

# THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

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



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## Mental Health in the Classroom: Recognizing Depression and its Academic Impacts

College can be an exciting time, but it can also be overwhelming and stressful. Depression, anxiety, substance use, and eating disorders are common mental health issues on college campuses.

According to a 2011 American College Health Association Survey, almost 1/3 of students reported feeling so depressed within the last 12 months that it was difficult to function, and almost half felt overwhelming anxiety. The most commonly identified traumatic issues were academic, financial, intimate relations, family, and sleep difficulties. Of the approximately 20% of students who had been diagnosed or treated for a mental health/substance use condition in the past year, the most common conditions were depression, anxiety, panic attacks and ADHD.

(Source: 2011 American College Health Association survey [www.achancha.org/](http://www.achancha.org/))

Major depression increases the likelihood of substance abuse, impairs functioning at school, influences an individual's subsequent development in negative ways and can also co-occur with other disorders, such as anxiety, physical illnesses and eating disorders. Functional limitations related to depression and mental health conditions might include:

- Difficulty with medication side effects: drowsiness, fatigue, slowed response time
- Sustaining concentration: shortened attention span, difficulty understanding or remembering verbal directions, deficits in screening out stimuli. Difficulty completing multi-task work and meeting deadlines.
- Interacting with others: difficulty getting along, fitting in, contributing to group work, and reading social cues. They may have difficulty approaching instructors or TAs.
- Responding to negative feedback: difficulty understanding and correctly interpreting criticism or poor grades. May not be able to separate person from task (personalization or defensiveness due to low self-esteem).
- Responding to change: difficulty coping with unexpected changes in coursework, such as changes in the assignments, due dates or instructors. Limited ability to tolerate interruptions.

(Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 1997).

### Faculty might observe the following in a student with depression:

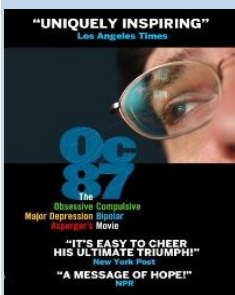
- May appear tired or sleepy and exhibit reduced energy and stamina
- May articulate persistent negative feelings
- May demonstrate a lack of engagement in class or poor class attendance
- May have difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions, or following lectures
- May have difficulty with organization or meeting deadlines
- May have difficulties with communication or difficulties in social situations
- May exhibit anxiety due to a feeling of lack of control.

### Common accommodations for depression and other mental health conditions include:

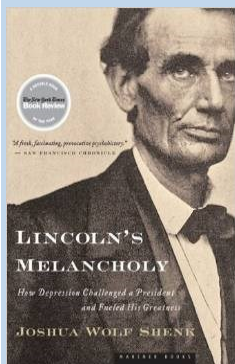
- |                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Extended time for testing | Preferential seating           |
| Frequent breaks           | Reduced distraction testing    |
| Peer notes/recordings     | If needed, flexible attendance |

At SMU, several resources are available for students with mental health disorders. Faculty can refer students to CAPS if there is a need for 1:1 counseling or intervention. The Caring Community Connections (CCC) portal allows faculty to alert the Office of Student Affairs of students of concern in an easy-to-use and timely manner. Finally, please contact DASS if you are concerned about students in your class and feel free to refer students to our office who seek accommodations for these disorders.

Want to learn more about depression? Check these out:



*87: The Obsessive Compulsive, Major Depression, Bipolar, Asperger's Movie*



*Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled his Greatness*

Joshua W. Schenk

## Planning Ahead: Reflections on Final Exams

Did you know DASS typically proctors over 200 tests during final exams?

We at DASS are happy to continue providing our test proctoring service to instructors who don't have the resources to test their students with testing accommodations. As we strive to improve this service, we look back carefully at what we've learned each semester, especially during the recent final exam period. DASS would like to share a few insights, specifically concerning our test proctoring forms.

