

## **Faculty Guide on Teaching Students with Disabilities**

This guide is intended to provide faculty guidance for teaching students with disabilities. It includes strategies related to working with students with varying disabilities including:

Attention Deficit Disorder  
Autism/Aspergers  
Blind/Vision Impaired  
Chronic Medical Conditions

Deaf/Hard of Hearing  
Learning Disabled/Cognitively Impaired  
Psychiatric Disorders  
Temporary Disabilities

As part of George Mason University's (GMU) continuing commitment to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities, the university established and maintains the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Under the administration of University Life, the center implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. The laws that provide guidance to ODS regarding accommodations for students include:

**The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADAA)** was established and brought into law in 1990. The law prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications, and governmental activities. The ADA also establishes requirements for telecommunications relay services.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** is a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. The nondiscrimination requirements of the law apply to employers and organizations that receive financial assistance from any Federal department or agency. These organizations and employers include hospitals, nursing homes, mental health centers, institutions of higher education and human service programs. Section 504 forbids organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services. It defines the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate in, and have access to, program benefits and services.

It is our hope that this guide will assist you in understanding the needs of students with disabilities in higher education and providing the necessary accommodations so they can fully participate in the classroom and related activities.

Should you require additional information beyond the information in this guide or have any questions or comments please contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu).

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## ***I. ODS Process***

The Office of Disability Services (ODS) collaborates with students with documented disabilities and faculty to provide reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids, and support services that are individualized and based upon medical documentation, functional limitations, and a collaborative assessment of needs. Students are taught to use advocacy skills to request authorized accommodations specific to class needs and personal preference. The ODS may not be able to meet all personal preference requests but does provide reasonable accommodations/auxiliary aids, in order to provide equal opportunity to access the university's programs and services. In order to receive accommodations, students must complete the following accommodation process:

Register with the ODS and submit medical documentation.

The ODS will review the medical documentation. The following questions need to be addressed to determine eligibility and reasonable accommodations:

- Does the student meet the criteria of having a disability as defined by the ADA Amendments Act of 2008
- What is the current impact of the impairment on the student's ability to participate in the university's educational programs and services (functional limitations)
- What are possible accommodations, modifications, and/or adjustments that might remove the barriers
- Without these accommodations, would the individual still have meaningful access to the program, service, or activity
- Would these accommodations compromise the essential elements of the curriculum?
- Would these accommodations require a fundamental alteration in the nature of the program, service, or activity?

The student initially meets with an ODS staff to design and develop reasonable accommodations.

If the plan calls for accommodations from the faculty, the ODS will communicate the student's accommodation in writing by creating a Faculty Contact Sheet. It will be the responsibility of the student to deliver this letter to the faculty member at the beginning of the semester or as soon as the accommodations have been determined. This letter serves as a catalyst for discussion of how the accommodations will be provided.

\* Some classes require more creative accommodations due to the nature of the course or the complexity of the functional limitations. When this occurs, the ODS will facilitate a dialog with the student and faculty member to clarify the essential elements of the

course and identify creative and reasonable accommodations, considering the functional limitations of the student.

## ***II. Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information***

Students with disabilities are admitted to GMU under the same requirements and process as other students. It is not mandatory for students with disabilities to disclose their disability during the admissions process, nor at any point during their time at GMU. However, in order to qualify for accommodations, it is necessary for a student to self-identify with a disability and submit appropriate documentation to the Office of Disability Services (ODS).

Documentation concerning disabilities submitted to the ODS is considered confidential information and will be treated in accordance with federal and state regulations. It is kept separate from the student's general academic file which is housed in the ODS unless the student chooses to also submit it to another campus department.

Disclosure of disability is a voluntary process. Information related to a disability may be disclosed only with the permission of the student or as permitted by federal law. Staff and faculty are advised that disability matters are confidential and should not be shared with others. Attention should be taken to handle academic accommodations in a discreet manner.

### ***III. Rights and Responsibilities***

#### ***Students with disabilities at GMU have a right to:***

- Reasonable and effective accommodations according to your disability based on documentation.
- Equal access to educational and co-curricular programs, services, jobs, activities, and facilities available through the university.
- To be treated with respect and dignity and receive equal and fair treatment.
- Confidentiality in all matters of your documentation and educational record.
- Information reasonably available in accessible formats.

#### ***Students with disabilities at GMU have the responsibility to:***

- *I understand* that it is my responsibility to initiate services with the ODS.
- *I will* provide appropriate documentation of my disability to the ODS according to ODS documentation guidelines. <http://ods.gmu.edu/students/documentation.php>
- *I understand* that it is my responsibility to request accommodations in a timely manner from the ODS to ensure that they are in place as soon as possible. However, I also understand that I may request accommodations at any time during my tenure at GMU.
- *I am responsible* for working in collaboration with ODS staff to determine reasonable accommodations.
- *I am responsible* for advocating for myself and monitoring my own progress, and will alert ODS if I need assistance with accommodation related issues as soon as possible.
- *I understand* that it is solely my responsibility to request and pick up Faculty Contact Sheets from the ODS at the beginning of each semester.
- *I acknowledge* that it is my responsibility to meet with my professor(s), hand them Faculty Contact Sheets, and discuss my accommodation needs at the beginning of each semester.
- *I will* contact ODS by email or phone to request the necessary number of Faculty Contact Sheets, at least one week before I need them.
- *I understand* that requests for accommodations are not retroactive. I am aware that accommodations begin at the time that I present a Faculty Contact Sheet to my professor(s).
- *I will* keep my documentation, contact and disclosure information up to date with the ODS.
- *I acknowledge* that in order to use the ODS testing services, I must follow all testing policies and procedures. The ODS testing center is available only in the event that my professor(s) cannot provide appropriate testing accommodations. <http://ods.gmu.edu/services/exams.php>
- *I agree* to abide by the Mason Honor Code. (Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.)

