The DASS Insider

A newsletter for SMU Faculty

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

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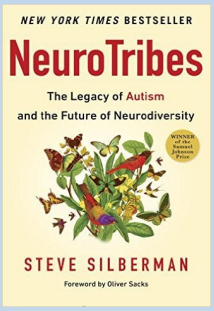
Inside this issue:

Preparing for final exams for DASS students	1
JanTerm considerations for faculty	2
Mid-term grade reports and DASS students	2
Asperger's Syndrome in the classroom	3
What is reasonable notice?	3
Thinking ahead to Spring: Your syllabus	4
Visit us at DASS	4

Want to know more about students with autism in higher education?



NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity
By Steve Silberman
(NYT review: www.nytimes.com/2015/08/23/books/review/neurotribes-by-steve-silberman.html)

The Final Stretch:
Preparing for Final Exams for DASS students

DASS Room 217
Test proctoring area

DASS typically proctors over 200 exams during finals, most with different instructions. We are happy to continue providing test proctoring service to instructors who do not have the resources to test their students with accommodations within the department. However, it is important to consider a few things:

Students must schedule their final exam(s) with DASS using our Online Scheduler. The deadline to schedule with DASS is 11/24 in order for us to start our work on checking accuracy of test times, creating proctor forms, arranging proctor coverage for the heavy schedule, and planning for unique accommodation needs like readers and scribes. If you have not already communicated with your DASS students about finals, please take them aside and discuss the plan. If testing at DASS is the only option, direct them to follow the procedures ASAP.

If students fail to follow our procedures for testing, we will direct them back to their instructors to work out the necessary accommodations. Just because DASS has denied a student to test at DASS because they missed our deadline does NOT mean the faculty member should necessarily deny the accommodation for the upcoming test. If it is reasonable for you to put the accommodation in place, then you should do so.

Just as in the regular part of the semester, we have limitations. For example:

*We do not allow tests that require the use of a computer, unless it is listed as an accommodation in the student's letter.

*In order to maximize space and proctors, we only start tests at 9am, 11:30am, or 2:30pm (except on Saturday's where the only start time is 9am). We want students to schedule their DASS Final as close to the classroom start time as possible, and if that time block is full, the instructor would have to give us written permission to test the student at a different day or time. If you are giving your other students less than the typical 3 hours, please let your DASS students and our office know in order to adjust the extended time appropriately.

*DASS will send out a proctor form 3-5 days before the final exam. We do this in waves so please be patient. Please complete it fully, including a cell phone, in order to contact you during the test time if there are any issues. Be as explicit as possible on what is allowed during the test (e.g., hand-written 3x5 notecard, simple calculator) so our proctors administer the exam correctly. For more details about having the test returned and other limitations, please review the details of finals on our website.

http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS/DisabilityAccommodations/TestProctoring

Are you teaching a JanTerm course? See Page 2 ⇨

JanTerm: Special Considerations for Faculty

If you are teaching a course for JanTerm, there are some things to consider when working with students with accommodations.

Be sure your DASS syllabus statement is up to date and encourage your students both verbally and in writing to get their letter of accommodation (LOA) to you as soon as possible. They do this by requesting the letters on our website and we will have them printed in a day or two, ready to be picked up by the student. Realize though that, once JanTerm starts, they have few hours during the work day to get to our office and we may have limited staff during that time. DASS suggests you contact your students BEFORE the course starts and encourage them to request their letters from DASS right away. DASS will also attempt to reach out to students enrolled in JanTerm courses and encourage the same behavior.

Beforehand, consider how you will accommodate any students who come to you with an LOA and request extended test time or a reduced distraction environment for testing (the most common accommodations). There should be available classroom space during JanTerm but your departmental support staff may be limited. DASS has very little opportunity to provide test proctoring so it is best for you to make plans to manage most accommodations within your department. If you have a unique circumstance, please contact our office early to discuss the situation.

Sometimes, instructors use part of class time to lecture and part of class time for an exam. Consider how that will impact a student with accommodations like extended time and how you can make it work for all students.

For any questions, please contact Alexa Taylor alexat@smu.edu. Note that the DASS admin, Candy Brown, will be out of the office for the first few days of JanTerm so do not email her directly. Wishing you a successful JanTerm!

In The News

Starbucks provides interpreter for deaf patrons in the drive thru :

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/deaf-starbucks-drive-thru_563affabe4b0411d306fb268

Faculty Going Above & Beyond: Mid-Term Grade Reports

We at DASS would like to thank all of you who completed Early Progress and Mid-Term Progress Reports for the students in your classes. Once warned, students can decide to make changes, for instance, utilizing office hours or tutoring at ALEC for one-on-one help. DASS students in particular, often considered a group "at-risk," greatly benefit from this mid-semester feedback. On their own, DASS students who know that they are struggling can make informed changes, perhaps meeting with their DASS Coordinator to discuss how to utilize accommodations more fully or sitting down with DASS's Learning Specialist to brush up on note taking or test taking techniques. Since DASS staff members have access to the reports, we reach out to all DASS students who are struggling, making sure that even those students who have a disability that makes it difficult to ask for help, communicate needs, or problem-solve know that they have someone to talk to and help them chart a more successful course for the remainder of the semester. In addition, DASS students, especially those with changeable medical and psychological conditions, may need a DASS staff member to talk through their chances of success versus withdrawing from a course. Your completing progress reports may take time, but it is certainly time well spent! Again, much thanks to you all, for this and all you do.

