

## CONTACT & REFERRAL

Please feel free to contact the director of Disability Support Services if you have any questions or concerns regarding a Faculty Contact Sheet that you receive from a student. The director can be reached at extension 1615. Additionally if you have a student you are concerned about, please strongly encourage him/her to make an appointment with the director as soon as possible.

Each student requesting accommodations must have a new FCS for each semester. Please remind students to update this important document at the beginning of each semester.

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**DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES  
MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY**

**INFORMATION & TOOLS  
FOR FACULTY AND  
STAFF:**

**DISABILITIES GUIDE**

# LEARNING DISABILITY

## CHARACTERISTICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

A learning disability (LD) presumably is caused by a neurological disorder. This disorder interferes with taking in information (reading, auditory perception, visual perception); processing information (memory, comprehension, retention), and expressing information (writing, speaking). To qualify as having a learning disability, a student must demonstrate an average or better ability (intelligence) level and an average or better achievement level in at least one academic area. In addition, the student must also demonstrate either a significant discrepancy between intra-cognitive abilities, or a significant discrepancy between aptitude and achievement levels. (This information was adapted from the 1987 Report of The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities published in the *Journal of Learning Disabilities*.)

A person with a learning disability has probably experienced significant frustration in academic environments. The ways in which LD manifests itself often cause teachers, parents, and others to decide that a person is lazy or not motivated, when in fact the person is struggling without success. Once students are identified as having a learning disability, they can begin to learn compensatory strategies that help them to learn more effectively and to partially overcome the deficits; however, it will always take more time and effort to succeed at certain academic tasks.

### COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Some characteristics of students with LD are listed below. Generally, no single student will have all of these difficulties.

#### *Reading*

- Slow reading rate
- Poor phonics skills, confusion of similar words
- Difficulty comprehending what is read
- Trouble identifying main ideas/determining what is important
- Difficulty remembering what is read

#### *Written Expression*

- Difficulty with sentence structure, syntax, grammar, but apt to be articulate with verbal language
- Spelling errors, particularly with specialized vocabulary and foreign languages
- Letter reversals
- Compositions which lack organization and development of concepts
- Slow or very messy handwriting
- Inability to copy correctly from the board

#### *Oral Expression*

- Difficulty remembering spoken instructions
- Problems describing events or stories in sequence
- May misuse words, using a similar sounding word for the appropriate one
- Greater problems with grammar or ideas when speaking than when writing
- Problems expressing ideas which he/she understands

#### *Mathematics*

- Difficulty recalling basic math operations and facts
- Problems with abstract concepts and reasoning
- Reversals and confusion of numbers and symbols
- Difficulty comprehending word problems
- Problems copying from the board or carrying across columns

#### *Organizational Skills*

- Difficulty with time management
- May be slow to begin or follow-through on assignments
- Lack of organization in note-taking and written assignments
- Inefficient use of library resources

### POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations can vary greatly according to the documentation provided, the student's strengths and weaknesses, and the recommendation of clinicians and educators.

- Extended time (1 ½ ) for exams
- Separate and individual test taking in LRC, separate classroom or office as appropriate
- Use of a note-taker or tape recorder in class
- Faculty sharing notes as is appropriate and feasible
- Use of a word processor for essays, or a calculator for math

# ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER ATTENTION DEFICIT AND HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

## CHARACTERISTICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Attention deficit disorder (ADD) and Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are diagnosed disorders, which at times impacts a student's learning. Documented diagnosis of ADD or ADHD is required for students to receive accommodations. At times, a student may have a diagnosis of ADD or ADHD and a Specified Learning Disability. Students with this disorder may have great difficulty in paying close attention to detail, may make careless mistakes, and may find themselves distracted during lengthy class sessions or study sessions.

## POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Extended time (1 ½) for exams
- Separate and individual test taking in LRC, separate classroom, or office as appropriate
- Use of a notetaker or tape recorder in class
- Faculty sharing notes as is appropriate and feasible

# PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES

## CHARACTERISTICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Individuals with psychiatric disabilities are becoming more numerous as medical management of such conditions becomes more sophisticated. Most individuals with psychiatric disabilities are involved in therapy outside of school and many are currently taking medications to help manage their condition. Many students with psychiatric disabilities have previously attended college and they often have strong intellectual abilities, but they may doubt those abilities after their illness. Given some support and classroom accommodations, most students will do well.

