from the same state. Having data from IPSE staff who work in multiple states and/or geographical regions could allow for a comparison to determine whether there are state/regional differences in perceived competence. At a minimum, this could be survey data that addressed IPSE staff perceptions across states and/or regions.

Lastly, to develop a more inclusive understanding of IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors, IPSE students should have input. This study did not include the voice of students with an ID. Consequently, we do not know whether IPSE students' understandings of their own academic enabling behaviors align with IPSE staff perceptions.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The voice of students with ID are often excluded from literature, specifically from special education and school psychology literature (Roach et al., 2021; Roach et al., 2009). Future studies should include interviews with IPSE students that allow for a deeper understanding of IPSE students' academic enabling behaviors from their perspective. For instance, students could be asked about their understandings of their academic enabling behavior strengths, whether they see growth in these areas over time, what can be done to support them as they leverage their strengths, and the barriers that hinder their development.

Furthermore, our study identified that IPSE students demonstrated growth in interpersonal skills with time in college. Additional research should be conducted to learn which components of ISPE programs most significantly influence interpersonal skill development, how interpersonal skill growth seen in the academic setting impacts other areas pertaining to the college experience that are more loosely associated with their studies and coursework, and how interpersonal skill growth specifically related to academic enabling behaviors generalizes to post-graduation experiences (e.g., employment, personal relationships, community involvement).

Lastly, many of the enabling behavior strengths IPSE staff mentioned can be taught. For example, students can learn study skills and appropriate classroom participation behaviors. Reed et al. (2016) suggested that when IPSE students participated in a note-taking intervention, their note-taking abilities improved. Students in IPSE programs also learned study skill strategies like

making concept maps to facilitate their learning (Kubiak, 2017). Related to class participation, Lipscomb et al. (2018) conducted an intervention study where they found a functional relation between the intervention and self-regulation. Research that contributes to establishing an evidence base of effective interventions for academic enabling behaviors would be valuable to the field.

### **Conclusion**

Utilizing the academic enabling behaviors framework within a strengths-based approach has the potential to empower IPSE students as they meet their short- and long-term goals. It is our hope that the results of this study may spur future research to help IPSE staff develop systematic processes for identifying students' strengths as they relate to AEBs. This would hopefully pave the way for more supportive and effective programming to help equip individuals with an ID with skills for success in college and beyond.

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## ACADEMIC ENABLING BEHAVIOR STRENGTHS IN IPSES

1

**Table 1***Interviewee's Colleges and Universities*

| Institution | Number of Interviewees | Location     | Projected Time for IPSE Program Completion |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------|--|
| Program 1   | 4                      | Urban County | 2 years                                    |
| Program 2   | 2                      | Urban County | 4 years                                    |
| Program 3   | 2                      | Urban County | 2 years                                    |
| Program 4   | 1                      | Urban County | 2 years                                    |
| Program 5   | 1                      | Rural County | 2 years                                    |

**Table 2**  
*An Example of CQR Coding Process*

| <b>Term</b>        | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Example</b>   |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Transcript Excerpt | A block of text from that focuses on one idea                   | <p><i>Researcher:</i> How effective do you think those supports are?</p> <p><i>Interviewee:</i> I feel like for the most part, they're pretty effective. I think definitely social coaching is helpful because I feel like if we just had the class by itself without any follow up students would probably forget what they learned in class, because I know they're not always paying attention or if they are they can just still forget. So, I think the reinforcement of afterwards like, "Okay, here's what we're learning. But then here's the real life application" So I think that is helpful, and then definitely in the presence of someone there to help them through it.</p> |
| Domain             | The broad subject area  | Interpersonal skills   |
| Core Idea          | A summary that concisely captures the essence of the text block | Interpersonal skills are "pretty effective," especially coaching to reinforce learned social skills.   |
| Category           | Phrases that capture common elements across core ideas          | Effectiveness of supports  |
| Subcategory        | A phrase that further capture similarities within categories    | Social coaching was effective  |

**Table 3***Staff Perceptions of Students' Interpersonal Skills Strengths*

| Subcategory  | Label   | Interviewees |
|--|---------|--------------|
| Interpersonal skills improved/increased over time  | General | 9            |
| Making friends/building connections  | Typical | 6            |
| Willingness to engage with others (e.g., participate in class or campus activities, share ideas) | Typical | 5            |
| Self-awareness   | Variant | 2            |

*Note.* The column headed "Interviewees" refers to the number of interviewees who discussed an idea in a respective subcategory.

**Table 4***Staff Perceptions of Students' Academic Engagement Strengths*

| Subcategory                       | Label   | Interviewees |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--------------|
| Participating in class discussion | Variant | 3            |
| Adapting to instructional demands | Rare    | 1            |
| Eagerness to participate          | Rare    | 1            |
| Requesting support                | Rare    | 1            |

*Note.* The column headed "Interviewees" refers to the number of interviewees who discussed an idea in a respective subcategory.

**Table 5***Staff Perceptions of Students' Motivation-Related Strengths*

| Subcategory                                  | Label   | Interviewees |
|--|---------|--------------|
| Having a goal/value orientation              | Typical | 6            |
| Willingness to work/Desire to succeed        | Typical | 6            |
| Active involvement in learning opportunities | Variant | 4            |
| Intrinsically motivated                      | Variant | 3            |
| Self-advocacy skills                         | Variant | 2            |
| Persistence                                  | Rare    | 1            |
| Positive attitude/sense of adventure         | Rare    | 1            |

*Note.* The column headed "Interviewees" refers to the number of interviewees who discussed an idea in a respective subcategory.

