# COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: AN INFORMATIONAL HANDBOOK

NORWICH UNIVERSITY
NORTHFIELD, VT

# COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: AN INFORMATIONAL HANDBOOK


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## HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

This handbook serves a variety of purposes for faculty, staff and students. It can be used as a reference guide for university and outside resources and services, a teaching guide for faculty who work with students with disabilities, a sourcebook for students who need to develop better learning and living strategies, and an interpretation of federal and university regulations regarding individuals with disabilities. The reason behind the decision to make this a comprehensive handbook is that we feel a collaborative model is the most desired one—when all involved are working together and communicating regularly, the effects of disabilities can be lessened in an academic setting. Moreover, it is important that faculty and staff understand the student point of view, and students be aware of the constraints and adjustments others experience in meeting their needs. As a result of this mutual understanding, students can be more effectively involved within the academic community, enabling them to realize academic and personal goals. Those working with these unique students will grow, as well, in interpersonal and instructional skills that can be applied to a variety of teaching and mentoring situations.

## INTRODUCTION

### A Word to Faculty and Staff

Working with individuals with disabilities is a rewarding and challenging opportunity. Some students may have physical disabilities that affect their mobility or learning in a more obvious way, while others may have mild to severe "invisible" learning difficulties which require certain adjustments to their academic program. Most individuals with these difficulties have worked very hard to make it as far as college despite impairments, yet some are better prepared than others for the transition to higher education. Thus, each student will present a unique combination of strengths and difficulties to be considered in your interaction with them. Working closely with them and frequently sharing what works and what doesn't is often the best way to meet their needs, and yours as well. Also be aware that some individuals do not view their conditions as handicaps or disabilities, but "differences" or "challenges." Thus, you will encounter a lot of variations of terminology in conversations with them and others. Federal regulations define such difficulties as "disabilities."

### *A Word to Students*

You will find that Norwich University faculty, staff and students are aware of the presence of individuals with disabilities on campus. You will also find that the University community is interested in learning more so it can find better ways to accommodate your needs. These things don't always happen automatically, however. Frequent, clear communication with faculty, staff and other students about your needs is an essential component of the partnership you will be expected to help form to ensure your academic and personal success. This includes decisions about disclosing the nature and severity of your disability, something only you can do. Remember - responsibility for communication lies with both sides, but often you hold the most important information about what works best for you. Do what you need to in order to learn how to best communicate your needs and work with the University in a straightforward and open manner. For the most part, your education is in your own hands. Take care with it.

## STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

When we think of disabilities, we most often think of those difficulties that are readily recognizable such as blindness, deafness or mobility impairments. These can be in degrees, as well, so an understanding of and appropriate responses to them will be varied.

For example, individuals with total deafness learn their own language patterns which are quite distinct from standard English; there is a fundamental difference in the structure of language as well as the outward representation in sign. People with blindness, as well, have differences in the way they interact with their environment using other sense impressions to compensate for the lack of sight.

Most non-hearing individuals wish to be called deaf because there is a unique deaf culture to which they belong that does not necessarily include individuals who are only hearing-impaired. Most sightless people have very specific ways they have adapted to in exploring new environments; helping them too much or teaching them more than one alternative can limit them further. Likewise, students without the use of legs or arms develop unique adaptive responses in order to interact effectively in a largely non-disabled environment. Even individuals with cerebral palsy, who were once thought to be mentally impaired, are able to participate fully in an academic environment, although they may appear on the surface to be too significantly impaired by speech and mobility problems.

While it is important to make some distinctions between physically disabling conditions and learning disabilities, these distinctions can be blurred if a student with a manual impairment also happens to have a learning disability. In addition, a student may have been wrongly diagnosed as mentally impaired, so he/she may come to college with a background of educational underpreparedness, yet possess college-level intelligence.

Although the bulk of this publication is primarily focused on learning disabilities, this is not meant to imply that they are, somehow, more important or meaningful conditions. In terms of numbers, however, they comprise the majority of disabilities registered at most colleges. This is changing, however, as individuals with physical disability continue to move more into the mainstream of college life. So, although most of the focus here is generally on LD issues, a lot of the discussion includes suggestions and guidelines for all students with disabilities.

What is especially true is that each individual is unique, and this needs to be appreciated by everyone involved in the educational process. It is always a two-way street—there will be give and take on both sides.

## STUDENTS WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL/ PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITY

Some individuals in the college setting may have disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Multiple Personality Disorder, Anxiety or Panic Disorder, Bi-Polar (AKA Manic Depressive) Disorder, etc. These students are intellectually intact, yet their disorder and/or medication may interfere with the everyday responsibilities they must attend to as students. They may need extensions on assignments or even leaves of absence for intermittent treatment. Some medications can interfere with academic skills, especially during changes in type or dosage.

