

# Focus on Disability Awareness

An Occasional Bulletin from the Office of Disability Services for LVC Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

## Characteristics of College Students with Learning Disabilities

Most students with learning disabilities are diagnosed in their elementary or middle school years. However, for a variety of reasons, many "slip through the cracks," and it is not until they enter college that they begin to experience extreme academic difficulty. For some, the ability to self-accommodate and to find ways to circumvent their areas of weakness has allowed them to make reasonable grades and remain undetected as students with learning disabilities. Coping strategies that worked at the high school level, however, begin to fail them in college, as the demands for effective integration of reading, writing, and abstract thinking skills increase significantly. Listed below are possible indicators of learning disabilities that you may notice in some of your students. If you have students who manifest several of these characteristics, ask to speak to them privately (and individually). Suggest that they consult with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to explore the possibility that a learning disorder is present. The ODS uses a screening instrument to determine whether to refer students for comprehensive psychoeducational testing.

### Reading Skills

- Slow reading rate
- Uneven comprehension and retention of what is read
- Difficulty discerning the most salient information
- Difficulty integrating new vocabulary
- Confusion of visually similar words
- Skips words or lines of print without awareness of doing so
- Difficulty reading for extended periods of time

### Writing Skills

- Difficulty with planning a topic and organizing ideas effectively
- Poor sentence structure; overuse of simple sentence structure, simple vocabulary
- Frequent spelling errors - omissions of middle sections of words, suffixes; transposition of letters; substitutions
- Poor understanding of basic writing mechanics - punctuation, capitalization, word usage
- Essays of limited length; lack of ideational density
- Difficulty effectively proofreading
- Sloppy handwriting; difficulty copying accurately from board

### Oral Language Skills

- Difficulty apprehending spoken language when presented rapidly or for extended periods of time
- Difficulty orally expressing concepts that they can otherwise convey understanding of
- Grammatically incorrect speech
- Difficulty sequencing information appropriately when speaking

- Difficulty following and participating in discussions about new or unfamiliar ideas
- Difficulty remembering and following oral instructions

### **Mathematical Skills**

- Incomplete mastery of basic math facts such as multiplication tables - lack of automaticity
- Confuses or seems to ignore operational signs
- Transposes digits (e.g., 314 becomes 341 or 413)
- Difficulty learning and recalling correct sequence of procedures
- Copies problems or equations incorrectly
- Difficulty comprehending word problems; difficulty perceiving extraneous or irrelevant information contained in word problems
- Difficulty understanding important math concepts and how to apply them in problem solving

### **Attention**

- Difficulty sustaining concentrated mental effort on academic tasks
- Distracted by auditory and/or visual stimuli such as noise or movement within the classroom, out in the hallway, out the window
- Difficulty handling multiple and/or simultaneous tasks; "shuts down", lapses into daydreaming when overwhelmed
- Excessive movement or fidgetiness in class
- Difficulty with task initiation and completion

### **Organizational and Study Skills**

- Difficulty organizing an effective approach to long-term assignments
- Difficulty with overall organization of lecture notes, maintaining an organized notebook
- Chronic problems with losing paperwork, forgetting to bring notebooks, books
- Difficulty estimating how much time an assignment will take and budgeting time accordingly
- Difficulty with the interpretation of charts and graphs
- Inefficient study strategies; an inability to describe how one studies to learn, to prepare for tests
- Little or no use of rehearsal strategies, mnemonics when memorizing information
- Inaccurate assessment of the depth of their own understanding of material or their performance on tests
- Inefficient use of reference materials

### **Social Skills**

- Trouble perceiving and interpreting nonverbal communication - facial expressions, body posture, hand gestures, personal space
- Difficulty understanding sarcasm, "getting jokes"
- Difficulty perceiving/understanding the meaning of subtle changes in tone of voice or inflection
- Difficulty understanding and following cultural norms for conversation
- Tendency to avoid social interactions, group activities in class