- *I acknowledge* that ODS staff members have provided me with a list of additional academic support resources available to me on campus.
- *I agree* to notify the ODS if I need textbooks or other printed material, enlarged or otherwise formatted, at least four weeks prior to the first day of classes of each semester. I agree to provide copies of my syllabi to assist in the delivery of these services.
- *I understand* that it is solely my responsibility to contact the ODS if I have any classroom accessibility issues that I cannot solve independently.

**Faculty at GMU have the right to:**

- Receive notification in writing from ODS of a student's need for accommodation. (Faculty and staff do not have a right to disability documentation.)
- Decide if an accommodation request meets the academic requirements of the course.
- Contact ODS to clarify student requests for accommodation, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids.

**Faculty at GMU have the responsibility to:**

- Provide information to all students about the accommodation procedure in her/his course with a syllabus statement such as:

***Accommodations for Disabilities:*** If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office for Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 2500; 993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

- Meet the classroom access needs of registered students with disabilities in a timely manner. Responsibilities for the provision of testing modifications include: completing Section B of the ODS testing form and refer to the ODS testing center OR provide needed accommodations for testing (extended time and/or reduced distraction area) in another location (your office, another classroom or room in the building).
- If the faculty thinks the accommodations approved by ODS for the student may undermine the essential requirements of the course or alter the nature of the course, they should contact ODS immediately so that the faculty, student and ODS staff can consult about feasible options for modifications to afford equal access.
- Provide an opportunity to take a make-up exam on a timely basis for students who miss exams for a disability related reason
- Provide accessible technology to his/her course including, captioned video for deaf/hearing of hearing students, web accessibility, accessible course materials. ODS

will work with the faculty where immediate access challenges cause barriers to students with disabilities.

- Maintain the confidentiality of information regarding disability issues.
- Alter the form of a testing procedure to measure proficiency in course knowledge based on the ability of the student, not the disability. (There may be an exception when the purpose of the test is to measure a particular skill.)
- Refer students who have disclosed having a disability and a need for an accommodation to ODS.

**As an institution of higher education, GMU has the right to:**

- Identify and establish essential functions, abilities, skills, knowledge, requirements, and standards for courses, programs, services and activities, and to evaluate students on this basis.
- Request and receive, through ODS, current documentation that supports requests for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services
- Deny a request for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services if the documentation demonstrates that the request is not necessary.
- Select among equally effective accommodations, adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services.
- Refuse an unreasonable accommodation, adjustment and/or auxiliary aid or service that imposes a fundamental alteration of a program or activity or places an undue burden on the university.

**GMU has the responsibility to:**

- Provide information to students with disabilities in accessible formats upon request.
- Ensure that courses, programs, services and activities, when viewed in their entirety, are available in the most integrated and appropriate settings.
- Evaluate students on their abilities and not their disabilities
- Provide or arrange for reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services for students with disabilities in courses, programs services and activities.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality of records and communication except where sharing information is permitted or required by law or when the student requests that such information be shared.

## ***IV. Accommodations***

### ***Preface***

One of the most important shifts in higher education over the last few decades has been the movement away from focusing simply on our *teaching* practices and, instead, emphasizing the degree to which our students are *learning*. Although some might argue that this change can seem like a sort of shell game where we are swapping semantics, the consequences for our classroom practices are actually quite dramatic. By concentrating on student learning, we call attention to the various processes students undergo as they construct their own pathways to knowledge from the tools presented to them by their instructors and the course materials.

In order for this kind of learning to occur, however, all students must be afforded equal access to the classroom and to course activities. It is often the case, though, that some students with disabilities will need reasonable accommodations in order to make the goal of a truly accessible class a reality. These students will be working with the Office of Disability Services in order to determine appropriate accommodations, which will then provide documentation regarding these accommodations.

This section of the handbook outlines the most frequent accommodations provided for students with disabilities along with pedagogical strategies for implementing these accommodations and for enhancing accessibility.

How, though, do we begin to think about our teaching in terms of accessibility? One way to do so is through the lens of universal design—a principle that originated in the fields of architecture and product design and that has taken hold in higher education over the last few decades. Implementing the tenets of universal design involves constructing courses fully accessible from the outset for students with the “widest possible range of abilities.” The benefit of this approach is that building courses with universal design in mind “instead of providing accommodations alone holds promise for making institutions more inclusive of students who disclose disabilities and request accommodations and those with disabilities who do not disclose, an estimated 60% of the population of students with disabilities.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, these benefits would extend to all students, and—thus—a universally-designed course would implicitly take into account every single type of student from the very beginning. In this way, courses that utilize universal design represent the essence of effective higher education, because they are constructed solely with the students in mind.

Despite our best intentions, though, universal design is often an ideal for which we strive rather than one that we completely attain. No matter how accessible we believe

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<sup>1</sup> Sheryl E. Burgstahler, “Universal Design in Education,” in *Universal Design in Higher Education: From Principles to Practice*, ed. Sheryl E. Burgstahler and Rebecca C. Cory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2008), 14.



our courses to be, it may not be possible to foresee all of the accommodations that will be necessary for students in a particular class. Questions can then arise as to how best to serve the students who need the accommodations while maintaining a consistent pedagogy.