Students who are documented as functionally limited by these conditions by licensed psychologists or psychiatrists fall under Section 504 and ADA Federal Regulations and must be accommodated in the educational setting. Aberrant or disruptive behavior that interferes with the general teaching-learning process for all is, of course, an exception. Students attempting to cope with both the rigors of the college experience and managing such disorders need a good deal of understanding and encouragement. A feeling of safety and support in their learning environment is crucial to their success.

## LANGUAGE GUIDE

A heightened awareness to the impact of language can help avoid awkward moments, and help acquaint all with specific issues around particular disabilities.

| Outdated or Offensive | Reason | Currently Accepted |
|---|---|---|
| The handicapped, the deaf, the blind, “the” anything | Condescending and groups individuals into one undifferentiated category | People with disabilities<br>Deaf people, blind people |
| Deaf and dumb, dumb, deaf-mute | Implies mental incapacitation | Deaf, hearing impaired |
| Cripple, crippled, handicapped | Dehumanizing; disabilities don’t handicap, attitudes and architecture handicap | Physical disability |
| Deformed, freak, vegetable | Dehumanizing; connotes repulsiveness | Multiple disabilities |
| Crazy, insane, psycho, maniac | Stigmatizing | Behavior disorder, emotional disability |
| Retarded, retardate, disabilities, slow, simple, moron, idiot, mongoloid(ism) | Stigmatizing | Developmentally delayed, has Down’s Syndrome |
| Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair | Wheelchairs don’t confine; they make people mobile | Wheelchair user,<br>uses a wheelchair |

(Source: Maine Arts Commission ADA Compliance Guide)

## LEARNING DISABILITIES: *An Introduction*

***We know that Thomas Edison's learning disabilities brought him failure at school, but they also helped to bring us the light bulb. August Rodin, the magnificent sculptor, had difficulty learning to read and write; he was known as the worst student in his school. Albert Einstein's teachers found him to be a slow learner and socially awkward.***

***(Smith, 1979)***

Edison, Rodin, Einstein-three individuals who, through their intellectual achievement and creativity, literally changed the world around them. There are others, too, such as George Patton, Winston Churchill and Nelson Rockefeller who achieved greatness despite their learning impairments. Their lives and the lives of others with learning difficulties help us to better understand the nature of these difficulties. They enable us to realize that some individuals with above-average intellectual capacity have difficulty with the typical educational process. They do not learn the same way or at the same pace as the majority of students. But, they can learn and achieve when allowed to encounter their education in ways that are compatible with their unique patterns of processing information.

Einstein is said to have discovered the theory of relativity while staring at the sky and daydreaming about the speed of light. He was a dismal failure at math in school and considered uneducable until his parents enrolled him in private school. Despite the disappointment and frustration that accompanied his educational experiences, Einstein and his family had the basic faith in his abilities that enabled him to persevere.Yet, not all are so fortunate. Many who fail at school are so discouraged by knowing that they are bright yet unsuccessful that they give up entirely and drop out.

Fortunately, this is happening less frequently since the advent of special service programs on the elementary and secondary level. Remedial and developmental programs can help students and educators to focus on student deficits and strengths in the learning process. Thus, more are now able to consider a college education and succeed on the post-secondary level, but they still need the academic support that accompanied their grade and high school courses. Public school services, however, vary widely according to resources and variability of compliance with regulations, so student preparation will be unique.

## SOME PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

"Having a learning disability causes you to see things differently. Do not compare yourself to some idea of what is 'normal', just a different way."

Corinna West,
**CAREERS and the disABLED**, Fall 1998.

"I use a tape recorder in class; I do not take many notes, because I end up being caught up in the notetaking and not in the learning. I have discovered I can write critical papers as well as fiction . . . I hurt very much when I think of all the good thoughts and ideas, as well as the creativity, that had been locked in my brain for so many years, trapped, unable to be expressed. I made the dean's list this past semester, with four A's and a B+ …."

Margaret A. Stolowitz,
**Journal of Learning Disabilities**, January 1995.

## LEARNING DISABILITIES DEFINED

***Learning disabilities were identified as early as 1896 when a British opthamologist named Morgan wrote in a journal about what he said was 'word blindness.' By 1937, formal clinical studies of the effects of brain dysfunction on learning behavior were being done by Samuel Orton, who was a pioneer in researching problems of children with developmental language difficulties. The field of study has grown steadily since, with many major contributions being made to the body of research in the past two decades.***

***(Johnson and Morasky, 1980)***

The National Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) defines a learning disability as a chronic condition of neurological origin. This dysfunction impedes learning, interfering with processing necessary for learning in the visual, auditory, motor and sensory systems. The manifestation and severity of a learning disability is variable, but most individuals experience problems with positive self image, educational achievement, vocational choices, social interaction and time management.