**Proctor Forms are critical.** They ensure that DASS administers a test according to faculty instructions and replicates the classroom requirements. To make sure things go smoothly, it is important to include the following items:

\*your **cell phone number** where you can be reached during the test in case there is a problem;

\*specific information about **items permitted** during the test — for example, are students allowed a notecard or note sheets? If so, what size paper? Can they use the front and the back? Are students allowed a calculator? If

so, is it a specific type, such as 4-function or Scientific?

\*your preferred method of **exam return with alternatives** (slip under door? Hand to admin? Place in mailbox?) — do keep in mind the time of day (or night) your students will be bringing tests to you;

\*the **standard testing time** that your class is allowed; DASS bases extended time on how much time others in the class are given so please share.

\*If students fail to follow our procedures for testing **OR** we are unable to reach an instructor to verify testing instructions, we will direct them back to their instructors to work out the necessary accommodations, even during the exam.

The finals period is stressful for most students, and, oftentimes, even more so for students with disabilities. We at DASS appreciate your efforts to support the procedures in place to alleviate stress for all parties — students, faculty, and DASS staff — during this busy time of each semester.



DASS Room 217

### Did You Know?

The Michigan Supreme Court has its first blind judge.

Richard Bernstein, blind since birth, took office in January.

To prepare for mid-January arguments for 10 cases, Bernstein memorized key points of every brief read to him by an aide.

"It would be much easier if I could read and write like everyone else, but that's not how I was created," Bernstein said. "This is what I've done my entire life."

Bernstein has run more than 15 marathons. In 2008, he completed a triathlon by riding a bike 112 miles, running 26.2 miles and swimming 2.4 miles with the help of guides.

The slogan for his campaign for the state Supreme Court?

"Blind Justice"

(Dallas Morning News, December 29, 2014, Page 11A)

### Faculty Focus: Accommodations or Arrangements?

Many SMU faculty make arrangements for their students during the year. Using specific language can help define the parameters of these arrangements to minimize confusion and conflict.

Student 1: "Professor, it takes me longer to finish essay tests; can I have extra time to finish tests in your class?"

*"In order to get accommodations in your classes for a disability, you need to use the DASS process to inform all of your faculty about your needs. In my class, however, I allow anyone who can't finish the tests additional time. Please remember this is an arrangement for my class though, and won't necessarily apply to your other classes."*

Student 2: "Professor, may I record your class so I can listen and review my notes later? Oh, I also need copies of your slides because I have a disability. Can you email them to me before class?"

*"Thanks for asking about the recording. I'm sure others are doing the same with phones and pens so I have no issue with it. Since your request for slides is tied to a disability, you will need to contact DASS so they can approve that accommodation and give you a letter."*

"But I don't have time to go over there. Can't you just make an exception and give me the accommodation?"

*"I'm sorry, it's my policy that I don't provide slides to all students. To alter that policy, I will need verification of your disability. I prefer that all disability accommodation requests go through the DASS office."*

**The words you use make a difference when making arrangements for students' needs. Faculty should clarify for students the difference between a Universal Design component of your class, an exception you are willing to make, and an approved disability-related accommodation. Be cautious when discussing 'arrangements' versus 'accommodations' when students approach you with requests.**



## Student Profile: Balancing Student Leadership Demands with a Disability

Student Body Vice President Monica Finnegan is a DASS student who successfully balances academic, social and leadership obligations, including those of being a Hunt Leadership Scholar. A senior from St. Louis, Missouri, majoring in Accounting and Communication Studies, Monica has been active on campus in the following areas:

- \* Chief of Staff of SMU Student Senate
- \* Virginia-Snider Honors Hall RA
- \* Alpha Chi Omega, Chair of Campus Involvement
- \* SMU-in-Taos Ambassador
- \* Honor Council delegate
- \* Mustang Corral Leader



DASS spoke to Monica recently and asked her to share her views on being a student with a disability on the SMU campus.

What impacts from your learning differences have required the most energy from you to manage while you have been a student at SMU?

***Time reading my class assignments and then processing tests in class have definitely required the most energy to manage during my time at SMU.***

How have accommodations helped you manage these impacts? What SMU support services seemed to help the most?

