

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

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



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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

Asst Director: Michelle Bufkin

Learning Specialist:

David Tylicki

Accommodations Coordinator:

Valiza Cameron-Patterson

DASS Administrative

Assistant: Candy Brown

Access vs. Success: What Faculty Need to Know Valiza Patterson

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Understanding Accommodations vs. Academic Standards

Providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities ensures equal access to SMU's academic programs and experiences. Accommodations mitigate the impact of a documented disability on a student's participation, addressing specific functional limitations that substantially limit a major life activity. It's important to note that while DASS authorizes accommodations, we do not lower academic program requirements or make modifications that would compromise course objectives and student learning outcomes. This distinction allows us to maintain academic integrity while still supporting student access.

Key Differences: Access vs. Success

Understanding the difference between access and success is important. Through accommodations like extended time for exams or assistive technology, post-secondary students with disabilities are given an equal opportunity to **access** the same course material as their peers. K-12 settings, through IEPs or 504 plans, often go beyond access and attempt to guarantee student **success** by modifying curriculum and adding tutoring, study strategies, and goal-oriented support.

In higher education, we provide access accommodations, while students are responsible for utilizing campus resources like tutoring, the Writing Center, and Academic Advising to increase their chances of success. The chart below illustrates these important distinctions.

ACCESS (Higher Education Focus)

- **Purpose:** Equal opportunity to educational benefits
Example: Extended time on exams for a student who struggles with processing information
- **Focus:** Addresses functional limitations from disability
Example: Note-taking assistance for a student with a mobility impairment
- **Documentation:** Provided through a Letter of Accommodation
Example: Faculty receives official notification of approved accommodations
- **Faculty responsibility:** Implement approved accommodations
- **Student responsibility:** Share letter with professors. Utilize campus tutoring, course supports and advising supports

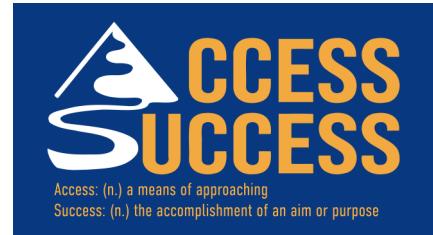
SUCCESS (K-12 IEP / 504 Approach)

- **Purpose:** Resources to achieve specific academic goals
Example: Weekly tutoring sessions or check-ins to improve grades or reach a target GPA
- **Focus:** Provides study strategies and skills coaching as well as accommodations
Example: Time-management coaching or test-taking strategies
- **Documentation:** Typically from IEP or 504 plans
Example: Student's K-12 plan included modified assignments or curriculum
- **Teacher responsibility:** Implement accommodations and modify curriculum to meet success goals



Questions?

Contact DASS for guidance on implementing accommodations while maintaining academic standards.



DASS Staff Changes

David Tylicki and Michelle Bufkin

We wish a fond farewell to **Jeanna Turay**, DASS Accommodations Coordinator, who assumed a position at Northwestern University. Jeanna worked with DASS students with physical and medical conditions as well as all graduate students. We wish her well!

We also say goodbye to both of our student workers, **Max Ashby** and **Lindsay Templeton**. Max, the DASS Graduate Assistant, leaves us to begin their practicum and internship as part of SMU's Master of Science in Counseling program. Lindsay spearheaded the first term of the DASS Peer Mentor program and acted as its first Peer Mentor. We congratulate her on her graduation from SMU! Max and Lindsay, we wish you both the best!

We welcome **Molly Morris** as our new Graduate Assistant, and **Katie Frymire** will continue our work piloting the DASS Peer Mentor Program. Katie also serves as the Vice President of SMU's neurodivergent student group, [Students for New Learning](#).

Here's a welcome from Molly:

Hi, SMU community! My name is **Molly Morris**, and I'm thrilled to be joining DASS as a Graduate Assistant this year. I'm here to support students with disabilities through academic coaching, skill-building strategies, and one-on-one guidance to help them succeed in and out of the classroom. Together, I hope to work on goal setting, time management, study skills, self-advocacy, and confidence-building.

I was a rower at the University of Tulsa, where I graduated in 2025 with a BA in Psychology and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. I am currently pursuing a Master of Science in Counseling with a specialization in clinical mental health. I've worked with students with disabilities before, but I'm looking forward to advocating for student success and accessibility through academic coaching at the collegiate level.

My goal is to help SMU students succeed throughout their academic journey, however that may look. I'm incredibly excited and can't wait to get started!



Medical Emergencies in the Classroom

Alexa Taylor



While teaching, emergency medical events can happen.

The DASS office works with a number of students with conditions that might lead to a situation in class such as a seizure, a fainting episode, or a debilitating panic attack.

Do you know the most important thing to do if someone is having a seizure? Should you always contact 911, even in the case of a student having a panic attack?

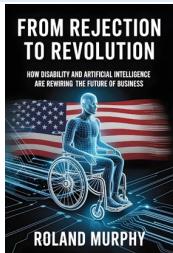
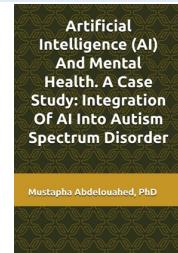
We recommend all faculty review the suggestions for what to do in a [medical emergency](#) and also review the Office of Risk Management's Emergency Guide and download SMU's Aware Safety App. All of this information with respective links can be found in the last few [FAQ's for faculty](#) on the DASS website.

