

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

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

SMU

SPRING 2025

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Welcome to our DASS Graduate Assistant, Max Ashby!

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Max Ashby is currently pursuing a master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at SMU after earning their Bachelor of Arts in Human Communication with a minor in Teaching from Trinity University in May 2022. Their professional interests include disability, trauma-informed care, and supporting adolescents and young adults. Before attending SMU, Max gained valuable experience in San Antonio as a Disability Advocacy Intern at the disABILITY nonprofit and as a Group Therapy Facilitator at the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas, where their dedication earned them a volunteer award.



As the DASS Graduate Assistant, Max is committed to helping SMU undergraduate students succeed. In academic coaching sessions, students will create realistic objectives, assess their academic strengths and weaknesses, and utilize time management practices and study strategies. Max is excited to offer a supportive academic coaching experience, working collaboratively with students to help them make intentional decisions and meet their academic goals.

The DASS Team Stays Informed

Jeanna Turay

DASS remains committed to staying informed on current disability impacts in Higher Education. Over the past few months, the DASS team has attended a variety of professional development and continuing education opportunities. These opportunities have included the National Conference Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum, Psychoeducational Evaluation Documentation Interpretation Training, Canva Workshops, Legal Precedents Guide for Disability Offices, National Conference: Accessing Higher Ground-Digital Accessibility and National Conference: Association on Higher Education and Disability.

The DASS team has also led seminars on Autism spectrum and social skills, met with area Universities to discuss disability policies and presented to several departments, teams and outside organizations. Our office regularly collaborates with diagnosticians, educational consultants and colleagues on other campuses to better serve the needs of our campus. These outreach efforts extend our expertise to other community members and build awareness of the exceptional services and programs we offer at SMU.

If you feel your team or department would benefit from receiving more information on DASS at SMU and how it intersects with your position, please let us know by emailing DASS@smu.edu.

A Rock Legend Faces Disability

Michelle Bufkin

Have you heard of Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM)? Read an inspiring story of how 70's star [Peter Frampton](#) faced a rare diagnosis and turned it into a Foundation to help others.

DASS Staff and Welcome

Welcome! Our office is the primary contact for all SMU students with disabilities and works with faculty and staff in making the accommodations process as seamless as possible. The abbreviated checklist on page 4 may be helpful as faculty transition to the system we use on our campus to meet the access needs of students with disabilities.

Director: Alexa Taylor

Learning Specialist:

David Tylicki

Accommodation Coordinators: Michelle Bufkin,

Jeanna Turay, Valiza Cameron-Patterson

DASS Administrative

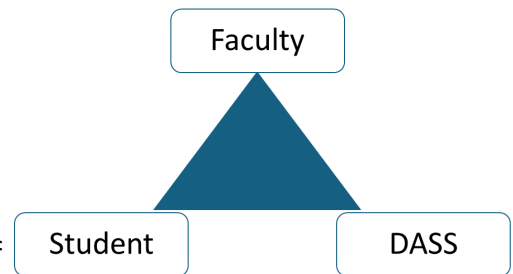
Assistant: Candy Brown

The Interactive Process at DASS

David Tylicki

An “interactive process” is a basic communication model – simply two or more people exchanging information. The interactive process is also a key component of the Americans with Disabilities Act and affects disability-related accommodations in both academic and employment settings. Here at DASS, we look at it as a way for students, DASS, and faculty to collaborate, so that everyone has the information they need to implement a student’s authorized accommodations.

Think of the Interactive Process like a triangle. Each party – the student, the instructor, and DASS – rests on one of the points, and they are connected by lines of communication. If any of the 3 points stop talking to one another, the process breaks down and complications arise.



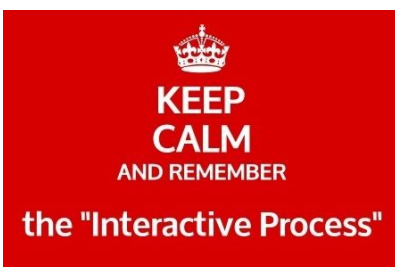
Many steps occur before faculty members enter the process. Some of these include: the University designating and publicizing DASS as the only department to receive disability-related accommodation requests from students and supporting documentation; DASS staff members working with students and their healthcare providers to verify their needs and determine meaningful and reasonable accommodations; and educating students about how to use their accommodations.

