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Episode 9 : ADHD and the College Student Experience [Full Episode]

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[MANDI] Hey, y'all Mandi here. Welcome to the SAS podcast. It's October and that is ADHD Awareness Month. In acknowledgement of that we wanted to focus on ADHD and how it impacts college students. In Student Accessibility Services we believe that hearing our students and listening to their lived experience is an integral part of our work. While we can put accommodations in place, offers strategies and work with students so they can succeed. Ultimately, it is the student and their own willpower and resilience that gets them across the finish line to graduation. I'm joined today by Mike, a UMaine student with ADHD, who is here to answer questions about his experience living with ADHD and cover some strategies that he uses to help organize his life. Also joining us is Amy Sturgeon, one of the professional staff at Student Accessibility Services. She'll be sharing some additional information about our office, as well as some suggestions that have worked for other students with ADHD. Welcome to you both.

[AMY] Hi there! Hi Mike. Thanks so much for joining us today. And it really means a lot to Mandi and I, that you're willing to share information about your experience with ADHD and just your life experiences in general. And we're just really thrilled and excited to have the opportunity to talk with you today. So when Mandi and I started thinking about what types of questions we wanted to ask you. We thought about how ADHD impacts people, not only in an academic way, but really in their whole life. And that could include socially like building relationships or just everyday stuff. And so really, our first question for you is focused on ADHD and how it may impact you socially.

[MIKE] So with that, that's kind of hard to answer because I've had it for my whole life. So like with ADHD and I'm assuming this is part of ADHD, I've always looked at things more logistically. Like I can't really be like, oh, that's different because of my ADHD. I'd would need to like be like, it would be more of a scientific experiment and be like, oh, this is why I'm acting this way. And it's because of the ADHD, which is really hard to apply to, you know, ADHD or really any mental condition, diagnosis, whatever. So it's kinda it's really hard to answer how it would impact me socially. I mean, when I was younger, I was I was put on medication in second grade. And when I was younger and this is true for me and my cousin who's also has it and also was put on medication at a young age. It would impact our behavior and our personality. Whereas I would be I when I'm on my meds, I eat like nothing. food looks like glass. I can't eat and maybe a bit quieter. My, the type of ADHD I have is PI Primarily Inattentive. It used to be ADD, but they changed that x years ago. I have no idea. My cousin had ADHD or now AD HD, Primarily Hyperactive, I think PH, And so for him, he would just go mellow. And I suppose for him that kind of still persists. Whereas for me, it's less noticeable. So behaviourally, I suppose it varies depending on the severity and the the specific impedance it has on you.

[AMY] Yeah. Great answer. And I think, you know, it's it's true sometimes it's hard to see outside yourself and it's something that you've had for forever. It's hard to see whether it's going to impact you socially or not. But I think it's great feedback to talk to us about medication and how that might change behaviors. And I think for sure it does. What ways does your ADHD affects your ability to organize your life? And examples can be like paying bills are cheaper at keeping doctor's appointments. And a follow-up to that. What types of strategies have you developed over time to keep you on track with that kind of stuff?

[MIKE] So take it for face value. what most people think of when they think organized, my organization abilities are just garbage. My room's a mess, stuff like that. And it's always been that way. Wherever wherever like at home, I'll have my bedroom. I'll late for some people they like they hang out in their bedroom. They do they watch TV in their bedroom. All that. I had another space for that. That was also a mess. That that's just how it was. But for say, like in high school and through Boy Scouts and through just my parents pushing me, I started to take more. What's the word I'm looking for? Ooh, take more charge in getting myself on track. So I started using Google Calendar like sophomore year of high school. And I think that was that might not even have been out of being pushed towards it was being irritated that I didn't know, hey, you have an appointment today and I was like, why didn't you tell me? So I just started doing it myself so that I knew ahead of time. And that was that was a huge help. So all my appointments and now in college, all my classes are on there. If I've got an activity, if I'm going to hang out with people, I put that on the calendar just so that I know ahead of time. Which also helps with forgetting, which is also something that a lot of people with ADHD tend to do is forget things really easily. And then in terms of like bills, I don't have a lot of bills yet, but the best thing that I've seen people do is set up auto pay. It's just you don't even think about it. All I do is set a reminder in my phone, Hey, auto pay is coming tomorrow. And then okay. Make sure all the money's in the account that that's going to be taken out and you're all good for in terms of like say, file management for classes, like get your homework, you got your exams, syllabi, online, PDF textbooks, whatever whatnot. I've used the same structure, since freshman year of college, break it down by semester, then by class, and then from there, whatever is needed or not needed. That was probably the smartest college decision I made. And then in terms of actually getting stuff done, I use an app called Todoist where I can put all my assignments, put it in there. If someone like on the offhand gives me, hey, you should take this course in the future or you should use this professor or whatnot. I put that in there is anything that I might need to reference later. I put in there and then from there I'll either organize it further later, if I remember to, I generally forget, And from there, that's pretty much how I manage it. I know a lot of people with ADHD struggle with this kinda thing. I was I'm a bit of a techie myself and by a bit, I mean to a nullifying degrading amount. So it comes easier to me because just interacting with a

computer or my phone or whatnot I actively enjoyed doing it and for for me and I notice for a lot of people with ADHD as well, if there's something that you enjoy, it makes it so much easier to do. So that's, I, I'm very lucky to be able to enjoy using my phone and all that for the most part. To stay and then use it to stay organized where it feels like I'm doing something that I want to do kind of, not all the time, but most of the time. And that really, really helps. So for some people this, this wouldn't apply.

[AMY] Yeah, that's such a great answer in so many ways. And I think some of the points that I want to refer to you is that you took your own initiative in identifying what's going to work for you and you find something that you're engaged in and that you you kind of like to do and established a good system for yourself. So, that's wonderful. Mandi, what do you think?