This is where our handbook comes in. We have combined important information about accommodations for students with many different kinds of disabilities along with a wide array of teaching strategies that are designed not just to be beneficial for the student in question, but for *all* students in the class. Because of the nature of the accommodations, not all of them have teaching strategies associated with them, but many do. We hope you find this resource to be helpful as you create learning-focused courses that are open and accessible to each and every student who walks through your door.

### **Frequent Accommodations**

**Extended time to take in class quizzes, tests, and exams (1.5x time).** Specific arrangements for testing accommodations are to be made between faculty and the student *for each test or exam*. Faculty is to be given reasonable notice (at least a week). A Test Proctoring Center is available when needed. Student must complete testing form for each quiz, test or exam.

**Extended time to take exams (1hour additional hour per exam).** Specific arrangements for testing accommodations are to be made between faculty and the student *for each test or exam*. Faculty is to be given reasonable notice (at least a week). A Test Proctoring Center is available when needed. Student must complete testing form for each quiz, test or exam.

**Reduced distraction environment for testing.** Specific arrangements for testing accommodations are to be made between faculty and the student *for each test or exam*. Faculty is to be given reasonable notice (at least a week). A Test Proctoring Center is available when needed.

**Teaching Strategy:** All three of these accommodations speak directly to the nature of exams and the kinds of student learning you hope to achieve through your exams. Planning for the types of exams you will give, of course, takes place as early as the course design stage. As you sit down to plan your course, consider what you want students to learn before they leave your class. We call this process “backwards design,” because you are beginning your plan for the course with the end result—student learning—rather than the more specific details like texts and assignments. Exams play an important part in this process. Once you have determined your learning outcomes and course goals, think about how your exams will fit into this larger context. Then, when it comes time to write your exams, return to these goals and use them to guide the process. The amount of time you will give students to complete the exam becomes an important

consideration at this point. Will the amount of time you have allotted allow students to demonstrate their learning? Do the questions need to be revised in order to achieve this goal? Would a take-home, open-book, or Blackboard exam be more effective? Could the exam be reconfigured as an open-ended assignment instead? In short, the timing and format of the exam can be just as important as the content, and focusing on your goals for the exam can help to alleviate any pressure you may feel to constrict (within reason) the time given to students to work on the exam.

Ultimately, of course, the specific accommodation for a particular student needs to be implemented, but considering the timeframe and scope of exams can benefit all of the students in your class.

For more information about exam design, see <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/exam-design/>.

**Altered exam dates.** Student will take no more than one exam in a 24 hour period.

**Breaks for quizzes, tests, and exams.** Provide student with a 5 minute break for every 45 minutes to one hour of testing. Specific arrangements for testing accommodations are to be made between faculty and the student *for each test or exam*. Faculty is to be given reasonable notice (at least a week). A Test Proctoring Center is available when needed.

Teaching Strategy: Although this accommodation is essential for some students, it is really a beneficial strategy for all students. We know that each student's brain processes material at a different rate, so many (if not all) may appreciate the ability to take a short break. The brief moment of rest may allow for a more successful performance on the exam. If you are worried about cheating or disrupting other students, allow them to take a break only within the strictures of the classroom.

**Scantron.** The student should be allowed to write on the test paper or have responses transferred to the scantron by a test proctor.

**Use of a computer for writing.** Allow use of computer for writing/typing out responses to essay exams and other in class activities that require extensive writing. ODS is available to administer exams requiring a written response (e.g. essay and short answer format) in electronic format. The specific arrangements for testing accommodations are to be made between faculty and the student *for each test or exam*. Faculty is to be given reasonable notice (at least a week).

Teaching Strategy: If you have access to computers in your classroom or have the ability to reserve a computer lab (or individual computers), consider designing assignments, exams, and other activities that allow all students to work on the computer. Because

many students can type more quickly than they can write by hand, this would allow them to produce more work. Additionally, it is easier to proofread and revise their work when it is created on the computer.

Similarly, another option would be to allow students to complete assignments that require a great deal of writing and complex critical thinking skills, such as essay exams, at home where they can compose their responses on the computer. This format may allow all students to better demonstrate their learning. These kinds of assignments also allow you to create more complex questions, because the students have more time to answer them.

For larger classes, a carefully designed rubric can help to make the grading of writing easier for you and/or your TAs. See <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/grading/>.

**Spelling.** Allow for as little weight as possible upon this student's spelling when composing written exams. Please allow this student to use a dictionary during the exam. This provision should only be provided if spelling is not one of the fundamental requirements which is being assessed. Specific arrangements for testing accommodations are to be made between faculty and the student *for each test or exam*. Faculty is to be given reasonable notice (at least a week). A Test Proctoring Center is available when needed.

Teaching Strategy: Although we all value precision of thought and of writing in our students' work, composition scholars who study college writers for whom English is a second language talk about the difference between local errors and global errors. Local errors are those, like basic misspellings, that do not impede the reader's understanding of the text. A comma splice would be another good example of a local error. Global errors, on the other hand, often make the meaning of the writing inscrutable. Long run-on sentences that are not just grammatically problematic but also affect our understanding of the idea qualify as global errors. By the same token, severe misspellings where you cannot even discern what word the student intended would also be global errors. A grading process whereby local errors have very little (if any) impact on students' grades, while global errors factor into the holistic grading of the writing assignment, may be effective in maximizing the learning of all students.