These disorders are not "curable", but accompanying processing problems can be compensated for by helping individuals discover alternative modes of learning. The majority of individuals have average to above-average intelligence. High aptitude and low achievement is the typical LD profile in diagnostic test results.

It is true, however, that some individuals who suffer brain injury are left with learning problems; there is a separate field of study in LD research that deals with traumatic brain injury and resultant disabilities.

## How is it Determined that an Individual has a Learning Disability?

An achievement-aptitude profile can be quantified only by certain psycho-educational tests, such as the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-III (WAIS-III) and standardized achievement tests. While these can be administered by various trained personnel, usually certified and/or licensed psychologists interpret the results and make diagnoses which are recorded in a detailed report with educational recommendations. Documented learning disabilities are not always determined alone by standardized testing instruments: classroom and tutorial work (especially reading and writing), personal observation, and informal testing instruments are also helpful in assessing achievement. Since some learning problems are the result of low intellectual capacity or psychological-emotional disturbance, it is essential that a comprehensive evaluation be performed and carefully analyzed before a LD diagnosis is made. It does happen that students get as far as post-secondary education with an undiagnosed learning disability. Because a specific learning disability does not directly affect intellectual aptitude (many students have I.Q. scores above average range), it may be possible for some to compensate enough through grade and high school to do at least average work. However, the increased stress and demands of higher education can make it impossible for them to keep up, and a pattern of failure may begin to emerge.

***Some signs of learning disabilities might be:***

- ***Distractibility (lack of concentration)***
- ***Hyperactivity***
- ***Impulsivity***
- ***Perseveration***
- ***Inconsistency***
- ***Left-Right Confusion***
- ***Irritability***
- ***Talkativeness***
- ***Awkwardness***
- ***Poor Speech***
- ***Social Immaturity***

***(Smith, 1979)***

There are other signs as well, such as language processing problems, difficulties with timed tasks, and a low threshold for frustration in performing academic tasks. Many observers report that they just "know" that a student is smarter than his or her performance would imply, or that a student has very "lopsided" performance features. Often these informal observations lead to a formal evaluation of learning problems, so it's a good idea to discuss them with academic support personnel.

## Students with Learning Disabilities at the College Level; A Unique Challenge

***The learning disabled person needs a realistic view of his strengths and capabilities as well as his weaknesses and disabilities, to make the most of what he has. . . . For many, a college education is possible and attainable.***

***(Smith, 1979)***

The term "disability" is somewhat misleading in that it may lead some to believe that individuals with LD do not have the innate ability to learn. Also, since LD is identified as a disabling condition by the Federal Government, some may equate it with the absence of an ability: "if a blind person cannot see, then a person with a learning disability cannot learn" is one common erroneous assumption people make. However, the one aspect this disabling condition does share with these other conditions is that it does not necessarily affect the individual's aptitude. A learning disability usually affects only the manner in which a person processes stimuli. Thus, just as it is possible for hearing or visually impaired students to use auxiliary aids such as recorders and computer enlargers, it is possible for learning disabled students to find ways to adapt to their difficulties and be successful in college.

Students with learning disabilities are like any others in the sense that some will fail and some will succeed. Some are better motivated than their counterparts; some are successful academically but are socially impaired; some want and need a good deal of support while some desire no special services. The one thing that is essential for all students with disabilities is a realistic view of strong and weak points and concrete strategies for discovering alternatives to traditional approaches to learning tasks. Generally, the more flexible and patient they are, the more they succeed. Motivation is also a key factor. For most, college is a reasonable choice, but success depends a lot on what the college community does to lend support, and student willingness to follow through.

## Helping Students with Learning Disabilities to Learn: The Key Process

"I study hours for my quizzes but I flunk every one of them."

"I just can't keep up with five different courses; they all sort of run together in my head."

"I never had to write any long papers before and I just can't organize my thoughts and hang them together."

"I can't spell. I never could. The teachers in school just quit taking off for words. I can't see 'em if they're wrong anyway.

"I don't seem to have time for anything. I'm always late for class and I keep getting lousy grades because my assignments are never in on time. I just can't seem to keep all my work straight."

"I get so mad and frustrated! I know what I want to say; I can say it to you right now. I know everything in this stupid book. But if you asked me to write it down so you could understand it the first time, forget it. It takes me 5 or 6 tries and it's still a mess."

"People laugh at me or look at me weird because I never seem to say the right thing."

"I have a lot of trouble following conversations when people talk fast. A lot of the time I can't even remember right off what someone just said to me."

"I always try hard to remember when I have to be somewhere at a certain time, but it seems I'm always late for my classes and appointments."