Asperger's Syndrome in the Classroom

As more students with Asperger's Syndrome enter higher education, faculty often seek ways to understand and manage autism meltdowns during class. Meltdowns are involuntary physical and emotional reactions to situations where no perceived escape exists. A recent article in Disability Compliance for Higher Education highlighted important points for faculty to consider to best manage an unexpected meltdown during class.

Meltdowns are caused by stressors and overload of the nervous system. Stressors may include:
*sensory, emotional or information overload;
*numerous or overly difficult tasks or demands;
*unexpected life changes or unfamiliar settings; or,
*typical stressors such as work, family, money and health.

Adult meltdowns may present as angry or aggressive outbursts, pacing, or even extreme quiet. The student may not be able to process anymore information at that point, and each person is different in how they express overload.

Should a meltdown occur, direct the student to a quiet, private place where sensory stimulation is reduced.

Use calm and deliberate actions to redirect their behaviors. Avoid loud responses, restraint, accusations, or sarcasm.

Two additional points can be helpful with these issues. First, education is the best accommodation - faculty, staff and students should acknowledge that all ways of interacting are acceptable, as long as those ways are not breaking through to others' boundaries. The instructor's response to the student in the classroom will inform how the rest of the class responds to the student, so this is crucial.

Second, structured support for group projects - assigned roles, support in finding a group, potential support in organizing times/ places to meet - the student will be the best source of information regarding how much and what kind of support they will need for group projects. However, they should only be excused from group projects in very infrequent cases, and you should be able to easily understand the specific reasons that this is necessary. Most autistic college students CAN do group work with supports, and many do so without supports.

For more information on successful classroom strategies for students with autism, please visit: http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/autismspectrumnavigators/faculty/.

As always, if concerns arise about behaviors in your classroom that are disability related, please reach out to DASS. We are here to assist.

What is reasonable notice?

You should have received an email reminder from DASS concerning students delivering a letter of accommodation (or just mentioning the accommodation request without even delivering a letter) with very little notice before the accommodation is needed. Faculty members often ask…
As a faculty member, what is my responsibility if a student requests testing accommodations immediately before an exam?

In this scenario, the term "reasonable" is key and used intentionally to give each instructor the freedom to determine how much time they need to implement testing accommodations. When given short notice, faculty members are not obligated to provide testing accommodations; however, they are obligated to first carefully consider each request on a case-by-case basis in light of their resources (e.g., the test format, a quiet testing space, their availability, an Office Assistant, a TA or student employee, etc.). Due to the need for a deliberative process, we encourage faculty members to avoid setting arbitrary deadlines for notification of accommodations. For more information on this topic, please click HERE.

Thinking Ahead to Spring

A Win-Win: Universal Design and Your Course Syllabus

Your course syllabus is your opportunity to set the class climate from Day One. Quite often, it is also a student's first impression of you and your course. Applying the principals of Universal Design (UD) to your course syllabus is a Win-Win: you clarify your own goals and expectations, as well as increase all of your students' understanding and potential for success, whether those students have disabilities or not.

A well-crafted syllabus with UD in mind begins by laying out clear expectations. Explicit due dates for testing and assignments help students to plan and prioritize. Statements about you or your department's policies on make-up exams, extensions on assignments, class absences, tardiness, and leaving class early inform students' decisions, lay out consequences for their choices, and remove anxiety and confusion when events, like illness happen that are beyond students' control.

A well-crafted syllabus not only identifies learning objectives and assessment, but also discusses options and accessibility. Adding communication options to the syllabus beyond office hours, such as links to social media that you might use, demonstrates approachability. Most SMU professors now include a paragraph in their syllabi about disability-related accommodations through DASS (found HERE), but DASS is not the only student support on campus. A page or section of your syllabus specifically designated to student support ensures that students see that help is available and sets the tone that you want them to succeed. For example, on-campus support might include a brief description of CAPS, the SMU Health Center, and the Tutoring and Writing Centers at the ALEC. Online support could be a list of YouTube videos, blogs, slide presentations, downloadable PDFs, or websites that show real-world applications of course content. From semester to semester, invite students to add to these lists.

Posting the syllabus to the SMU syllabus library, Blackboard, or another type of course website helps students access course information in multiple ways. You might also consider supplementing the traditional hard-copy syllabus with multimedia. Your syllabus could contain a link to a video that includes a personal introduction to you, your course, and your expectations. In time, you might take these videos further, adding a video tour of critical features, supports, communication options, and specific assignments.

Thank you for visiting us!

In September, the A-LEC, which includes the DASS office, welcomed faculty from across campus during three open houses. We hope to see you again at future A-LEC events!

VISIT US ONLINE AT
WWW.SMU.EDU/ALEC/DASS.ASP

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

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