[MANDI] I mean, it sounds like you have a strategy pretty well worked out, which is, which is, I feel like really commendable and impressive like for your, for your age. Because I know that it's, it's a real struggle for some students who were younger and for some students who are non-traditional and older adults and or maybe newly diagnosed you know. So, but I think that you have a very clear strategy, which I imagine is, is helpful and thank you for sharing the app recommendation as well. Amy what has your experience been with other students?

[AMY] yeah, I mean, I think that's another great question. I think as, you know, I was kind of referring to their earlier and talking with you, Mike, that I think that every student has to find what it's going to work for them. And I, there's lots of options out there. And it is really figuring out what's the best fit and what's going to be most workable for it for the student as an individual. And you know, some people are really tech focused like Mike is and using technology comes easily and it's engaging and there's an interest there. And I think that's awesome. So if that's the case, you're using organizational apps like Mike, you referenced one. There's a ton of them out there. A lot of them are free and they do calendar management. Reminders that you do have to kind of log stuff in. You take some time to do that. But I think it can really keep people on track really well. And if anybody is interested in learning more about organization apps when they're listening to our podcast, today, you should checkout our website, which is, Umaine.edu/studentaccessibility and we've got a whole list of different apps there for you to check out. We also highlight a new app of the month every month and encourage you to, to look at it. So Mike you mentioned earlier, doing some sort of auto pay system for bills or reminders that like, you know, you're going to see regularly for important due dates. So I definitely encourage that as well. Personally, I'm a big fan of making small lists. And usually what I do if I know I have some really important things to get done, or even less important, smaller things is I just make a quick list of maybe two or three things that I think need to be done, maybe with a small due date. I just keep that list on my desk in my line of sight and it's

there. I can't avoid looking at it. And then as I go along, as I accomplished like one or two things, they just scratch them off the list and I find that like, you know, scratching the thing off the list gives me a small amount of instant gratification, makes me feel good and makes me feel like I accomplished something. So I tend to do that quite a bit. And I also wanted to mention that some students aren't really into technology and it's frustrating to have to learn a new tech piece or a new app and have to transfer due dates and deadlines on to a new piece of technology. And so what I want to say is that some students just aren't going to use tech apps. And that's OK. So using good old pen and paper and, and using a paper calendar where agenda book or a white board or something like that is great as well. And like overall, I, again, I think it's just, it's important to find what works for the individual. And then to also stick with some sort of routine and I don't know Mike do you have any feedback at all about that

[MIKE] Not off the top my head.

[AMY] Okay, I just figured I'd ask

[MIKE] I do have something to add, though. It should be noted for people listening that don't have ADHD. Like if in my case, if I put my homework assignments, all of them in my as soon as I get the email from, what are we using now Brightspace? Soon as I get the email Brightspace, this assignment is going to be due at this day, blah, blah, blah. Soon as I put that in, even though I'd put it in, does not mean it's going to get done, especially not in a timely manner. For example, this morning. I got out of bed and did my laundry. That's weird. I browsed amazon prime because there was a lot of stuff I needed to buy that was important, like I'm looking for a printer and stuff like that, stuff that I needed but wasn't a priority. I mailed my absentee ballot. But you know what I didn't do. I wasn't paying attention in class. And after this, I'm doing the homework that's due at 08:00 PM tonight when I could have done it for the past week. So just because we get like you can, you can, we can manage our time. Quote unquote, we can manage, plan to manage our time is a probably better way to do it. And then as soon as like I'm sitting down, I'm ready to do my work. And then suddenly some thought pops in my head, oh, you know what, I should do that instead, it'll only take me five minutes and then 50 minutes later, I should probably get back to the other thing that another thought pops in. So just wanted to put that in.

[AMY] Yeah, I think that's a great point. And that is certainly that you can have some good strategies and intentions to get stuff done, but then something else kind of puts you in a different direction. And I think being mindful of that as something that can happen is important. If it's possible to be mindful to try to redirect it if you can. You know?

[MANDI] One of the other questions I have is, what advice would you give to other students that either have ADHD or another disability if they're just they're just starting their experience? Now that you're further along in your education.

[MIKE] Definitely work with the SAS the accommodations that I've received because of my ADHD have probably what ended up keeping me in college because otherwise, I get extended time and quiet place to take tests because tests kill me. This has, this has always been true. This, this back through like middle school even I was always the last person to turn in, like a quiz or a test or whatever. And like like I said, I was doing great in high school grade wise by was still the last person to do it. And that's not because like I was doing it right. That's just because I'm slow. I'm just really slow it taking it. And that changed the game for me. So definitely work with the SAS. Something I found that really helps me is finding a group of people in my major, taking as many as the classes that I can with them, hanging out with them. And that really helps keep me like on my A-game. And like Oh do we have the assignment due in case like I miss something in class or if I miss the note or something then they help me with that. I help them with that, blah, blah, blah. Before coronavirus, I'd like to go to for mechanical engineers. We've got a lounge in Boardman Hall that was great to work at. And then the library was also great on second floor in the quiet space. That was also fantastic. And in terms of actual just focusing and this applies, it applies to a lot of people, a lot of people like the lo-fi beats and whatnot on YouTube, that 24 hour live stream that's always going on. I do. I go for like soundtracks, like movie soundtracks, game soundtracks, Star Wars, Interstellar, Minecraft, stuff like that. They're all super soothing and really helped me focus. So I guess that's four quick points. I could probably go on, but that's all I got off the top my head.

[MANDI] Thanks

[AMY] I want to say thank you for suggesting our office to other people. and some people think that they have to get connected with us right away or right at the start and then first semester. And certainly that's fantastic, but they don't have to do really, there is no deadline. And so if students are starting to struggle four semesters in or they arrived at something you in their life that's impacting them. Our area can provide accommodations for than getting connected with us is really great, you know? And I want to encourage students to be able to make contact with us and just have a conversation about what's going on and talk about what accommodations might be available?

[Mike] Yeah.