Faculty members contribute to the process in numerous ways. The most common is when the student and DASS notify an instructor that the student has completed the accommodation process here at SMU. This notification, which arrives in the instructor’s DASS Link account portal, lists specific accommodations that have been authorized by DASS for the student. The student will then work with professors to implement these accommodations. Another way is if the instructor has questions or concerns about the accommodations and contacts DASS for clarification. Though uncommon, a third way is when a DASS Coordinator asks an instructor for information about a student’s attendance, behavior, or classroom experiences such as with lecture notes, writing, or assessments, in order to determine the nature and the need for a recently requested accommodation.

An open, meaningful dialogue between the student, faculty, and DASS, also helps to create a welcoming environment for SMU students with disabilities. When each point of the triangle communicates effectively, the interactive process runs smoothly, ensuring that our students’ needs are met and their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act are upheld.

The Intake Meeting with DASS Students

Michelle Bufkin



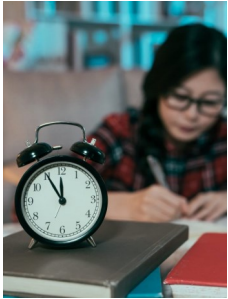
The final step in the interactive process is a scheduled intake meeting with a potential DASS student. At this meeting, the student’s self-report is combined with the other items previously reviewed in order to determine what will be reasonable accommodations for this student on our campus. These meetings typically last 60 minutes but can take longer depending on need and complexity of the case.

At the intake appointment, DASS students receive detailed instructions on how to self-identify with their faculty members and discuss the implementation of their particular accommodations. The DASS accommodation letter created during this meeting is the legal document that outlines what our office has determined is needed to create equal access for a student. Requests outside of the accommodation letter should be referred back to DASS so that students remain in the legally required interactive process for additional accommodation grants.

Students also learn about the variety of resources SMU offers students, and the unique support services our office offers to DASS students. Some of these resources include the DASS student newsletter, referrals across campus based on needs, information about academic coaching with DASS, reminders relevant to semester deadlines, and the DASS student support group (Students for New Learning). Students are always given an opportunity to ask questions, and an overarching goal of this meeting is to build rapport with the DASS student. If a student has not had an intake meeting at DASS, faculty should assume their request is still pending or under review. Feel free to reach out to our office if questions arise.

How Much Extended Time?

Alexa Taylor



Extended time for tests is the most common accommodation approved by disability services offices in higher education settings (approximately 90% of DASS students are approved for an extended time accommodation). All sorts of disability types and their impacts might lead to the need for a little more time to read, process, write or respond. Medical conditions, physical impairments, reading disorders, and even attention disorders could impact a student such that they take longer to get to the end of a test and without the extended time, are then being measured not on the content knowledge, but on how quickly they process.

Since quick processing is typically not the essential learning outcome in most college courses, extended time is

usually a reasonable accommodation for these students. Some institutions start with approving 25% more time. Most use the standard of 50% more time, and only in cases where the impacts are more severe, would 100% be considered.

How does the DASS office determine the reasonable amount of extended time? This is mostly determined by severity level as well as the layering impacts of multiple conditions. Psychoeducational testing evaluations can provide objective measures on reading speed and fluency, written expression abilities, math computation skills, visual-spatial processing, psycho-motor speed, memory functioning, or even emotional impacts that might be highly distracting. Taken together, along with the student's self-report, data from real-life experiences in the classroom performing academic tasks, history of accommodations, and recommendations from providers, the DASS Coordinator must determine the reasonable amount of extended time as an accommodation, while also considering the effects of layering of different accommodations.