## TYPES OF DISABILITIES

Some of the more common psychiatric disabilities that students may identify are bi-polar affective disorder (manic-depressive disorder); schizophrenia; obsessive-compulsive disorder; anxiety disorder, personality disorder; and clinical depression. For many students medication often causes thought-processing and expressive abilities to be slower than usual. Sensitivity about in-class assignments, particularly oral presentations, is important.

## POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Extended time (1 ½) for exams
- Separate and individual test taking in LRC, separate classroom, or office as appropriate
- Understanding of occasional absences due to medication issues, or a "bad day"
- Negotiated extended time to complete assignments

# PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

## CHARACTERISTICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Students with physical disabilities may have multiple disabilities that require a variety of accommodations or they may need only an accessible classroom location. Ask students to describe their needs for you. Many students who appear quite disabled may have complete use of arms and hands and be able to take notes and write exams, while others who do not appear disabled may have nerve damage, which prevents them from taking notes or writing exams.

When there is a student with an apparent disability in your class, you may approach her/him after the first class and ask if there are any accommodations required. Although this is not your obligation, it is a courteous way to open communication and may help the student to express needs early. Also, it is not insulting to the person involved. Many students mention that they appreciate a professor who approaches them. This should always be done privately and never in front of the class.

## TYPES OF DISABILITIES

- Wheelchair Users: cerebral palsy (CP), multiple sclerosis (MS), muscular dystrophy (MD), spinal cord injuries, spina bifida
- Mobility Impairments: amputees, arthritis, lupus, diabetes, medical illnesses, cystic fibrosis (CF), MS

## POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Relocation of a classroom or activity to assure physical access. NOTE: If a class takes field trips or other OFF-CAMPUS activities, those must also be accessible. If you need to relocate the class, please check to see that the new location is accessible. Some buildings on campus are not accessible to mobility-impaired students (e.g. St. Joseph Hall)
- Alternatives to in-class writing assignments for a student who cannot write
- A note-taker; a scribe or adaptive computer equipment for exams
- Schedule more frequent, shorter breaks, or allow student to get up and move around during lengthy class sessions
- Ways to include a student who cannot speak in group discussions or other group formats; student may have a communication device or an aide
- Extra time for written exams and in some cases the use of a word processor. The Learning Resource Center is available in these situations. Students and faculty should discuss optimal testing situations at the beginning of the semester. Faculty should contact the LRC staff to make necessary arrangements in a timely fashion.

# HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

## CHARACTERISTICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Students with impaired hearing may vary widely in the degree of loss and the means they use to compensate. Some individuals may be deaf, with little or no useful residual hearing. Many of these individuals do not wear hearing aids because they have too little hearing to augment. Others will wear hearing aids that help improve their hearing somewhat, but even the latest technology provides distorted hearing at best. Some people with a hearing loss will develop lip-reading skills; however the most adept lip-reader will only understand 60-70% of a conversation and even less of a lecture.

Deaf students and students with a hearing loss may have a spoken voice that is easy to understand and may choose to communicate orally. Others may be very hard to understand, or may choose not to use their voices. If a student is not using his or her voice, but comes to see you without an interpreter, use a pad and pen or a word-processor to communicate in writing. If a person tries to use his or her voice and you do not understand them, please let the person know you are having trouble and ask him or her to repeat or to write the message down. Conversely, a student with a hearing loss may nod and appear to understand what you are saying, but may miss an important point. It is often a good approach to stop frequently to ask the person to repeat what was understood and to clarify any missed information.

When a deaf student or a student with a hearing loss identifies him or herself to you using a Faculty Contact Sheet, it is important to determine how best you can meet that person's needs. Explain your teaching style (i.e. lecture, board work, group discussion, films or videos) and ask the student to suggest ways he or she can best access the information you present in class. Here are some recommendations when working with students with a hearing disability:

- Look directly at the student and speak in a normal pitched voice - speaking louder does not help.
- Try not to stand with your back to a light source or window, which makes it difficult for the student to read lips.
- Address the student even if an interpreter is being used.

## POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Use of overheads, when possible. When you write on the whiteboard, don't speak with your back turned.
- Encourage front-row seating.
- Use a sign language interpreter or an oral interpreter. People with significant hearing loss who do not know sign language use an oral interpreter. The interpreter mouths the professor's words for the individual and uses gestures and facial expressions. (DSS arranges interpreting services).
- Assist the student in obtaining a volunteer note-taker and/or share personal faculty notes as is appropriate and feasible
- Give permission to have the student tape record the lectures for later transcription.
- Use a phonic ear. The professor wears a wireless microphone and the individual uses a receiver, and this allows the person to hear only the professor's voice amplified and screens out the background noise that hearing aids would amplify. DSS will work with the student if such technology is necessary.