These statements are common in conversations with students who have learning disabilities. Because their auditory visual and/or motor processing is disorganized and/or inefficient, these individuals often find that the simplest of tasks, such as following and participating in a conversation, can be a highly demanding, unpleasant task. It's no surprise, then, that these students can be, at times, insecure, frustrated, demoralized, lonely and reticent. They are no strangers to school-related frustration and anxiety. In addition, they are often very rigid in their approaches to learning tasks, since once they find one way to do something, they will cling to the process even if it results in failure. The fear of losing control is often a much greater one than not doing something correctly.

Some might perceive these students as "dumb" for persevering at something resulting in failure, but this can also be seen as a clever method of self-preservation in what appears to be, to them, threatening circumstances. Since students with learning disabilities often do not fit into the so-called "normal" student population, they must create their own distinct forms of operation in order to function in academic and social situations. Still, they need assistance in learning specific strategies in writing, reading and study skills in order to adjust to the increased information processing demands on them at the college level. Some common problems in these and other areas are as follows (keep in mind that no two individuals will experience a disability in exactly the same way.)

## STUDY SKILLS

Students may have problems with listening skills on the levels of understanding, comprehension and analysis. The slowness and confusion of their linguistic processing mechanisms may largely prevent them from assimilating and responding quickly. Thus, courses that rely largely on lecture and discussion can be overwhelming. Students with learning disabilities also commonly have trouble with time management, organization, problem-solving and manipulation and application of information. Study skills must be taught immediately and reinforced continually as these students make the transition to college work.

## READING

Students with learning disabilities generally lack flexibility in approaching reading tasks. Many have not had a wide range of reading experiences. Other difficulties they may encounter are poor short and long-term memory, distractibility, inaccurate copying, letter and/or word reversals, poor sight vocabulary, word/letter omission and substitution, and difficulty with oral reading. They also tend to read at a very literal level because of processing difficulties; thus, many haven't had much experience with higher level critical thinking abilities such as analysis and synthesis. Some may even have difficulty summarizing and paraphrasing.

## WRITING

Students with learning disabilities may have problems with emotional blocks and motivation, to begin with. They also may have a variety of conceptual, structural and mechanical problems including generating ideas, organization, vocabulary, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling and neatness. For many, writing has been so difficult that they have spent most of their effort on finding ways to avoid it. In some cases, special high school programs have emphasized reading and study skill programs over writing, putting some students at a significant disadvantage in college composition classes.

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Whether or not students with learning disabilities should attempt a foreign language on the college level depends largely on the type of disability and method of language instruction. For example, a student with a severe auditory processing deficit would be at a disadvantage in a situation that depended heavily on auditory presentation and verbal response. However, this same student might excel in Latin or in a situation where the instructional method relies heavily on reading and writing. In a few cases, the psychoeducational evaluation may indicate that a foreign language should not even be attempted.

## MATH

Students with dyslexia may have particular problems with reversing or omitting numbers and signs. Students with this and other learning disabilities may have trouble with numeration, complex numerals, computational skills and problem-solving. They may also require increased time to complete assignments, especially in-class work such as quizzes and exams.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

This is a key area for those who work with students with learning disabilities to consider because it has an impact on every other area of a student's adjustment to college. These students often misperceive their environment because of processing problems, and often "lag" in maturation because of slower processing capabilities. These factors influence their behavior with peers and instructors, behavior that often may seem inappropriate or exaggerated. This behavior may not seem at all strange or inappropriate to the student with a learning disability, even after it is pointed out. Such students need time to develop "living" strategies as consistent and positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior patterns, and need to be made consistently aware of patterns that are counter-productive to functioning successfully in society.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS FROM THE COLLEGE EDUCATOR

"Are LD students really capable of doing college-level work?"

"Why do LD students need more time on tests?"

"Do I have to 'water down' my courses for these students?"

"How can I help one student in a class of 35? 1 can't slow down for one person-we'd never cover all the material we are required to. And who does the extra work he/she will require?"

"How do I advise an LD student? What kinds of things do I suggest—what kinds of things shouldn't I say?"

"How do I make sure I'm following the Federal Regulations and the University's rules plus my course requirements?"

"How far do special considerations go—when do they end?"

"What can we do to enable the student to function after college when he/she will get no special consideration?"

"I consider myself to be a pretty good teacher, but I haven't any idea what to do with LD students—I sincerely want to help them as much as I can."

These questions reflect the sincere apprehension and suspicion that many college educators feel about the issue of dealing with learning disabilities at the college level. These questions rise partly because instructors at this level have not been trained to work with special needs students; they also meet fewer of them than their colleagues in the public school system since some students are still shying away from the demands of college work. Thus, with little or no experience or background in the field of LD, this unique and demanding challenge places college teachers in sometimes awkward and uncomfortable positions.

