HELPING POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES SUCCEED

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Road Map

1. What is a Learning Disability?
2. Diagnostic Criteria for SLD
3. Legal Considerations
4. Accommodations
5. Faculty Perspectives and Considerations
6. Universal Design Implications
What is a Learning Disability?

• Neurological differences in brain structure and function that affect the brain’s ability to store, process, or communicate information
• Etiology is unclear; genetics plays a part
• Imperfect ability:
  - Listening
  - Speaking
  - Writing (spelling)
  - Reading
• Occurs despite average to above average intelligence
What is a Learning Disability? (cont.)

- Occurs across the life span

- Not due to any sensory impairment, mental retardation, psychiatric disabilities, cultural and instructional deprivation, or cultural differences (exclusion clause)
Demographic Trends

• “Between 1988 and 2000, ‘learning disability’ was the fastest growing category of reported disability among students. By 2000, two in five freshmen with disabilities (40%) cited a learning disability”**

• Henderson’s 2001 Biennial Statistical Profile of College Freshmen with Disabilities doesn’t break out ASD or ADHD as identified disabilities – but by 2011, ASD has risen to a 2% percentage distribution of all disabilities among first-year students, with ADHD at 18% (vs 31% SLD)

• **http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=ED458728
Enrolled Postsecondary Students with LD as a Relative Percentage of All Disabilities

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
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# Diagnostic Criteria for LD
**DSM-5 (May, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DSM-IV</th>
<th>DSM-5</th>
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| Reading Disorder (dyslexia)  
Writing Disorder (written expression disorder)  
Math Disorder (dyscalculia) | Specific Learning Disorder |
| Negatively impacts academic achievement, work, or daily living | Negatively impacts academic achievement, work, or daily living |
| Rule out sensory impairment | Rule out IDD, GDD, sensory impairment |
| Generalized statement about poor achievement measured on tests | Specific characteristics of reading, writing, math |

**IDD:** Intellectual Development Disorder  
**GDD:** Global Development Disorder
Diagnostic Criteria for SLD

A. **Key characteristics:** *persistent* learning difficulties, despite targeted intervention, manifest by one or more of the specified symptoms

B. **Measurement:** academic skills substantially below expected by age + impairment arising from low academic achievement

C. **Age of onset:** early school years

D. **Exclusion/inclusion:**
   - IDD/GDD
   - Uncorrected visual/auditory acuity
   - Other mental/neurological disorders
   - Psychosocial adversity
   - Lack of educational opportunity
Diagnostic Criteria for LD

• Psychoeducational or neuropsychological evaluation report – Disability Documentation

• Guidelines for Documentation

  - AHEAD guidance on documentation practices – conceptual framework
Legal Considerations in Determining Accommodations

• Guided by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADA AA, 2008)
• Accommodation decisions are based on 4 basic determinations:
  (1) Is there a disability under the ADA?
  (2) What are the current functional limitations?
  (3) Are the limitations significant enough to warrant accommodations?
  (4) What are reasonable accommodations?
Legal Considerations in Determining Accommodations

• Under the ADA, an individual with a disability is a person who:
  
  (a) Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities
  
  (b) Has a record of such an impairment; or
  
  (c) Is regarded as having such an impairment

http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-ada.html
Legal Considerations in Determining Accommodations

- An impairment that is episodic or in remission is a disability if it would substantially limit a major life activity, when active.
- Need for accommodation must be considered based on comparison to “most people in the general population.”
- Accommodation must “best ensure” ability to demonstrate knowledge (Enyart case).
Legal Considerations in Determining Accommodations

• Mitigating measures other than “ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses” should not be considered in assessing whether an individual has a disability.

• Short-term conditions that are expected to last 6 months or less do not qualify at a disability.
Typical “Academic” Accommodations

- Extended time
- Note-taker/scribe
- E-Text or audio books
- Distraction-reduced exam room
- Priority registration
- Additional breaks during an exam
- Reduced course load
- Adjustment to attendance policy
- Foreign language substitution
NCES Data (2008 - 2009): Percent of Universities Providing Selected Accommodations or Services by Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alt Exam Formats</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend Time</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers</td>
<td>62%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scribes</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course notes</td>
<td>72%</td>
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<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Books</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutors</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course sub</td>
<td>35%</td>
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Typically Not Considered to Be Postsecondary Accommodations

- Rephrasing or re-clarifying test questions
- Modifying course requirements for individual needs
- Changing “essential elements” of a program of study
- “Unlimited time” for test taking
- Study skills training
Accommodations and Perceived Stigma

- Student orientation
- Faculty and staff training
- Disability services/accommodation statement on syllabus
- Website information
- Open House sessions
Faculty Considerations

• In 1992, Houck et al. found that university faculty were willing “to make certain course related accommodations for students with learning disabilities and believed that such accommodations are fair to other students”

• In 2012, Cole found that university students with LD “do not disclose at expected levels [...] even in favorable circumstances,” and “experiences with faculty seem to influence why some students disclose more deeply while other students disclose at a surface level”
2011 NCES Data – How Large is the Current Challenge?
What are the Stakes? High School Outcomes for Students with LD vs. All Disabilities (2003 – 2004)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>LD</th>
<th>All disabilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>140,577</td>
<td>213,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>25,205</td>
<td>50,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropped out</td>
<td>68,260</td>
<td>121,053</td>
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- **Employed**
  - With LD: 54.8%
  - Without LD: 76.4%

- **Unemployed**
  - With LD: 5.7%
  - Without LD: 2.3%

- **Not in labor force**
  - With LD: 20.9%
  - Without LD: 39.5%
Resources for Further Investigation


Universal Design: A “One-Size Fits All” Solution?

• Because educators cannot legally query students about their diagnosis – and given the rising number of diagnosed post-secondary students – universities are moving to a Universal Design for Instruction model.

• UDI serves a broad spectrum of learners within a diverse, inclusive environment.

• UDI is not a panacea, but an approach, requiring discipline and depth of understanding.
Universal Design for Increased Accessibility for All

• Universal Design is “the design of products and environments to be usable to the greatest extent possible by people of all ages and disabilities” (Story, Mueller, & Mace, 1998)

• Example: a ramp for wheelchairs that also helps someone carrying a heavy suitcase or pushing a stroller

• The seven Guiding Principles of UD were adapted as eight Universal Design of Instruction principles [UDI] by Burgstahler in 2007; and as nine Universal Design for Instruction principles by Scott, McGuire & Embry, 2002

- Training: 52%
- Tech costs: 46%
- Inst. Priority: 45%
- No incentives: 41%
- Facil. Costs: 41%
- Faculty interest: 38%
- Perceived need: 35%
Universal Design – Increased Accessibility for All – Resources

• CAST Inc. – www.cast.org
• University of Connecticut’s Faculty Ware – http://www.facultyware.uconn.edu/home.htm
• University of Connecticut Universal Design for Instruction in Postsecondary Education – http://www.udi.uconn.edu/
• University of Washington's Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) Center – http://www.washington.edu/doit
• Access-Ed Project – http://access-ed.r2d2.uwm.edu/
• Universal Design and Access to Higher Education – http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/extension/ped/northeastADA/publications/Article_60.html
Thank You!

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