

Southern Adventist University

Faculty Guide

Academic Accommodations - Students with Disabilities

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Faculty Guide for Assisting Students with Disabilities

In recent years, the number of students diagnosed with disabilities who are attending postsecondary institutions has increased dramatically. In most situations, a learning disability is not readily observable. Because there are no outward signs of a disability, students with learning disabilities are often overlooked or misunderstood. Some instructors and administrators suspect that students who claim to have learning disabilities are faking it, are playing the system, or lack the intelligence needed to succeed in college. Understanding the implications of learning disabilities, preparing to teach students with diverse characteristics, and learning to accommodate students with learning disabilities are essential for faculty and staff to provide academic and career opportunities for these students that are equivalent to those provided to their nondisabled peers.

Southern Adventist University offers its programs and activities to all students who meet the prerequisite academic and technical standards of those programs and activities. This offer extends to those who can meet the school's requirements through reasonable and approved accommodation. "Accommodation" means helping a student meet, not excuse any student from meeting, all the essential course or program requirements demanded of all other students, if the university can do so without undue hardship.

Learning Disabilities and Functional Limitations

Generally speaking, students may be diagnosed with learning disabilities if they are of average or "above average" intelligence and there is a significant discrepancy between their academic achievement and their intellectual ability. The diagnosis of a learning disability is often made by a psychologist trained in administering and interpreting psycho-educational assessments. Psychologists use the results of their assessments to understand how individuals receive, process, integrate, retain, and communicate information. Since these functions cannot always be directly observed, it is often difficult to diagnose specific learning disabilities, determine their impact, and recommend appropriate accommodations. There are many types of learning disabilities that often impact student abilities in one or more of the following categories:

- Spoken language—listening and speaking.
- Written language—reading, writing, and spelling.
- Arithmetic—calculation and mathematical concepts.
- Reasoning—organization and integration of ideas and thoughts.
- Learning disabilities may also be present along with other disabilities such as mobility and sensory impairments, brain injuries, Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD), Autism and psychiatric disabilities.

Whether or not students' disabilities are obvious, professors can show through word and deeds that they are willing to be of assistance in various ways:

- By printing in syllabi invitations to make appointments for personal conferences in which students talk about their needs and suggest ways to meet those needs,
- By asking for essential medical information, by outlining specific procedures for emergency evacuation of a building, by adjusting physical facilities,
- By pointing out tutorial services, and by directing students to the Student Support Office, to the Center for Learning Success, and/or to Counseling and Testing Services.

What are the responsibilities of the student who has a disability?

Although it is the responsibility of faculty to create a learning environment that makes information accessible, the student must bear some of the responsibility as well. Generally, a student is responsible for:

- Registering with the Disability Support Services “DSS”;
- Requesting accommodations;
- Identifying themselves to their professor;
- Arranging for tutors;
- Keeping up with assignments or, if having difficulty, talking with their professor regarding possible strategies or alternatives;
- Requesting in advance special testing procedures or situations such as alternate sites or proctoring by DSS;

Accommodations

It is the student's responsibility to request services from DSS in a timely manner. DSS confirms a student's disability and eligibility for services and accommodations. A course instructor typically receives a letter from DSS detailing recommended accommodations for a student. The student with a disability is responsible for meeting all course requirements using only approved accommodations. The goal is to give the student with a disability equal access to the learning environment. Individualized accommodations are not designed to give the student an advantage over other students, to alter a fundamental aspect of the course, nor to weaken academic rigor. A specific learning disability is unique to the individual and can be manifested in a variety of ways. Therefore, accommodations for a specific student must be tailored to the individual. When in doubt about how to assist a student, work with the student privately or contact Disability Support Services. Described below are some of the functional limitations that may require accommodations. A student with a learning disability may have one or more of these limitations.

- **Auditory Perception and Processing**—the student may have difficulty processing information communicated through lectures or class discussions. He or she may have difficulty distinguishing subtle differences in sound or knowing which sounds to attend to.
- **Visual Perception and Processing**—the student may have difficulty distinguishing subtle differences in shape (e.g., the letters b and d), deciding what images to focus on when multiple images are present, skip words or repeat sections when reading, or misjudge depth or distance. He or she may have difficulty processing information communicated via overhead projection, through video, in graphs and charts, by email, or within web-based distance learning courses.
- **Information Processing Speed**—the student may process auditory and visual information more slowly than the average person. He or she may be a slow reader because of the need for additional time to decode and comprehend written material.

