

Texas A&M Working with Students who have Disabilities Guide

<http://disability.tamu.edu/facultyguide/teaching>

Teaching & Interacting with Students with Disabilities

Faculty impart knowledge to students and evaluate whether students have learned the material by creating assignments and exams that allow the student to demonstrate mastery based on course goals, objectives and the nature of the curriculum. Having an understanding of a disability and the limitations caused by that disability are essential when teaching to and interacting with students whose learning styles are different from their peers.

Students with Learning Disabilities and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Often called "hidden disabilities", students with Learning Disabilities (LD's) and/or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) make up the majority of students registered with DS. Examples of LD's include Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Math Disorders, and Nonverbal Learning Disorders. Students are diagnosed after a battery of testing with results that indicate lack of achievement at age and ability level and a severe discrepancy between achievement and intelligence.

- Examples of limitations faced by these students are:
- Inability to change from one task to another
- Difficulty scheduling time to complete short and long-term assignments
- Difficulty completing tests without additional time
- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty concentrating in lectures
- Problems with grammar
- Impulsiveness
- Difficulty delaying resolution to a problem
- Poor self-esteem
- Difficulty taking notes
- Slow reading rate
- Poor comprehension and retention of material read
- Difficulty with basic math operations
- Difficulty with reasoning

When preparing your lectures, and then presenting the materials, consider the following:

- Link previous lecture to current lecture
- Outline main points on overhead
- State class objective
- Write key terms on overhead
- Leave overheads up longer than you think necessary for you to copy
- Identify patterns of organization
- Make lectures interactive
- Make notes available on the internet
- Maintain student attention by varying delivery approach
- Move around the room
- Summarize or draw conclusions at the end of the lecture

Commonly used accommodations for students with LD's:

- Use of a dictionary
- Use of a computer with a spell-checking program
- Use of a calculator
- Copies of overheads, handouts, lecture notes

- Readers for exams
- Preferential seating

Accommodations for students with ADHD may include:

- Reduced distraction environment for testing
- Extended time for testing
- Preferential seating near the front of the class

Student with Visual Impairments

There are two categories of visual disabilities: blindness and low vision. Between 70 and 80 percent of all persons in the United States identified as "legally blind" actually have some measurable vision. A person who is blind usually has adapted in individual ways to compensate for the lack of vision. Low vision can vary greatly due to individual situations. To be diagnosed with a visual disability, visual acuity has to be 20/70 or less in the better eye after the best possible correction.

Academic limitations can be the result of constricted peripheral vision, progressive loss of vision, and fluctuation of visual acuity and may include:

- Mobility around campus and in the classroom
- Ability to take notes in class
- Ability to see classroom visual aids, writing on chalkboard, etc.
- Reading
- Locating large-print materials
- Finding transportation
- Researching reports and short articles
- Obtaining textbooks in an alternative format and in a timely manner (audio, large print, Braille)

Accommodations used by students who are blind or visually impaired:

- Large print or Braille handouts, signs, equipment labels
- TV monitor connected to microscope to enlarge images
- Directions, notices, assignments in electronic format
- Computers with enlarged screen images
- Seating where the lighting is best
- Audio-tape, Braille, electronic notes, handouts, texts
- Describe visual aids
- Raised-line drawings and tactile models of graphic materials
- Computers with optical character readers, voice activated computers, voice output, Braille keyboards and printers
- Extended time for testing
- Use of a reader and/or scribe for exams

Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Communication is the most common barrier between students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and their hearing peers. Many of these students use American Sign Language and not spoken English. They often identify with other people of similar upbringing and prefer to be called Deaf with a capital D. People who became deaf later in life may call themselves deaf or hard-of-hearing based on the degree of hearing loss they experience.

Examples of disability related limitations include:

- Listening to and understanding lecture information
- Taking notes in class
- Working effectively in group projects or class discussions

Commonly used accommodations are:

- Interpreters, real-time captions, FM systems, note taking assistance
- Face student when speaking
- Written directions, assignments, lab instructions
- Visual aids, visual warning systems
- Repeat questions and statements from others
- Electronic mail for communicating
- Captioned videos and transcripts of audio recordings

Students with Health Impairments

Chronic illnesses include conditions affecting one or more of the body's functions. These conditions can include, but are not limited to, the respiratory, immunological, neurological and circulatory systems. There can be several different impairments and they can vary significantly in their effects and symptoms. In general, these conditions can vary in severity and length of time, and can be very unstable. Examples of chronic medical conditions include:

- Cancer
- Chemical dependency
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy/seizure disorder
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- Multiple chemical sensitivities
- Multiple sclerosis
- Muscular dystrophy
- Renal disease/failure

Academic difficulties can include:

- Mobility around campus and in the classroom
- Taking notes in class
- Concentration/attention
- Time management
- Anxiety

Most commonly requested accommodations are:

- Note taking assistance, audio-taped class sessions
- Flexible attendance requirements
- Extra exam time, alternative testing arrangements
- Assignments in electronic formats

- Communication through electronic mail
- Absences due to symptomology and doctors appointments

Students with Mental Health Issues

Psychiatric disorders may not be apparent, but they can have a dramatic impact on interpersonal and school behavior that affects the learning process. These disorders cover a wide range of conditions that may be chronic or reoccurring. With appropriate treatment many disorders can be effectively cured or controlled. However treatment, which often combines medications and psychotherapy and may effectively stop acute symptoms or halt the downward spiral in some individuals, sometimes causes additional limitations as a result of prescribed medications.

Examples of some psychiatric disabilities are:

- Major depression
- Bipolar disorder
- Severe anxiety disorders
- Sleep disorders
- Eating disorders
- Substance-related disorders

Academic difficulties can include:

- Concentration
- Cognitive (short term memory difficulties)
- Distractibility
- Time management
- Impulsiveness
- Fluctuating stamina causing class absences
- Irritability
- Feelings of fear and anxiety about exams

Accommodations can include:

- Preferential seating, near door
- Prearranged or frequent breaks
- Audio recorder, note taking assistance
- Early availability of syllabus, text
- Text, assignments in alternate formats
- Personal and private feedback
- Permit use of computer software
- Extended test taking time
- Separate, quiet room for testing

Students with Physical Disabilities

The phrase "physical disability" is used to describe a wide range of physical limitations and diagnoses, the most common of which would be someone that uses a wheelchair. Their limitations may be very severe and noticeable, or almost hidden. The most common barrier to academic success for a person with a physical disability is access. Access takes many forms, from a class assigned in an inaccessible building to the person's own limitations preventing them from taking class notes. As with all other disabilities and impairments, it is important to treat students with physical disabilities fairly. Students with physical disabilities typically are very knowledgeable of both their limitations and abilities and are accustomed to communicating their needs to others.

Examples of physical disabilities include:

- Wheelchair users
- Amputees
- Speech impairments
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Multiple Sclerosis

Some limitations of students with physical disabilities are:

- Difficulty writing, such as class notes and on exams
- Sitting in a standard desk
- Participating in labs where lab tables and equipment are hard to reach
- Transportation
- Classrooms or buildings that are not wheelchair accessible

Possible accommodations include:

- Relocating a class or lab to an accessible building
- Audio recorder or notetaking assistance
- Accessible seating or table in the classroom
- Additional time for completing exams

Students with Autism or Asperger's Syndrome

College campuses are seeing an increase in the number of students who are diagnosed along the high end of the autism spectrum, with the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome or high functioning autism. They can generally be distinguished from people with other forms of autism by two areas of relative strength: more normal language function and higher cognitive abilities. These individuals may be affected in their ability to understand and respond to the thoughts and feelings of others. Please note that no two students with Asperger's are alike in terms of how they are affected.

Below are some examples of what may be seen.

- The social behavior of persons with Asperger's tends to be naive and peculiar.
- Many of these individuals expect all people to be good, and it is a rude awakening for them to learn that some people may try to exploit them.
- They may not understand jokes, irony and metaphors.
- These individuals may talk "at" rather than "to" people, disregarding the listener's interest.
- They may talk too loud, stand too close and maintain poor eye contact.
- The individual usually does not accurately convey the intensity of his or her emotions until they are full blown, such that the reaction may appear to be far more intense than the situation warrants.
- Although the individual may crave social interaction, his or her unusual manner may rebuff others, leaving the individual feeling misunderstood and isolated.
- Difficulty "fitting in" with other college students (many students with Asperger's know they are different, but have a desire to be "normal").
- Social immaturity (interest in relationships is often appropriate for their physical developmental level, but their social developmental level lags behind).
- Lack of structure (students may not know what to do with much more free time than in high school)
- Difficulty with classes that are not within their interests (often have preoccupations and they may not see the relevance of "core curriculum" classes).
- Difficulty dealing with ambiguity and lack of problem solving skills.
- Difficulty getting a job after college (poor interviewing skills, limited knowledge of how to look for a job, lack of references).

When interacting with a student with Asperger's:

- Use clear, specific language. Avoid slang or regional (or university) terms.
- Give specific directions.
- Find out the student's strengths and limitations and advise accordingly.
- Get to know the student so he/she will feel comfortable coming to you with problems.
- Help connect students to academic advisor or other professional who can be a resource.
- Set explicit guidelines for classroom behavior.
- Don't be surprised if parents are involved.

(Adapted for Bachelor of Education students of The University of Adelaide 18 August 2015)



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