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ABSTRACT

Information on types of learning disabilities (i.e. dyslexia and dyscalculia) is presented to help professionals in the field of higher education learn about how to identify learning disabled (LD) students, appropriate accommodations and modifications, special services, resources for referral, policy implications, and legal issues. Due to improved special education programs in kindergarten through 12th grade, LD students are enrolling in college in increasing numbers. Some have never been previously identified because they have been able to adapt until challenged by the rigors of college level work. Swift identification may be crucial for the student who has the ability to succeed with the assistance of support services. Information on relevant federal legislation and legal definitions of LD is provided. Potential LD symptoms are discussed in regard to written language, oral language, reading, mathematics, thinking and reasoning, behaviors, and personal growth. A list of 21 classroom modifications includes establishing study and support groups, providing lecture notes in advance, and giving extended deadlines for assignments. Six policy implications consider admissions, evaluation, registration, degree requirements, classroom modifications/accommodations, and provision of support services on campus. Contains 18 references. (SM)

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Serving Learning Disabled Students

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Serving Learning Disabled Students  
within and outside the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Learning disabled (L.D.) students are enrolling in college in increasing numbers. The purpose of this presentation is to inform higher education professionals regarding types of learning disabilities--e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia--their symptoms, how to identify L.D. students, appropriate accommodations and modifications, special services, resources for referral, policy implications, and legal issues

Learning disability (L.D.) is a term which describes a broad range of neurological dysfunction. Due to improved special education programs in K-12 education, learning disabled students are enrolling in college in increasing numbers. There are also students entering institutions of higher education who never have been previously identified as learning disabled because they have been able to adapt until challenged by the rigors of college level work. The purpose of this presentation is to inform higher education professionals regarding types of learning disabilities--e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia--their symptoms, appropriate accommodations and modifications, special services, resources for referral, policy implications, and legal issues.

Learning disabilities are invisible and often misunderstood. Swift identification may be crucial for the student who has the ability to succeed with the assistance of support services. Some L.D. students will prefer to attempt to hide their disabilities until the extent of their academic difficulty prevents them from keeping their secret any longer.

#### Federal Law

Learning disabilities, as defined below, is considered a handicap under the terms of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, PL 93-112, which protects handicapped individuals against discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, architectural accessibility, and

education, as follows:

No otherwise qualified handicapped individual shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity which receives or benefits from Federal financial assistance.

The definition of "Children with specific learning disabilities," which is applied to Section 504, is provided in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, PL 94-142.

PL 94-482, the Vocational Education Act of 1976, strengthens previous legislation by providing for vocational education in postsecondary educational institutions.

#### Definitions

Two definitions of Specific Learning Disability " are as follows:

(1) Federal Register, August 23, 1977:

'Specific learning disability' means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding and using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental asphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, learning or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

(2) Association of Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD):

"Specific Learning Disabilities is a chronic condition of neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or non-verbal abilities. Specific Learning Disabilities exist as a distinct handicapping condition in the presence of average to superior intelligence, adequate sensory and motor systems, and adequate learning opportunities. The condition varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity. Throughout life the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and/or daily living activities."

The following terms are sometimes used interchangeably with the term, "learning disability," but each is a separate and unique disorder:

Developmental Aphasia---a disorder of language functions

Dyscalculia---primary calculating disability

Dysgraphia---primary writing disability

Dyslexia---primary reading disability

Specific Language Disability---difficulty with symbol systems

Cognitive problems---difficulty organizing or sequencing thoughts or distinguishing between concepts

Directional problems---trouble with left and right, directions, maps

Perceptual problems---sensory intake and/or processing

Potential Symptoms of Learning Disabilities

The following behaviors may be indicative of a learning disability, especially if several of these traits are displayed by an individual.