[MANDI] I think that's been especially true this semester to we've gotten a lot of calls from people that were like, so I have x and I was fine and now I'm not fine. And so this, this whole new kind of world that we're living in is definitely exacerbating a lot of things for people that like they were able

to keep things on a specific track. But it's just it's just not as easy. And they find that they do need help. But, you know, in, in a lot of cases it's taking them several weeks to reach out to us. And and so we always want to talk to someone and we're never going to force students to come into our office and use their accommodations. But at the same time, you know, we we really do want to be helpful, so thank you for that. So I have a question which is, maybe sounds a little abnormal, but it's something that I've seen going through the communities of people who have varying disabilities, thinking about ways and can you think of any ways in which ADHD has improved your life or improves or maybe not even improved. But like, can you comment on how your world view might be different from other people that you talk to you that don't have ADHD?

[MIKE] So it's kind of hard to say that if ADHD really improves my life, so to speak. I mean, that like I said earlier, it's I've always had it. So it's in a sense part of who I am. So it's, it, there's nothing I can compare and contrast to. Like, if I didn't have it, this would be so much better. And I mean, there would like there are things that if I didn't have ADHD, things will be better. Like I'd probably be able to get stuff done on time. Or like another thing that keeps on coming up in my college life. A lot of I have to take my meds in the morning and they take about an hour to an hour and a half to actually work its way through the bloodstream and get me go and pride or that I can't do work late. It's just, it's painful. So like some people hate 8 AMs because they don't want to get out of bed in the morning, right? I hate 8 AMs. Because if I do, I gotta get out of bed at six to make breakfast, to take my pill. You can't take the pill without food or else you're gonna feel like garbage. So that means I gotta have food done by 630. And then take my pill at 630 and then go to class. So it's not like like I know some people are like like freshman year they'd be slogging out to 8 AM, 745 in the morning in their pajamas. Like that sucks for you, but I'd love to be able to do that. Or like get out of bed at nine and like do my homework assignment for my class that's due that due at noon. Now, it's not like that for me. I'm going to have to get up either earlier or do it much faster than you. So it makes it a lot more difficult for people to do it with like time constraints because I can't just stop doing it at night and then being like, oh, I should go to bed at a reasonable hour. You gotta, you gotta figure out there's no you can't make priorities. You're kind of at the whim of the medication. So it's it's a bit more than that would be nice to not have to do. But back to the original question of, does it improved my life? I mean, like I said earlier, it's part of who I am. So but if I didn't have it, I don't know if I would be the person that I am. So it's kind of hard to like outright reject it. I guess that's that's how I'd have to leave it.

[AMY] Wow, and I think that what you said is such a powerful statement. And I just want to validate it that yeah, this is part of the whole like ADHD is part of you and you wouldn't be here unless you have it. So super important to acknowledge that. And I think that we believe that ADHD is part of the

diversity of humanity really. And you know, Mike, What are your thoughts overall and not such a broad statement, but what do you think?

[MIKE] On ADHD as a whole?

[AMY] Just being part of a diverse population of people.

[MIKE] I feel that it's an interesting spot because it's very much misunderstood for and because it like a lot of, like it, like a lot of things. It's a, it's a gradient. There's isn't ADHD and then no ADHD. Some people just can't focus. Some people can't focus at all. Some people, like some people have learned like, have managed to go about their lives without medication. Some can't. It really depends and like it like the method of diagnosis varies. The symptoms vary. It's very convoluted, so it's very misunderstood. And I mean, part of that is just the science of our time. It's like compared to years ago, like the early two thousands, nineties, like it was a more recent discovery. Now it's a bit more, like I said earlier it I have ADHD PI used to be called ADD. I didn't know that that had changed until I did a paper on it two years ago. I haven't I don't remember when it changed. But like as it improves, it'll be easier to understand. But until then, it's just going to be much more misunderstood. And in a lot of cases not taken seriously. Like in some instances people are like, oh, everyone, some of the older generations are like oh everyone, everyone that grew up with a smartphone has ADHD. No. These, like like yes, some of these kids are growing up, super distracted and might have trouble focusing, but they're also still like ten years old. That's just kids in general. And they just happen to have these devices which amplify that. But as they get older, like some of the kids my age that have for more or less grown up with these devices all around us. Like they can put it down. They might have trouble with it, but they can put it down and they can and if they put it away, they'll focus just fine. I won't. And a lot of people like me won't. So it's not like it's not inhibited by the device. It's not caused by the device. And there's another thing, the stereotype that it's like little boys running around the classroom? No. That's just kids. And I mean, behaviors have changed a lot over the past 30 40 years or so. Kids are getting beaten less. So I mean, like when you think about it, we're, we're trying we're in this time where we're, we're changing a lot of factors in our society. We're trying to, you know, be nicer, raise kids better, stuff like that instead of Placebo be nicer. That were like back in the fifties and sixties where it was, it was all, you know, how you presented it at face value. But then behind your back it's all garbage. It's as, that's, as we're changing our society like that. And added to the rapid advancement of technology, people are putting the blame in different camps, which is why you see people saying, oh, all young people are ADHD because these devices or like stuff like that. So because of how fast things are changing, it's become a lot harder for people to place the blame on things. And it's overall a lot less simple because it's, it's, it's not going to be one thing, it's going to be, alright. There's these devices. How

is it affecting kids mental health? How we are rapidly increasing ability to evaluate on a psychological level, making it seem like, oh, people are more ADHD. No, we just understand it more now. So there's there's, there's so many factors, so many variables. And people are trying to simplify that, which ends up with us being very misunderstood. That was, that was a lot, that was all over the place. But if you want a textbook example of how some guys mind on ADHD works, There you go.

[AMY] Well, that's great. You mean a lot of really wonderful points. And I think overall, the messages that ADHD is, is greatly misunderstood or misrepresented in some ways and that there really needs to be more education out in society in general about what ADHD is, what it might look like in certain people and and also thinking about environments as well. And Mandi, I mean, I know that you've, you've really thought a lot about neurodiversity and diversity in disability. And I know you have so much to talk about this particular topic and what are your thoughts like overall about how ADHD is like part of diversity and why maybe it's misunderstood.

