

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

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



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Welcome Back to the Start-of-Semester (SOS) Issue

DASS is the primary contact for all SMU students with disabilities. This issue of the DASS Insider summarizes the critical items faculty and staff consider at the start of each fall semester. We encourage you to keep it handy as a first resource when questions arise with your DASS students and their accommodations. As always, DASS is here to assist you in meeting the needs of your DASS students.



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Start of Semester Checklist

- ⇒ **Syllabus Statement:** replace with the current one provided by the Provost's office each semester. See page 4 for the current statement. Professors sometimes add requirements to the approved statement; some are appropriate, but some are not and should be avoided. An example of an acceptable addition is to encourage the student to meet with you when submitting the DASS accommodation letter. Inappropriate additions include a firm deadline to deliver accommodation letters (such as in the first two weeks of school). Accommodations are determined year-round.
- ⇒ **Textbooks:** establish reading lists early enough that other formats of your books can be ordered by DASS if necessary. Red Shelf and VitalSource are options for digital textbooks that are typically accessible by those who use a screen reader. Alt Format Texts take time to order, prepare and process. Delayed delivery of these items impacts student learning.
- ⇒ **Reduced distraction testing environment:** determine resources for providing a smaller space for these students, preferably within your department.
- ⇒ **Allowed to audio record:** give permission to students with this accommodation to audio record lecture to supplement their own note taking.
- ⇒ **Peer notes:** determine how peer notes will be requested, delivered and verified for students with this accommodation. See page 3 for additional tips.
- ⇒ **Accessible material:** If videos/films are required, set up how these will be made available to any student, including a visually impaired student.
- ⇒ **Laptops:** consider ways to accommodate DASS students requiring laptops for notetaking if you maintain a no laptop policy. Many faculty use a laptop contract and flexible syllabi language to provide access and maintain classroom preferences.
- ⇒ **Readings:** make these available at the start of the semester. This is critical for students with reading disorders who spend considerably more time with reading assignments.
- ⇒ **Meetings with DASS students:** many first year or new students will be contacting you at the start of the semester for meetings to discuss their accommodations. Determine options for making these meetings go smoothly. See page 2 for suggestions.



Distraction Reduced Environments

Definition and Best Practices

When you receive an accommodation letter with this accommodation, it means the student should be tested in an environment which minimizes distractions for the student. Each student has different levels of distractibility and different stimuli which may distract them. Instructors should discuss with the student the optimal settings in which the student will take the test. Typically, students need an environment which minimizes both auditory (e.g. copy machines, talking, other noises) and visual distractions (e.g. people walking in and out). A distraction-reduced environment does not necessitate the student's testing in a private room, nor does it mean that an environment is completely distraction-free.

Accommodation Letters

Many DASS students deliver their accommodation letters in the first few weeks of a semester. In fact, DASS processes over 3000 letters each semester (for around 650 students) so we do stay very busy verifying them in the DASS Link system and meeting with new students during the first few weeks of the semester. For students new to DASS, the digital delivery of the letters to faculty occurs after a lengthy process involving paperwork, interviews, diagnostic testing, professional review and discussion with DASS staff. Accommodation letters:

- are provided during a 1:1 intake appointment with the DASS student (initially).
- formalize an agreement between the university and the student. They follow a predictable template to meet legal requirements.
- are not all the same. Accommodations granted for unique disability impacts may also include detailed information the student has asked our office to share with you. Please read them carefully to help frame your conversation with the DASS student.
- do not include a student's diagnosis but may contain specific information or suggestions as a means of guiding faculty to implementation options. Students retain the option of disclosing (or not) their diagnosis to others.
- are reviewed and shared digitally for each semester of enrollment for a DASS student. Please verify the letter you receive lists the current semester below the student's name.
- are shared with individual instructors only after the student initiates the request in DASS Link.
- are housed on your DASS Link portal. You can filter to only view the current semester's letters.

Sticky Scenarios:

*Some students may provide faculty with copies of their diagnostic information or make requests for accommodations outside the DASS process. In both instances, DASS strongly encourages you to refer students to our office for these needs. Because of confidentiality demands of the review process, faculty should not agree to hold or review diagnostic reports containing protected medical information. Likewise, granting informal accommodations not recognized by the university through the DASS process can lead to situations which jeopardize the university or surprise the student when subsequent faculty do not allow accommodations without a letter. A good rule of thumb is to require the accommodation letter in order to implement accommodations in your class. This policy protects you, the university and the student.

