

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

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



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Welcome to the DASS Insider.

- ◆ To help us identify topics of interest for faculty, please let us know of questions or issues you would like addressed in this newsletter. Send your suggestions to dass@smu.edu.
- ◆ Please share this newsletter with your TAs and talk with them about questions they have regarding students with disabilities.
- ◆ You are not expected to be an expert in disabilities. Remember, we are available to talk through any questions or concerns.

DASS: Who We Are and What We Do

Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies



From Left: Rebecca Marin, Michelle Bufkin, David Tylicki, Candy Brown, Alexa Taylor

DASS is more than accommodations. The DASS team assists SMU in complying with state and federal laws that mandate equal access to education for people with disabilities. Our team:

- Evaluates student documentation in support of a disability to determine disability status and need for accommodation;
- Determines and authorizes on a case-by-case basis appropriate, reasonable academic accommodations;
- Provides academic coaching and support for DASS students; and,
- Serves as a resource and consultant to faculty and staff.

DASS serves hundreds of students who have a wide variety of conditions that affect their ability to access classes, services, and programs here at SMU. These include attention and learning disabilities as well as psychological and medical conditions, and others.

In order to receive DASS services, students must meet eligibility requirements defined by state and federal laws. They provide DASS with documentation from an appropriate evaluator or medical provider who verifies their disability. You can view the SMU guidelines for this documentation at:

<http://smu.edu/alec/GuidelinesforDocumenting.asp>.

After carefully reviewing all disability-related documentation, DASS Coordinators meet individually with each student to determine appropriate accommodations and discuss how those accommodations are implemented at SMU. Students are also introduced to a wide spectrum of services to enhance their learning skills.

Our team is committed to helping students practice responsible self-advocacy skills and effective study strategies to achieve their academic goals at SMU. We invite you to partner with us in meeting this goal. Please let DASS know if we can assist you or your department.

Accommodation Focus: Reminders for Faculty

Include the current University approved disability statement in your syllabi (see page 4).

Expect a hand-delivered and current accommodation letter from students in a sealed envelope (no faxes or emails).

Read the letters carefully. They are not all the same.

Discuss the letter in private with the student. Be clear on how each accommodation will be implemented.

Privately address issues related to the student's disability, not in class or around other students. **Never identify** students with disabilities as such in front of others.

Expect ample advance request by students for testing arrangements. Provide advance notice and all required forms to DASS when requested.

If questions arise, **call DASS** or the Coordinator listed on the letter of accommodation. We are here to help!

Test Proctoring at DASS: Just the Facts

If you have students with testing accommodations, such as extended testing time or a reduced distraction environment, chances are you have had to come up with creative ways to accommodate them within your department. SMU encourages faculty to manage most accommodations themselves and refer the student to DASS for test proctoring only if you are not able to work out a viable solution in your department.

DASS serves as a back-up to faculty, and can proctor exams, quizzes, and the like, when needed. However, there are things to remember! We only proctor M-F, between 9am-5pm, and only with at least 4 days notice from the student. We also are not equipped to manage tests that require a computer and are limited on space, so students and their professors must work out many of the accommodations on their own. Testing

with the professor is often preferable for the students as well, so they receive a similar experience as other students. If a student needs more advanced accommodations such as a reader or a scribe, it is usually best for the instructor or department to provide this. Having a reader/scribe with some knowledge of the content may be necessary for classes like Math, Stat, Foreign Language, Computer Science and Engineering, among others. If you have concerns or limitations, please bring up your issues in a depart-

The deadline for students to arrange DASS test proctoring for Spring final exams is APRIL 23.

ment meeting or with your Department Chair, and consider inviting a DASS representative to your next departmental meeting to discuss options. See our website for details and deadlines for test proctoring. <http://smu.edu/alec/testproctoring.asp>



DASS Room 217—test proctoring area

Does your department need more information from DASS?

Consider inviting Alexa Taylor to a faculty meeting to brainstorm and offer support to your department.

Documentation Jeopardy for Faculty

At times, students may provide faculty with disability related documentation and ask you to work with them individually without going through the DASS office.

DASS discourages this practice for several reasons. If you choose to provide accommodations without insti-

tutional authorization, you subject yourself to unwanted legal liability. You may also gain access to confidential information inappropriately. SMU may also be at risk if all professors do not uniformly apply established accommodations. Finally, students suffer most since

helpful services beyond accommodations are not pursued, and an official history of their accommodations is not kept.

Please refer students to DASS and resist being drawn into taking responsibility for accommodation decisions yourself. By doing so, you eliminate potential jeopardy for all concerned.



Faculty Focus: *The Extra Mile Award* Honoring Faculty who go the Extra Mile

SMU annually honors three faculty members who work well with students with learning differences by presenting them Extra Mile Awards at the Awards Extravaganza. Since 2008, fifteen faculty members have been recognized. Students for New Learning (SNL), an organization chartered by Student Senate, helps identify the winners. Funding and support for this award are provided by the President's Advisory Committee on the Needs of Persons with Disabilities (PACNPD), reflecting how much it values faculty sensitivity to students with Learning Disabilities or ADHD. Most of the winners would quickly acknowledge that what they do for students with learning differences is the same as what they do for all students: prepare a clear syllabus, be ready to meet with students in office hours, be sensitive to different learners and their needs, and treat students with respect and a belief that they can be successful. Our recent winners in 2012 were: Craig Flournoy (Journalism), Judy Foxman (Marketing), John Wise (Biology). Our students thank them!

Disability Spotlight: Invisible Disabilities

What is People-First Language?

The purpose of people-first language is to promote the idea that someone's disability label is just a disability label—not the defining characteristic of the entire individual. Some examples of people-first language might include saying "person with a disability," "woman with cerebral palsy," and "student with a learning disability". Language to avoid would include "a deaf person", or "a handicapped student".

