Lesson 9: Learning Disabilities

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to increase your awareness of the issues and strategies related specifically to accommodating students with Learning Disabilities.

By reflecting on your own course while reading the Lesson Content, you will be guided to consider possible modifications to your course specifically related to learning disabilities. By sharing and discussing course modifications with other participants, you will develop an awareness of additional strategies and applications of the issues related to accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

Questions to REFLECT upon while reading the CONTENT

What challenges might students with learning disabilities face in your selected course? And what accommodations might they require?

CONTENT

We are now concentrating on accommodations for students with specific disabilities or impairments. This lesson presents issues and suggestions related to accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

Students with specific learning disabilities generally have average to above average intelligence but may have difficulties acquiring and demonstrating knowledge and understanding. This results in a lack of achievement for age and ability level, and a severe discrepancy between their achievement and intellectual abilities.

According to the National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities, learning disabilities are a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. The specific causes of learning disabilities are not clearly understood; however, these disorders are presumably related to central nervous system dysfunction. The effects of a learning disability are manifested differently for each individual and can range from mild to severe. Learning disabilities may also be present with other disabilities such as mobility or sensory impairments and Attention Deficit Disorder.
Specific TYPES of LEARNING DISABILITIES include:

DYSGRAPHIA
An individual with dysgraphia has a difficult time with the physical task of forming letters and words using a pen and paper and has difficulty producing legible handwriting.

DYSCALCULA
A person with dyscalcula has difficulty understanding and using math concepts and symbols.

DYSLEXIA
An individual with dyslexia may mix up letters within words and sentences while reading. He may have difficulty spelling words correctly while writing. Letter reversals are common. Some individuals with dyslexia have a difficult time with navigating and route-finding tasks as they are easily confused by directions and spatial information such as left and right.

DYSPRAXIA
A person with dyspraxia may mix up words and sentences while talking. There is often a discrepancy between language comprehension and language production.

NON-VERBAL LEARNING DISORDER
Poor motor coordination, visual-spatial organization, and/or a lack of social skills may characterize non-verbal learning disorders.

For a student with a learning disability, auditory, visual, or tactile information can become jumbled at any point during transmission, receipt, processing, and/or re-transmission. For example, it may take longer for some students who have learning disabilities to process written information. Lengthy reading or writing assignments and tests may therefore, be difficult to complete in a standard amount of time. This may be due to difficulty discriminating numerals or letters because they appear jumbled or reversed. Inconsistencies between knowledge and test scores are also common.

Some students who have learning disabilities may be able to organize and communicate their thoughts in a one-to-one conversation but find it difficult to articulate the same ideas in a noisy classroom. Other students may experience difficulties with specific processes or subject areas such as calculating mathematics problems, reading, or understanding language. People with learning disabilities may have difficulty spelling and subsequently have difficulty creating or editing text or otherwise communicating in writing. Difficulties with attention, organization, time management, and prioritizing tasks are also common.

Examples of accommodations for students with learning disabilities may include:

- ✔ Note-takers, use of computers in class for note taking
Audiotaped class sessions
Extended exam time and a quiet testing location
Visual, aural, and tactile demonstrations incorporated into instruction
Concise course and lecture outlines
Books on tape
Alternative evaluation methods (e.g., portfolio, oral or video presentations)
Use of electronic discussions via email or the Web
Providing projects or detailed instructions verbally or printed copies of instructions
Reinforcing directions verbally
Breaking large amounts of information or instructions into smaller segments.

**Computers** can be adapted to assist students with learning disabilities. A student with learning disabilities might find these accommodations useful:

- Computers equipped with speech output, which highlights and reads (via screen reading software and a speech synthesizer) text on the computer screen.
- Word processing software that includes electronic spelling and grammar checkers, software with highlighting capabilities, and word prediction software.
- Software to enlarge screen images.

For **Math** and **Science** classes, examples of specific accommodations that are useful for students with learning disabilities include:

- The use of scratch paper to work out math problems during exams
- Talking calculators
- Fractional, decimal, and statistical scientific calculators
- Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) software for math
- Computer Assisted Design (CAD) software for engineering
- Large display screens for calculators and adding machines.

**Summary**

Learning Disabilities are documented disabilities that may affect reading, processing information, remembering, calculating, and spatial abilities. Some typical accommodations for students with learning disabilities include:

- Note takers and/or audiotaped class sessions, captioned films
- Extra exam time, alternative testing, and/or assignment arrangements
- Visual, aural, and tactile instructional demonstrations
- Equipment with adaptive technology

Note: When considering accommodations, remember that students with learning disabilities generally have average to above average intelligence, but may have difficulties acquiring and demonstrating knowledge and understanding. By working together, you, the student, and the Office of Disability Support Services help create an environment to lessen the discrepancy
between achievement and intellectual abilities, and thereby encourage success in the student's academic endeavors.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION

While reading the Content, you considered ways in which your selected course might accommodate a student with a learning disability. State two or three accommodations you might make in your selected course for a student with dyslexia in relation to your assignments.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Read answers to frequently asked questions, explore case studies or access additional resources regarding working with students with hearing disabilities
- Learn more at UCO’s Disability Support Services website
- Learn more at UCO’s DSS Handbook for Faculty & Staff
- View resources for helping instructors accommodate students with disabilities in specific academic activities

This lesson has been developed in part by © 2001 DO-IT at the University of Washington where permission has been granted to copy material for educational, non-commercial purposes. The information has been edited as needed by the University of Central Oklahoma Disability Support Services’ Staff (2012) in an effort to meet UCO’s need, purpose, and intent of faculty development regarding students with disabilities.