



# Momentum:

## Research & Innovation



COVER STORY

### NEW FRONTIERS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

*featured inside*

WHAT DO ARTISTS DO?

HELPING CHILDREN  
OVERCOME ANXIETY

LIVES IN THE BALANCE:  
PROTECTING OUR PLANET'S  
COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Spring | 2015

What's inside



Welcome to the latest edition of *Momentum: Research and Innovation*, the magazine covering advances in scholarly activity and research at the University of Rhode Island. We are pleased to offer this platform to you to explore the activities of University of Rhode Island faculty, staff and students to expand knowledge in diverse areas of study. The magazine is meant to include stories about work and people involved in all the disciplines of study at the University over time. We are also including stories about how applied research can enhance the economic development of Rhode Island, the United States and the world. We hope that you will enjoy this issue and also come back to examine future editions. Thanks for sharing these adventures with us.

Sincerely,  
  
Gerald Sonnenfeld, Ph.D.  
Vice President for Research  
and Economic Development



Momentum:  
Research & Innovation

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# Right on TRAC

## Guiding College Students with ADHD to Succeed

by Bruce Mason

Conventional wisdom says that children outgrow attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. New research at the University of Rhode Island (URI) is changing that perception.

URI Psychology Professor Lisa Weyandt leads a multi-year effort to study the impact of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) on college students both during and after their college careers.

Weyandt found that there are few guidelines for clinically managing the rising number of students with ADHD on college campuses. In her 2013 published book, coauthored with Professor George DuPaul of the Lehigh University Department of Education and Human Services, "College students with ADHD: Current Issues and Future Directions" they report that high school students with ADHD are approximately eight times more likely to be dropping out of school and graduation rates of college students with ADHD are substantially lower than college students without the disorder.

Weyandt's five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Trajectories Related to ADHD in College, (TRAC), is the first to assess the educational, cognitive, social, psychological and vocational functioning of college students with ADHD compared to students without ADHD. TRAC hopes to understand the natural course of ADHD among college students and identify strategies for assessment and intervention.

Nationally and internationally recognized for her research concerning ADHD and her work with executive functions, Weyandt is the author of the aforementioned "College Students with ADHD", "The Physiological Bases of Cognitive and Behavior Disorders" and "An ADHD Primer."

In 2011, Weyandt completed the first double-blind placebo controlled study exploring the effectiveness of a prescription stimulate medication, Vyvanse, at reducing symptoms in college students with ADHD. The project was funded by Shire Development Inc. and findings were published in the *Journal of Attention Disorders* and the *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*. Results revealed that Vyvanse was associated with substantial improvements in ADHD symptoms as well as improvements in several areas of cognition.

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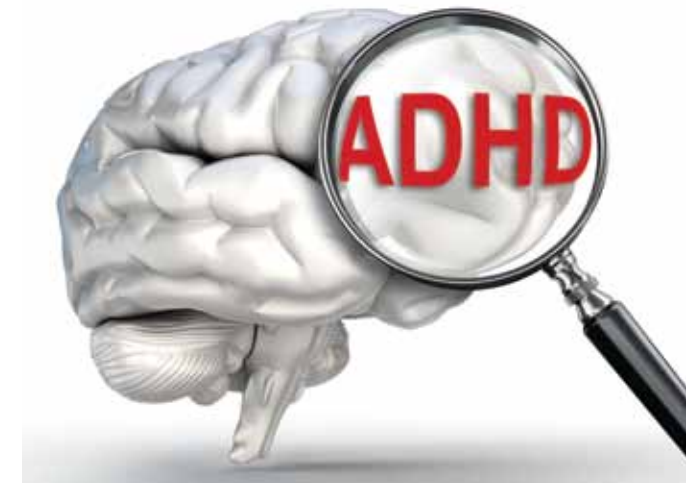


“The findings will help to shed light on the specific needs of college students with ADHD, which will ultimately lead to appropriate interventions for these students.”

- Lisa Weyandt

Lisa Weyandt

Professor, Psychology



Weyandt says more students with ADHD now attend college thanks to better special education programs in elementary, middle and high schools. Yet, data from her study shows these students are more likely to face additional challenges. The study’s findings can help improve the likelihood that students with ADHD will graduate from college, thereby increasing their long-term chances for financial stability and positive mental health.

“The findings will help to shed light on the specific needs of college students with ADHD, which will ultimately lead to appropriate interventions for these students,” she says. “Currently, stimulant medication is the most common treatment for college students with ADHD, but other non-pharmacological interventions may be necessary and beneficial for these students.”

For the study, Weyandt joined psychologists DuPaul and Professor Arthur Anastopoulos, of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Department of Human Development and Family Studies. Together they were awarded a \$3 million grant from the NIH to fund the first-ever study on how ADHD affects college students.

The study began in the summer of 2012, when a group of 210 first-year college students were recruited in two consecutive years for the study across colleges in Rhode Island, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Each site was responsible for recruiting a total of 70 students — 35 students with ADHD and 35 without.

One of the unique and cutting-edge components of the TRAC Project features the gathering of real-time information as opposed to relying only on surveys and questionnaires. Through electronic means, the project collected information about students’ academic and social activities.

One of the greatest adjustments students with ADHD make when they go to college is self-regulation. They become withdrawn from their familiar support systems (parents, high school personnel, treatment) and are suddenly managing their own lives. When added up, basic components of the average college life such as classes, assignments, time management, money, laundry and personal life can seem overwhelming. College students often will indulge in the temptations of campus life such as alcohol, drugs and sex as a distraction or perhaps as a means to self-medicate. Some begin to suffer from other disorders as well. According to Weyandt, more than 60 percent of the students in the study diagnosed with ADHD also have at least one other disorder.

“They have either depression or anxiety or other types of disorders, and that’s compared to only 16 percent of the comparison group,” Weyandt says. “So we know that these students are at great risk once they’re here, and we’re trying to understand their developmental outcomes, which ultimately will help develop interventions to increase the likelihood that they will succeed.”

Weyandt’s next project will involve conducting a pilot study in the spring of 2015 with Tara White, an assistant professor in behavioral and social sciences at Brown University, to explore the potential neurocognitive effects of a prescription stimulant among college students without ADHD. In a 2013 publication, Weyandt and colleagues found between 5 and 35 percent of college students misuse prescription stimulants and these rates vary across universities, regions of the United States, ethnicities, gender and social peers. Given that prescription stimulant misuse continues to rise among college students across the nation, it is critical to determine whether prescription stimulants enhance cognition or whether students simply believe this to be true.

Weyandt, says she hopes the results of TRAC and all of her studies will suggest better ways for colleges to understand and help students with and without ADHD.

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