

# **Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS)**

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<http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp>

## **DASS OFFICE**

The DASS team assists students with disabilities in using resources effectively and helping them work with professors and staff to obtain appropriate and reasonable accommodations. DASS is dedicated to providing students an equal opportunity to participate in the University's curriculum, programs, and activities. This team has two main functions:

1. establishing students' eligibility for accommodations; and,
2. providing ongoing support strategies for students with disabilities, primarily those with learning disabilities or ADHD.

Students who seek accommodations from DASS must provide current and appropriate documentation that verifies they have a condition that meets the legal definition of a disability and describes the current impact of the condition. On the basis of this information, the DASS team may make recommendations of services and/or reasonable accommodations that the University should provide and, upon the request of the student, will communicate these recommendations by letter to the student to share with appropriate persons within the institution.

## **SUCCESS STRATEGIES**

For students with learning and attention disorders, DASS also offers one-to-one academic coaching on topics such as time management, organization, test-taking strategies, and self-advocacy. Please feel free to refer students to DASS for individualized assistance with these academic and life skills that may help mitigate the impact of a learning disability or ADHD. Undergraduate students do not necessarily have to qualify for accommodations to use DASS academic coaching.

## **SYLLABUS STATEMENT**

To ensure that students follow the proper channels to establish eligibility for accommodations, we strongly recommend that all faculty members include the following paragraph on their syllabi:

\* Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4; an attachment describes the DASS procedures and relocated office.)

## **ACCOMMODATIONS LETTERS FOR FACULTY**

Before making any accommodations, faculty should require that each student seeking accommodations present a letter from DASS establishing his or her eligibility and recommending specific reasonable accommodations. If a student does not provide the instructor with such a letter but requests accommodations on the basis of a disability, the instructor should refer the student to the DASS team for guidance on how to establish eligibility. Accommodations should not be granted until the faculty member receives a letter from DASS.

Many of the students served by the DASS team have hidden disabilities (e.g., ADHD, depression or learning disabilities). The most commonly requested accommodation is extra time on tests to compensate for difficulties with maintaining concentration, reading issues, or processing speed. The national norm for extended time is 1.5 to 2 times the amount allotted to peers. The accommodation letter will indicate which amount is likely to be adequate in the case of the particular student involved.

Students are instructed to take the accommodation letter to faculty in private (e.g., during office hours) to come to an agreement about how the accommodations will be handled. Many students are very uncomfortable disclosing that they have a disability or feel ashamed, so faculty members are urged to create an open and receptive climate. When students hand you their accommodation letters, please do not say you do not need to meet about the letter. Instead,

please always invite students to discuss things with you if they would like, or ask if you can help in any way. However, professors must treat the students' disclosure of their disability as a confidential matter, taking the utmost care to protect students' privacy. Students should not fear that their disability will be "announced" or inadvertently disclosed to others.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS PROCESS**

Students are instructed to give faculty ample notification of their need for accommodations, such as extended time on testing, so that faculty will have adequate time to make appropriate arrangements. We strongly suggest at least a week in advance of the exam for this notification by the student. We encourage faculty to accommodate the students in a location near them so that the students may have someone with expertise, for example, to clarify an ambiguous test question if needed.

If the department/faculty cannot provide a suitable location for testing a student eligible for accommodations, DASS may be able to arrange for a testing setting and proctor at the L.E.C. if given sufficient notice. Please remember that DASS proctoring is available as a back-up to faculty members and should not be seen as the first response to a student requesting accommodations. The steps to follow to arrange for DASS proctoring include:

1. Determine the time you expect the student to take a test, and have the student--not the faculty member--call DASS to arrange for a proctored exam. We require that the student notify us at least 4 school days ahead of the exam date. The L.E.C. is open for test proctoring from 9-5 weekdays, so tests administered by this office must be taken within that timeframe.
2. Once the student contacts DASS to set up the testing time, a DASS staff member will send you an email with the DASS Test Proctoring Form attached. Please fill out this form, which provides information including arrangements for getting the test to DASS within 2 days of the test date, as well as arrangements for picking up the test.

## **WHY?**

The accommodations recommended by DASS are intended to mitigate the impact of the disability on eligible students and to provide a fairer opportunity for these students to compete with the average student without a disability. Accommodations level the academic playing field, enabling instructors to assess the student's ability and mastery of course material, rather than assess the student's disability. When determining what accommodations to recommend, DASS follows several principles. The accommodations:

- Should not necessitate that faculty lower standards or compromise on what is essential to the course. Faculty should maintain high expectations for students with disabilities. It is correct to think of this as an ethical or best practices issue: we do no one – including students with disabilities – any favors if we lower expectations.
- Should not give the student an unfair advantage over peers, but a fair opportunity to compete with others who do not have a disability.
- Should not require instructors to redesign class or impose an undue burden on the instructors.
- Should not incur an undue financial burden to the University (in the context of its entire budget).
- Are not retroactive. They are only effective forward in time from the point at which the student has established his/her eligibility with DASS and self-identified with the faculty through the accommodation letter.

Professors are expected to implement recommended accommodations so long as they are reasonable for their class. It is permissible to deny accommodations, but doing so requires sound justification from the institution. No individual professor should make such an important decision independently. Faculty members who find the recommended accommodations unreasonable or who have questions about how to implement them are invited to contact the Associate Director.

Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the University has a legal obligation to provide auxiliary aids and services and reasonable accommodations to qualified students with a disability. The purpose of such accommodations is to foster inclusion of these students so that they have as much of an opportunity to succeed as students without disabilities. Besides there being a legal basis for doing so, it is the right thing to do. The provision of accommodations is a collaborative, on-going process that requires deliberation between student, faculty, and the DASS team. We welcome your questions and suggestions on how we can collaborate more effectively.

*Please refer to our website for more information on establishing eligibility for accommodations, success strategies for students, FAQ's for faculty, and our contact information.*

*[www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp](http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp)*