

Information for Advisors: Working with Students who experience Disabilities
Presented by Kaela Parks, Director of Disability Support Services



Important General Information

- Roughly 1 in 15 postsecondary students disclose a disability.
- Not all individuals with disabilities need/want accommodations
- Most disabilities are hidden (Learning Disabilities, Health/Mental Health, etc.)
- Accommodations may be appropriate for temporary and/or permanent disabilities
- Documentation is the responsibility of the student and must support any request
- Accommodation is determined on an individualized basis
- Accommodation never fundamentally alters a program or lowers standards

Accommodation Process

- 1) Student makes request to DSS (syllabus statement is critical to increasing awareness)
- 2) DSS works with student to determine reasonable adjustments (always individualized)
- 3) Student and faculty work together to implement adjustments (DSS is available to help)

Examples of services and accommodations for students with documented need

- Testing accommodations (time, environment, scribe/reader)
- Notetaking assistance (fellow student taking notes on special paper - \$25/credit)
- Ergonomic Furniture (chairs with lumbar support, stools for labs, podiums, tables)
- Alternate format materials (e-text, large print, Braille, audio)
- Assistive Technology (hardware/software training and access on campus)
- Realtime access (ASL, CART, Transcribing, FM Listening Systems)
- Priority registration and/or reduced course load

Reduced versus Balanced Course Loads

Reduced Course Load is a programmatic accommodation – letter from DSS states that for this student 6 or 9 credits should be considered full-time – usually used to continue coverage under parents insurance

Balanced Course Load is choice to take courses that demand efforts in different areas in effort to avoid being overtaxed (ex not all heavy reading/writing at once)

Scheduling Needs and Priority Registration

Time of Day and Meeting Schedules vary - not all course offerings are equally viable for all students – chronic health conditions, mobility limitations, side effects of medication, etc can impact appropriateness of distance ed, early morning, or tightly scheduled courses

Priority Registration is possible but students with disabilities can not bump others to get placed in classes that are already full – early planning is vital

Technical Standards and Course Expectations

Technical Standards are vital and students must understand the entry and exit criteria for any program they consider – all students will be held to a high standard and must be otherwise qualified to participate (with or without appropriate accommodation)

Course Expectations are very important and can vary from section to section so students should try to see the syllabus before registering – this is especially important if there is a potential that absences or grading policies could be impacted by disability

Course Waivers and Substitutions

Course Waivers are very seldom put in place because they tend to fundamentally alter programs

Course Substitutions may be reasonable if disability prevents completion of a course and there is another course that the academic program approves as a reasonable substitute

Modified Course Delivery through a directed study is an approach that can be more successful

Lending Library Resource

The supplemental DSS website lists hundreds of books and videos that are available for checkout. Some items are specifically related to postsecondary education, others are disability specific. We have everything from academic journals and documentaries to first-person narratives, comedies, drama, and dance. Abstracts are included and there are online search and request pages. On the web at <http://access.uaa.alaska.edu>

Accessible Information Training and Support

Adaptive computing stations are available for use all across campus. We also offer individual and group training in how to create content that is accessible as well as how to use tools like voice recognition and text-to-audio. Workshop topics covered this fall include voice recorders, accessible adobe, text to audio and voice recognition. The schedule will be repeated in the spring. Handouts are available.

Informational Resource

We work with individuals and groups who have particular questions or concerns. We participate in awareness building efforts such as Constitution Day in the fall, Civil Rights Week in the winter, and the Reel Eyes film series in the spring. This year Reel Eyes will occur in Anchorage on March 18 and 25.



