

**The University Experience for Students with ADHD: The Strengths of ADHD in an
Academic Setting and Use of Accommodations**

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Abstract

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder which can be associated with negative academic outcomes in university students. However, less is known about possible benefits of ADHD in a university context. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of university students with ADHD, including perceived benefits of ADHD, and how ADHD affects students' academic outcomes as well as their experience with accommodation. In this study we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 students (aged 18 – 39; 77.3 % women) from Brandon University who were experiencing ADHD symptoms. We asked participants a variety of questions about their experience of having ADHD in university, including benefits and drawbacks, and their experiences using accommodation services (if applicable). Interviews were recorded and transcribed and analyzed for common themes. Results showed that a main theme regarding the benefits of ADHD in an academic setting included showing a strong passion toward a topic. Other main themes related to the benefit of ADHD included heightened creativity and understanding how one's brain works best. Regarding drawbacks to having ADHD in university, many students reported having difficulty maintaining focus on tasks in which they were not interested. Participants also commonly mentioned being easily distracted by external stimuli. In regards to participants' experiences with accommodation services, it was found that accommodations helped participants to accurately demonstrate their learning and decrease their anxiety. Accommodation services also provided ways to compensate for participants' inability to sustain focus during lectures. Results can inform research on ADHD as well as student services at universities. In particular, the results of this study add to the literature by including some of the perceived benefits of having ADHD from the perspective of university students.