

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

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



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George Utkov, Outstanding Senior Man, with Robert Ray and Chad Harbour at the Awards Extravaganza, April 21, 2014.

SMU Outstanding Senior Man and DASS Student: George Utkov

On April 21, SMU recognized outstanding achievement by students and faculty at the annual Awards Extravaganza. Two of these awards focus on the academic, leadership and service accomplishments of a Senior man and woman. The Outstanding Senior Man and Woman awardees are chosen from a group of twenty nominees from the Deans of each of SMU's five schools: Dedman, Lyle, Simmons, Meadows and Cox. All nominees have grade point averages that place them on the honor roll, and participate in numerous honor programs as well as honors societies in their respective fields. This year's Outstanding Senior Man, **George Utkov**, has been a student receiving accommodations through DASS and participates in Students for New Learning (SNL) as well. George graduates from SMU as an Engineering Fellow's Scholar, an SMU Distinguished Scholar and University Memorial Scholar, with a BS in Mechanical Engineering and minor in Business Administration. He has served as the Student Trustee on the SMU Board of Trustees and studied at SMU-in-Italy and SMU-in-Taos. His internships include infectious disease research at a Memphis children's hospital and development of maintenance programs for oil and gas equipment with Hunt Consolidated, Inc. George shared the following insights with DASS after winning the award.

What impacts from your learning differences have required the most energy from you to manage at SMU?

My biggest challenges have been related to reading and writing. Reading and writing have always been difficult for me, so adjusting to the college reading and writing load was not easy. Reading textbooks and assignments always took me much longer than my classmates, and writing papers was always a three-week struggle. However, through the support systems at SMU, the LEC, Mickey Saloma, and my parents, I was able to not only adapt but also thrive with my learning disabilities.

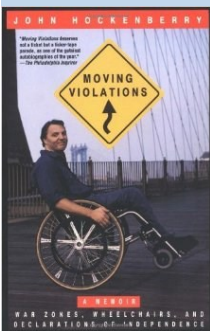
How have accommodations and SMU support services helped you manage these impacts?

Disability accommodations and the support services at the LEC have been instrumental to my success both in and out of the classroom. As a first-year, an academic coach helped me schedule classes, prepare for exams, and manage my time efficiently, and the writing tutors made the daunting task of writing papers more manageable. Throughout all four years, the testing accommodations and personnel in DASS helped alleviate stress and anxiety by creating a more conducive testing environment.

What advice would you give SMU faculty about working with students with disabilities?

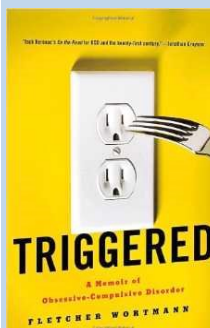
Over the past four years, I have had faculty who bent over backwards to help me succeed in their classes and faculty who were difficult to work with simply because they did not understand learning disabilities. The courses that I learned the most from are not the ones I aced but the ones in which the professor went out of his or her way to help me grasp the material. I encourage our faculty to go the extra mile for students with disabilities: work with them one-on-one, be flexible in administering tests and quizzes, and at the very least, understand their students' learning disabilities. If faculty are familiar with the learning disabilities of their students, they are more likely to make a greater impact on the lives of their students and be better stewards of our University's mission.

Interested in disability memoirs? Check out these books:



Moving Violations: A Memoir War Zones, Wheelchairs, and Declarations of Independence

John Hockenberry



Triggered: A Memoir of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Fletcher Wortmann

Final Exams at DASS: Faculty Reminders

The deadline for students to reserve space at DASS for final exams was April 22. A few reminders will help DASS final exam testing procedures to run smoothly.

At DASS our testing blocks during finals are 9 – 1:30, 11:30 – 4, and 2:30 – 7. The exception is Saturday finals, which are only offered at 9:00 am.

Before Finals:

Professors will receive a Test Proctor Form and request for the exam 3-5 days before the test date. Please fill it in completely, noting a contact number during the test time, and return promptly.

Any changes to original times reserved by the student will require written approval by the professor.

If students fail to follow our procedures for testing, we will direct them back to their instructors to work out the necessary accommodations. Just because DASS has denied a student to test at DASS because they missed the deadline does NOT mean the faculty member should necessarily deny the accommodation for the upcoming test.

If it is reasonable for you to put the accommodation in place, then you should do so.