The truth is that these students can succeed like any others who have the motivation and discipline to do college-level work. They merely need to be allowed to explore and employ the ways they learn best. Current testing instruments can provide educators with information essential to developing a suitable individualized academic support program for each student. There is no substitute for a detailed psycho-educational evaluation. Thus, educators can be assured that specific guidelines they are being asked to follow are well-grounded in theory and practice.

Some accommodation may be necessary for the duration of a college career (e.g. not penalizing misspellings on in-class exams), while some might be slowly withdrawn as the student masters new skills. Some problem areas may affect a student for life and may have impact on job situations and personal relationships, but the college experience will many times help to prepare the individual for developing workable strategies on his or her own after college. It is important for educators and students to realize that federal law protects LD individuals from discrimination in employment situations, as well. Moreover, it is not appropriate to consider employability after graduation as a criteria for evaluation in college. Clearly, though, students will need to pass licensing exams in certain fields.

The following are general suggestions for working with these students on the post-secondary level.

**SUPPORT THEM**. Tell them that you understand what a learning disability is, and if you're not sure, ask them—they are often the best source of information. Also, tell them that you will be in contact with institutional support services to find out how to best help them. Make sure that you are aware of what support services exist for them and encourage them to go regularly. Underscore your awareness that a learning disability does not mean a lack of intelligence.

**MOTIVATE THEM**. If necessary, break large, complex tasks into parts that they can master successfully one at a time. Tell them you expect the same thing of them as the other students in terms of the amount of work completed by the end of the semester. Accommodation does not mean exemption from course requirements or having others do work for them; make sure they realize this. Tell them that you expect them to do well eventually. Share your own experiences of mastering difficult cognitive tasks (such as writing a thesis or book); explain how you did this one step at a time. Try to stress that their way of doing something is just different, not inferior or inept.

**CHALLENGE THEM**. Do not water down work or requirements, or allow "extra-credit" assignments to substitute for required work. Give alternative ways of getting to the same end as the other students. If they can't write an acceptable paper or keep up with readings, don't exempt them from the work. Explore ways of improving these areas. Give them some credit (such as class participation) for coming up with creative ways of working around their obstacles to learning. Do this in a gradual, supportive way, setting goals for each step. They can learn to compensate if they are motivated enough; it often just takes them more time and energy to complete tasks. Keep in mind that while it might take additional time in the beginning to work out accommodation, ongoing tutorial assistance will often be provided by the Learning Support Center. The primary burden of time management and the trial and error process of evaluating accommodation's is largely the student's responsibility. Making students autonomous learners is the primary goal, but they still may need some individual assistance from you from time to time.

**ALLOW THEM** to explore ways of learning. Give them time and opportunity to rehearse information. Let them fail sometimes without consequence, perhaps working up to a more comprehensive grade. Give them more class time to finish work if they need it. Let them collaborate with other students in the learning process so they can see how others learn successfully. Small group and one on one discussion are ideal ways to encourage this.

**PRAISE THEM**. Find every opportunity you can to let them know they are doing well, but be honest—false praise can hurt more than help, inevitably. Criticism can be presented in positive ways, such as "you might have done it more successfully this way" instead of "you did this all wrong".

**EVALUATE THEM OFTEN**. They need to know where they stand as often as possible. Frequent quizzes and other informal evaluations will keep you both continually informed of progress. Ask frequent questions to check comprehension and assimilation. Encourage them to ask questions so that they have the chance to practice higher level cognitive tasks. Try to model your expectations as much as you can, providing examples whenever possible. Check their notes and encourage them to attend self-help and review sessions.

**REFER THEM** at the first sign of difficulty. Since many students with learning disabilities take a long time to adapt to learning situations, time is essential in the intervention process. Stress and frustration are common companions to these difficulties and need to be dealt with along with academic difficulties. Thus, don't hesitate to suggest personal counseling if it seems warranted. You are not violating privacy but showing concern for their well-being.

**KNOW THOROUGHLY** the sections (Appendices 3 and 4) of the University Academic Regulations pertaining to confidentiality and students with disabilities. Both faculty and students are required to fulfill the obligations outlined in these laws. Questions about procedures should be referred to University personnel who are trained in 504/ADA interpretation. The Learning Support Center Director is an appropriate starting point.

(A more detailed explanation of disability laws and university guidelines can be found on pages 10-11.)

## SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE LD STUDENT

***Things to Know***

Learning disabled students who do well in college share at least ten common attributes which promote their success.