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Advising Issues & Resources

Advising Students with Disabilities

- **Resource Web links** for advising students with disabilities
- **Overviews** of issues surrounding advising students with disabilities
 - [Advising Students with Disabilities](#)
 - First-Year Students with [Dyslexia](#) Transitioning to College
 - [IDEA](#) and College Accommodations
 - [Mental Health](#) Issues and College Students
 - [Off to College Alone, Shadowed by Mental Illness](#) via *The New York Times*
 - [Reaching Students with Learning Disabilities](#) via *Inside Higher Education*
 - Using Creativity to [Assist Students](#) with Disabilities
- **[Read More About It!](#) Annotated Bibliography** dealing with this issue

Advising Students with Disabilities

Leslie L. Hemphill

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Advising students with disabilities presents many challenges to the college advisor. However, skilled advising can go a long way towards insuring the success of a student with a disability. To effectively advise a student with a disability, it requires a thorough understanding of the student's goals as well as the student's disability, the barriers the institution may have inadvertently created and the resources the college provides that can be used to assist the student in pursuing his or her educational aspirations.

Advisors who become familiar with the difficulties imposed by a particular disability can logically deduce the importance of some advising practices. For example, if the student is taking medication, are there certain times of the day when the student is less alert? This could have important implications when developing a class schedule. In a similar fashion, students experiencing clinical depression often have more difficulty in the morning.

Information concerning the impact of various disabilities is particularly important in attempting to determine if the college poses structural, educational or bureaucratic barriers for a student. Many colleges have buildings that were constructed before federal laws regarding accessibility were implemented. Awareness of the campus could prevent enrolling a student who uses a wheelchair in a class that can only be accessed by a stairway. Depending upon the amount of time allowed to pass from one class to another, any student with a mobility issue might have difficulty with classes scheduled back to back in different buildings.

Educational barriers are less visible but no less demanding for students with disabilities. Students with learning disabilities often have difficulty with structure and organization. Instructors who break material down into small sequences and then present it in a logical step-by-step fashion serve them well. Advisors should attempt to learn something about the teaching style of various instructors and enroll students with disabilities accordingly.

It is also important for advisors to know the rules and regulations of their institution. Only if you know the rules are you in a position to take advantage of them for the benefit of the students with whom you are working. Financial aid and course substitutions are two obvious examples of areas that can be used to a student's advantage. A student with a disability can receive a full Pell Grant even though the student is enrolled in less than twelve hours, if their disability warrants it. Other students may qualify for a course substitution. Advisors need to know the procedures on their campus for such things as obtaining a course substitution if they hope to assist students who qualify.

Finally, when working with a student who has a disability, an advisor would be wise to develop collaborative relationships with faculty, financial aid, counseling and other organizations within the college. This can be one of the most important tasks an advisor can undertake. Earlier it was suggested that a knowledge of the campus could prevent enrolling a student in a class they could not physically access. A working relationship with those in the college who schedule classes can preempt such a problem by insuring that additional sections of the course are available in classrooms that are accessible. In the unlikely event that only one section of a required course is being offered and the classroom is not accessible, strong allies can help to persuade the administration to move the course to an accessible classroom or create an additional accessible section.

There are two important allies an advisor should network with for assistance with such problems. The first is the individual designated by the college to enforce compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The second ally is the person or persons at the college responsible for establishing eligibility for accommodations, determining the nature of the accommodations needed by a particular student and helping to insure that the student receives the accommodations for which they are eligible. While the titles for these two potential allies may vary from one campus to another, federal law requires that they exist and that they be readily identifiable on any campus.

Advising students with disabilities may present many challenges, but meeting these challenges can provide long term rewards for you and the students you serve.

[Read More About It!](#) Annotated bibliography dealing with this issue
[Disability Resources web links](#)

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Cite the above resource using APA style as:

Hemphill, L. L. (2002). Advising students with disabilities. *The Academic Advising News*, 25(3). Retrieved - insert today's date- from *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources Web site*:
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/disability.htm>

Listed resources are member suggested; as such, listings are not comprehensive in nature. Members are encouraged to suggest resources they find helpful to their advising practice. Listing of commercial sites does not imply NACADA endorsement.

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