



FAST FACTS FOR FACULTY

Center for Academic Success and Achievement
Disability/Access Services

Teaching Students with Invisible Disabilities

Invisible disabilities are the most common type of disability among college students. For example, students with learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and/or psychiatric disabilities may request accommodations even though they do not appear to have a disability. There are numerous other hidden or invisible disabilities such as heart condition, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, and Seizure Disorder. **It is also important to remember that the severity of functional limitations do not depend on your ability to see the disability.**

There may be several students in your classroom with invisible disabilities. Of these students, only some will request accommodations. Likewise, the student may choose to share their disability with you although they are not obligated to do so to receive accommodations. For those students who request accommodations, it is important to express your willingness to accommodate all types of disabilities and to be supportive of their accommodation requests.

Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities often learn differently than their peers. Although they have average or above average intelligence, there is frequently a discrepancy between their ability and their achievement in specific areas due to a central nervous system dysfunction. A learning disability is a permanent disorder that interferes with integrating, acquiring, and/or demonstrating verbal or nonverbal abilities and skills. Frequently, there are some processing or memory deficits.

Each student with a learning disability may need different types of accommodations, services, and/or supports based on what area(s) of learning is affected by the disability. Students with learning disabilities may have difficulties with some of the following:

- Reading comprehension
- Processing speed
- Written or oral expression
- Auditory or visual processing
- Abstract Reasoning
- Visual spatial skills
- Mathematics

Guidelines

Via the *Academic Accommodation letter*, you will be notified if a student qualifies for certain accommodations. These can include:

- **Exam Accommodations:** Assist these students in arranging for appropriate exam accommodations, whether you arrange them yourself or through CASA.
- **Assistance with Notetaking/Permission to Record Lectures:** Some of these students have difficulty taking their own notes and would benefit from supplemental notes from a classmate and/or recording the lecture to listen to later.

- **PC for exams:** Students may need to type short-answer or essay-based exams, either in class or in CASA.
- **Course Materials in an Alternate Format:** Coordinate with CASA to ensure that course materials will be available in alternative format. Some of these students need print material in alternative format (e.g., audio or electronic format). When you are contacted by a student or Disability/Access Services, it is important that you immediately provide information about the required textbook(s) and readings you will be using as well as any other reading expectations. It can take a considerable amount of time to convert materials into alternative format.
- **Exam Aids:** Permit these students to use simple calculators, hand held spell checkers, and scratch paper during exams. Any other exam aids (word banks, formulas, etc.) are at faculty discretion.

In addition, multi-modality instruction is helpful for all students. Provide important information and assignments in both oral and written formats to help promote accessibility to course content. A multi-modality approach to instruction assists these students in finding a modality that is consistent with their learning strength.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5, 2014). Students with ADHD or ADD (without hyperactivity) may have difficulty with one or more of the following areas:

- Concentration
- Listening, following directions
- Distractibility
- Organization, planning
- Sitting for lengthy periods
- Completing tasks
- Transitions from one task to another
- Sedentary tasks, like reading

Guidelines

Via the *Academic Accommodation letter*, you will be notified if a student qualifies for certain accommodations. These can include:

- **Exam Accommodations:** Assist students in arranging for appropriate exam accommodations with the CASA. Many students with ADHD use exam accommodations including extended time and a distraction-reduced exam space.
- **Assistance with Notetaking/Permission to Record Lectures:** Some of these students have difficulty focusing and concentrating and would benefit from supplemental notes from a classmate and/or recording the lecture to listen to later.
- **Preferential Seating:** If a student appears extremely distracted, it may be appropriate to encourage the student to sit near the front of the class, away from doors, air conditioning units, windows, or any other possible sources of distraction.

Psychiatric Disabilities

Students with psychiatric disabilities exhibit a persistent psychological disorder or psychiatric disorder, emotional or mental illness that adversely affects educational performance and/or functioning and frequently requires medication. These conditions can include:

- **Depression** may be characterized by a depressed mood most of each day, a lack of pleasure in most activities, thoughts of suicide, insomnia, and feelings of worthlessness or guilt.
- **Bipolar disorder** is characterized by two extreme phases of mood. In the manic phase, a person might experience inflated self-esteem and a decreased need to sleep; however, in the depressive phase, a person may experience a lack of energy and less self-esteem and interest in family, friends, and school.

- **Anxiety disorders** can disrupt a person's ability to concentrate and cause hyperventilation, a racing heart, chest pains, dizziness, panic, and extreme fear.

In most situations you will not be aware that you have a student with a psychiatric disability in your classroom. Many of these students are fearful of and have faced stigmatization because of their disability. Some do not need or request any accommodations, and some require a variety of accommodations. For some the disability is temporary, while for others it is chronic.

Guidelines

Via the *Academic Accommodation letter*, you will be notified if a student qualifies for certain accommodations. These can include:

- **Exam Accommodations:** Assist these students in arranging for exam accommodations when requested. The exam accommodations that they will most likely use are a distraction reduced exam space and extra time.
- **Assistance with Notetaking/Permission to Record Lectures:** Some of these students have difficulty focusing and concentrating and would benefit from supplemental notes from a classmate and/or recording the lecture to listen to later.
- **Occasional absences:** Collaborate with students about arrangements to makeup tests and other assignments, allowing them extra time since these students may miss class during serious psychiatric episodes. **Please note that this accommodation does not override your attendance or make-up policy;** rather it serves to verify to the Faculty member that the student has a documented condition that may result in occasional absences. The student and Faculty member should work together as early as possible to address how to handle late or missed work.

Chronic Medical Conditions

Many students manage chronic medical conditions that are not outwardly visible, but can cause significant impairment in their day-to-day functioning. Some examples include diabetes, which needs to be closely monitored and managed with medication; gastrointestinal issues like IBS and Chron's disease; seizure disorders, and pain disorders.

Guidelines

Via the *Academic Accommodation letter*, you will be notified if a student qualifies for certain accommodations. These can include:

- **Exam Accommodations:** Assist these students in arranging for exam accommodations when requested. The exam accommodations that they will most likely use are a distraction reduced exam space and extra time.
- **Assistance with Notetaking/Permission to Record Lectures:** Some of these students have difficulty focusing and concentrating and would benefit from supplemental notes from a classmate and/or recording the lecture to listen to later.
- **Occasional absences:** Collaborate with students about arrangements to makeup tests and other assignments, allowing them extra time since these students may miss class during serious psychiatric episodes. **Please note that this accommodation does not override your attendance or make-up policy;** rather it serves to verify to the Faculty member that the student has a documented condition that may result in occasional absences. The student and Faculty member should work together as early as possible to address how to handle late or missed work.
- **Frequent breaks:** Students may need to leave the classroom in order to manage symptoms.