

# THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

INFORMATION ON DISABILITY SERVICES AND ACCESS ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR STUDENTS AND CLASSES



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## Managing Dyslexia Impacts in the Classroom

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Increasing numbers of high school graduates with learning disabilities are enrolling in colleges and universities each year. Students with disabilities make up about 8 – 10% of the undergraduate population at SMU, and dyslexia is the most common learning disability reported by first-year college students. The primary deficit for students with dyslexia is weak phonemic decoding skills, or a breakdown in the association between sounds and letters. Students with dyslexia experience difficulties with poor reading fluency and accuracy, inconsistent comprehension and retention of texts, differentiating main ideas and details in readings, and following written directions.

Dyslexia can also contribute to poor spelling and writing skills and impaired sequencing of writing tasks. Above-average intelligence allows these students to develop coping strategies in earlier school settings which often prove inadequate to manage the intensity, format and amount of college reading and writing.

The most common accommodation for these students is extra time which helps bridge the gap between text and meaning created by poor decoding skills. With extra time, students can re-read passages, and apply multisensory reading techniques to make sense out of print. Other areas of classroom performance which can be affected by dyslexia include note taking, listening, auditory comprehension, and writing organization. Multiple choice exams can be particularly difficult for these students, as the lack of contextual information eliminates a reliable compensation strategy.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind as ways to support these students:

### **For faculty:**

\*Provide detailed syllabi with reading selections confirmed at the beginning of class. This enables students with dyslexia to spread out their reading load and begin early. Additionally, post your syllabi online so these students can order alternative texts prior to the start of class. Select texts that are available in digital formats (see pg.3).

\*If reading aloud in class is part of your classroom, post this in your syllabus and consider how to make this amenable to the students who may have difficulty with this task. When discussing the accommodation letter with DASS students, you can bring up this topic, and pursue alternatives, such as giving advanced notice to the DASS student with the passage they will read.

\*If you notice unusual deficits in written assignments, discuss these with your student and suggest they reach out to campus services for help, including the Writing Center and DASS. If it appears their difficulty is disability-based, we can assist in helping them start the DASS process for accommodations.

### **For advisors:**

\*Help students with dyslexia spread courses with heavy reading requirements across their entire educational careers.

\*Take into account the extra time spent reading that students with dyslexia will spend in college when setting up their weekly schedule. Evening classes followed by early morning classes leaves little time for these students to get reading and assignments completed. More than two classes without a break makes extended testing time difficult to use.

(Continued on page 4)

### In the News



North Texas is home to a 2-year program designed to help young adults with autism learn to live independently, and offer specialized job training and employment assistance.

To learn more about this innovative project, visit:

<https://www.dallasnews.com/business/health-care/2018/01/31/north-texas-academy-people-autism-seeks-first-students>

[www.29acres.org](http://www.29acres.org)

## Service Dog or ESA?

Do you know there is an Animals on Campus policy at SMU? Do you know what questions can be asked to determine if the dog is indeed a Service Dog? What is an ESA? DASS is here to help the SMU community understand the difference between Service Dogs and Emotional Support Animals (ESAs).

Service Dogs have been trained to perform specific work or tasks for their handler to mitigate disability-related needs. These needs can be related to mobility, vision, hearing, episodic illness or sometimes psychiatric diagnoses. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Service Dogs are allowed access everywhere on campus the student is allowed to go, except where they would be specifically disallowed for safety reasons (e.g., clean room, kitchen, chemistry lab). These working dogs are not required to be certified by any particular organization nor must they be registered with DASS. They also do not have to wear any identifiable tags or vests, though most probably do.

Emotional Support Animals, on the other hand, are not recognized by the ADA and they typically are not allowed in the classroom. Under



the ADA, they are essentially viewed as pets that do not have a specific purpose beyond helping their owner feel calm. Under the Fair Housing Act, however, ESAs are recognized and might be approved to live in campus housing IF the student has made the particular request from DASS and RLSH.

If you encounter a dog on campus and it is NOT readily apparent that it is a Service Dog, the ADA limits what questions may be asked about its status. You are permitted to ask:

Is this dog required for disability-related needs?

What work or task has this dog been trained to perform?

If the dog is indeed required for a disability-related need and the handler describes the specific work or task this dog has been trained to perform, the dog should be considered a Service Dog at that point. If the answer to the first question is “no”, obviously the dog is not a Service Dog. If the answer to the work question is more in line with “licks my hand and keeps me calm,” this is likely an ESA and should be referred to DASS. If a Service Dog is in the classroom (or anywhere on campus), it must be well-behaved and quiet, except if it has been trained to vocalize an alert to its handler. Please refer to the campus policy for more details and don’t hesitate to contact the DASS office for more information.