Picking up Finals:

During the week: please come before 5 pm to pick up tests taken at 9 and 11:30. For tests taken at

2:30, please come the next morning.

Saturday: DASS will only be open until the last student finishes on Saturday. Please plan on being here by noon if you must pick up a final on Saturday. DASS is closed on Sunday during finals.

To pick up tests after hours or on Saturday, professors will need to swipe their ID to enter the building. The only entrance to use is the main LEC entrance, which is just north of Gate 3, facing the Meadows Museum. Asking a student to return an exam after hours when buildings are closed is ill-advised.

Please note that there may be a delay in scanning/emailing exams due to the high volume of tests. Please keep that in mind with deadlines on the proctor form.

Please remember DASS is **not able to proctor exams that are administered on a computer**, unless the student has the accommodation that requires a word processor for a writing intensive test.



DASS Room 217—test proctoring area

For more information on final exams at DASS, please visit :
<http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS/DisabilityAccommodations/TestProctoring>

Test Proctoring at DASS during Maymester and Summer Sessions

If you are teaching courses during the upcoming May Term or Summer School sessions, please be aware that the procedure for accommodating your students is slightly different than in the regular term. You should consider all possible ways to provide the requested accommodations within your own department due to limited staff and proctors at DASS. Only in extreme cases where you are not able to provide the accommodation yourself, should you refer your student to DASS during the summer. Also be aware of the timing of your tests and how a student with extended time would be afforded that accommodation in a summer schedule. Thank you for your efforts and your understanding!

Faculty Focus: The Extra Mile Award



Victoria Serrano, President of SNL, with Professor Stephen Robertson at the Awards Extravaganza

2014
Faculty
Award
Winners



SMU annually honors faculty members who work well with students with learning differences by presenting them with the Extra Mile Award at the Awards Extravaganza. Since 2008, seventeen faculty members have been recognized. Students for New Learning (SNL), an organization chartered by the Student Senate, helps identify the awardees.

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 consistent with how they approach all students: prepare a clear syllabus, meet regularly with students in office hours, remain sensitive to different learners and their needs, and treat students with respect and a belief that they can be successful.

Our recent winners announced at the 2014 Awards Extravaganza include Steve Robertson (Dedman College: Statistical Sciences) and Victoria Lockwood (Dedman College: Anthropology). Our students thank them!

SMU Outstanding Senior Man and DASS Student: George Utkov

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What advice would you give students on being a successful student at SMU with a learning disability?

I believe my learning disabilities are blessings in disguise. Because of them, I have been forced to adapt my learning styles in order to be successful. Through this process, I have learned more than I can describe about myself, my family, and other students. My first piece of advice to students with learning disabilities is to see their disabilities as blessings. Viewing their differences in this light psychologically allows them to make the most of the gifts they have been given. My second piece of advice is to take advantage of the resources and support systems at SMU. Our University does a tremendous job of putting our students into positions to succeed, but students often do not utilize all of the resources available to them.

What are your plans after graduation?

I plan to learn more about myself and broaden my global perspective by traveling around the world with friends and family. Upon my return—much to my parents' excitement—I will be gainfully employed with Hunt Consolidated, Inc., in downtown Dallas, where I will work as a project analyst. After working for a few years, I will consider returning to school for graduate degrees in business and/or law, depending on my areas of interest.

Ultimately, I would really enjoy starting my own business, pursuing philanthropic work related to saltwater fishing with mentally handicapped children and their families, and perhaps becoming a pastor. I'd love to do all of these, and many others, while remaining actively involved with and giving back to the University that has given me more than I could have ever imagined, SMU.

George is one of many DASS students who successfully balance the demands of academic work, leadership positions on campus and service to our community while managing the impacts of learning disabilities. DASS celebrates the accomplishments of these students and congratulates George on this significant award!

What is a Reduced Distraction Environment?

When most instructors consider "Testing Accommodations" for students with disabilities, they tend to think of extended testing time. While extended time is the most commonly authorized such accommodation, there are several others. One of these is the Distraction Reduced Testing Environment, which for many students can address their disability-related needs better than having more testing time.

Most students with ADHD have an extremely difficult time focusing their attention on tasks, like exams, for longer than a few minutes at a time, and when they do establish concentration, it is easily broken by movements and sounds that those without ADHD might find trivial. For example, a ticking wristwatch of a nearby student, the scratching of a pen or pencil on paper, or a tapping foot can break the concentration that the student with ADHD has achieved.