*With the bulk of new DASS students scheduling intake appointments at the start of the semester, it often becomes impossible to complete all intake appointments before initial tests occur in classes. Instructors can contact our office to confirm a student has started our process, if

Meetings with Students

DASS students are expected to communicate with faculty to discuss their accommodation letters that were shared via DASS Link. When DASS students request meetings with faculty, we encourage you to make this an easy step for them, as for many this will be a novel experience. Most will request a private meeting with you to discuss their accommodations. Preparing for these meetings can set the tone for your DASS students.

Some students may be nervous about meeting with you or discussing their learning needs. During the meeting, ask leading questions to help students share with you their academic strengths and struggles, so that they connect for you the purpose of the accommodations they have been granted. Some questions you may consider asking your DASS students include:

How have these accommodations helped you become a successful student?

What areas of your academic performance or learning would you like me to know about?

DASS students are instructed to remind faculty 7 days' in advance of any test they wish to use their extended time or other test-related accommodations. During this meeting, they will ask you how you wish to be reminded of their extended time testing requests. Have your preference (email, text, other) ready to provide to them. Students are instructed to bring their semester schedule to this meeting so that testing arrangements, preferably in your department, can be decided upon at that time. DASS serves as a back-up testing option if you are unable to provide the accommodations internally.

During the meeting, take notes regarding your conversation on the student's accommodations letter. These can be helpful should issues arise later.

If additional forms are required by a student's particular accommodations (i.e., flexible attendance), take time to complete these while meeting with the student. These are designed to stave off specific problems which commonly arise with this accommodation.

Ultimately, the purpose of these meetings is to facilitate an accommodation agreement and to build rapport between faculty and students. If our office can assist in either area, please let DASS know.



Test Proctoring

When you call the main number at DASS, you usually are speaking with Candy Brown, our DASS Administrative Assistant. Candy works with DASS students in many ways and also coordinates all the test proctoring for the department. If you have students with testing accommodations, we ask that you attempt to manage as many of them in the department as you can. For those who have a scheduling conflict or an accommodation that is more elaborate (2.0x or a reader/scribe), you can refer them to schedule their test at DASS. DASS can be an alternative, but be sure to check out our limitations on our website. Your department may have resources for you, as well, so consider talking to your department Chair person.



As you begin administering tests to your class, we, too, begin test proctoring. We serve as a back-up to faculty but your student *should* know they are responsible to schedule tests *at least* 7 days from the test date (if testing at DASS). If you don't inform your students about a test date with at least 7 days notice, that will really put them (and us...and you!) in a bind.

After your student schedules a test through the DASS online portal, you will receive a test request notification, asking you to log in to DASS Link. It is *critical*-ly important to finalize the Test Room Booking appointment in the DASS Link system. This is the perfect time to contact Candy if the student has not accurately scheduled the time or date, or if the test date has been changed or cancelled or the student has decided to test with you. Clear communication between our students, faculty and the DASS office will keep misunderstandings (and stress) to a minimum. Lastly, if you do need to drop off a test (and choose not to upload it to DASS Link), there's a handy locked drop box right outside Room 202M for your convenience. Note that we will be returning all tests through the DASS Link portal instead of by email. You can elect to pick up the test instead.

Please refer to the email DASS provided to faculty on September 8th for details on test proctoring, contact DASS with any questions about our policies and procedures or visit us at: <https://www.smu.edu/Provost/SASP/DASS/DisabilityAccommodations/TestProctoring>.

Note Taking Accommodations

Accommodations to assist student with note taking are one of the most common DASS accommodations. Students granted note taking accommodations typically experience difficulty with simultaneous processing of oral, visual and written material. The accommodation can take multiple forms, depending on the student's needs and class format. The options for note taking accommodations include:



*ability to audio record class and review sessions. Recording of lectures can be accomplished by a digital recording device, laptop or LiveScribe pen. Students acknowledge in their intake appointments that any notes obtained by peers or recordings are not to be shared with others or online, and they are not available for classes they do not attend. DASS has not approved video recording for any student, due to their disability, so note the specifics in the accommodation letters. Students may find they need to sit up front to improve the recording quality.