<https://www.smu.edu/IAE/PoliciesandProcedures>

Watch this video on the subject: Animals on Campus – what, when, and where

<http://www.texasbartoday.com/2014/02/24/veterans-and-boots-law-service-animals-and-persons-with-disabilities-in-texas/>



## DASS By the Numbers

In the post-secondary disability services field, everything is approached with a case-by-case perspective. Trends are just that...trends. However, at DASS we believe it is also important to be aware of the particular needs of our student population, any emerging issues, and best practices from other institutions. Therefore, we closely monitor usage of services in order to best meet the needs of the students and represent the University. Contacts with students are carefully documented and semester reports compiled and the following numbers come from the most recent semester usage report from Fall 2017:



Total number of students approved for at least 1 accommodation: 740

DASS students with 2 or more diagnosed conditions: 278

Undergrad vs. graduate level: 651 vs. 88

Number of intakes (new to DASS): 176

Academic counseling sessions (for LD/ADHD population): 255

Letter pick-ups (returners to DASS): 293

Tests proctored (non-finals): 690

Tests proctored (finals only): 232

Students with disabilities tend to make up about 8-10% of the undergraduate population at SMU. This has increased in the past five years. Student groups with medical conditions, psychological conditions (anxiety or depression) and ADHD have increased at the highest rate, while student groups with learning disabilities as well as visual and hearing impairments have remained stable. DASS has also experienced an increase in requests for housing-related disability accommodations, particularly since the two-year live-on requirement was instituted. Test proctoring at DASS is an ever-increasing support service. Although we serve as a back-up to faculty, DASS still administers more and more tests each semester. For the Fall 2017 semester, we proctored approximately 150 more tests than our busiest semester in the past five years. We continue to partner with individual faculty members and departments on ways to accommodate as many students within the departments, when possible.



### Planning Ahead for Spring Final Exams at DASS

It's never too early to discuss testing policies with your DASS student. When you receive an accommodation letter from a DASS student, please take a few moments to talk about testing arrangement for the semester, including final exams.



Our DASS students learn from our office that their professor has the final decision on testing details, such as time, date and location. Please validate this information we share by discussing your expectations for their testing needs when you meet with them to discuss their accommodation letter.

When a student schedules a test at DASS, including their final exam, without consent from their professor, it creates (1) a surprise for your department when you receive our request for a proctor form; and, (2) extra work for DASS when we learn of the student's mistake. Speaking directly with your student at the start of the semester about your testing expectations will help resolve these scheduling errors.

DASS students have already been informed of the dates to schedule Spring 2018 final exams through our online system (**April 2— 30**). Remember our seating is limited. For several semesters, many of our sections have filled up quickly. Students have been informed in person and through our newsletter of the importance of speaking with you EARLY to work out conflicts during final exams.

Our office appreciates your willingness to support our DASS students by modeling effective decision-making in this critical area of our services to students and faculty!



## Managing Dyslexia in the Classroom (concluded)

You probably know students with dyslexia who possess exceptional leadership abilities, creative problem-solving skills, and strong empathy for others. While people with dyslexia are slow readers, they often are very fast and creative thinkers with strong reasoning abilities. Employers often seek the tenacity, humility and self-advocacy skills these students develop as part of dealing with their challenges related to reading. With supportive programs and mentors in higher education, college students with dyslexia can move forward to contribute in unique ways to their professions and communities.

## Faculty Q&A: Audio books

### Some of my DASS students report they use audio books for my reading assignments? Is this cheating?

Students with reading deficits in decoding, fluency or comprehension often find the multi sensory elements of audio books an effective compensation strategy. Audio books allow students to read along as text is highlighted on a screen and listen to the spoken text simultaneously. Students report this multiple modality approach helps overcome loss of meaning which occurs when readers must stop and start repeatedly while reading a passage or longer text. Audio books are also helpful for students with distractibility and impulsivity due to ADHD.

For more information on this topic, visit [HERE](#).

For more FAQ's for faculty, see [HERE](#).



## Assistive Technology at SMU: The C-Pen and Kurzweil

From time to time, we at DASS get the chance to try out new assistive technology that could make a huge difference in the lives of our students. The latest is the C-Pen. Popular in Europe for most of this decade, C-Pens are just now finding their way to the US. Surprisingly, these pens don't write! Instead, they're fitted with a scanner and text-to-speech tech. The user passes the "point" of the pen over lines of text, which are uploaded into the memory of the pen, and then the pen reads the text out loud to the user. Such a device can be a game changer for students with reading disorders or visual impairments. The C-Pen also has a dictionary and can read in 5 different languages. Once we become proficient in the pen's use, we'll begin offering demos of the pen and purchase information.



The C-Pen is just the latest assistive tech that could help SMU students. DASS, Academic Development for Student-Athletes (ADSA), and Fondren Library partnered 3 years ago to secure a university-wide site license for the text-to-speech software, Kurzweil. Kurzweil and its tablet/phone-friendly version, Firefly, read electronic text (such as a pdf or scanned document) aloud to the user. All SMU students are eligible to use the software. All they need do is sign up for it at DASS, ADSA, or Fondren Library, and upload the program to their laptop or other device.

VISIT US ONLINE AT

**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 retro-active and require advance notice to implement.

VISIT US AT DASS

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](mailto: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>