- Ability to articulate one's special talents and abilities clearly.
- Knowledge of the nature of one's learning disability, and of the kinds of teaching strategies, tools, and services which best help one compensate.
- Ability to explain both special talents and needed compensatory strategies clearly and frankly to adults.
- Maturity and initiative to assume the greater share of one's own advocacy.
- Adherence to effective, routine study habits, to whatever degree is necessary for success.
- Acceptance of the need to seek assistance for academic and other problems as appropriate.
- Initiative to seek such assistance.
- Acceptance of the idea that it may take one longer to graduate than one's friends, and that one may have to study harder than they seem to do.
- Recognition of the concept that college is meant to be a challenge, and that temporary frustrations are part of the normal growth process.
- Regular, frequent communication with parents, friends, classroom professors, academic advisors, and support service teachers.

by Margaret Dietz Meyer, Ph.D.
FCLD (1988)

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The following are some specific strategies for students and faculty for developing reading, writing, study and adjustment skills.

## READING

- consider distractions in reading environment, diminish as much as possible.
- use SQ3R system for text reading.
- use flash cards for difficult vocabulary.
- stop periodically while reading to write summaries.
- keep reading response journals.
- outline passages using key points.
- discuss readings with professor and other students.

## WRITING

- pay close attention to environment—cut down distractions.
- chunk act of writing into distinct steps: pre-drafting activities (brainstorming, planning, organizing, freewriting, mapping, clustering); drafting (writing without stopping); revising (checking for organization, coherence and clarity of expression); and editing (mechanical and structural considerations).
- keep a log of words often misspelled and review often.
- use a word processor and put spelling words on disk.
- read writing out loud when revising and editing.
- talk out ideas with someone else or on a tape recorder before drafting.
- read models and rehearse by copying them.
- try to make an outline from a final draft to check organization and coherence.
- divide large writing tasks into sections.
- do sentence-combining exercises.
- read backwards to check spelling.
- try window proofreading (cut slot in 4x6 card the size of one typed line and move down paper while reading aloud.)

## STUDY SKILLS

- find least distractible environment—take learning style inventory to assess strengths.
- try Cornell Method of Notetaking from lectures.
- review material before and after course meetings.
- have separate loose-leaf notebook sections for each course.
- keep calendar in room and with course materials, record all upcoming due dates.
- review syllabi often.
- learn techniques of mapping and webbing (information manipulation).
- prepare questions before class and remember to ask them.
- ask professors for lecture outlines, if they have them.
- tape lecture and discussion sessions.
- compose and take sample quizzes by yourself or with a tutor.
- re-take examinations to check progress.
- discuss course material with other students and compare lecture notes.
- develop thinking skills by using the following—observing, describing, comparing, and contrasting differentiating and defining, hypothesizing, explaining, predicting, generalizing, questioning, exploring alternatives, "meta-cognitive" strategies—(student monitoring own learning process for purpose of developing successful learning behaviors).

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT SKILLS

- seek counseling for stress reduction.
- model appropriate behavior patterns.
- encourage participation in on-campus social activities.
- be understanding about failures to adjust quickly to unfamiliar surroundings or circumstances.
- encourage participation in campus support groups

## Attention Deficit Disorder: Paying too Much Attention to Everything

Most people think that ADD, with or without hyperactivity, is a condition that prevents an individual from paying attention. In actuality, it is a neurological dysfunction that prevents an individual from effectively screening out distractions, so attention is paid to just about everything in the immediate environment. Symptoms of ADD are, commonly, lack of attention to close detail, "careless" errors, lack of task persistence, appearing to not listen, difficulty following through on complex projects to the end, organizational problems, forgetfulness, and distraction by events that would not affect most people. These symptoms can be combined with impulsivity and, when hyperactivity is a pronounced feature, the condition is called AD/HD, or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. While diagnostic criteria in the medical profession do separate ADD from AD/HD, there is a diagnosis of combined type which would include all symptoms listed.

It is important to understand that ADD-AD/HD are not learning disabilities but separate conditions that result in a deficit in performance. Barkley (1997) makes the meaningful distinction that "AD/HD is not a disorder of knowing what to do, but of doing what one knows." While a learning disability is usually a deficit in skills that can and must be taught, such as reading or arithmetic, attentional disorders commonly present a profile of intact basic skills with difficulty demonstrating them. Many individuals with AD/HD are awarded the "bright but lazy" appraisal by family members and educators alike. In addition, the kinds of interventions helpful for students with AD/HD are not the same as those for students with LD, and not all students find that medication resolves their problems with inattention, although it can be a helpful part of a more comprehensive treatment program, including coaching and counseling. It seems to some that ADD has become the latest "fashionable" disorder, and there are those who doubt its existence at all. The medical community does employ accurate testing procedures for ADD, but these must be applied methodically and comprehensively. When they are, diagnosis can be trusted. Still, many ask why there are growing numbers of these students on college campuses while LD enrollments may not be increasing as steadily. It's possible that there are a growing number of individuals in the general population with the disorder, but that heightened awareness and refined diagnostic procedures are "finding" those who already are there. This is the same trend that has been noted with LD diagnosis in the college population in the past twenty years.