Often people think the term disability only applies to those who use assistive devices like wheelchairs or walkers. In fact, 74% of Americans who live with disabilities do not use aids like these. The term 'invisible disabilities' can be applied to many diagnostic categories that qualify students for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Some of these invisible disabilities may include Traumatic Brain Injury, ADHD, chronic fatigue syndrome, Asperger syndrome, depression, hearing impairments, bipolar disorder and various learning disabilities. Because visual cues are not available for these disabilities, some people wrongly infer that these disabilities do not exist or are not severe. Rather, the impacts of these disabilities can produce mild to severe functional limitations. In fact, people often conclude a person can or cannot do something by the way they look. This can be equally frustrating for those who may appear *unable*, but are perfectly capable, as well as those who appear *able*, but are not. When a student presents a letter of accommodation from DASS to faculty, the professional staff at DASS has found that the documentation provided meets criteria dictated by federal and best-practice standards for that particular disability—whether visible or not. The specifics of that documentation are kept confidential in the DASS office. DASS is available to help professors understand how to apply the accommodations to each student's specific classroom situation. Everyone with a disability is different, with unique challenges and abilities. Relying on more than what we see helps provide the equal access to learning protected under federal laws. For more information, a brief video is available at <http://www.conquercollegewithld.com/1475/learning-disabilities-college/>.

FERPA and Confidentiality: Protecting Students' Privacy

All disability-related information is protected by FERPA guidelines. By being mindful of a student's right to confidentiality, faculty members can comply with federal law and avoid creating uncomfortable situations for a student with disabilities. Welcome students with disabilities by providing a syllabus statement that

invites them to privately discuss their disability-related accommodations. Students should present you with DASS Letters of Accommodation explaining their accommodations. This information may be shared only on a "need to know" basis, for example, with a TA or department assistant in order to facilitate a testing accommo-

dation. When implementing accommodations, do not identify DASS students or acknowledge their requests for accommodations in public. If you have questions or concerns about implementing a student's accommodations in your class, contact DASS directly. FAQs on confidentiality are available at <http://smu.edu/alec/dassfacultyfaq.asp>.

Academic Coaching - What It Is and How It Helps



Students meet weekly with DASS academic coaches.

DASS offers one-on-one academic coaching tailored to students with AD/HD and Learning Disabilities. The DASS coach considers the individual needs of a student, then teaches needed academic skills, such as note taking, textbook reading, and test-taking, as well as time management. The coach and student determine realistic goals and the plans to meet them, then during regular appointments, assess progress, providing structure and a degree of accountability to the student.

Coaching promotes independence; over time, students learn to utilize their natural talents, build self-confidence, recognize and avoid pitfalls on their own, and self-advocate effectively. Ultimately, coaching is a positive, supportive, and empowering experience for students, and the DASS team at SMU is proud to be able to provide this valuable service.

Resources for Faculty

DASS strives to be a resource to faculty in your efforts to teach all of your students successfully, including those with disabilities. Please don't hesitate to contact our office with questions. We offer the resources below to assist you in your efforts to maintain an inclusive educational environment.

Resources for Faculty

Frequently Asked Questions at <http://smu.edu/alec/dassfacultyfaq.asp> on such topics as allowing use of laptops, recording devices, flexible attendance and accommodation procedures.

"Tips for Working With A Person Who Has A Disability" prepared by Everett Community College at http://www.everettcc.edu/uploadedFiles/Student_Resources_and_Services/CDS/CDS_Tips_for_Working_With_A_Person_Who_Has_A_Disability.pdf.

SMU's **Assistive Technology Center** on the first floor of the Fondren Library has state-of-the-art equipment, including voice-activated and text-to-speech output software, and advanced grammar and spell-checking software. For more information on how they are used, contact tnolen@smu.edu.

Tips for Faculty

Many students find it awkward and daunting to speak with faculty. Invite them to meet with you to talk about learning issues in a welcoming, sensitive way.

For students with hearing loss, attention or processing difficulties, getting notes or an outline of presentations **PRIOR** to class can be invaluable. This can free them up to pay closer attention to what's being said during class, rather than focusing on note-taking. Important information, such

as test dates, should be provided in writing in addition to being verbalized.

Preferential seating (in the first couple of rows and away from distractions at a window or door) can improve attention significantly, as well as help students with hearing impairments.

Be sure to make films and readings available in an accessible format for all students in a timely way. Films/videos should have **captioning** to make them accessible to students who have hearing impairments so that they can participate fully in class.

A **well-designed syllabus** should contain due dates for specified reading assignments and papers. Students need advance notice to arrange for e-books or audio-books, and are disadvantaged if reading or written assignments are revised with little prior notice.

Because I found it hard to attend to anything less interesting than my thoughts, I was difficult to teach. —Yeats

VISIT US AT DASS

5800 Ownby Drive—Suite 202
2nd Floor - Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center
Entrance near Gate 3 of Ford Stadium

Phone: 214-768-1470
Email: dass@smu.edu
Fax: 214-768-1255



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 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 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.

Accommodations Beyond SMU

Faculty members often ask us whether students will receive disability accommodations after they leave SMU. You might wonder, "How are we preparing them for an environment that might not offer them the same kind of flexibility?" Actually, many students who receive accommodations in undergraduate school will receive them on high-stakes testing such as the GRE, MCAT, and LSAT. They also may receive them in graduate school, whether it is a Ph.D. program, Law School or Medical School.

Although the work world is not made up of timed tests, people with disabilities also are afforded accommodations in the work environment. It just may look a little different than in a school environment. Therefore, our focus should be ensuring our students have full access to their education RIGHT NOW in this environment.

DASS IS MORE THAN ACCOMMODATIONS.