**Table 6***Staff Perceptions of Students' Study Skill Strengths*

| Subcategory  | Label   | Interviewees |
|--|---------|--------------|
| Taking initiative and being independent in their study skills and behaviors    | Typical | 5            |
| Identifying and using effective study tools/technology                         | Variant | 4            |
| Awareness that study skills are important and related to their long-term goals | Variant | 2            |
| Improvements in time management/scheduling                                     | Rare    | 1            |

*Note.* The column headed "Interviewees" refers to the number of interviewees who discussed an idea in a respective subcategory.

ACADEMIC ENABLING BEHAVIORS: IPSES

**Table 7**

*Students' Academic Enabling Behavior Strengths*

| Interpersonal Skills  | Academic Engagement   | Motivation  | Study Skills   |
|---|---|---|--|
| Strengths Similar Across Multiple Academic Enabler Domains          |   |   |  |
| Willingness to engage with others                                   | Participating in class activities<br><br>Requesting support | Active involvement in learning opportunities<br>Self-advocacy skills<br>Having a goal/value orientation | Awareness that study skills are important and related to their long-term goals                       |
| Strengths Unique to Specific Academic Enabler Domains               |   |   |  |
| Making friends/building connections                                 | Adapting to instructional demands                           | Willingness to work/Desire to succeed   | Taking initiative and being independent in their study skills and behaviors                          |
| Interpersonal skills improved/increased over time<br>Self-awareness |   | Persistence<br><br>Positive attitude/sense of adventure<br>Intrinsically motivated                      | Improvements in time management/scheduling<br>Identifying and using effective study tools/technology |

**Figure 1****Interview Protocol**

I'm interested in learning more about learning-related non-academic thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that support the academic success of students who participate in IPSE programs. More specifically, I'm interested in learning more about IPSE students' communication and cooperation skills, their initiative and persistence of academic behaviors, their motivations and interest in learning new information, and their study skills. I'm interested in what you see in these areas.

I'm guessing you've worked with many students and I know that everyone is different. As you're thinking about how to answer the questions, please try to think about the students that are most characteristic of individuals in IPSE programs instead of the exceptions in terms of academic performance. Please do not reveal any of the students' identities.

| Academic Enabler Area  | Questions   | Potential Prompts  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Interpersonal Skills</b></p> <p><i>I want to learn about how their <b>interpersonal skills</b> in the classroom and other academic environments.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking about IPSE students' interpersonal skills in academic settings/activities, what strengths to you see?</li> <li>• What could they use help with in terms of interpersonal skills?</li> <li>• How important do you think interpersonal skills are to students' academic success?</li> <li>• What supports are in place to help students with these skills?</li> <li>• How effective do you think these supports are?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well do they get along with others in class?</li> <li>• How do they get along with others in academic-related settings outside of class (e.g., study groups, group projects)?</li> <li>• How well do they listen to others?</li> <li>• Do students make connections with non-IPSE students in their classes? Have you seen this have an impact on class engagement?</li> <li>• How do you think interpersonal skills relate to students' academic success and class engagement? Have you seen how they relate?</li> <li>• Do you measure/track this skill/trait in students?</li> </ul> |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Engagement</b></p> <p><i>I'd like to learn more about their <b>academic engagement</b>.</i></p>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking about IPSE students' engagement in academic settings/activities, what strengths do you see?</li> <li>• What could they use help with in terms of academic engagement?</li> <li>• How important do you think academic engagement-related behaviors are to students' academic success?</li> <li>• What supports are in place to help students with these skills?</li> <li>• How effective do you think these supports are?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When they participate in a class discussion, what does that look like?</li> <li>• When they participate in small group activities, what does that look like?</li> <li>• When they need help in class, what do they do?</li> <li>• Do you measure/track this skill/trait in students?</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Motivation</b></p> <p><i>I want to learn about their <b>motivations for learning new things and academics</b>.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking about IPSE students' motivation in academic settings/activities, what strengths do you see?</li> <li>• What could they use help with in terms of academic motivation?</li> <li>• How important do you think motivation-related behaviors are to students' academic success?</li> <li>• What supports are in place to help students with these skills?</li> <li>• How effective do you think these supports are?</li> </ul>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do they look for ways to challenge themselves academically? If so, how?</li> <li>• Do they set learning/classroom goals and then try to reach these goals? If so, tell me more.</li> <li>• Do they think about their work and then try to improve? If so, what does this look like?</li> <li>• Do you measure/track this skill/trait in students?</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Study Skills</b></p> <p><i>I'd also like to learn more about their <b>study skills</b>.</i></p>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking about IPSE students' study skills, what strengths do you see?</li> <li>• What could they use help with in terms of study skills?</li> <li>• How important do you think study skills are to students' academic success?</li> <li>• What supports are in place to help students with these skills?</li> <li>• How effective do you think these supports are?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strategies do you see them using to help them remember information?</li> <li>• What do they do to help prepare for class?</li> <li>• What do they do to help prepare for assignments and / or exams?</li> <li>• Do you measure/track this skill/trait in students?</li> </ul>   |

Are there any other important non-academic thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that are important for IPSE students' academic success, that we haven't talked about? Can you describe them?

Please rank the behaviors we just talked about – interpersonal skills, academic engagement, motivation, and study skills – in order of importance?

**Background/Additional Information Questions**

*I'd like to learn a little more about your interactions with students in IPSE programs.*

- In what capacity do you work with students in IPSE programs?
- How long have you worked with students in IPSE programs?
- About how much time do you spend in contact with IPSE students per week?  
    About how many students do you come in contact with each week