[MANDI] So I'm very passionate about this particular subject of, of human diversity. And there's so many different ways to look at the diversity of the human race. And when we talk about biodiversity, we don't include humanity most of the time, which is a mistake. We're just another creature on the planet. And so of course, there's a diversity of experiences and a range of ways in which we interact with the environment around us. So at SAS, we are trying to change the conversation from this person has this thing to, you know, more of a conversation about the fact that people who are atypical or people who have ADHD, are just another facet of the diverse human experience. Because we're finding more and more evidence throughout history and that there are so many individuals that had various disabilities. And without those people, by our collective history of humanity would be less advanced, less vibrant, less beautiful. I mean, the amount of information that's come forward about, you know, people talk about Van Gogh and how he was depressed, but they don't think about the fact that because he was depressed, he made this incredible art because that's how he saw the world. So without. And she think about disabilities like ADHD or depression being part of the diverse human experience. You think about the fact that those paintings wouldn't exist without his mental health struggle. So what we are trying to do here and what I am really passionate about is changing the language. From, you know, that this person needs to be, you know, like that there's something wrong as opposed to you, there's something different, you know, and, and pushing to create actual equitable access. So not just equal access, equitable access. So like the key is universal design for everyone. So if there were things like if there weren't tests that were timed, if people just were able to take that amount of time they need then students wouldn't need extra time. If every building on campus were fully accessible than students who are wheelchair users wouldn't need to use a different entrance. You know that if we build a world that is designed universally for everyone, then everyone gets the same amount of

access and everyone's able to participate in the same way. And I think one of the really key points that Mike brought up when he was speaking was the fact that our society is changing. And I think for the better. We are not, we are no longer in a place where we are willing to just shove people in the corner or make everyone present as neurotypical, make everyone present as the same in order to be normal and accepted. And I think that's the narrative that we really try and go with here is we are trying to make sure to like the stories of students who have various disabilities are heard because it's, everyone's experience is different. Just like every neurotypical person. Every neurotypical person's experience is different and how their disability affects them is different. And that's just part of the human story. So, and I think it's, it's just really important for us to tell the stories of people. And if we're not telling the stories of all people, if we're just telling the stories of people who are quote unquote normal or as Mike was saying, Have that, have that perfect front, that normal front where everything's fine even though they're a mess behind them. That like we're not actually telling the story of humanity where we're selling everybody a fiction. And I think it'll be really validating for other students who either have disabilities or even don't, who think they might have a disability to like hear something and feel really validated by the fact that like, you know what, that was my experience and maybe they didn't have parents who are understanding but are able to hear things in what you're saying or what Mike's saying that are really validating for them. And so that's our ultimate like social goal at our department. Like our regular function is to provide accommodations. But our social goal is really to provide a place that's like accepting and truly inclusive of everyone.

[AMY] Yeah, such powerful statements and really wonderful statements for sure.

[MANDI] And so the question I have is because I know this is in line with that. It's something that we kind of struggled to, you know, find ways to dispel myths about mental health and ADHD and other things. Because we know that people with ADHD can experience being misunderstood or stigmatized by like their friends, their peers, your family might have you experienced that personally or Harvard bots on that.

[MIKE] So in in varying capacity, it runs in the family under we think. My brother has it. He didn't have a diagnosed I think was I know. I'm not sure. I haven't done it. Keep tabs. But he had a diagnosed in middle school, maybe the first year of high school. He's a junior now, I think. And he started taking it, but there were times when he wasn't taking it, but then his grades will slip and it seemed like the conversation besides the point he grew up without it and he can do fine without it as far as we're concerned. But he could do better with medication or he could just apply himself, were not sure. He's kinda lazy and doesn't care about school, so it's hard to tell. My father has it is our understanding he does a lot of the same things I do. For example, a lot of guys with, people with

ADHD. We'll start a project. And like, depending on who you are, you'll put in a day's work, a week's work may be few hours, blah, blah, we'll get it started. We'll do all this planning. It'll be like is going to be the greatest thing ever. Week goes by, just sits there for months. That's the current state of the motorcycle that he took apart in the garage in June and has been sitting there sense. My grandfather, who was born in the forties, fifties, maybe. I'm not sure. Forties. He grew up, for since people can't see me, let me give a bit of background. I'm mixed race, I'm various shades of European and stuff like that. And then I am also African-American. The grandfather I'm talking about is pretty as far as we're concerned, full African-American, maybe something else mixed in somewhere. But we're not sure. He grew up in near the border of North Carolina and Virginia in a town called Bracie, which is named after the Bracie family, which used to run the slave plantation there. So deep south, it's still all tobacco farming. So when he grew up down there when he was in school, they just assumed he was stupid couldn't sit still and he was just misbehaving in the back of the class. But it sounds like based on how it's been described to me that he likely also ADHD is just it didn't, the diagnosis didn't exist then. So that would've been and I mean, there was also a whole ton of other ignorance at the time. So it kind of, it sounds to me like it runs in the family. So tying that back to the, tying that back to the, the misunderstood or stigmatized. Because that the traits that me and other of my family members have had or have. It's not it's never really been a problem at home. Everyone kind of gets it. It in, in a way. It almost seems like that's just how we act and it's not because of ADHD. But outside of the home. A bit of background. I attended a in high school, I went to a vocational high school, trade school. So there we spend half the year in the shop of our choosing that could be plumbing, carpentry, hairdressing, bio environmental technology like information systems, automotive, auto body, stuff like that. My shop of choice was computer aided drafting and design, so that I'm a mechanical engineering major now it really ties together well. But in that trade, tying it back to me saying that how I was a techie earlier we did a lot of work with computers, so that worked out for me well. So that made me more successful because of that. But also, so like I said earlier, we spent half the time in shop, our trade, half the time and academics. And it would be about a week to two weeks cycles. So you could spend 8 days and shop and then go 10 days in academics than 14 days and shop than 7 days and academics back and forth. So for me that constant switching made us so I didn't burn out as easily, which also contributed to my success. So now we've got the, the constant switching and the being a techie in my trade, which made my life easier. And then I was really some, surprisingly, I didn't go there with the intent of doing drafting. I was surprisingly good at it and the teacher was very helpful, very nice to me. Great guy. And he pushed me further. So having that support structure, have a school that that shifted things around in terms of instead of the normal, go to school every day academics, academics, academics. That also pushed my success further. So that made my grades a lot better, may be a lot happier and push my success further than it would've been at, say, a