**Note-taking services.** Student will need assistance from the instructor in locating an appropriate in-class note-taker. This should be done discreetly as possible to protect the student's confidentiality. In order to activate this provision, the student will provide the instructor with a note-taker's packet.

**Flexibility with attendance.** Due to the disability, there may be absences due to medical appointments/disability related illness. Consideration in allowing make-up

work is appropriate. The student understands that they are responsible for all class work. Absences cannot interfere with the fundamental outcomes of the course.

**Computer access during class.** Due to the disability, the student may need to use his/her computer during class to access books and/or to take notes.

Teaching Strategy: Technology has become an integral part of teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both in and out of the classroom. At its most basic, computers and other electronic devices can make note-taking quite a bit easier for students and can allow them to participate more fully in the class. Beyond this use, though, there is a wide range of activities possible that utilize technology in the classroom: everything from showing YouTube clips, to using personal response systems (sometimes called “clickers”) to assess student learning on a particular topic, to employing social media as a supplement to class discussions. The possibilities are tremendous, and technology can definitely amplify pedagogy.

A *caveat*: technology should only be used in class, of course, if it is contributing to and enhancing the learning for the course. The danger here is that students might begin using technology for purposes unrelated to class. If you wish to implement a policy for the use of electronic devices in class, you can find sample syllabus language here: <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/designing-your-syllabus/>.

**Copies of lecture notes/outlines/PowerPoint presentations.** When available provide copies of lecture notes, outlines, or PowerPoint presentations prior to class to allow the student to focus on the lecture and to minimize the amount of writing needed to develop an adequate record of class. A lecture agreement form is available upon request.

**Screen Reader.** Any information in handout form, PowerPoint, etc., should be provided to the student in electronic format as early as possible, preferably before class, to be accessed while using a screen reader.

**Audio record lectures.** The student may utilize their own equipment to audio record lectures. An audio lecture agreement form is available upon request.

**Video record lectures.** The student may utilize their own equipment to video record lectures. A video lecture agreement form is available upon request.

**Breaks during class and exam.** Due to the disability, the student may need to leave class for a short period of time. They will return as soon as possible. Please allow flexibility to make up any work they missed while out of class.

Teaching Strategy: We certainly want students in class and paying attention, but sometimes needs arise. If you are concerned about students not returning to class,

consider implementing a participation grade for your course that combines attendance with contributions to discussion or other class activities. This level of accountability can serve to minimize arriving late or leaving early. For more information about participation grades, please see <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/grading/>.

**Paper formatted exams.** The student should be allowed to receive electronic or on-line tests in a paper format. Specific arrangements for testing accommodations are to be made between faculty and the student *for each test or exam*. Faculty is to be given reasonable notice (at least a week). A Test Proctoring Center is available when needed.

**Use of a calculator for quantitatively based exams.** This accommodation should only be offered if the knowledge being measured does not fundamentally alter the learning outcomes of the exam.

**Classroom Furniture.** Student may require the use of alternative seating (adaptive table, chair or stood) in classroom.

**Extended time for out of class assignments.** Prior to the assignment due date the student and faculty member will discuss a reasonable period of time in which to complete assignments. Class assignment extension will be provided only in the case that missing an assignment date will not delay the progress of all other students in the class or serve as a foundation for a next assignment.

**Extended time for out of class assignments up to a 2 day extension past original due date if needed.** Prior to the assignment due date the student and faculty member will discuss an extended time in which to complete assignments. Class assignment extension will be provided only in the case that missing an assignment date will not delay the progress of all other students in the class or serve as a foundation for a next assignment.

**Flexibility with arrival and departure** from class (no more than 15 minutes).

Teaching Strategy: See the note under “Breaks during class and exam.”

**Flexibility with presentations.** Student may require an alternate format of publicly presenting.

Teaching Strategy: We are seeing more and more in the way of creative approaches to student presentations these days. We know, for example, that PowerPoint presentations where students read from slides or lecture-style presentations where students read text without any interaction with the rest of the class are ineffective for the same reason that those methods do not work in other kinds of teaching environments: there is no engagement with the audience and, hence, very little learning takes place (for either the presenter or the audience). On the other hand, presentations that allow students to use other media or other formats—such as mock trials, roundtable discussions, etc.—or to

collaborate with their peers are more successful in engendering learning because both the presenters and the audience tend to be more active and engaged.

**Group projects.** Instructor may need to assist student with forming a group for in and out of class assignments.

Teaching Strategy: Group projects can be tricky, not least because of their social dynamics. Before determining how groups will be formed, though, it is helpful to consider your goals for the assignment. What do you want to achieve by implementing this assignment and how will the use of groups aid in the effectiveness of the project? Once you have answered these questions, then it becomes easier to see what kind of group structure will be most beneficial. In any case, we suggest that you have some hand in deciding how all groups are formed, simply because if students form their own groups, they may align themselves for a variety of reasons (friendship, social status, etc.) that have nothing to do with the learning outcomes for the project. For more information on group assignments, see <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/collaborative-learning/>.

**Scribe.** Student requires the use of a scribe to complete tests, quizzes, exams and in-class assignments.

**Closed Circuit Television (CCTV).** Student requires the use of a CCTV to complete tests, quizzes, exams and in-class assignments.

**Speech Recognition Software.** Student requires the use of speech recognition software to complete tests, quizzes, exams, in and out of class assignments.

**CART Services.** This accommodation is provided to students who require information in a transcribed format by use of Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART). A transcription disclosure agreement form will be signed by the student if they request a copy of the transcript.