Sometimes the student who requests 100% (or double-time), might be best served with 50% more time plus a reduced distraction environment. The extended time may address a slower reading rate from dyslexia and the reduced distraction environment may address distractibility from ADHD or an anxiety disorder. If that same student also experiences epilepsy and the effects of the anti-seizure medication causes significantly slowed processing and physical fatigue, it may be appropriate to approve double-time. If a student who has 50% extended time is struggling to complete exams fluently, the DASS Coordinator may ask for that "real-time classroom" feedback that can help us understand how the current accommodation may not be sufficient. Alternatively, rationales such as "I've always had double-time" or "I feel better without time constraints" are not sufficient to establish an increase from 50% to 100%. Test-taking strategies, test-anxiety management training and thorough test preparation are also critical for students to utilize. Although there is no formula to make these difficult decisions, each case is examined carefully with the above parameters in mind in order to assure students' equal access.



The DASS Letter of Accommodation sent to faculty represents a Coordinator's thorough review and professional judgment based on a variety of sources. These sources help our office determine specific accommodations for specific needs. When an accommodation change is approved by our office, faculty receive an updated DASS letter, and the DASS student is instructed to communicate with the faculty member about the new or revised accommodation. Following the approved accommodations minimizes confusion and risk for students, faculty and the University.

Did you Know?

Extended time testing is the most commonly requested accommodation from DASS.

However, 30-40 students currently have established a need for 100% extended time for tests/exams.

Faculty FAQ: Accommodating without a DASS Letter

Q: A student has no letter of accommodation from DASS but is requesting an accommodation from me. What should I do?

A: Sometimes students circumvent the DASS system and, therefore, have not been verified by our office. Faculty are free to work with their students in any way they see fit, but are not under any obligation to provide disability accommodations without a letter of accommodation from DASS. Students may provide their professor with a report from their doctor stating a diagnosis, but faculty should not feel compelled to review this documentation and make a decision on what accommodations would be appropriate. Professionals in the DASS office are the most appropriate people to review documentation and determine the current educational impact. Approving informal accommodations can also set a precedence that the student may come to expect with other professors. Please refer the student to DASS to properly request accommodations and always include the approved [syllabus statement](#). Also, check out "[When Faculty are TOO Accommodating](#)", an article written by Jane Jarrow, long-time disability service provider in higher ed.

Successful Case Reviews Include Campus Collaborations

Michelle Bufkin

DASS collaborates with many departments on campus each semester to review accommodation requests. We enjoy working with colleagues across campus! In these scenarios, consider which departments DASS might contact in order to determine an accommodation grant for these students.

Scenario 1:

A DASS student returns to campus after an emergency surgery which impacts mobility. Student will be on crutches for 6-8 weeks while living on the top floor of a residence hall with an unreliable elevator and community bath door that is too heavy to open without assistance. The community bath floors are regularly wet and slick, a fall hazard for student while using crutches or a rollator. Student's classes are spread across campus in different buildings but follow a tight schedule with few breaks. Student has a car but must rely on others to drive it for now. Student's request included housing, transport, and academic assistance during recovery time.

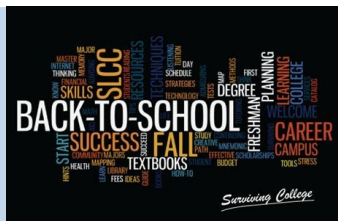
DASS worked with the following departments on this case: Student and Student's Parent, Student's medical professionals, RLSH (RA and RCD), Facilities, Maintenance, SMU Faculty, Police Department, Parking Services, Mustang Express, Provost's Office.

Scenario 2:

A student walked with their graduating class in May 2024, but still needed to complete the Second Language Requirement in order to graduate. Student has not requested DASS accommodations before but completed the form for a Second Language Substitution accommodation in Fall 2023. Documentation was over 10 years old; student did not respond to multiple outreach efforts to discuss case needs during the semester. Student eventually completed updated testing and submitted new report in Spring 2024 for review.

DASS worked with the following departments on this case: Student and Student's Parents, Previous diagnostician, Current diagnostician, Previous institution's Registrar re transcripts, SMU Faculty, Academic Advisor, Office of General Education, Major Department, Student's high school second language instructors, World Languages Department advisor, Registrar.

Start of Semester Checklist



The start of each semester is a

good time to go over the basics related to DASS students and accommodations. The most urgent are making plans for the Syllabus Statement and reviewing Accommodation Letters on DASS Link. The complete checklist of items is found on our website under the [FAQ section](#).

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:
<https://www.smu.edu/provost/saes/academic-support/disability-accommodations>