Many of the practical suggestions in this handbook can be helpful for students with this disorder. Other important things for students and educators to attend to are: "environmental engineering"—working to minimize distractions or buffer their effects; creating an organizational system that works in all facets of performance, not just academic; finding a "coach" to work with to help to stay on track; monitoring performance on a regular basis; willingness to ask for help readily and not fall into habits of avoidance and procrastination. Finally, there are several excellent guides for the student with ADD or AD/HD—these coaching materials are listed in the resource section of this publication.

## COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973

It is essential for faculty, staff and students to be aware of the federal regulations regarding individuals with disabilities in the post-secondary setting. These conditions include sensory or manual impairment as well as certain medical conditions. The condition, in itself, is not what determines disability eligibility under the law: it is the degree of "functional limitation" it imposes on a "major life activity." The federal government also provides a clear definition of learning disabilities which may be qualifying under this law: "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 do mathematic calculation . . . The term does not include . . . (those) who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor handicaps or mental retardation, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage."

(Federal Register, 1977)

No one in the college environment, including fellow students, may discriminate against a student with such a condition if the result is the diminishment of educational opportunity. Any form of personal harassment is also unlawful under federal or state statutes (reference State of VT Hate Crime Statutes) and is a violation of the Norwich University Anti-Discrimination Policy.

## WHAT FEDERAL LAW MANDATES CONCERNING ALL DISABLING CONDITIONS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that educational institutions at the post-secondary level must follow certain guidelines in working with students who have disabling conditions. These include:

- not considering a learning disability when admitting a student to a program or course.
- allowing modification of degree or course requirements (not a waiver of requirements).
- allowing auxiliary aids, such as tape recorders or note-takers.
- developing alternate testing and evaluation procedures.
- not counseling students toward more restrictive careers unless strict certification or licensing requirements demand it.

The basic point of these guidelines is to allow disabled students to have the same educational ***opportunity***—they do not suggest that academic programs or procedures be fundamentally changed or waived so as to unfairly discriminate against non-disabled students. The law attempts to ensure that disabilities do not prevent ***access*** to college admission, specific courses, living arrangements or employment opportunities; it also mandates an accommodation process students must initiate once they enroll.

Regional Civil Rights offices are contact points for questions and/or grievance procedures after appropriate university procedures have been satisfied. The regional office serving Vermont is:

U.S. Dept. of Education Office for Civil Rights

John W. McCormack

Post Office and Courthouse Building

Room 222

Boston, MA 02109

(617) 223-9662, (617) 223-9324 (TDD)

(Note: *All* disabilities apply, not just learning disabilities.)

A Special Note About the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

Because ***Section 504 Federal Regulations*** were perceived by some as not far-reaching enough to adequately prevent discrimination in employment, public transportation, and access to communication and public accommodations, the ***ADA was created to attempt to end segregation and exclusion of the millions of Americans with disabilities.*** **The ADA does not change** 504 regulations colleges are now subject to enforcing, and its provisions require the same degree of compliance monitoring. While it sometimes deals more with access to more "physical" entities, it still will have an impact on post-secondary education in that being widely publicized, it will enhance general knowledge of mandatory accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Thus, more people are likely to consider college as a viable choice despite impairments, and more will be aware of regulations protecting their rights to an equal educational opportunity.

The federal government and other agencies have published guides to this important act that assist public and private business and educational institutions in becoming aware of applicable standards and compliance regulations. At Norwich University, the designated University 504 Coordinator is the Director of Human Resources, who has such materials for reference/assistance with questions. The LSC Director has information specific to academic accommodations. Faculty, staff and students may contact them (LSC/Human Resources Directors) for specific information as to how the ADA will affect them in their interactions concerning disabilities.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE NOTIFIED THAT A LEARNING OR OTHER DISABILITY HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED

The following is the required procedure as outlined in the Norwich University Academic Regulations.

Individual Planning: Any student who has identified him/herself as having a disability shall submit the following as written documentation in order for accommodations to be made. As appropriate to the type and severity of the disability, written documentation must include: A comprehensive neurological, medical, psychological or educational report by an appropriate licensed medical or educational specialist. This report must contain: (a) date of evaluation and/or date of original diagnosis and diagnostic statement identifying the disability with a medical or DSM-IV code (learning disability reports may be no more than five years old; AD/HD reports, no more than three; (b) explanation of diagnostic criteria and/or evaluation measures used with all test scores included; (c) explanation of current/future functional impact of the condition; (d) services, accommodation, treatment, medication, and/or assistive devices currently in use or prescribed; (e) credentials of diagnosing professional(s) (all reports must be on standard-size letterhead, signed by the evaluator (s)).

When information is received relating to a disability which may directly affect the academic, psychological or environmental life-style of the student, the appropriate University departments or individuals (e.g. Counseling, Commandant's Office, Dean of Students, Infirmary, faculty) can be contacted to coordinate the necessary accommodations only after the student's permission is secured. The following will be the procedure.