regular high school. So because of all that's because of all that, I graduated top of my class in both drafting in the overall grade. You know, great grades, all that and well, the school didn't have like, AP courses. We just had honors classes. We didn't have like the like, there wasn't even language courses. I mean, kinda makes sense. A large majority of population the school, the student body was Latino, so there was a lot of Spanish speaking going on anyway. So it'll be kind of weird to just have a Spanish class. And I mean, I guess the, the other choice in the area was French and they just didn't feel like offering it. So though the classes weren't as hard, I guess, I mean, they were difficult and I still learned a lot of what people in surrounding areas learned, but they weren't like, you're going to be up til one in the morning doing this homework for AP World History or something like that. So it really worked for me and gave like this construed sense of like, wow, he's really killing it. And it wasn't to say that like my school was super easy. No, I was putting work in. It was just the structure of the school was just a lot easier for me to succeed. Whereas for other people, it was a, it was still difficult and like people would still stay up late doing homework or stuff like that. But it wasn't, it was more of a model of schooling that I think should be implemented elsewhere because I think it worked a lot better. And I mean, my mental health was definitely a lot better than, you know, other high schoolers my age. But because of that success has graduated top of my class, valedictorian and all that. Some people, a lot of my friends like to make jokes, "oh Mike you're only doing that good because your pill you didn't do squat", which I mean like one, ya'll lazy. Ya'll should do your homework on time. But also the pill doesn't make me better than you at puts me on par. It it's not, I don't, I'm not successful because of the pill. I am equal to you because of the pill. And then my own motivation, my own drive, my own personality is what makes me successful in this space. So for that, I suppose that's a bit of the stigmatization. I I'm I don't I've never really hid my ADHD. A lot of people that have it actually, we tend to overshare lot. So especially like even with people that we don't know at all. So it's never really been something I'm embarrassed by. I've never hid it. And no one's ever really said that to me seriously, like it's "Oh, it's because you're ADHD meds that you are that successful". But that I suppose is the closest I've ever gotten to some sort of stigmatization.

[AMY] And I was just thinking about this in, you know, transitioning to college? And certainly college schedules are quite unique and different from a traditional high school schedule where many students in high school are in classes from like 7:30 in the morning all the way through to 2:30 with very little free time and ability to do their own thing. So I'm just curious, like what when he got to school, did you find that like transitioning into college level schedules and courses worked for you because you had such a dynamic and different structure from in high school or did you struggle, you know, with the environment?

[MIKE] I definitely struggled. I remember first semester of freshman year, which oddly enough was the highest GPA per semester I've ever had or just in general? It was, it was a bit, I didn't even know the SAS had existed at this point. I don't think I got into I don't think I ever worked out the paperwork. I found out about it spring semester, freshman year, and then I got the paperwork in for fall semester of sophomore year, I think. But the overall transition wasn't great. I mean, it was it wasn't terrible. But I think the classes might have just been a bit easier then. But overall, it was definitely a lot more stressful, especially, especially sophomore year or spring semester of well, sophomore year was bad, but spring semester, freshman year was way more rough than the fall. That whole from spring semester freshman year to alike. Spring semester, sophomore year. It was just a whole mess of really try it like that points just trying to be like, hey, I'm a college student, yay. And then like really struggling.

[AMY] Yeah.

[MIKE] And like d minus failed a few courses, you know, that work that garbage stuff to get failed to maybe three over that span. I can't remember. It wasn't until junior year that I really started sorting things out and figuring it out for myself. And that's when things started actually going up in my GPA started recovering. Thankfully.

[AMY] Mike, do you think that the ADHD had a part of contributing to how rough your semesters were or was there other stuff going on? I was thinking that it's highly possible that ADHD did impact you

[MIKE] Partially, partially. I think part of it was I was for the first time my life, I was off the chain, so to speak.

[AMY] Having fun right?

[MIKE] Yes. What I mean by that is I didn't I wasn't like I had to, you know, if I like, I was the one that was going to class, it wasn't oh, you gotta get on the bus. You're not just gonna stay home. No. You're not your parents aren't gonna find out if you're like, I'm not going to class today, I'm going to sit and play video games all day. It like it was, you had to do it yourself. And that was the first thing. That's something I had to learn. Because back freshman year, this was because freshmen get the short end of the stick when they are scheduling classes. So I was having like nine AMs, eight AMs, stuff like that. And I was like, oh, this is terrible. I didn't sleep well last night. Sleep is more important. So I'm going to sleep in. And it was, it was hard for me to motivate. And especially with the early class as part of that was the ADHD meds. Because I was like, even, I'll get out of bed now and I'll go the dining hall and eat, take my pill, and then I'll be in a good mood for my 11 AM instead of rushing to my nine AM or my ten AM or whatever. So it definitely contributed in some

capacity. It was all over the place. Because like I said, there's, there's so many factors that contribute to your life. And the the brand new college experience having ADHD, having to, you know, move myself and do all that. It really was a learning experience. And I mean, it could have been much, much worse. I could have done stupid things. I didn't. But so yeah, in in at least partially it contributed wasn't the the whole thing and that definitely could have gone better. And I think if I maybe known more about it, then it probably would have gone better. But it's in the past now.

[AMY] Yeah. And I like your point about kind of figuring out how to work through a new level of independence and establishing what works for you with being a college student, being on here all I'm making your own choices and really relying on yourself that kind of get out of bed and do the work and get to class at all. So I want to just have a think about how ADHD can affect you in academics. And I know you've done a lot already, but is there anything else you can think of that you want to point out to the rest of the listeners about how it can affect you academically?

