Building Bridges, Removing Barriers: Supporting Students with Disabilities

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Topics to be Covered

- Information about Learning with Disabilities SIG and Introduction of Speakers
- Understanding varying disabilities in the classroom
- Identifying and reducing barriers in the classroom
- Developing interpersonal connections between faculty and students with disabilities
- Questions and Answers
Understanding varying disabilities in the classroom

Ann Palmer M. Ed.
Understanding Varying Disabilities in the Classroom

- Learning Disabilities
- Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (HD/HD)
- Visual Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Mobility Impairment
Learning Disabilities

Based on a significant discrepancy between mental ability and achievement in one or more of the following skill areas:

● Study skills
● Writing skills
● Reading skills
● Math skills
● Social skills
Learning Disabilities (cont’d)

Challenges associated with study skills:

- Poor organization and time management skills
- Difficulty taking notes/Outlining material
- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty completing assignments on time
Learning Disabilities (cont’d)

Challenges associated with writing skills:

- Frequent spelling errors
- Incorrect grammar
- Illegible penmanship
- Inadequate sentence structure
- Difficulty taking notes while listening to class lectures
- Problems with organization, development of ideas, and transition words
Learning Disabilities (cont’d)

Challenges associated with reading skills:

- Slow reading rate
- Inaccurate comprehension-poor retention
- Poor tracking skills (skip words, lose place, miss lines)
- Difficulty with complex syntax
- Incomplete mastery of phonics
Learning Disabilities (cont’d)

Challenges associated with math skills

- Computational difficulties
- Difficulty with reasoning, basic math operations.
- Number reversals, confusion of symbols
- Difficulty copying problems
- Difficulty with concepts of time and money
Learning Disabilities (cont’d)

Challenges associated with social skills

- Spatial disorientation
- Low frustration level
- Low self-esteem
- Impulsive
- Disorientation in time
- Difficulty with delaying problem resolution
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)

Difficulty sustaining attention, may exhibit problems with:

- Impulse control
- Concentrating
- Listening
- Starting, organizing, and completing tasks
- Following directions, especially if more than one direction is given at a time
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)

May exhibit problems with

- Making transitions
- Interacting with others
- Producing work at a consistent level
- Organizing multi-step tasks
- Remaining seated in the classroom
Visual Impairment

Legal blindness is visual acuity not exceeding 20/200 in the better eye with correction or a limit in the field of vision that is less than a 20-degree angle (tunnel vision).

- May not require any mobility assistance
- May use a white cane, a guide dog, or a sighted guide to assist with mobility.
Hearing Impairment

Any type or degree of auditory impairment is considered to be a hearing impairment

- May have some English language deficiencies similar to those of foreign individuals learning English as a second language.
- American Sign Language (ASL) used by some people with hearing impairment is a unique language that is different from English, with its own syntax and grammar.
Mobility Impairment

Individuals with mobility impairment may have:

- Pain, spasticity, or lack of coordination
- Flare-ups of intensity of the symptoms
- Periods of remission in which little or no symptoms are visible
- Inability to walk without crutches, canes, braces, or walkers
- Ability to stand or walk, may use wheelchair to conserve energy or gain speed
- Inability to stand or walk, and use wheelchair for total mobility
Mobility Impairment

Individuals with mobility impairment may have:

- Limited lower body use but full use of arms and hands
- Limited use of lower body and limited use of arms and hands
- Impairment of speech
- Decreased physical stamina and endurance
- Decreased eye-hand coordination
Identifying and Reducing Barriers in the Classroom

Charlotte O’Connor, M.Ed.
Identifying and Reducing Barriers in the Classroom

Who gets accommodations?

● Students registered with the campus disability office

AND

● who provide a letter of accommodation
In the Classroom

In General:

- Provide only the adjustments on the letter of accommodation
- Contact your institution’s disability office if you have questions about the accommodations or how to provide for them.
In the Classroom

● Do not lower classroom expectations or alter the nature of the course

● Refer any student who requests accommodations without an official letter to your campus disability office
In the Classroom

- Ensure that instructional materials are accessible
- Maintain confidentiality
- Implement best practices in teaching to reach all learners (Universal Design)
In the Classroom

- Individuals have the choice to disclose details about their disability
- Do not ask a student for details
- Your campus disability office can disclose information to faculty if it relates to the facilitation of accommodations
In the Classroom

- Make your syllabus as clear as possible
- Provide a calendar of due dates
- Include tips for success - office hours, tutoring, supplemental instruction, etc.
- Include a disability statement
- List additional resources: learning center, etc.
In the Classroom