***When I first came to SMU, I had trouble even finishing a half of my test. I realized very quickly that I was consuming much more time processing the questions during my tests and as a result, I tried to speed up my test time. I vividly recall that there was a statistics class that I had spent much time studying through the material, and had practiced problems to increase my comprehension speed. Yet on test days I didn't even complete half of the test. Now with accommodations, I have the ability to work at my pace and show my professors what I know.***

What advice would you give students on being a successful student at SMU with a learning difference?

***"Be prepared to work hard." Students could use their difference as a 'crutch', but the way I see it is that I think a learning difference gives me the extra incentive to study extra hours and begin to prepare ahead of time so that I, too, can run with the other top students at SMU.***

What advice would you give SMU faculty about working with students with learning differences?

***Keep up the good work; remember that some students don't like to advertise their differences so complete confidentiality (which was never breached for me) means a lot.***

What are your plans after graduation in May?

***Short term, I have been hired by PricewaterhouseCoopers for next summer as an audit accounting intern. I plan on attending graduate school afterwards.***

***Monica is one of many DASS students who successfully balance the demands of academic work, leadership positions on campus and service to our community while managing the impacts of learning disabilities. DASS celebrates the accomplishments of these students and congratulates Monica on her successful SMU journey!***

**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>**

# Testing Talk: Scenarios and Solutions

You are handed an accommodation letter by a student with a disability. You have been asked to arrange for testing accommodations for this student. Now what? This may represent a difficult communication on the part of the student and some need for planning by the faculty. Listed below are some real scenarios and solutions.

Lisa has a **severe anxiety disorder** and rushes up to her professor in the hallway and thrusts her accommodation letter in his hands. He understands right away that she is nervous and reassures her, “No problem, Lisa. I have handled lots of accommodation requests. Unfortunately, I have to dash to a meeting right now but we can talk later.” Lisa is thrilled to have the letter delivery behind her and moves away quickly.

*DASS encourages students to deliver and discuss their letters during private appointments, especially because there may be unusual accommodations beyond just extended time. If a student delivers their letter to you in this manner, it is appropriate to remind them of the need to discuss the letter at another appointment when both of you can talk about the details in the letter. In this scenario, Lisa has delivered her letter but has no clear instruction on how her accommodations will be put in place. The nature of her disability means she is likely to wait for the professor to communicate with her.*

George has **ADHD** and struggles with executive functioning skills such as organization, planning and prioritizing tasks. He waits until class ends and all students have left to approach his professor with his letter. Unexpectedly, the professor says, “Sure, extra time is not problem, George. Just remind me one week prior to each test that you need the accommodation.” George is thrilled that he has his letter delivered but is worried that he will forget to remind the professor each time.

*During intake appointments, DASS reminds students of the advance notice requirements which avoid surprises. We often use academic coaching to train students how to handle deadlines and remind professors of the arrangements for their tests. Professors are encouraged to check in with their DASS students, especially early in the semester for first tests or for first-year students new to the process.*

Laura has **Asperger’s Syndrome**, which affects her fine motor movements and processing time. When she delivers her letters to her professor, he explains that he has no space or proctor available and that she should test at DASS. Emily forgets to remind her professor of her accommodations for the first test but shows up on test day at DASS to take the test. DASS sends Laura back to the classroom for other arrangements to take the test and receive her accommodations.

*DASS is one of many arrangements available for faculty to use for testing accommodations. Others include rooms/space adjacent to the department office where a secretary or assistant could proctor or scheduling the student’s test for another time. If DASS is used, we have a specific procedure when assisting faculty with testing accommodations. When Laura forgot to follow that procedure, it created a stressful situation on test day. Had Laura registered for the test using the DASS Online Scheduler after receiving permission from her professor to do so, a proctor form request would have been sent to the professor and the DASS process would have proceeded to allow Laura to test at DASS.*

VISIT US ONLINE AT

[WWW.SMU.EDU/ALEC/DASS.ASP](http://WWW.SMU.EDU/ALEC/DASS.ASP)

**NEW! PLEASE UPDATE YOUR SYLLABUS.**

**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.

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.**