

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

INFORMATION ON DISABILITY SERVICES AND ACCESS ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR STUDENTS AND CLASSES



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Physical Disabilities on the SMU Campus



Students with physical disabilities face many obstacles on a college campus. From finding paths around construction sites to finding an appropriate seat in class, each day can be a challenge.

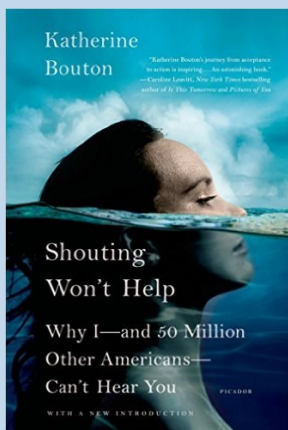
SMU and DASS work to make the educational environment accessible to all students. For example, DASS requests that specific tables (without chairs attached) be placed in classrooms of students who use wheelchairs. Without an appropriate table, these students often cannot take notes during lectures. Faculty can help by ensuring the needed table is in place when teaching that class. Many of our students with physical mobility challenges have planned their schedules carefully, in order to allow time to move from building to building. However, ever-changing construction zones or even a broken elevator can become a major obstacle. Consideration for tardiness may be warranted.

Some students have disabilities that impact their ability to write or take notes. This could be due to paralysis, some type of swelling or a muscular or joint condition. These students will likely have an accommodation for obtaining copies of peer notes, professor notes or audio-recorded lectures. Testing can be an issue as well, as they will most likely utilize a scribe. DASS does have the ability to provide a scribe, but in higher-level, complex courses, someone with specialized knowledge, like a TA or the professor, tends to administer tests more effectively.

You may have a student in your class who is visually impaired. The accommodations for this student require more instructor involvement, but in most cases, someone from DASS will contact you well ahead of time and guide you in the process of making course content accessible. For example, removing barriers by providing all text and handouts in an electronic format becomes a necessity. DASS also recommends you prepare your syllabus early, identify the readings and textbooks for the class, as well as identify any critical videos or images. It is not acceptable to assume your class is not a good choice for a student who is blind; rather, you will work with DASS and the student on ways to allow the student to fully participate. Even math, science and art courses can be made accessible! Check out DASS FAQ's for faculty for more ideas about working with students who are visually impaired. <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS/FAQ/ForFaculty>

Our campus has a number of amazing students, some of whom happen to have physical disabilities. Working with DASS and the student, faculty members help ensure that we are meeting their needs, while allowing them to be academically challenged at SMU.

Want to know more about hearing impairments?



Shouting Won't Help Why I and 50 Million Other Americans Can't Hear You

By Katherine Bouton

A Kirkus Reviews Best Nonfiction
Book of 2013

In The News

A new restaurant near campus in the Park Cities is staffed almost entirely by special-needs adults. Check out Howdy Homemade on Lovers Lane! Learn more about this successful business model [HERE](#).



Faculty Interview: A Personal View on Disabilities in the Classroom

Each semester, the *DASS Insider* profiles an important person on campus in order to highlight disability issues. Pauline Newton, Ph.D., is a Lecturer in Discernment and Discourse and has been teaching SMU undergraduates for 14 years. She hails from all over the country and South America, and attended Hollins University, American University and the University of Tulsa. Her passions include writing, running, her son and daughter, and her four-legged family member. She has bilateral cochlear implants and has experienced severe hearing loss since birth. Dr. Newton was the recipient of the Extra Mile Award in 2008 for her efforts in teaching to all learners, including those who learn differently. She has sat on SMU's President's Commission for the Needs of Persons with Disabilities (PCNPD) for the past several years.



Q1: As a faculty member at SMU for the past 10+ years, what have you learned from students with disabilities that has helped improve your teaching?

I have become more conscious of how I deliver material. I endeavor to write down most of the instructions (via Canvas) so that students who, say, have auditory processing challenges, can read and hear the material. Sometimes students will gently remind me that it helps for them to read, learn or hear content a specific way, and I always appreciate those reminders. I will then sometimes go over the materials again with those students in my office or in a quieter environment.

Q2: How does your own disability impact your teaching and working with students?

It reminds me to be sensitive. People say that hearing loss is a hidden disability; I make it seem easy to communicate even though it's not (I'm exhausted after a full day of listening to students!), and this perception can be true for students who have learning differences such as dyslexia. I don't see how long it takes them to write or dictate a paper. I don't see how long it takes them to read or listen to the materials. And so I have to remind myself: this student is making this look easy, but she probably spent twice as much time, if not more, composing this paper.

Q3: What do you want other faculty members to remember when working with students with classroom accommodations, such as extended testing time or note-taking assistance?

When you get the accommodation letter, you might ask students, even if they just put the letter in your hand and walk away immediately, what you can do to help. Let them know your door is open. They may be shy or nervous about requesting assistance. You might also ask them to remind you later if any needs arise. Students may discover that X method works better later on in the semester.

If you are asking for someone to take notes, don't bring attention to the student who is requesting the notes. Simply ask a good note-taker if he/she wouldn't mind sharing his/her typed notes. The note taker can email you the notes and you can email them to the student. At times, I have also sent students copies of my lesson plans if requested.

With regard to extended testing: no one wants to be singled out. No one wants to have to take a test in a room, away from his or her peers. This request can also be difficult for students who have back-to-back classes since the extended time will overlap with their upcoming class. Plus, remember how stressed you were during exam time in college? Add the stress of rearranging schedules for accommodations.