- **Abstract Reasoning**—the student may have difficulty understanding the context of subjects such as philosophy and logic, which require high level reasoning skills.
- **Memory** (long-term, short-term)—the student may have difficulty with the storing or recalling of information during short or long time periods.
- **Spoken and Written Language**—the student may have difficulty with spelling (e.g., mixing up letters) or with speaking (e.g., reversing words or phrases).
- **Mathematical Calculation**—the student may have difficulty manipulating numbers, may sometimes invert numbers, and may have difficulty converting problems described in words to mathematical expressions.
- **Executive functioning** (planning and time management)—the student may have difficulty breaking larger projects into smaller sub-projects, creating and following a timeline, and meeting deadlines.

Challenges and accommodations for students with Asperger’s / High-Functioning Autism

Students with Asperger’s/High Functioning Autism “ASD” include social interactions, noisy or disordered environments, intense sensory stimulation, and changes in expected routines. The unstructured parts of the school day present the greatest challenges. Many students with ASD have difficulty using a pencil and paper for writing. Some have difficulty with organization and schedules. Although each individual is unique, the following accommodations may be helpful to students with ASD:

- Clearly established and ordered routines;
- Warning and preparation when changes are anticipated;
- Planning and practicing of communication strategies and social routines;
- Quiet area where student can take a time-out if necessary;
- Visual schedules and graphic organizers;
- Visual or written, rather than auditory, instructions;
- Computer use, especially word processing for writing;
- Note taker.

Universal Design

There are a number of things professors can do while planning a course to make it more accessible to all students, including those with learning disabilities. The strategies listed below are part of a process called universal design (UD):

- A statement in your syllabi inviting students to talk with you or DSS about disability-related issues.
- Remind students of the resources available to them such as tutoring, writing lab, student support services, SOAR and counseling centers.

- Clearly and early announce the dates of exams and when assignments are due. Avoid last-minute readings or additional assignments and provide advance notice of changes in assignments and due dates.
- Read aloud what you write on the board or present on an overhead visual.
- Provide study guides or review sheets.
- Provide printed materials early to allow students sufficient time to read and comprehend the material. Many students with learning disabilities find it beneficial to use software that can read the textbook and other text-based materials aloud. In order for them to take advantage of this technology, the printed text must first be converted into an electronic file, a process that can be time-consuming.
- Use multi-modal methods to present classroom material, in order to address a variety of learning styles and strengths (e.g., auditory, visual, kinesthetic). Provide important information in both oral and written formats.
- Use more than one way to demonstrate or explain information.
- Keep instructions brief and uncomplicated. Repeat them word-for-word.
- Allow time for clarification of directions and essential information.
- Use captioned videos, though typically used for students who are deaf, they also help students with learning disabilities and those for whom English is a second language. Give all students an opportunity to view a video multiple times (e.g., by making it available in a library or learning center, or on a website).
- Have multiple methods for course assessment, such as allowing students to take an exam or writing a paper; work alone or in a group; or deliver an oral, written, or videotaped project presentation.
- Stress organization and ideas rather than mechanics when grading in-class writing assignments and assessments.

Possible classroom and assignment accommodations may include:

- Tape recording of lectures;
- Additional time to complete in-class assignments.

Possible examination accommodations may include:

- Extended exam time, typically time and one half to double time;
- Taking exams in a room with reduced distractions;
- Assistance of a reader, scribe, or word processor for exams;
- Option of an oral exam;
- Use of spelling / grammar assistive devices for essay exams;
- Use a calculator for exams;
- Use scratch paper during exams.

General tips for suggested accommodations that may facilitate student's academic success.

- Proper acoustics in a classroom;
- Reduction, as much as possible, of interfering sounds emitted from lights, vents, air conditioning units and/or interference from outside noise.
- Seat selection of close to the professor or of close to the door;
- Advanced textbook information to insure time for alternative book format;

- Written copies or dated outlines of lectures;
- Use of adaptive tools and methods;
- Advance notice of changes to schedule or outside field trips
- Pathways clear of obstructions;
- Verbal descriptions to supplement use of visual aids.

Policy and Procedure

It is the policy and practice of Southern Adventist University to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and state and local requirements regarding students and applicants with disabilities. Under these laws, no qualified individual with a disability shall be denied access to or participation in services, programs and activities of Southern Adventist University.

This guide is adapted from: Accommodating Students with Learning and Emotional Disabilities: A Legal Compendium. 1996 National Association of College and University Attorneys and What are typical challenges and accommodations for students with Asperger's Disorder and high-functioning Autism. 8/21/2015 The DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology).