

Broadening Our Lens

What Autistic College Students' Lived Experiences Reveal About Student Success

THE STUDY	A qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of 10 adult college students with autism navigating nutrition in higher education.
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THREE RESEARCH INSIGHTS — AND WHY THEY MATTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

RESEARCH INSIGHT	PARTICIPANT EVIDENCE	CONNECTION TO STUDENT SUCCESS
Academic demands can compete with basic needs.	Jasmine reflected: “This week’s food choices have been impacted severely in favor of the success of my academic performance.”	What happens when the pursuit of academic success competes with the conditions that support learning?
Hunger can interfere with concentration.	Lori described being “constantly hungry” while trying to focus on class or work, making it difficult to “concentrate and be able to perform well.”	What might educators overlook when they see a student struggling academically?
Available resources aren’t necessarily usable resources.	Dustin explained: “I have an unlimited meal plan, and I only go to the dining hall, I would say, literally, no more than twice a week. And twice is still being generous.”	How can institutions understand whether their resources work for the students they’re intended to serve?

A BROADER LENS

Everyday conditions Schedules • sensory environments • social interactions • available resources	Student experience Negotiating hunger, comfort, time, and competing demands	Learning and participation Conditions that may shape concentration, belonging, and engagement
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DISCUSSION

1. What might we overlook when we focus only on what happens in the classroom?	2. How might understanding experiences like these inform the way we teach, advise, or design campus resources to support student success?
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Interpretive note: These qualitative accounts illuminate conditions relevant to student success; they do not establish causal effects on academic outcomes or imply that all autistic students share these experiences.