- If you suspect that a student has a disability, seek guidance from the disability office.
- Do not make assumptions about a student’s abilities or comment on presumed disabilities that are not visible.
In the Classroom

● Limit distractions
● Share lecture outlines, notes, and PowerPoints
● Speak clearly and slowly
In the Classroom

- Think out loud
- Use multisensory teaching methods
- Use audio-visual aids
- Break up lectures with group work, discussion, etc.
In the Classroom

Mental illness and chronic health conditions

- Consider extending deadlines due to *excused* absences
In the Classroom

Learning Disabilities

● Minimize distractions
● Extend testing time
● Provide alternative test format
● Be aware that student may need a note-taker, scribe
In the Classroom

● Substitute answer sheets - especially computer forms or Scantrons
● Allow for notetaker or use of laptop or audio recording device
In the Classroom

**ADHD**

- Give clear, concise directions
- Provide the least-restrictive environment for testing
- Alternative exam format
In the Classroom

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Use clear language
- Be direct
- Adjust noise/lighting
- Avoid sarcasm or metaphors
- Write out instructions
- Allow for short breaks if needed
In the Classroom

*Deaf and Hard of Hearing*

- Speak directly to the student, even if an interpreter is present
- Don’t stand or otherwise block view between the student and the interpreter
In the Classroom

Blind and Low Vision

- Adjust lighting
- Talk aloud about what you write on the board
- Use large print, electronic text, braille
- Make available electronic text and voice mails
In the Classroom

Mobility Impairments

- Ensure access to wide, clear aisles and uncluttered work areas
- Make sure that materials are within reach
- Allow scribes, lab assistants, notetakers
- Make course materials available in electronic format
Developing Interpersonal Connections Between Faculty and Students with Disabilities

Shelly Tait, M.Ed.
Developing Interpersonal Connections Between Faculty and Students with Disabilities

- In 2011–12, the percentage of undergraduates who reported having a disability was 11 percent for both males and females (U.S. Department of Education)
  - 11% of students are interacting with faculty members, tutors, administration, peers, etc.
  - Not even accounting for students undiagnosed, you are interacting with students with disabilities just about everyday.

SO....WHERE DO YOU START TO HELP STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?
Developing Interpersonal Connections Between Faculty and Students with Disabilities

- Get to know the student’s struggles or behaviors first
  - Pay attention to behaviors or patterns: Is the student late often and consistently? Seem disgruntled often taking notes? Does the student bring a backpack? Taking tests, is the student staying focused or starting to stare off? Avoid eye contact? Did the student come in with accommodations or not?
  - Don’t be afraid to ask outside campus resources for tips/strategies on growing concerns
    - Academic advisors, Disability Support, Learning center
Developing Interpersonal Connections Between Faculty and Students with Disabilities

● **Be available!**
  ○ After a lecture stay for a few minutes to allow for questions privately.
  ○ Remind students about office hours and that you are willing to make one-on-one appointments
  ○ Staff positions: say hello! If the student should know who you are, always be welcoming

● **Meet one-on-one with the student.**
  ○ Make sure you have conversations with the student before confronting possible disability issues.
  ○ Begin to really get to know the student. What are their mannerisms and characteristics like?
  ○ If the student starts the semester with documentation, make sure you meet one-on-one with that student, acknowledging you are here to help
Developing Interpersonal Connections Between Faculty and Students with Disabilities

One-on-One Help Guide

● Practice good habits together
● Correct a behavior or skill that needs improvement
  ○ Be positive
  ○ Ask the student to explain what the behavior or skill should have been
● Celebrate the improvements!
  ○ Noticing improving grades, or improving behaviors, gives positive reinforcement that someone is proud of their hard work. Affirmation.

● Knowing when it is out of your scope. THAT IS OKAY.
  ○ Go with the student if necessary
  ○ Talk student through process and your limitations
Importance of Interpersonal Relationships

• A belief held by others (based on a high quality relationships) can become a part of the individual belief system (Wentzel, 1999).
  ○ Academically: a good relationship with a faculty member, is likely to lead to the student internalized the faculty member’s beliefs about school.

• Fostering these positive relationships, allow these students to gain self-esteem and self-confidence, especially in the area of academics
QUESTIONS?
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Resources

- Austin Community College, Student Accessibility Services (SAS)
- International Dyslexia Association (IDA), Box TransitionToCollegeFactSheetMay 13.pdf, https://app.box.com/s/fqg4o5h0gz7dnts50vezw4c689d702h5