On exam days, students with anxiety disorders may be far more stressed than their peers. Being in a crowded testing room could add to this potentially debilitating state. Sometimes, just seeing someone turn in an exam early can trigger a flight of worrisome and distracting thoughts like "How is that student already done? I'm only on page one! What if I didn't study enough and I fail!"

Putting students like these in a more controlled, small-group testing environment lessens distractions and lowers anxiety. We have such a testing environment here at DASS, and you can as well. A closed space without foot traffic is ideal, such as an office, carrel, conference room, or small classroom. Phones, printers, copiers, computers, and the like should be turned off. Placing a sign on the testing room door asking people to keep voices down and not to knock helps considerably. Also, if testing a small group, keep the testing numbers small and ensure that students have plenty of space between them.

As always, if you have any questions about accommodations, including how to create a distraction-reduced testing space, contact us at DASS. We're happy to help!

Equal versus Equitable: Concepts of Fairness in Accommodations

At the foundation of civil rights law is the concept of equal treatment. Neutrality is considered the ideal expression of equal treatment. Historically referred to as the color-blind approach, neutrality calls for eliminating protected class status from any consideration in decision making and treating everyone identically.

Consider this example:

"Your disability and skin color are meaningless here. It is irrelevant to the hiring process, only skill and talent matters. I assure you I will treat you like any other applicant. Now if you don't mind Mr. Wonder, please start playing at the fifth bar on the sheet music in front of you."

Neutrality would seem to be the ideal solution to discrimination based on race, sex, age and national origin but it can not fully address the goals of the ADA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This was first recognized in the development of the regulations to enforce Section 504:

There are no inherent differences or inequalities between the general public and the persons protected by these statutes [Title VI of the Civil Right Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972] and, therefore, there should be no differential treatment in the administration of Federal programs.

The concept of Section 504, on the other hand, is far more complex. Handicapped persons may require quite different treatment in order to be afforded equal access to federally assisted programs and activities, and identical treatment, in fact, constitutes discrimination." As quoted from the Federal Register (41 Federal Register 20296) in Disability, Civil Rights, and Public Policy (1989), by Stephen L. Percy, University of Alabama Press (page 72)

With the understanding that the traditional "color blind" approach would not work for the applicant who could not see the application or climb the steps to the Registrar's Office the concept of reasonable accommodation or equitable treatment was born along with its twin, "competing equities."

It was recognized that providing accommodations would have costs (financial and administrative) and could impinge upon fundamental program goals. The implementation and enforcement of Section 504 would require balancing the rights of the individual to participate and potentially burdensome demands on programs. "Implicit in this situation is the need to assess carefully the overall impact of a particular requirement both on the persons protected by the statute and those regulated by it."(41 Federal Register 20296) Balancing

these competing equities leads to reasonable accommodations.

As the final regulations guidance for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act evolved it divided the decision making process. The initial determination that a barrier in the environment, policy or practice constitutes discrimination and presents a need for accommodation should exclude cost considerations. The second tier decision concerning the types and extent of accommodations could consider costs. "costs or difficulty are appropriate considerations, not in determining what constitutes discrimination, but in fashioning a remedy if a recipient has been found to be discriminating." (41 Federal Register 29550)

This brief legislative history of Section 504 highlights three core principles that should guide policy and practice:
Equality Of Opportunity – nondiscrimination through decisions based on facts not assumption or stereotype;
Equitable Versus Identical Treatment – providing accommodations - the modification of facilities, policy, and practice or the provision of auxiliary aids and services identified through an interactive process; and
Balance Competing Equities - determining reasonable accommodations through individualized decision making in context.

Prepared by L. Scott Lissner, President of AHEAD, and ADA Coordinator, Ohio State University, 2/04-Revised 7/05)

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
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.

The DASS team carefully weighs multiple sources of information when reviewing and determining reasonable accommodations. This approach helps us balance competing equities and fulfill the university's legal obligations. The accommodation letters students deliver to faculty represent the culmination of this thorough deliberative process. For this reason, DASS encourages students to always discuss their accommodation letter with faculty members, and give the letter and its contents the weight it deserves as a means of providing equal access for them at SMU.

DASS IS MORE THAN ACCOMMODATIONS.