[MIKE] So it definitely affects me severely. And so like like I've said a lot, I need to take my meds to do work. Some people think that if you don't take medication for ADHD, over time. Like over time you'll learn to live without it. There's no, I don't have a clone. So there's no way of me to say whether or not that would have been true or not. Especially since I'd been on it from second grade. And I don't really remember much from them.

[AMY] Right.

[MIKE] But when I in high school, and this happened a lot in high school, I would forget to take my meds in the morning. So if I forgot to take my meds, school would be like hell, like just sitting in class. It would be quite literally physically painful. My limbs, my joints. They're very sore. Writing anything feels like a drag. It's just awful. And I wouldn't say its like withdrawal because withdrawal implies that you like if you're in rehab and you're going through alcohol, withdrawal, urine, pain the whole time? It's only painful for me when I'm in class. If I'm at a class, if it just like a Saturday morning, Fine. I'll take my pills on the weekends unless I gotta do work. Over the summer and depending on what I gotta do that day at work, maybe I won't take my pill. It's it's I don't need it. Which is what kinda constitutes withdrawal or addiction and that sort of thing. But it would be quite literally very physically painful and I would be completely miserable. But then like after it wears off for the day, my my dosage after wears off at like six or so hours later. Like I could still do work later and it wouldn't be painful. It just be difficult.

[AMY] right.

[MIKE] So it's very dynamic is very weird. And I mean, like, especially now in college where I'm paying for this, I don't exactly have time to run self experiments as much as I may like to. So

academically it definitely, it definitely affects me. Because even, like, even if it's something in school that I really enjoy, it might still, it'll still be difficult at times. Because especially if it's something tedious, like if it's something I enjoy, but I gotta do repetitively. Ooh boy, that is, that's not pleasant. And then there's like other things. Like, like I said earlier, early classes, yikes. Same thing goes for late classes because one of my classes that I have a class at 11 AM, that's fine. My pills are learned in my bloodstream whatnot. But the quiz is at seven PM on a Thursday online. Why? Why would you do that? Because that means that means I gotta take a booster pill with dinner, which will mess up my diet it for the rest of the night. These pills also, I take Vyvanse, they can mess up your sleep schedule. I remember I accidentally took my main dosage at 11:00 PM at night Freshman year by accident when I was thinking I was taking one of my other medications. I didn't not sleep that night. Tries I might've so it definitely definitely affects me. I mean, it would be less if professors didn't schedule quizzes at 7:00 PM. And I are like late late classes in general, just ridiculous to me. Like my cousin, the one I mentioned earlier who also has ADHD. He as he goes to Connecticut Central Connecticut State University, CCS, you he has a class from 8:45 to 10:00 PM

[AMY] That's really difficult. Wow, yeah.

[MANDI] What is way too late for me

[MIKE] However, it can work for our students because it could take night classes. And like if I were to be in that position, if I were to for the structure of my life, how I need to do things, need to take night classes. I could probably do it. I just need to take the pill. I've I've like I remember there was a project sophomore, junior, junior year, that I had to stay up to like 3:00 AM working on. And I was fine because I add my meds and it worked out great. I wasn't tired. I was, ate beforehand, had enough caffeine on hand, was great. But for like if I'm trying to maintain a proper sleep schedule and not to say that staying late taking night classes is against the proper sleep schedule. But sorry, a consistent sleep schedule is probably better way to put it. Like I'd try to go to bed at 11, get up at eight. That's like my ideal sleep schedule. And that's just what works for my lifestyle. So having stuff that late at night is is difficult for us and not having that flexibility is also difficult because like I said, my cousin, his class gets out of ten, normally he goes to bed at nine. So it's it's a bit rough for him. He's not having fun with that. So it definitely affects me. And people like me academically a fair amount. And of course for some people it's less. Because, like we were saying earlier, it varies there is very much very much variance and the severity of symptoms.

[AMY] Yeah. Okay.

[MANDI] So I have a question academic branch and we know this semester has been different for everybody across our entire country and probably internationally as well. And the shift to remote

and online learning has been affecting people in a variety of ways. So what has your experience been with this shift to remote learning?

[MIKE] Miserable. Yeah. Which is which I mean, I had a hope at the very beginning that'd be fine. Because like, I'm a techie, I love being, I built my computer myself. I built this whole lab, really, that battle station, whatever you wanna call it Workspace,

[AMY] Command center

[MIKE] Yes, on something like that over the past 5-6 years now, it's 2020. I don't know. And I love working with it. But the the online, the the, the structure of it. Like some classes, asynchronous. It's just watch a video online. I am maybe three weeks behind in some classes. I'm just reading the book at this point. I mean, it's working. It works. But it's kinda like I don't understand how people can just sit and watch these dragging on lectures for hours on end is just video after video after video. And it's not it's it's and maybe it is probably because of just, I know there's a lot of professors that would much rather be in front of a whiteboard. And I would much rather be in a lecture room, which is something I did not believe I would be saying three years ago or two years ago or ten months ago. But it's just, it's it's not like for, Like I said, I built my computer, then I lake I'd run it used to do that's how I made my money in high school was like fixing people's computers, being like some tech was Guy, the Geek Squad but, you know, cheap. All of that was self-taught. No one in my family had ever, no one in my family does stuff like that. And when I'm in my family, it's like, like taught me I didn't learn from Anyway. I'll learn from YouTube videos. I learned from reading online forums and stuff like that. But it was something I enjoyed and especially with the YouTube videos, the, the presenter, the host of the videos, had a much more living personality and a much better onscreen presence. And it's a much more professional job because it's not like your staring. You hear a voice over and you're staring at a white board and it's just drawing the old-time No, it's you get a shadow presenter then they pan to whatever they're working on. And it's lots of motion and stuff like that. It's much more engaging. And these online lectures aren't that. And like the live ones are a bit better. But they're not great. And in just across the board, I'm struggling to take notes. And I would, I would much rather be in the lecture room being able to watch it. And even if I was there, I'd still be zoning out from time to time. But whereas here, right now this semester, I've had very few, like, that was a real productive lecture. I got so many good notes. Whereas like, especially because I would really sucked about this whole thing is last less spring semester, I was doing great. I was on top of my game, I felt awesome. And then coronavirus said, screw you. So yeah. It's rough. It's very rough.