**Sign Language Interpreter/Transliterator.** Students who are Deaf or hard of hearing may require a Sign Language interpreter(s)/transliterator(s) who manually signs what is audible by any speaker and voices what is signed by the student, using English, American Sign Language (ASL) or Signed English.

Teaching Strategy: When you need to use technical terminology and/or jargon that is specific to your field, or you need to make reference to very complex ideas, consider offering your students illustrative definitions, explanations, and examples in order to further their understanding. This will help all of the students in your class learn more effectively, because they will be able to make deeper connections to the material than if they were only presented with the term or concept. This could even lead to several kinds

of group activities where you ask students to discuss your explanations or to come up with their own examples.

**Personal Attendant.** Student requires the assistance of a personal attendant during class and they will be present in the classroom. The personal attendant will not interfere with the integrity of the learning process.

## V. Testing Process

### Exam Proctoring through the Office of Disability Services (ODS)

#### Exam Accommodations

The Office for Disability Services (ODS) is committed to maintain the highest academic integrity standards possible in the ODS exam environment.

In order to meet this goal, ODS uses their own testing center which is monitored by a secure closed circuit security system. We offer private and semi-private testing rooms. The testing center and rooms are located in Student Union Building 1 (SUB1) on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.

ODS requires that all students show their Mason ID before taking exams at ODS.

***Any student observed utilizing any unauthorized resource during an exam will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and their instructor as a violation of the GMU Honor Code.***

Exam accommodations may include but are not limited to the following:

- Distraction-reduced space
- Extended time
- Computer
- CCTV
- Audio output
- Assistive technology
- Large print
- Scribe
- Reader
- Braille
- Raised table

Students authorized for exam accommodations have three exam options:

1. Take exams with the class.
2. Take exams with appropriate accommodations arranged by the instructor.
3. Take exams at the Office of Disability Services (ODS).

#### Procedure

In order to be eligible for exam proctoring through ODS, students must be registered with the ODS as a qualified student with a disability. Students must have accommodations noted as a result of that registration on their Faculty Contact Sheet (FCS). Students should request their Faculty Contact Sheets prior to the beginning of each semester.



The student needs to present the FCS to their instructors at the beginning of the semester as well as make test arrangements, using ODS Test Forms (OTF) for each individual exam. The OTF is considered a contract between student, instructor and the Office of Disability Services. Turn in the OTF at the beginning of each semester or at least 5 business days in advance of your scheduled exam date.

### **Policy**

1. It is the student's responsibility to meet with each instructor at the beginning of each semester to discuss the disability-related needs in the course - including appropriate testing accommodations, as outlined in the Faculty Contact Sheet.; ODS does not automatically inform faculty that the student will be in their class.
2. If the instructor prefers to administer the exam and can arrange the proper accommodations, the student makes the arrangements directly with the instructor. ODS does not need to be informed about these exam arrangements.
3. If it is decided, after talking with the instructor, that the student should take the exam at ODS, an ODS Test Form (OTF) should be completed by the student and instructor for each specific exam. **It is the student responsibility that ODS receives the completed OTF no later than 5 business days prior to the exam date.**
4. Failure to deliver completed ODS Test Form(s) on time to ODS may result in denial of the request, due to insufficient testing space and/or unavailability of sufficient proctors.
5. If the student initiates with the instructor a request to take an exam at a time/day different than the time previously arranged with ODS, ODS is under no obligation to proctor that exam; *ODS requires a minimum of 48 hours notice to change the originally scheduled time.* The Office of Disability Services may not be able to accommodate students who request final exams to be scheduled or changed with less than one week notice. If ODS is unable to accommodate the change, then the student is responsible for contacting the instructor. The instructor has the final decision about re-scheduling and arranging the accommodation in their office.
6. Instructors are requested to deliver exams to ODS 24 hours prior to the testing date, either by email or hand delivery to our office. This should be specified on the ODS Test Form (OTF). The student is encouraged to remind the professor of the need to deliver the test before the exam date. ODS assumes responsibility for

security of the exam.

7. During each semester, the ODS testing center and exam rooms are available Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 9 AM till 5 PM and Tuesday from 9 AM till 9 PM, with the exception of final exams. Availability during finals will be posted in advance on the ODS website, <http://ods.gmu.edu>.
8. Exams that need to be converted to large print, Braille, or scanned into a computer must be received by ODS early enough to ensure adequate time for conversion.
9. The student should arrive at ODS 10-15 minutes prior to the start of the exam.
10. All students need to show their Mason ID or driver license when checking in to take an exam with ODS.
11. Faculty instructions on the ODS Test Form (OTF) will be reviewed with you before the exam begins. *You will be held responsible for following these instructions at all times.*
12. Students are not permitted to choose your exam room and seating area. ODS cannot guarantee a specific test environment.
13. Students are responsible for their own personal exam materials. If you forget your personal exam materials (like calculator, bluebook, and scantron) and you leave to retrieve them, when you return you will only be given the remainder of your allotted time.
14. Exams will be given at the appointed time and students who are late will forfeit the time they miss and only be offered the scheduled time remaining. Faculty will be notified of the omission. If a student is more than twenty (20) minutes late, the exam is considered a 'no show' and the instructor will be notified. It will be up to the student to contact the instructor regarding any options for rescheduling.
15. If you are unable to take an exam due to illness or emergency, contact your instructor and ODS immediately. You are responsible for coordinating the makeup of any missed exam or quiz with your instructor.
16. If for any reason you have decided not to take your exam at ODS after completing and returning the ODS Test Form (OTF), you are responsible for notifying our office. This also applies if you have dropped a course but have handed in ODS