1. Information will go to the Director of the Learning Support Center for review. If documentation is not sufficient, the student will be referred for further evaluation/verification.
2. The Director will determine student eligibility. If the student chooses, an educational profile may be developed listing suggestions for classroom accommodation. (NOTE: The student must formally register with the LSC before accommodation can be arranged.)
3. The Director at the signed request of the student will send the academic advisor and course professors a copy of the educational profile. The student must then meet with these individuals to assist with developing a plan for the execution of accommodation pertinent to each distinct course; this should be done within the first two weeks of classes with or without direct consultation with the LSC Director. A written contract can be agreed upon, signed by both parties and sent to the Learning Support Center Director for placement in the student's file.
4. Decisions about specific adjustments to the Educational Profile can be made only in consultation with the student and further diagnostic information; the LSC Director may then revise the list of legal accommodation included in the student's profile. **Note: All accommodation must be based on comprehensive, written diagnostic information from a qualified professional. It cannot be based on school programming reports (IEPs), notes or short letters, conversations or informal observations.**
5. Degree requirements will not be waived for students with disabilities, but course substitutions may be petitioned for in extreme circumstances where accommodation alone has been demonstrated as insufficient to serve the needs of an otherwise qualified disabled student.

The student is asked to sign the Educational Profile in order to give permission for faculty to be notified. A separate form is then filled out at the LSC to designate specific faculty. Keep in mind that confidentiality about this information is essential-no one may discuss or otherwise divulge information about a student's disability without direct permission, in writing, from the student. Doing so violates Federal Law. Consultation with the LSC Director is, however, allowed at any time once a student formally activates his or her profile.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

On the following pages you will find a collection of references and resources to assist you in your own research on disabilities. Remember that there is not necessarily a "right" way to work with all disabled individuals; each one has distinct needs and ways of operating intellectually, socially, emotionally and psychologically.

Time, patience and concern are often the most important components of a successful teaching/learning relationship, a relationship that can be significantly rewarding for both participants because of the special challenge disabilities present.

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## A COLLECTION OF RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

### Resources/Organizations—Learning Disabilities

Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
P.O. Box 540666
Waltham, MA 02454
(v) 781-788-0003 (e) AHEAD@ahead.org
Http://www.ahead.org

VT Center for Independent Living
Montpelier, VT
(800) 622-4555 or (802) 229-0501

Educational Interpreting for Deaf Students
Available from: Rochester Institute of Technology
National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Lyndon Baines Johnson Bldg. P.O. Box 9887
Rochester, NY 14623-0887

The George Washington University
HEATH Resource Center
2121 K. Street NW Suite 220
Washington, DC 20037
800-544-3284 (e) askheath@heath@gwu.edu
www.heath.gwu.edu
(National Clearinghouse on Post-Secondary Education for individuals with disabilities—an invaluable resource!)

National Braille Association, Inc.
1290 University Avenue
Rochester, NY 14607
(716) 473-0900

Learning Disabilities Association of America
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(write for publication catalogue)
(412) 341-1515
www.ldaamerica.org

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
1291 Taylor St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20011
800-424-8567 (e) nls@loc.gov

The International Dyslexia Society
Chester Building, Suite 382
8600 LaSalle Road
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
410-296-0232 (e) www.interdys.org

Vision Resource List
Vision Foundation
818 Mt. Auburn St.
Watertown, MA 02172
(617) 926-4232, 1-800-852-3029 (MA only)

Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
37 Elmwood Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401
(800) 639-5861

Vermont Association for Learning Disabilities
9 Heaton St.
Montpelier, VT 05602
223-5480

Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights
73 Main St.
Montpelier, VT
223-6140

Vermont Commission of the Deaf and Hearing Impaired
Vermont Human Rights Commission
828-2480

### Federal Government Publications

***The college student with a disability: A faculty handbook.*** The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped,Washington, DC 20210

***Your responsibilities to disabled persons as a school or college administrator.*** U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C. 20201

***Students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary education: know your rights and responsibilities.*** U. S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Washington D.C. 20202

### Journals/Periodicals

***Journal of Learning Disabilities***

Pro-Ed
8700 Shoal Creek Blvd.
Austin, TX 78758-6897

***Learning Disabilities. A Multidisciplinary Journal***

Learning Disabilities Association
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15234

### Pamphlet (highly recommended)

Transitions to postsecondary learning: self-advocacy handbook for students with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorder

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## Attention Deficit Disorder Organizations and Resources

CHADD
Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
8181 Professional Place, Suite 150
Landover, MD 20785
www.chadd.org

Adult ADD Association
1225 East Sunset Drive, Suite 640
Bellingham, WA 98226
(write for ADD support groups in your area)