[AMY] Yeah. And I want to thank you for sharing that in that there's so much that's happened this year and have been out of our control. And everybody is struggling, struggling in some ways with like

the online learning format. And that probably includes professors too that, like you said, but that they probably would prefer to be in an in-personal environment too. But with everything going on with Corona and Covid, it that that's not the most optimal situation. And it's good feedback to hear that even if it's not good feedback, meaning like what you're reporting is, is that you're struggling and it's important for us to hear that. Hopefully, pass that on to professors. And I'm sure they're trying and they want to make it better. So yeah.

[MANDI] And Amy, what have we been hearing from like other students regarding online learning and like, are there, are there strategies or feedback that we're getting from students like this is working for me or I did this and it actually helped me stay on task or what have you been hearing from students?

[AMY] Well, you know, I think that it is true that I'm hearing similar stories with Mike, that the learning an asynchronous environment is difficult. Having to navigate a new learning management system has been difficult for some students. And I think I just want to acknowledge in general that students and professors and staff and everybody has had so much to deal with over the past few months that it's it's really hard, to kinda just stay on top of things and when there's a lot going on in life. But I know that we have to move forward in some way. We have to yes acknowledge that this particular semester's not for best, or what's happening in the world is not good. But we have to move forward. And I started thinking about strategies that could be helpful for students to navigate like online learning. And the first thing I thought about is trying to encourage students to build like an effective routine. And it's hard because when you meet, you might have one class that is asynchronous and one class that is on zoom that you have to report to you at a specific time and then online class that was totally, totally asynchronous. And how do you build a schedule around that when there's not a whole lot of schedule already in place. But I think building a routine is important. And sitting down and looking at Brightspace the learning management system. Looking at what you have to do on a daily basis for an hour or half an hour or whatever amount of time it is. You need to check on what you need to do for the week is really important. And I haven't tried to suggest students do that like every day, like me, no matter what time it is, it's in the morning and that works better. Great. It's two o'clock in the morning and that works better. Fantastic. But to try to stay on top of all the work and everything that's going on in Brightspace. I think that students need to look at that daily and just building that routine. Because I know that you're more likely to stay in a routine if you're doing it every day, kind of maintain like a habit of doing it. You know? And I think that the other thing that we talked about is using some sort of calendar system. I know we talked about it a lot earlier, but, you know, keeping on top of the due dates and putting them in a digital calendar or paper calendar that you can look at more regularly and see in front of you is super important. In Brightspace, there is a calendar function that's available for students. In some students told me that

they've had good luck with it, that they're due dates or readings and things like that tend to be like auto populated into a weekly, daily or monthly calendar. So try to encourage students to use that. And what are the other suggestions I thought about is just overall trying to be present in class, even if it's over zoom, setting up a good workspace for yourself. Whether that's in your home environment or maybe somewhere else on campus like the library or, or somewhere else. And trying to just stay engaged in the material. And I think like, you know, if you can establish that human connection with your professor or your peers and class, even if it's over zoom, then you're going to be more likely to, to stay engaged in the material. And fourth and I guess lastly, I've been thinking a lot about resilience and what we need to do to get through this. Really any bad situation is, is acknowledging that like some days are going to be really bad, you know, and other days are going to be okay. And we need to put one foot in front of the other. We have to be willing to say, wow, that really sucked and hit the reset button and start over again and try to maintain some positivity and just get through the semester. What do you think Mike? Do you have more comments about my suggestions?

[MIKE] My mentality is just been trying keep on trucking. Whether it's it's it's it's been way like my mental health is slowly degrading by slowly. I mean, it's been pretty, I mean, it could it could always be worse. But like it's spent I've just been, you know, less happy now. But you just gotta keep on trucking because it's not the end of the world and most importantly, it's not my fault. So that's really what's keeping me going, is just get through the day. And once you're done with your work, there's good food to eat in the kitchen and stuff. So that's, that's what's gotten me go and through it.

[AMY} Right. And I think that self-care is more into like, you know, I think we met earlier in the conversation. I'm talking about like the small things, small things that you can find happiness in. It is really important to try to acknowledge. Because sometimes when we look at our current situation, things can look a little bit more gray or more miserable than they, they should be. And how do we find happiness? How do we move forward? And taking care of yourself, doing what works for you to try to improve happiness, whether it's exercising or socially distancing socializing, you know, interacting with your friends or playing music or doing meditation or crafts or something like that to try to improve mood is I think a really good thing to do. And sometimes it's, it's easy to lose sight of that. Like, you know, what are the small things that we can do that maybe make us make us better, make us get through this situation.

[MIKE} Yeah, absolutely.

[MANDI] And I just want to ask, is there any any last thoughts you have from over our conversation or anything that came up for you that you want to mention?