## METHODS OF EVALUATION

Generally, written examinations should not present any difficulties, but an oral presentation or a group project may require a different evaluation. Keep in mind that students who have been deaf since birth and who are sign-language users have a very different concept of sentence structure than a native English speaker or writer. This may sometimes result in writing that is somewhat awkward, and the student may need to be referred for some assistance at the Learning Resource Center. It does not mean they are not intelligent and that they do not know how to write, but American Sign Language (ASL) truly is a "foreign" language.

# BLINDNESS AND VISUAL DEFICITS

## CHARACTERISTICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Visual deficits range from minor loss, which is somewhat correctable, to complete blindness. This is an area where there has been an explosion of useful technology. Computerized reading machines, voice synthesizers, and machines for enlarging textbook print are often available in local public libraries.

An important fact to keep in mind with students without the ability to read is that many have not been taught Braille, and therefore must listen to all of the material. This reliance on listening poses challenges and may slow down the pace at which they can take in information; listening to a book takes longer than reading the same book. Additionally, the student probably tapes class lectures instead of taking notes and has to listen to portions of those to review for exams. So, a request for additional time to complete assignments is indeed a legitimate request.

## POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Making lists of texts and class syllabi available in advance for readers and for recording these materials on tape. The director of DSS is able to assist if necessary.
- Taped books or other written materials (the DSS office will make referrals to appropriate agencies)
- Provide front-row seating
- Enlarged print books and written materials (referrals will be made to appropriate agencies by the DDS)
- Extended time for examinations
- Alternative forms of examinations – taped, oral with professor, dictated to a scribe
- Make textbook selections early so that students will have the necessary "lead time" to order taped texts
- Special assistance in laboratories and other experiential components of class

# ASPERGER'S AND DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

## CHARACTERISTICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Asperger's Syndrome is a developmental disorder disability that is characterized by social interaction deficits, impaired communication skills, and unusual behaviors. The following characteristics may be present in an individual with Asperger's Syndrome. Due to the diversity and complexity of this disability, some of the characteristics or problems discussed may not be evident in a particular individual. An understanding of these characteristics is important, because the behavior of these individuals is frequently misinterpreted. Many behaviors that seem odd or unusual are due to the disability and not the result of intentional rudeness.

- Frequent errors in the interpretation of body language, intentions or facial expressions of others; Poor quality eye contact
- May appear socially awkward or difficult to work with
- Difficulty understanding the motives and perceptions of others
- Problems asking for help
- May show motor clumsiness, unusual body movements, and/or repetitive behavior
- Often have difficulty with the big picture, **perseverate** on the details (can't see the forest for the trees)
- Difficulties with transitions and changes in schedule
- Problems with organization (including initiating, planning, carrying out, and finishing tasks)
- Deficits in abstract thinking (concrete, misses the "big picture," focuses on irrelevant details, difficulty generalizing)
- Unusual sensitivity to touch, sounds, and visual details, may experience sensory overload
- Difficulty in initiating and sustaining connected relationships with people
- Problems understanding social rules (such as personal space)
- Impairment of two-way interaction (May seem to talk "at you" rather than "with you")
- Conversation and questions may be tangential or repetitive
- Restricted interests that may be unusual and sometime become a rigid topic for social conversation
- Unusual speech intonation, volume rhythm and/or rate
- Literal understanding of language (difficulty interpreting words with double meaning, confused by metaphors and sarcasm)

## POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Clearly define course requirements, the dates of exams and when assignments are due. Provide advance notice of any changes.
- Teach to generalize and to consolidate information.
- Go for gist, meaning and patterns. Don't get bogged down in details.
- Use scripts and teach strategies selectively.
- All expectations need to be direct and explicit. Don't require these students to "read between the lines" to glean your intentions. Don't expect the student to automatically generalize instructions. Provide direct feedback to the student when you observe areas of academic difficulty.
- Encourage use of resources designed to help students with study skills, particularly organizational skills.
- Avoid idioms, double meaning and sarcasm, unless you plan to explain your usage.
- If the student has poor handwriting, use of a computer may be easier for them.
- Use the preoccupying interest to help focus/motivate the student. Suggest ways to integrate this interest into the course, such as related paper topics.
- The setting for tests should account for any sensitivity to sound, light, touch etc.