(Cont. on page 4)

**A good resource to recommend to your DASS students is
SNL (Students for New Learning),
a student support group with monthly dinner meetings.
For more info, click [HERE](#) .**

Administering Your Own Exams to Students with Accommodations

Did you know that in a vast majority of cases, students with approved testing accommodations don't have to test at DASS? In fact, we prefer that instructors administer their own exams to students with accommodations. The instructor has complete control of the test administration without having to relay testing instructions, basic or otherwise, to DASS. In addition, students can ask clarifying questions directly to the instructor, TA, or proctoring staff and get any test corrections, all with minimal or no delay.

If you plan to provide test accommodations yourself, ensure that they are effective. This means:

- ◆ All accommodations identified as reasonable in the DASS letter should be provided. Students have the right to all of their testing

accommodations regardless of testing location, unless an accommodation changes the fundamental nature of the testing. If you think there is such a conflict, please consult with a DASS staff member before denying an accommodation.

- ◆ The test space is appropriate for concentrated effort. Whether or not a student has a "Distraction-reduced environment" as an accommodation, the testing environment should be quiet.
- ◆ Students clearly understand when they need to finish the exam. An effective strategy is to note the start time, required end time, and completed exam time on the test itself.

Occasionally, instructors con-

tact us with questions about how best to test students with extended test time. Some ideas include:

- ◆ Allowing the student to test uninterrupted in a quiet office or conference room.
- ◆ Ensuring ahead of time that you, a TA, or staff member can proctor the student in the testing location. Be aware that a student does not have the right to demand to test alone with no proctor. They should be monitored.
- ◆ Asking the student to take the majority of the test with the class but begin early or stay late when the classroom is available. If the classroom is not available, test the student with the class, but allow him or her to finish the exam in your office or another appropriate location.

Our thanks to University of Arizona's Disability Resource Center for help with this article.

What do I do with these accommodation letters?

Faculty often ask DASS about best practices in handling and managing the accommodation letters they receive each semester from students. Here are our suggestions:

1. Carefully read the letter as they are not all the same. Pay attention to any special instructions attached to the letter. These usually signal a complex accommodation that requires more conversation with the student.
2. Verify the letter heading has the current semester.
3. Place the date of receipt on the top and any notes from your discussion with the student on the letter for future reference during the semester.
4. Maintain a confidential file of accommodation letters for each class for easy reference when needed.
5. Ask the student how you can be helpful to their learning. Make them feel comfortable during this appointment.

As always, if you have questions about this topic, please let us know at DASS. We're here to help!



Faculty Interview: A Personal View on Disabilities in the Classroom (cont.)

The DASS team will do everything it can to work with a number of students and faculty during a very busy period. My recommendation would be to remain flexible about schedules and delivery of testing materials.

Q4: What kinds of challenges did you face in undergraduate and graduate school?

I attended a very small college, deliberately, so that I could lip read my way through classes. At the time, I wore hearing aids, which were powerful, but I was still wiped out at the end of a class day from looking and listening. I did have note takers for larger classes, and the professors were always compassionate and helpful. If I needed help, I went to their office and asked for clarification. They were always, without exception, ready to assist me. I started college right when the ADA became law (in 1992), so I was just testing the waters, and I had a lot of support from many wonderful mentors. When I was in graduate school, I used CART. CART allows you to read, real time, what the professor and other students are saying--for a class with a professor who was notoriously challenging. I then learned how much I had been missing! CART is expensive, so I was very thoughtful when I requested it, but I knew that I was within my rights. The professor was actually very enthusiastic and encouraging about using CART. If you need an accommodation, don't be shy. The grades you earn can be boosted by those accommodations.

Q5: What kind of bias have you witnessed in the world of academia against those with disabilities?

This bias isn't limited to the academic world. I have had conversations with students, lawyers, hiring committees and administrators about disclosing one's disability when applying for jobs. I recently read about a study that showed that applicants who disclosed their disability in their cover letters were more likely to be rejected. However, an undisclosed disability can lead to mistrust; prospective employers who are unfamiliar with disabilities or learning differences may feel as if the applicant is "hiding" something, even though applicants are not required to disclose information until after they are hired. It's important to be up front, but only when necessary. This tactic applies in the academic world (as a student) and in the professional world (as an employee).

Q6: You have been involved in PCNPD for many years but what else would you like to see more of on campus, in regards to supporting people with disabilities?

I sometimes wonder if we can do more in the way of mobility assistance. Students on crutches or in a wheelchair or scooter have to come all the way from the residential commons or even from the DART station. How can we better meet their needs? We have such a wide range of needs, and requests evolve. We need more sensitivity with regard to requests - for the students and for the DASS team. Yes, it might feel risky to send exam materials ahead of time, but most students just want an equitable chance to do well in academia so that, in turn, they can excel in their jobs in the real world. Their accommodations should not provide them with an advantage, but should offer an equal opportunity to participate.

VISIT US ONLINE AT
WWW.SMU.EDU/ALEC/DASS.ASP

Please include this statement in your syllabus:

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

VISIT US AT DASS

5800 Ownby Drive—Suite 202 Loyd Center
2nd Floor - Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center
Entrance near Gate 3 of Ford Stadium
Parking in the Meadows Garage

Phone: 214-768-1470
Email: dass@smu.edu



DASS IS MORE THAN ACCOMMODATIONS.

For resources that may be helpful to faculty and staff, please visit:
<http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS/Resources/ForFaculty>