[MIKE] Yeah. So I think there's I've got I've got a closing monologue or whatever you want to call it. I think what a lot of people just need to, and this isn't, like a lot of times, especially now it's like people like to put things on their Instagram story. Like don't say these things about, like to these people. You then blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And that's great and all. But a lot of times they can come off as more aggressive. And especially if you are like if you're saying like, if you're posting something ADHD related, don't make, make sure, you know someone with ADHD talk to them first. Be like, hey, what do you think of this? Do you think I should post this? Would this be good because a lot of times they can come off as more aggressive than you might think. Because like and I'm also saying this as a mixed race person, African-American. And there was a lot going on over the past few months regarding that. And there were something that I noticed was a lot of people and I'll be frank, a lot of white people making posts about African-American people. Like trying to step up being like, hey, we need to do this. But like not helping the situation, like at protests. And this is going to tie into a later point at protests like African American individuals that were protesting trying to communicate with the police. Because this is our, that's how we're going to solve the problem is through communication, not through violence. As much as some people would like to burn the city down. And I get that. It's been 70 years of this. But communication is what's going to solve it. Black people trying to talk to the police officers and then like someone white would become over, "don't, don't, don't talk to them. ACAB, kill, cops" stuff like that. Don't talk to this pig and stuff like that. Like you're not helping the situation. You need to stop thinking of yourself as a hero and start thinking of yourself as an assistant. Like, talk to people, get to know people were a lot of people that ADHD. We love to overshare. I'll talk about this with anybody. I'll talk about it if you don't want to hear about it. So like, do that. And like we said earlier, there's a lot of change going on in our society. And I think that as like psychology progresses, like the concept of like ADHD is going to go away. Or say Asperger's is gonna go away and it's going to be like in the future, you're more likely to be evaluated across like a broad spectrum at once. And you'll be given like a scorecard where you're like, oh, you're, you're, you place here on this level of how able you are to focus. And then like the like for example, a lot of people don't have ADHD, but like they tap their feet a lot when they're studying or whatever, or focusing. They not ADHD, they just have a habit or is it an impulse? What is it? How do we evaluate that? What's, what's your hyper activity score? Stuff like that. And like now, a lot of people are trying to put people into camps, like for, for an instance. And this is going back to like social media posts. A lot of people, like their Twitter bio or their Instagram by It'll be like ADHD, bipolar, depression, and stuff like that. But like putting that they're like, yes, you're representing yourself and that's good. But at the same time, you're making it easier for people to make assumptions about you and you like, and people will do that. It's super easy. We all do it and we should try not to. But like it's, it's just something that we as a society are going to have to figure out how to work around as things start moving from more definitive camps, to more grayscale

and more variance. And it's going to be a problem for us as well. Because like like I said earlier, I don't know if I like proud of my ADHD or I wouldn't say if I like I love my ADHD, I'm so glad I habit. But I'm also not like I'm not ashamed of it. And kinda in a sense proud of it, I guess. And here's another example. There's a guy and one of my online communities that shared something really interesting. So he is a medic. He and what he he's he was a volunteer medic at some of the protests over the summer and this regardless of what do you think of that ,the medics are always the good guys. You can't argue against a medic helping somebody. That's why killing medics is war crime. So he wears a plate carrier and for those that don't know, that is the vest that you put bullet proof armor plating in? Not that he needs it at the protests. There just very handy because they're covered in velcro. So you can velcro your MEDPAC, your First Aid kit here. You can Velcro a walkie talkie here, and it's, it's very fitting to your needs. He, a lot of people that wear those kind of vests because their covenant velcro like to wear like morale patches on them. Like I've got I've got some on my backpack that have like video game references on it or some various political messages, whatnot. He has a patch in. He's 30 years old, he has Asperger's and a lot of people don't know he has Asperger's because it's just his severity and how he's grown up over 30 years with his patch says ASPY on it. And some people view that as an offensive term. Like, why are you saying that? Why do you have that? Like, because some people use it as an insult. And some people are like, oh, he's putting people down. But no, that's just part of his identity. And that's that's also a note. Taking offensive language and reappropriating it for your own terms is something that I've liked to do because like I lay I've had insults thrown at me all the time. And especially I was younger. I just was like, yeah. Uh-huh. Because it makes me, it it doesn't, I don't let it tear me down. So we when we reappropriate those words, it makes us feel better about ourselves and it gives a sense of community. So if he's, when he wears the patches, that says ASPY. He's not letting people tear him down with it. And this applies to race, this applies to mental symptoms, conditions, whatever you want to call it. This applies to any labeling you could have. And whereas I really like that and it's, it's boosted by mental health a lot because I've been called a lot, lot of things over the years. And whereas like anyone else could be like "were you insulted by that". I'm like, no. I think it's funny that you can call me whatever he wants. I don't really care. But the problem with that in the future could arise when ADHD becomes less of ADHD and more like, oh, you just can't focus. Well, then it's less of camps. From a like on your medical report, it's not you have ADHD. It's seven different bars or numbers and how Well, on a scale of 0 to 100, you perform in that, in that sector, that area. So I think that that could be a problem in the future. But for the time being, if like the most important thing that you can do as someone that has ADHD, that has Asperger's as autism that has anything, or is black, is Mexican, Hispanic, whatever is, do what makes you feel best. If you feel insulted by those terms, I highly recommend. Just reappropriate it. Take it for yourself. It, I've used it in this, build me up a whole ton and I'm probably a lot happier than I would be if I hadn't. Because if

you let it get to you, it will make you miserable. And we see it everywhere. Depression is, so many people are depressed. And while that necessary isn't necessarily a symptom of being called these things, it can certainly contribute. So if you, if you take, if you take the power back, good song, Rage Against the Machine. If you take the power back, you definitely feel a lot better about yourself. And then people like you, you can help build them up as well. I think that's really important and I think people should know that.

[MANDI] Thank you so much, Mike, for volunteering and for talking with us today. And we've really, really deeply appreciate it. Like I said earlier, we're, we're really looking for ways to talk and engage with students which is much harder this semester then and has been in the past. But to also really try and always be centered on the student's voice and not our own. And thank you Amy for joining and providing your experience as an accessibility services professional. And so just a couple quick wrap ups. We now have an Instagram. So you can go check us out. We're @umainesas on Instagram and we have also Facebook page. We're going to be posting various content about ADHD awareness month throughout this month and in the future about other things we want to challenge myths around disability and breakdown stigma and generally makes sure that all of the students that attend the university feel like they're having an experience that is valid for them and that they are seen and included. So as always if you know someone who meets our office or if you need our office, please reach out to us. And thank you all for listening. As always, SAS is here to help.

[AMY] And thank you again, Mike for this really powerful message that you've delivered today and so much.

[MIKE] My pleasure.

[AMY] All right, take care.