*access to a copy of peer notes, taken by a volunteer note taker in the class. If audio recording is not sufficient due to the student's disability or the course content (math, for example), a copy of peer notes may be necessary. Faculty solicit these note takers and facilitate the transfer of notes to the DASS student. In most cases, DASS students set up anonymous g-mail accounts, and the peer note taker scans and sends the notes each day to the DASS student. In other cases, the note taker and DASS student coordinate this transfer when the DASS student does not wish to remain anonymous. A suggested script is included in the accommodation letter to assist faculty with locating peer note takers. DASS recommends identifying at least two volunteer note takers early in the semester for each class where they are needed.

*ability to use a laptop for note taking. DASS recommends that faculty use laptop contracts if classroom policies prohibit laptops. See our [Faculty FAQ](#) for suggestions.

Laptops and recordings for this accommodation are more independent options for the DASS student, and are not prone to logistical delays often created by peer notes. For this reason, you may receive accommodation letters which list two of these options as a means of ensuring the DASS student is receiving equal access to class information when peer notes are not forthcoming.

When notes are not forthcoming from a peer note taker, DASS students are instructed to inform their faculty first to ask for assistance. If the gap in access is not easily and quickly fixed, we suggest DASS students and instructors reach out to our office for assistance in brainstorming solutions with faculty.

Please note, the delivery of notes or outlines before a class meets is not generally considered a reasonable accommodation.

Confidentiality

What can I say, and to whom? This can be confusing, when you receive a letter that says “Confidential”! This means you shouldn’t discuss this student’s disability status with anyone OTHER than the student, except in real “need to know” situations. Your TA might need to know the student has extended time for testing, but the TA does not need to see all of their accommodations or know about their condition, if the DASS student shared that with you. Do NOT talk about accommodations with this student in front of other students, for any reason. This is the most common way a student’s confidentiality has been broken, and although unintended, it can be very upsetting to the student. Failing to bcc: a group of students in an email concerning test arrangements also violates confidentiality and should be avoided. Other best practices concerning confidentiality include:



*Do not require a student to discuss their diagnosis or disability in a classroom setting.

*Avoid restrictions which would identify a student with a disability. Examples include no laptop policies, or refusals to allow students to remain enrolled in your class if their testing times require them to test at another time from class.

Resources and Troubleshooting

From time to time, faculty or staff may have questions about accommodations or concerns about a student whose difficulties may be disability-based. DASS encourages you to consult the resources below and to reach out to our office for assistance. We are here to help students gain equal access to their education at SMU, and to increase understanding of disabilities among our community. Here are some resources to manage common issues with accommodations:

Extended time tests on Canvas: Detailed instructions are found [HERE](#).

DASS website/Faculty FAQs: These include your most common questions regarding working with your students with disabilities, as well as policies and procedures of the DASS office. Check out the [site](#) for the complete list.

DASS Staff: for issues with implementing accommodations OR increasing department awareness of accommodations. Our Director is happy to visit departmental meetings.

Academic coaching: This is a unique resource with proven benefits to students with disabilities. 1:1 sessions available to DASS students with a Learning Specialist to work on a variety of needs. Details are found [HERE](#).

Kurzweil Firefly: All SMU students have access to this technology which converts printed text to spoken text. If students report difficulties with keeping up with readings, refer them to this tool, available from Fondren Librarians. All DASS students can access Firefly through their Accommodations Coordinator. A complete list of campus resources is [HERE](#).

A-LEC Resources: Tutoring, Writing Center, Study Skills Workshops, Academic Counseling are described [HERE](#).

VISIT US ONLINE AT WWW.SMU.EDU/DASS

VISIT US AT DASS

Please include this statement in your syllabus:

Students who need 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/SASP/DASS> to begin the process. Once they are registered and approved, students then submit a DASS Accommodation Letter through the electronic portal, *DASS Link*, and then communicate directly with each of their instructors to make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, but rather require advance notice in order 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/SASP/DASS/Resources/ForFaculty>