## Test Forms.

17. Once the student has begun the exam, she/he will not be allowed to leave an exam, unless otherwise stated as an accommodation on the Faculty Contact Sheet. Exception is a bathroom break. Notify the assigned proctor or ODS Staff before leaving the testing area.
18. If during an exam the student has any question about the test or instructions, the student should explain the problem to the ODS Staff or available proctor. If it is something the instructor must handle, ODS will attempt to contact the instructor by phone or email; however, the student is advised to continue with the test and include a written explanation about the problem so it will come to the attention of the instructor. **ODS will not clarify questions which a student has about the test or any items on the test.**
19. A staff member from ODS or assigned proctor may come into the testing room at any time to monitor the instructor's guidelines for the exam.
20. Only necessary items mentioned on the ODS Test Form (OTF) are allowed in the testing room. The items not allowed include (but are not limited to):
  - a. Notes and/or books not permitted by professor/instructor
  - b. Any communication device including cell phones, notebooks, iPods and other electronic devices.
  - c. Storage devices like CD, DVD, USB flash drive, floppy disk
  - d. Coats, hats, backpacks and purses.
21. Non-permitted items during the exam, including all communication devices, can be stored with our office. However, the Office of Disability Services will not be responsible for any damage or loss.
22. Use of the internet/intranet other than mentioned on the ODS Test Form (OTF) is strictly prohibited.
23. Any actual or suspected incident/evidence of improper test-taking or dishonesty will be documented by ODS staff or proctor and may result in termination of the exam. Suspected violations will be seen as an Honor Code violation and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and to the instructor.
24. Pop Quizzes. The instructor must call ODS in the event of a pop quiz as soon as it is planned. The instructor should deliver the quiz in person or via email to ODS

for administration and enclose instructions for administering the quiz (e.g., time allotment and authorized materials).

## **VI. Specific Disabilities**

### **Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):**

#### **Strategies for Teaching Students with ADHD**

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) is a neurobehavioral disorder. AD/HD is usually diagnosed in childhood, and the condition can continue into the adult years. Many individuals with AD/HD are undiagnosed until adulthood. The common characteristics of AD/HD are impulsivity, inattention, and/or over-activity (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Failure to listen to instructions, inability to organize oneself and work tasks, fidgeting with hands and feet, talking too much, inability to stay on task, leaving projects, chores and work tasks unfinished, and having trouble paying attention to and responding to details are the primary symptoms of AD/HD. Although individuals may have both inattention and hyperactivity symptoms, many individuals predominantly display one symptom more than another. Therefore, the DSM-IV-TR identifies three subtypes that can be diagnosed:

- AD/HD predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type: The major characteristics are fidgeting, talking excessively, interrupting others when talking, and impatience.
- AD/HD predominantly inattentive type: The major characteristics are distractibility, organization problems, failure to give close attention to details, difficulty processing information quickly and accurately, and difficulty following through with instructions.
- AD/HD combined type: The individual with combined type meets the criteria for both hyperactive-impulsive and inattentive type.

#### **Suggestions & Strategies for Preparing for, Teaching and Communicating with Students with AD/HD**

- Provide a syllabus with clear explanations of course objectives with specific due-dates for assignments.
- For large projects or long papers, break down the task into smaller parts.
- Give verbal reminders in class of upcoming deadlines regarding homework assignments and upcoming exams.
- Provide an outline of each lecture at the start of class.
- When possible, start each lecture with a summary of material to be covered and conclude each lecture with a summary of major points addressed.
- Students with AD/HD may start to “drift” during class. A varied format may help to keep their attention.
- Students with AD/HD are encouraged to use the following strategies:
  - Use of a day planner
  - Write down all assignments
  - Take notes in class, rewriting notes after class

- Break tasks down into manageable components
- Set reasonable goals and use a checklist to keep track of progress
- Use of an audio recorder for lectures and studying
- Work on projects with someone who has strong organizational skills
- Get feedback on social behavior from a trusted friend

## *Autism/Aspergers*

### *A Guide for Understanding*

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a group of developmental disorders that are characterized by difficulties in the areas of social skills, communication, and unusual repetitive behaviors. The spectrum includes autism, Asperger's syndrome (sometimes referred to as "high functioning autism"), and pervasive developmental disorder. The core feature appears to be the individual's inability to understand the thoughts, feelings and motivations of other people and to use this understanding to regulate his or her own behaviors.

### *General Characteristics*

The following characteristics are typical in an individual with an ASD. Due to the diversity and complexity of this disability, you may not see all of these characteristics in a given student. It is important to understand these characteristics, because they can result in behaviors that are easy to misinterpret, as discussed below. Often behaviors that seem odd or unusual, or even rude, are in fact unintentional symptoms of ASD.

