

**NEURODIVERGENT COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THERAPY DOGS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION**

by

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PREVIEW

Dedications

Dedicated to all the neurodivergent individuals pursuing a degree in higher education.

Dedicated to all the hard-working neurodivergent college students who have continued to overcome the obstacles that once doubted them.

Dedicated to all individuals who advocate for equal opportunities for neurodivergent students in education.

This study is dedicated to anyone passionate about neurodiversity and making a difference in higher education.

PREVIEW

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to examine neurodivergent students in higher education and their experience with The Shreiber Family Pet Therapy Program at Rowan University to investigate whether therapy dogs reduce anxiety levels and provide relaxation. In addition, this study provides recommendations for The Shreiber Family Pet Therapy program at Rowan University to promote the program and its purpose on campus. These resources are important when discussing the neurodivergent student population in higher education, which this research study discusses, based on previous research and the results found from this quantitative approach. This study also makes recommendations for Rowan University and how the pet therapy program can be promoted more and also attend larger public campus events like career fairs and other events.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
List of Tables.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Significance of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Assumptions and Limitations	3
Operational Definition of Terms.....	4
Research Questions.....	4
Organization of Study	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
Introduction	6
The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990	6
Disability.....	7
The Americans with Disabilities Act in Higher Education	7
The Neurodiversity Movement.....	8
Neurodiversity in Higher Education.....	9
Autism Spectrum Disorder.....	9
Autism Spectrum Disorder in Young Adults	10
Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder	11
Student Support Services for Students with ASD	12

Table of Contents (Continued)

Therapy Dogs Versus Service Dogs.....	13
Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT).....	13
Therapy Dogs and Mental Health.....	15
Therapy Dogs in Higher Education	15
Neurodivergent Students and Anxiety	17
Theoretical Framework.....	18
Malsow’s Hierarchy of Needs	18
Physiological Needs.....	19
Safety Needs.....	19
Belongingness and Love Needs.....	19
Esteem Needs.....	20
Self-Actualization Needs	20
Conclusion	21
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	22
Context of Study	22
Population and Sampling	23
Data Instrument and Collection.....	23
Data Analysis	24
Chapter 4: Findings.....	25
Profile of Sample	25
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations.....	31
Summary of Study.....	31

Table of Contents (Continued)

Discussion..... 31

 Research Question 1 31

 Research Question 2 32

Recommendations for Practice 33

Recommendations for Further Research..... 33

Conclusions..... 34

References..... 35

PREVIEW

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. Q9- Did You Find Petting a Dog Relaxing?	26
Table 2. Q10-- Did You Feel Less Anxious After Petting a Therapy Dog?	27
Table 3. Q1- Have You Ever Heard of Rowan University's Shreiber Family Pet Therapy Program?	28
Table 4. Q4- Do You Like Having Therapy Dogs on Campus?.....	29
Table 5. Q5- How Did You Hear About The Event Today?	29
Table 6. Q8- Did You Have a Positive Experience At The Pet Therapy Event Today?.....	30

PREVIEW

Chapter 1

Introduction

Today, the number of students in higher education who identify as neurodiverse is increasing significantly (Cooper, 2016). To identify as neurodiverse means that an individual has been diagnosed with one of the following identities: Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit-hyperactivity disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, dyslexia, and many more (Cooper, 2016). Neurodiversity is in education, the workplace, and in society whether it is visible or not. Over time, higher education professionals have been more welcoming to minds of all kinds and making their classrooms more inclusive. Even though higher education professionals are becoming more educated on neurodiversity, the need for awareness is still lacking (Cooper, 2016). As times are changing, so is the language and culture as neurodiversity is becoming more welcomed in education, the workplace and other functional spaces.

In addition to neurodivergent students in higher education increasing, the use of therapy dogs in education is also increasing. Therapy dogs are being used in education to increase the sense of belonging across student populations (Grové et al., 2021). Therapy dogs have provided therapeutic support for students and participate in reading-assisted activities to help reduce stress of students (Grové et al., 2021). Individuals who identify as neurodiverse may encounter some challenges in education, the workplace, and other public spaces. Specifically, in education support for neurodiverse students may not be accessible to everyone or the support may be lacking. Higher education institutions welcome neurodiversity to their institutions and want more inclusivity. For example, Rowan University, where this study took place, has a club for neurodiversity, a building