The DASS Insider

A newsletter for SMU Faculty and Staff

Information on disability services and access issues affecting your students and classes

Digital Learning Edition
Strategies and Tips for Making Online Classrooms Accessible

Academic Support Available Remotely

Please alert your students of ongoing academic resources available to all students remotely.

Writing Center— appointments are booked through Canvas.

Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center (ALEC) offers drop-in Academic Counseling on Tues—Friday and by appointment: www.smu.edu/AcademicCounseling

DASS continues to process requests, conduct intakes and offer academic coaching to DASS students:

www.smu.edu/Provost/SASP/DASS

This edition of the DASS Insider is a shorter version focused on issues related to accessible online teaching and learning. As our campus swiftly moved to online learning last month, DASS began to field many questions from faculty and students on how this new platform would affect students with disabilities.

Our DASS team compiled this list of issues raised by DASS students as a way of sharing the unique challenges DASS students may face in digital classrooms. We offer suggestions below for managing each area, and hope you find them helpful as we work together to navigate this new learning environment.

Issue: Student feels disorganized and thinks classroom expectations are unclear.
DASS Suggestions:
- Make sure your syllabus is updated with the latest policies and due dates.
- Make sure your course's Canvas page is updated with the latest due dates and the student's current grades.
- Announcements made in class should be delivered in writing via email, Canvas page or other means, as well.
- Consider sample language for syllabi found HERE.

Issue: Student is having trouble focusing on Zoom lecture.
DASS Suggestions:
- Recommend student pin your frame so that the screen does not switch between you and other students.
- Post PowerPoints, an outline, or notes for students preview before the class.
- Ask the student(s) if there are connectivity/bandwidth problems. If so, consult with OIT.
- Use visuals like Power Points or share interesting/important things on your screen to provide more than just lecture and keep distracted students engaged. "Zoom Fatigue" decreases attention span and the ability to filter distractions, traits already at risk with some DASS students.
- Recommend students use their note taking assistance accommodation if they are not doing so.
- Professors can enable closed captioning on their Zoom conferences. Instructions are HERE. You can also assign a TA in your class to close caption audio for students who request that accommodation. Enable this function through your settings on Zoom.
- The Chat feature on Zoom, especially with larger classes, allows students to participate who might otherwise hesitate to do so. Chat also allows professors to sift through questions and answer relevant ones to the lecture.

Issue: Digital learning feels like additional work and creates processing strain and anxiety.
DASS Suggestions:
- Use ALEC learning specialists to organize time and create structure.
- Check email and Canvas DAILY for updates and reminders about due dates.
- Adopt paper planning and tracking systems that create 'visible' parameters for an invisible platform.

Issue: Backtracking while taking tests is disabled and creates challenges to test-taking strategies.
DASS Suggestions:
- Consider allowing backtracking on your online assessments, if possible. This allows students to use the strategies students learn like previewing the exam before starting, answering easy questions first, allocating energy to highest point sections first. These strategies are taught at the ALEC.
- OIT can assist with ways to minimize cheating, if this is the basis for disabling backtracking.
- Students with poor internet connectivity who are at risk of losing service during an exam are especially affected if backtracking is disabled.

Planning Ahead for Online Learning: May and June and Beyond?

Much like portions of our beautiful Dallas campus, online teaching and learning was "Under Construction" during the Spring 2020 semester! DASS appreciates the many ways faculty and departments worked together to provide a rich learning environment on very short notice for all students.

With May and June classes moved online, DASS wants to encourage course designers to be mindful of accessibility issues as courses are created. Although there was very little time to consider access issues in March, we do have to be considerate of how a person with a disability might experience a barrier in your course for the near future.

Here are some things professors can do to create access in online learning environments:

⇒ Provide recorded lectures. This allows students to review the material again.

⇒ Make outlines or PowerPoints easily available to students. This allows students who have difficulties processing visual, auditory and written material simultaneously to feel more prepared for lectures online.

⇒ Be very clear on how to extend time on any assessments within the system you choose to use.

⇒ Consider alternatives to traditional tests since timed tests with a lockdown browser may limit a student who requires assistive technology to access the digital information.

⇒ As always, establish and provide textbooks and reading lists well in advance. This allows DASS and our students to access digital formats before classes begin.

⇒ Provide ways for students to ask questions during online exams, if this is something you allowed before online classes. Contact OIT for instructions on how to have students use Zoom on their phones or tablets to ask you questions in real-time.

⇒ If Fall 2020 courses are administered online or in some hybrid format, please contact our office as well as CTE to discuss ways to minimize barriers as you design the course, rather than waiting until classes start to retrofit.

Remember, DASS Link works well in our current virtual environment by allowing the instructor to log in and view DASS accommodation letters at any time. You can quickly check your roster of students and see (in list form) those with accommodations. DASS staff are still reviewing new accommodation requests so you could receive a new accommodation letter at any point in the semester, but accommodations are not retroactive.

Designing Syllabi for Online Learning

Looking for a few tips on designing your syllabi for maximum accessibility in online learning? This Inside Higher Ed article offers some helpful guidance:

https://exclusive.multibriefs.com/content/6-tips-for-redesigning-your-online-syllabus-due-to-covid-19/education

**Visit us online at
www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp**

Visit us at DASS

**Please include this statement in your syllabus:**

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

**5800 Ownby Drive—Suite 202 Loyd Center
2nd Floor - Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center
Entrance near Gate 3 of Ford Stadium
Parking in the Meadows Garage**

**Phone: 214-768-1470
Email: dass@smu.edu**

DASS IS MORE THAN ACCOMMODATIONS.

**For resources that may be helpful to faculty and staff, please visit:
http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS/Resources/ForFaculty**