- Frequent errors in interpreting others' body language, intentions or facial expressions
- Difficulty understanding the motives and perceptions of others
- Problems asking for help
- Motor clumsiness, unusual body movements and/or repetitive behavior
- Difficulty with the big picture, perseverate on the details (can't see the forest for the trees)
- Unusually strong narrow interests
- Difficulties with transitions and changes in schedule
- Wants things "just so"
- Problems with organization (including initiating, planning, carrying out, and finishing tasks)
- Deficits in abstract thinking (concrete, focuses on irrelevant details, difficulty generalizing)
- Unusual sensitivity to touch, sounds, and visual details, may experience sensory overload

### *In the Classroom*

**Strengths.** Students diagnosed with an ASD bring unique strengths and perspectives to the classroom. You may observe any of the following characteristics:

- Above average or superior intellect

- Friendly
- Supportive of others
- Follow rules/guidelines when set
- Excellent memory
- Sharp attention to detail
- Punctual
- Reliable
- Superior knowledge and outstanding memory in specific areas

**Functional Impact.** Students diagnosed with an ASD may face challenges in the following areas:

### **Communication and Social Skills**

- Understanding non-verbal forms of communication
- Initiating and sustaining connected relationships (but usually desires connection)
- Limited eye contact/conversation skills
- Unusual speech intonation, volume, rhythm, and/or rate
- Understanding unstated rules or expectations (such as personal space)
- Impairment of two-way interaction (may seem to talk “at you” rather than “with you”)
- Conversation with questions may be tangential or repetitive
- Restricted interests that may be unusual and can sometimes become a rigid topic for social conversation
- Literal understanding of language (difficulty interpreting words with double meaning, confused by metaphors and sarcasm)
- Unaware of how their behavior affects others

### **Writing**

- Information in papers may be redundant, returning to the same topic focus repeatedly
- Student may be able to state facts and details, but be greatly challenged by papers requiring
  - taking another’s point of view
  - synthesizing information to arrive at a larger concept
  - comparing and contrasting to arrive at “the big picture”
  - using analogies, similes, or metaphors

### **Learning Style**



Students may have sophisticated and impressive vocabulary and excellent rote memory but may have difficulty with high-level thinking and comprehension skills. They can give the impression that they understand, when in reality they may be repeating what they have heard or read.

**General classroom behavior.** In general, while students diagnosed with ASD are often valuable assets in the classroom, some potentially challenging and easily misunderstood behaviors – which can usually be attributed to the functional impact of the condition – may be noted.

***Students may:***

- Be resistant to change
- Have difficulty expressing needs or asking for help
- Attempt to monopolize a conversation
- Make little or no eye contact
- Have repetitive verbal behavior
- Become tangential in answering questions
- Display a very literal thinking style
- Exhibit distracting behavior in long classes
- Be hypersensitive to sounds
- Engage in self-stimulating behavior (rocking, tapping, playing with “stress toys”)
- Not like to interact
- Prefer to be alone
- Be argumentative
- Behave in a disruptive manner

**Tools for Interaction and Instruction**

The following suggested tips may be helpful in working with students.

***Personal Interactions and Boundary Setting***

- Establish trust to decrease conflict
- Be clear about times and reasons for office visits
- Be willing to re-explain information as concretely as possible
- Use clear directives and establish rules if . . .
  - a student invades your space or imposes on your time
  - the student’s classroom comments or conversational volume become inappropriate
- If the student is disruptive to others, arrange to meet privately; let the student know what behavior is disrupting others, and help them understand why

- Give reasons for your requests to help the student understand your point of view
- Avoid arguing if the student gets “stuck” on the topic; instead, stick to your reasoning and let them know that the conversation is done

### ***Classroom Interactions***

- Don’t use absolute words such as “always” or “never” unless that is exactly what you mean
- Supplement oral with written instructions when revising assignments, dates, etc.
- May need to set limits on participation, i.e. allow student to answer three questions per class period
- Limit use of metaphors, as they are often misunderstood
- Discuss any safety concerns, such as evacuation procedures, ahead of time
- Be aware that students with ASD may be distracted by others making noise, or they may be disruptive to others unintentionally
- Group work
  - when working in groups, student may need to be monitored by the professor in order to avoid getting off task or taking over group activity
  - avoid having students self-select into groups
  - wherever possible, it may be helpful to offer an alternative approach where the student can select to work on an individual basis
  - if conflict arises, explain to student what effect they had on others, why the conflict arose, and how to behave appropriately in a group setting
- If a student’s head is down on the desk, consider the possibility that they may be experiencing sensory overload rather than sleeping

### ***Writing***

- Use clear and detailed directives when referring to revisions that need to be made
- Listing or numbering changes on the paper will provide guidelines for student when working
- If modeling writing rules, write them on a separate sheet for future reference
- Keep directions simple and declarative
- Ask students to repeat directions in their own words to check comprehension

Example: (Student arrives at your office at 1:40). “We have 20 minutes to work together. At 2:00, I’m going to ask you to take my suggestions home and start making changes to your paper. Come to my office tomorrow afternoon at 3:00 and show me what you’ve done.”

### ***General Instructional Tips***

- Clearly define course requirements, the dates of exams and when assignments are due. Provide advance notice of any changes.
- Teach to generalize and to consolidate information.
- Many individuals with ASD are visual learners. Pictures and graphs may be helpful to them.
- Redirect tangential responses to bring student to the point.
- Go for gist, meaning, and patterns. Don't get bogged down in details.
- Use scripts and teach strategies selectively.
- Make sure all expectations are direct and explicit. Don't require students to "read between the lines" to glean your intentions. Don't expect the student to automatically generalize instructions. Provide direct feedback to the student when you observe areas of academic difficulty.
- Encourage use of resources designed to help students with study skills, particularly organizational skills.
- Avoid idioms, double meaning, and sarcasm, unless you plan to explain your usage.
- If the student has poor handwriting, allow use of a computer if easier for the student.
- Use the student's preoccupying interest to help focus/motivate the student. Suggest ways to integrate this interest into the course, such as related paper topics
- Make sure the setting for tests takes into consideration any sensitivity to sound, light, touch, etc.

