

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

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



SPRING 2024

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SASP Open House: Welcome Back to Faculty and Staff!

On Thursday, January 11, DASS participated in an Open House and Breakfast to welcome faculty and staff back to campus. Sponsored by SASP, the morning event gathered staff from the A-LEC, DASS and ADSA to meet and mingle with faculty and staff and to provide information and updates on the support services we offer the SMU community. Well over 50 guests were in attendance, and informal discussions continued well beyond the stated end time. We were excited to see so many colleagues with whom we work throughout the year.

If you stopped by for the event, thank you for taking time to join DASS in this collaborative effort. If you could not make it, please make a point to stop in whenever you are in our building. We would love to visit with you and offer support.

We wish all of you a successful Spring semester!
The DASS Team

FACULTY & STAFF BREAKFAST WITH ADSA & SASP



**THURSDAY
JANUARY 11
2024**

Tours start at 9am
and 9:30am
Lloyd All Sports Center
Suite 316 (ADSA);
Suite 202 (SASP)

Please come meet the Student Academic Success Programs staff and Academic Development of Student Athletes staff for breakfast and Open House. Tour our facilities and learn about the services offered to our students. Let's talk about how we can partner with you! Start times for each location are 9:00 am and 9:30 am.



The DASS Website Update

David Tylicki

In the second half of 2023, we at DASS overhauled our entire website, updating layout, content, accessibility, and navigation. We made it more engaging by adding brighter colors and photos with alt text, and easier to navigate by showcasing our most popular pages and services on the DASS front page.

Faculty members now have their own section of the site, consolidating all the information they need to keep SMU accessible for our students with disabilities. You can access the *Faculty Resources* pages via the *Resources and Campus Accessibly* tab on the DASS front page. Inside, faculty can learn about the partnership between DASS and Faculty, how to use our online interface, DASS Link, more effectively, browse the Faculty FAQ, and even peruse the current and past issues of this very publication, *The DASS Insider*.

Required Syllabus Statement

Remember to update your syllabus with the most current DASS syllabus statement.

[ACCESS THE STATEMENT](#)

Other Faculty Resources



Faculty FAQ



The DASS Insider Faculty Newsletter



Test Proctoring

Beyond the faculty section, the site is a clearinghouse of DASS and disability-related information. Do you want to know more about how common accommodations work, or how students apply for accommodations and services here at SMU? Check out the *Request Services* section. How about a deep dive into our recently updated Policies and Procedures? You can find those in the *About* section.

We invite you to explore! And of course, if you have any feedback, let us know.

DASS Staff and Welcome

Welcome! Our office is the primary contact for all SMU students with disabilities and works with faculty and staff in making the accommodations process as seamless as possible. The abbreviated checklist on page 4 may be helpful as faculty transition to the system we use on our campus to meet the access needs of students with disabilities.

Director: Alexa Taylor

Learning Specialist:

David Tylicki

Accommodation Coordinators: Michelle Bufkin,

Jeanna Turay, Valiza Cameron-Patterson

DASS Administrative

Assistant: Candy Brown

Disability Services Benchmarking Study 2023

Alexa Taylor

In the Fall of 2023, the DASS office initiated a disability services benchmarking study. The study included aspirant, peer, and regional colleges and universities. Alexa Taylor, DASS Director, held phone conversations with nine other institutions, exploring staffing configurations, student-to-staff ratios, documentation expectations, and approaches to students who had limited documentation of their disability.



SMU aligned with most other DS offices in most areas, including how we describe our documentation guidelines on our website, our utilizing a digital data management system (DASS Link) for secure record keeping, and the general expectation that documentation expectations look different at the college level than the high school level. All agreed that recommendations from an outside provider are not always approved as an accommodation, and that only the DASS office (or equivalent office), and no other campus office, makes accommodation decisions. Also, all schools continue to see increases in requests for accommodations, particularly housing accommodations and flexible attendance, as well as more students reporting mental health conditions.