Hot Topics: Artificial Intelligence and Disability Access

Michelle Bufkin

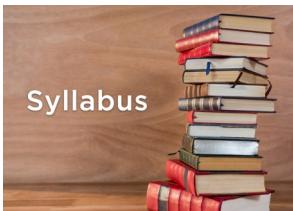
Curious about the intersection of AI and disabilities? Here are a few resources highlighting the pros and cons for this emerging field.

- [AI Tools Transform the Lives of People with Disabilities](#)
- [Harmful Effects of AI on People with Disabilities](#)
- [AI is a Game-Changer](#)



Syllabus vs. Canvas: 10 Years Later

David Tylicki



In 2015, I wrote “A Win-Win: Universal Design and Your Course Syllabus” for the *Faculty Insider*. The article explored how applying Universal Design principles to a syllabus benefits everyone by making it more accessible and by clearly communicating expectations. A lot has changed since then, so it’s time for an update with a focus on how those same principles play out using Canvas.

Universal Design reduces unnecessary barriers and cognitive load, so students can focus on learning rather than logistics. How and where information appears in Canvas and your syllabus matters, especially when students are managing multiple courses with different structures and expectations.

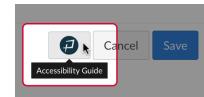
Use Simple Syllabus. Simple Syllabus in Canvas makes creating your syllabus easier and more consistent. Required syllabus statements appear automatically with no copying and pasting needed. You enter course-specific information at the prompts, and Simple Syllabus organizes and populates the document for you.

Use Canvas Assignments. If you enter assignments and assessments into **Assignments**, they are automatically embedded in the Simple Syllabus as well as the Canvas Calendar, which most students use. Students don’t have to hunt for this critical information. Imagine a student taking five courses, each listing assignments and assessments in different places. That extra effort adds up, can become overwhelming, and students may miss things.

List Due Dates. Exams, papers, and presentations often require more lead time for students with disabilities, but all students can benefit from advance planning. Some even map out their entire term within the first few weeks to manage workload and stress. Having dates for major assessments, even tentative ones, can make a difference.

Be concise. Dense blocks of text make key information harder to find. Clear headings, brief paragraphs, and bullet points help all students, especially those with ADHD, dyslexia, or other processing differences.

Check accessibility. SMU’s Pope Tech app helps Canvas users identify accessibility issues in their content. Integrated directly into Canvas, it flags errors by category so you can prioritize what to fix first. You can find it in the left-side menu and near the Cancel/Save buttons when editing content.



Get help. The [Center for Teaching Excellence \(CTE\)](#) and the [Office of Information Technology \(OIT\)](#) have published helpful resources on accessible syllabi and effective Canvas use, and their staff are available to consult with you directly.

When you create an accessible syllabus and use Canvas intentionally, you reduce unnecessary barriers and help ensure that students’ grades reflect what they are learning from you, not just simply their ability to find and track your expectations and course requirements.

STUDENT FEEDBACK ABOUT CANVAS

Here’s some student feedback I’ve collected over the years:

I can’t find the assignments. They’re posted in 2 (or 3) different places; OR, different instructors post the same things in different places. I have 5 classes and have to remember what’s where for each of them.

Why does my instructor put all of the course information in “Files”?

My instructor only emails us date changes or announces them in class but doesn’t update the course calendar.

My instructor doesn’t post assignments on Canvas, so I can’t see them on my Canvas calendar.

My instructor doesn’t post my grades on Canvas in a timely way/until the end of the semester/at all.

There are so many options in the navigation bar, I don’t know what they all mean or what to click.



dreamstime.com

ID 93134697 © Valyaviridshot

Transfer Students at SMU



Valiza Patterson

Many new transfer students with disabilities have shared that transitioning to SMU has been more academically and personally challenging than expected. Students report difficulty navigating a different institutional system, balancing coursework with work and/or family responsibilities, and adjusting to increased academic rigor. Many experience

“transfer shock,” a dip in grades that can cause students to believe their accommodations are ineffective or that they are not capable of succeeding here. Others arrive confident they will perform as well as they did at their previous institution only to feel discouraged when expectations and course demands are different.

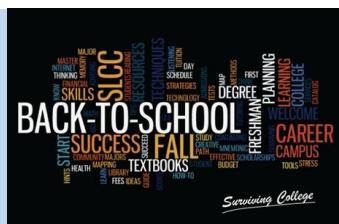
Some have mentioned how faculty played a key role in easing this transition through a few intentional actions. Normalizing transfer shock early, by naming it in class or in the syllabus, helped reduce the student’s uncertainty about the course. Clearly explaining course expectations, workload, and grading has prevented coursework misunderstandings and frustration later in the term. Repeatedly pointing students to key campus resources like tutoring, office hours, and advising, especially after the first major assessment, helps transfer students learn a new campus while completing upper-division coursework. Be sure to include the accommodations related syllabus statement so transfer students can find the DASS office quickly, if needed.

Equally important has been fostering a sense of belonging and self-awareness. Many transfer students struggle to form connections, compare their experiences to their previous institution, and feel uncertain about their place at our university, especially students who stayed close to home at the beginning of their college career. Despite being older, these students often encounter typical first year challenges of being away from home. Small actions such as structured peer interaction, inclusive classroom practices, and inviting office-hour conversations can make a meaningful difference. You might point them to [Mustang Transfers](#), an organization designed to provide educational and social opportunities for SMU transfer students, or to the Office of Orientation & Transitions, which sponsors a free monthly lunch for transfer students.

When students understand their new expectations, they are more likely to engage, persist, and succeed while reducing academic issues later in the semester.



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 details on how DASS supports our campus:
[DASS Summary](#)

For resources that may be helpful to faculty and staff:
[DASS Resources](#)