Written Language

Handwriting---writes illegibly, very small characters, or often prints

Spelling---words written like they sound (logically, but incorrectly)

e.g. "verry," "skool"

Difficulty with visual memory

Organizational problems when writing a simple paragraph

Idiosyncrasies in capitalization and punctuation

Difficulty applying grammatical rules and concepts

Weak vocabulary skills

Oral Language

Listening problems---remaining attentive, selecting relevant information,  
recalling specific words

Auditory discrimination, memory, and sequencing problems

Difficulty organizing ideas and/or expressing ideas in words or coherent  
sentences

Forgetting, confusing, or misarticulating words

Problems with separating words into distinct sounds or syllables or  
blending sounds together to form a word

Trouble understanding figurative language; overdependence upon concrete  
language

Lack of gestures when speaking

Utilizing language inappropriate for specific social situations

Non-participation

### Reading

Low or inconsistent reading rate; word-by-word reader; subvocalization

Errors in oral reading, mispronunciation, omissions, substitutions

Slow processing of verbal information

Perceptual confusion

Inadequate memory span: orientation of letters, order of letters

Problems with decoding and/or comprehension

Vowel confusion

Visual discrimination problems

### Mathematics

Difficulty learning the series of steps to solve a problem



Trouble performing the actual calculations  
Inability to apply mathematical concepts to word problems  
Difficulty solving problems presented orally  
Problems with part - whole relationships, decimals, and/or percentages  
Difficulty with concepts of time and space, spatial visualization (geometry)

Thinking and Reasoning

Characterized by disorganization, inability to plan or set goals, poor problem solving skills, difficulty in making choices or selecting from alternatives, and/or understanding causal relationships  
Problems in identifying main ideas; misled by irrelevant information  
Poor abstract reasoning skills  
Divergent problem solving  
Difficulty generalizing experiences/ideas to new or different situations

Behaviors

Hyperactivity, short attention span, distractibility  
Egocentric

Inflexible

Clumsy, difficulty with motor coordination

Directional confusion (left and right, finding a location, etc.)

Manipulative

Negative reaction to touching/being touched

Impulsive

Passive or active aggression

Inappropriate comments

#### Personal Growth

Immaturity

Feelings of inadequacy; poor self-concept

Difficulty defining and using personal space

Problems anticipating the reactions of others

Difficulty generalizing experiences

Independence/dependence confusion

Easily influenced by others

High level of anxiety

May be very creative

Classroom Modifications/Accommodations

1. Allow the student to tape record lectures or have another student serve as note-taker.
2. Give extra time to complete exams if necessary and/or allow the student to take exams in a separate room.
3. Allow the student to respond orally to essay and/or objective tests, either to a proctor or into a tape recorder.
4. Permit the student to use a four-function calculator in class and/or when taking exams.
5. Provide alternatives to computer-scored answer sheets.
6. Give extended deadlines for assignments.
7. Provide lecture notes in advance.
8. Clearly state reading and written assignments for entire quarter/semester on the course syllabus.
9. Create a different weighting system for spelling errors.
10. Allow use of a word processing package which corrects for spelling.
11. Permit the student to take exams on the computer.
12. Give partial credit for work shown even when answer is incorrect.
13. Check the availability of taped texts or create another system for communicating written information.
14. Establish study and support groups.
15. Provide information regarding the availability of tutoring.

16. Be accessible to respond to questions immediately before and after class.
17. Consider the preferred perceptual modalities of L. D. students when planning methods of instruction.
18. Permit the student to attend more than one section of the class.
19. Make provisions for extra credit assignments.
20. Review previous material and preview new material at beginning of class. Summarize at end of class.
21. Be aware of cues indicating high levels of frustration and/or anxiety. Make appropriate referrals for counseling.

#### Policy Implications

1. Admissions: Should learning disabled students receive any special consideration during the admissions process? (E. g., should SAT scores be weighted less heavily in calculating predicted college GPA?)
2. Evaluation: What is the institution's policy regarding the evaluation process which determines whether the student qualifies for accommodations or modifications in degree and course requirements or special services? What documentation is required? If private assessments or previous public school evaluations are utilized, how recent must they be? Or is the student required to be evaluated on campus or by a specific community agency?

3. Registration: Are L. D. students given the opportunity to register early in order to sign up for courses appropriate to their needs?
4. Degree requirements: Is there an opportunity for substitution of degree requirements (e.g., foreign language) for L. D. students?
5. Classroom modifications/accommodations: To what extent are faculty members expected/required to allow modifications or accommodations such as those listed previously as appropriate for individual L. D. students?
6. Provision of support services on campus: To what extent are services provided? Where are they housed? To whom do service providers report, e. g., V. P. for Student Affairs or V. P. for Academic Affairs? How are services funded, e. g., institutional budget or fee generation?

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