Some schools provide minimal accommodations for certain populations of students (e.g., transfers) while they gather documentation; however, SMU tends to expect some type of diagnostic information, even if outdated and limited in detail, to initiate the accommodation process. In other words, SMU students are not typically approved for accommodations if they provide no documentation OR provide only their accommodation plan from K-12, which is not considered a diagnostic document. In the study, we found that most schools do not provide financial resources to students pursuing a Learning Disability evaluation; however, SMU does set aside funds in the event a student qualifies for this financial assistance and is unable to pay for an evaluation otherwise. Like SMU, most schools do provide community referrals for students seeking evaluations for learning and attention disorders, as well as for mental health treatment. Most of the schools interviewed had the same or a greater percentage of students with accommodations in their student body as SMU. Many of the schools provide either live captions, ASL interpreters, or both at their large Commencement ceremonies. This is something we encourage SMU to adopt to make our large events more accessible to all.

Relationships were built between directors during this benchmarking study. Alexa Taylor is now participating in an ACC Director's group which meets monthly to discuss disability services issues among other ACC institutions. Overall, the benchmarking experience confirmed that the DASS office operates similarly to our peer and aspirant institutions in most areas, and we will continue to look for ways to improve our services and transparency.

Campus-wide Disability Commission

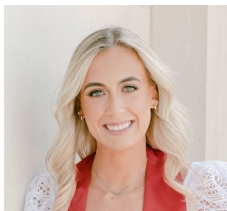
Alexa Taylor



Did you know that for more than 20 years, a campus-wide commission has reported to the President on disability-related issues that face our students, employees, and guests? Just like other commissions on campus, the President's Commission on the Needs of Persons with Disabilities ([PCNPD](#)) is made up of faculty, staff and students and meets several times each semester. Efforts are made to ensure there is representation from each of the schools within SMU, and you can contact the Chair of PCNPD if you are aware of issues that you'd like to bring to the attention of the Commission. The current Chair of PCNPD is [Jennifer Culver](#), from OIT.

After 2-4 meetings each semester, at the end of the academic year, the Commission prepares a report to President Turner highlighting the efforts of the group, issues or trends to be aware of, and recommendations for the coming year. Recent discussions in this Commission centered around a variety of topics, such as physical access to buildings during construction, the increasing need for test proctoring for students with accommodations, CART (captions) or ASL interpreting at events, and new technology to make websites more accessible. Please reach out to Dr. Culver to identify who within your school is represented on the Commission or if you have any disability-related concerns that the Commission should be made aware of.

Welcome New DASS Staff: Kelsey Bauer, Graduate Assistant



My name is Kelsey Bauer, and I am honored to serve as DASS's new Graduate Assistant for the 2023-2024 academic year. I'll mainly be providing academic coaching alongside David Tylicki, the DASS Senior Learning Specialist, and I'll also be working on a few projects for the DASS team.

I graduated from SMU in the Spring of 2021 with a BA in Psychology and a minor in Educational Studies, I am now pursuing a Master's of Science in Counseling, specializing in child and adolescent counseling. My professional journey has predominantly revolved around empowering marginalized groups of younger children.

Joining the DASS team is an exciting next step for me, as I anticipate learning from our wonderful faculty and embracing the challenges that working with university students present. This position will expand my professional repertoire and contribute to the emotional and academic well-being of our students. In various academic settings, I have witnessed the transformative power of one-on-one collaboration. By crafting personalized plans that cultivate academic success, my goal is to boost students' confidence and help them establish and achieve attainable goals. I look forward to the upcoming Spring semester and the valuable opportunities ahead, and I hope to see you all around campus!

Accommodations for Graduate Students

Jeanna Turay

Did you know DASS has a dedicated Graduate and Advanced Studies accommodations coordinator? If you teach graduate students and they have disability needs, they likely will be working with Jeanna Turay. We know each program is unique and sometimes there are less traditional accommodation needs with graduate students. There is support we can offer so feel free to contact Jeanna Turay with questions and/or point your students to her. Jaturay@smu.edu

Students with Psychological Conditions

Valiza Cameron-Patterson

I joined the DASS Team in Summer, 2023 and work with students diagnosed with a mental health condition. The most frequent diagnoses on my caseload are generalized anxiety disorder as either a primary or co-occurring diagnosis. The most severe diagnoses I review include Bipolar Disorder, ADHD/ Autism combination, depression with past hospitalization, Schizophrenia and PTSD. DASS has seen a significant increase in students requesting accommodations based on psychological conditions in the past five years.

