

Diversity
Topic:

Students with Learning Disabilities or Challenges

Compiled
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Introduction:

Understanding learning disabilities or challenges that may impede a student's ability to learn is vital to providing the best possible classroom environment. Students with learning disabilities are no less intelligent than the average college student and often require very simple accommodations to maximize their learning experience. While your institution most likely has a department that deals specifically with testing students for learning disabilities and maintaining their approval for specific accommodations, oftentimes involvement from the faculty or staff can make the experience better for all parties.

Facts and
Tips:

- A variety of disabilities or diagnoses may potentially affect a student's classroom experience. The list includes but is not limited to:
 - 1) ADHD
 - 3 different types with different manifest symptoms.
 - o Inattentive type: Students may have fail to pay attention to details, make careless errors, appear not to listen when spoken to, have difficulty organizing materials, or be forgetful or easily distracted.
 - o Hyperactive-impulsive type: Students may fidget excessively, have difficulty remaining seated, talk excessively, interrupt or blurt out responses, or have difficulties waiting his or her turn.
 - o Combined type: Students may exhibit any of the above systems.
 - ADHD often occurs in concert with other mood, personality, behavioral or neurological disorders which may compound symptoms.
 - Common myths:
 - o ADHD results from immaturity, lack of motivation, laziness, or poor study habits.
 - o It is an attempt to “work the system”.
 - o Students with ADHD are educationally or culturally deprived.
 - o It is akin to mental retardation.
 - Potential accommodations:
 - o Provide a clear syllabus outlining expectations and specific due dates
 - o Start and end lectures with a summary/review of the major points

- Keep lectures stimulating by using varied formats and allowing for appropriate breaks
 - Write down assignments on the board or provide handouts as students with ADHD may have difficulty with oral assignments.
 - Assist students with breaking down larger assignments into smaller parts.
 - Encourage students with ADHD to sit near the front of the classroom.
- 2) Head Injuries or Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI)
- Brain injuries may be the result of external events (accidents, assault) or internal events (stroke, loss of oxygen, tumors).
 - A variety of potential impairments might result from TBI. These include but are not limited to:
 - Memory: These deficits are the most common result of TBI. Most often affected is the student’s short term memory.
 - Cognitive/Perceptual Communication: Students may be more easily distracted by extraneous stimuli resulting in difficulty focusing.
 - Speed of Thinking: Information processing may take longer.
 - Communication/Language Function: Writing, reading, speaking, and/or listening may be impaired. Also interrupting, talking out of turn, dominating discussion, speaking too loudly or rudely, or standing too close to the listener may result.
 - Spatial Reasoning: Results in difficulty visualizing images, understanding mechanical function, navigating, or judging distances.
 - Conceptualization: Reduced ability to categorize, sequence, prioritize, and generalize information.
 - Executive Function: Planning, organization, goal-setting, and flexibility are impaired.
 - Potential accommodations:
 - Allow students to tape record lectures.
 - Repeat instructions without paraphrasing.
 - Present lectures visually (PowerPoint, use of whiteboard, etc.)
 - Provide study guides for exams.
 - Review/Summarize main points of lectures.
 - Ask the student what specific accommodations would be helpful for them.
 - Be flexible and understanding.
- 3) Autism
- 4) Processing/Learning Disabilities

General
Tips for the
Classroom:

- As with any disability be sure to use person first language. By referring to an individual as a “student with a learning disability” or a “person with ADHD” you acknowledge their individual identity without labeling them as merely “disabled”.
- Ask the student what you can do to facilitate their time in the course.
- Remember that many learning disabilities are not visible to the outside observer. In addition, not every student who has a disability that impedes their learning has

- been diagnosed. Be open minded to students who may appear to learn in different ways or require different types of attention to get the best learning experience in your classroom.
- Be aware of your institution’s policies for students with learning disabilities. Most colleges or universities have a center or department for testing and assigning accommodations that can provide you with more in depth information.

Helpful

Web Sites:

- Visit the Learning Disabilities Association of America. This site is tremendously helpful and references a large variety of different types of disabilities. In addition, there is a separate section designed specifically for teachers who work with students with learning disabilities. <http://www.ldanatl.org/>
- This website, maintained by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, includes a brief overview of learning disabilities. Most helpful is their compilation of organizations that deal with different learning disorders. This is a resource that provides many further resources.
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/learningdisabilities/learningdisabilities.htm>
- The Child Development Institute provides this website for teachers that outlines a variety of potential classroom accommodations that can assist students with varying symptoms of learning disorders.
<http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/learning/teacher.shtml>

Citations:

- University of Connecticut, Center for Students with Disabilities
<http://www.csd.uconn.edu/index.html>