Complex cases generate an interview with the student and their provider to understand the student's current emotional status and treatment plan while attending classes. Not all psychological disorders necessarily translate into academic struggles or require accommodation. Many psychological disorders can stabilize with effective treatment and/or medication, and some accommodations may be approved for a semester or two to monitor response to treatment. If improvements in their condition do not occur, our office requests updates from providers to determine ongoing severity of impacts.

The most common accommodations for psychological disorders include extra time on tests, a reduced distraction environment, and the ability to audio record lectures to manage internal distracting thoughts or low mood, panic and anxiety symptoms, or possibly cognitive sluggishness from medications. Flexible attendance and breaks during class are less common accommodations, requiring detailed documentation, interviews with medical providers and team consultation as part of the decision process.

As with all disabilities, every diagnosis manifests differently. Student and provider interviews can delve into tough subjects, addressing the student's needs and concerns while maintaining a realistic understanding of the difference between a success plan (K-12) and an access plan (higher ed).
(Concluded on Page 4)

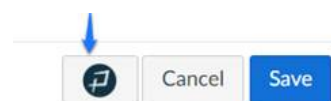
Event Accessibility Statement: Planning a Successful Event



University departments are responsible for providing reasonable accommodations for guests attending their events. For employees and guests, the Institutional Access & Equity (IAE) office is available to provide guidance and assistance to departments as needed. For student needs, DASS is a resource to answer questions about accessibility. The University, by way of the [IAE website](#), recommends that hosts of SMU events place the following statement on their event advertising/registration materials: “Any person who requires a reasonable accommodation on the basis of a disability in order to participate in this program should contact the [department name] at [department phone number and/or email] at least one week prior to the event to arrange for the accommodation.”

Making Your Canvas Course More Accessible

OIT recently rolled out [PopeTech](#) to assist instructors in making their course content in Canvas as accessible as possible. With an accessibility guide and clear instructions, you can add alternative text to images, make sure the contrast of the font on the page is readable for a screenreading-user, and get an overall score of accessibility. In Canvas, you can easily check the accessibility of your page by clicking on the “p” button near the buttons where you would normally save and publish a page:



Check with your school's OIT [Academic Technology Services representative](#) for information on using this tool!

Students with Psychological Conditions (conc.)

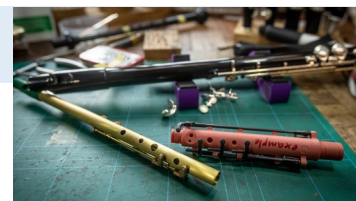
Valiza Cameron-Patterson

Mental health conditions especially require discussions about what constitutes reasonable accommodation, ensuring access for the student without compromising the curriculum they aim to master. Students are advised that accommodations are one part of a multi-pronged approach to managing their treatment plan and their studies. Students are encouraged to explore services offered by SMU Counseling Services on various mental health topics and provided outside referrals, if needed.

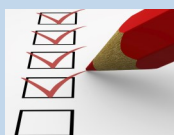
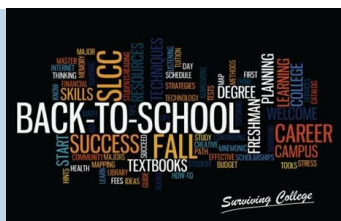
If you are concerned about one of your DASS students, please don't hesitate to contact our office to brainstorm ways we can collaborate on supporting the mental health of SMU students.

Adaptive Musical Instruments: Peter Worrell

The BBC show, *Music Matters*, highlights the workshop of Peter Worrell where musical instruments are adapted for young musicians with limb differences. See what he has done to [advance accessibility](#) for all musicians!



Start of Semester Checklist



The start of each semester is a

good time to go over the basics related to DASS students and accommodations. The most urgent are making plans for the Syllabus Statement and reviewing Accommodation Letters on DASS Link. The complete checklist of items is found on our website under the [FAQ section](#).

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/SASP/DASS/Resources/ForFaculty>