### ***Ask for Help***

As always, please feel free to contact the ODS at 703-993-2474 or [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu), for assistance with any questions you may have.

Adapted with permission from Wolf, L..E., Thierfield Brown, J., & Kudiela Bork, G.R. (2009). *Students with Asperge Syndrome: A guide for college personnel* (pp. 309-313). Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

## **Blind/Vision Impaired**

### **Strategies for Teaching Students with Visual Impairments**

#### **Introduction**

There are two main categories of visual impairments: Low Vision and Blind. Low vision students usually are print users, but may require special equipment and materials. The definition of legal blindness covers a broad spectrum of visual impairments. The extent of visual disability depends upon the physical sensory impairment of the student's eyes, the age of the student at the onset of vision impairment, and the way in which that impairment occurred. Vision also may fluctuate or may be influenced by factors such as inappropriate lighting, light glare, or fatigue. Hence, there is no "typical" vision impaired student. The major challenge facing visually impaired students in the educational environment is the overwhelming mass of visual material to which they are continually exposed in textbooks, class outlines, class schedules, chalkboards writing, etc. In addition, the increase in the use of films, videotapes, computers, laser disks, and television adds to the volume of visual material to which they have only limited access.

#### **General Courtesy**

- Speak to the class upon entering and leaving the room or site.
- Call the student by name if you want his/her attention.
- Use descriptive words such as straight, forward, left, etc. in relation to the student's body orientation. Be specific in directions and avoid the use of vague terms with unusable information, such as "over there", "here", "this", etc.
- Describe, in detail, pertinent visual occurrences of the learning activities.
- Describe and tactually familiarize the student to the classroom, laboratory, equipment, supplies, materials, field sites, etc.
- Give verbal notice of room changes, special meetings, or assignments.
- Offer to read written information for a person with a visual impairment, when appropriate.
- Identify yourself by name; don't assume that the student who is visually impaired will recognize you by your voice even though you have met before.
- If you are asked to guide a student with a visual impairment, identify yourself, offer your services and, if accepted, offer your arm to the student's hand. Tell them if they have to step up or step down, let them know if the door is to their left or right, and warn them of possible hazards.
- Orally, let the student know if you need to move or need to end a conversation.
- If a visually impaired student is in class, routinely check the instructional environment to be sure it is adequate and ready for use.
- When communicating with a student who has a visional impairment, always identify yourself and others who are present.
- Do not pet or touch a guide dog. Guide dogs are working animals. It can be hazardous for the visually impaired person if the dog is distracted.
- Be understanding of the slight noise made by a portable braille.

- Also use an auditory or tactile signal where a visual signal is normally used.
- It is not necessary to speak loudly to people with visual impairments.
- Explain sudden noises
- Don't shout. People who are blind or vision impaired are not deaf.
- When seating a person who is blind or vision impaired guide their hand to the back of the chair and allow them to seat themselves.
- Show the student where things are placed and let the student pick up and feel objects, where appropriate.
- Don't move objects without telling the student
- Don't leave doors ajar. Close or open them fully.
- Give clear directions, don't talk about "here" and "there"
- Speak directly to the student not through another person
- It's OK to use words like "look" and "see"
- It's OK to refer to color when talking to the student.
- Let the student have hands-on experiences whenever possible. Don't force the student to touch new things if they are unsure about them.
- Ask if the student needs help rather than assuming. The student needs to become independent.
- Don't leave the student unless they know where they are
- Don't push or steer the student, let them take your hand or elbow

**Basic information for faculty when working with a student who is blind or vision impaired:**

- Accept the students Faculty Contact Sheet and ask student if you have questions regarding the accommodations OR contact ODS for further assistance.
- By verbally spelling out a new or technical word, you will be helping the visually impaired student, as well as for other students.
- Contact ATI in advance if showing any media or video's in the classroom i.e. movies, YouTube videos, websites, etc...
- Describe, in detail, all pertinent visual occurrences or chalkboard writing.
- Modify instructions for auditory/tactile presentation.
- Allow student to use a tape recorder for recording class presentations.
- Make all handouts and assignments available in an appropriate form: e.g., regular print, large print, Braille, or cassette, depending on the student's optimal mode of communication.

## **Chronic Medical Conditions**

Chronic Medical Condition involves a disease or other human health condition that is persistent or long-lasting in nature. The term chronic is usually applied when the course of the disease lasts for more than three months. Chronic Medical Conditions may substantially limit a person's ability to perform major life activities such as seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, learning, caring for oneself, and working. Many medical conditions require chronic care management for effective long-term treatment. Effective chronic disease control requires attention to social, behavioral, environmental and clinical aspects. Below is a list of the more common conditions experienced by the students at GMU.

AIDS	Chronic Pain	Paraplegia/quadruplegia
Allergies	Diabetes	Respiratory Disorders
Back Conditions	Epilepsy	Sickle Cell Anemia
Brain Injuries	Gastrointestinal Disorders	Sleep Disorders
Cancer	Heart Conditions	Spinal Cord Injury
Cerebral Palsy	Lyme Disease	Stroke
Chemical Sensitivity	Migraine Headaches	
Chronic Fatigue Syndrome	Multiple Sclerosis	

### **Strategies for working with students with Chronic Medical Conditions**

There are many kinds of medical conditions, varying significantly in their effects and symptoms. These conditions may not be static therefore as the condition changes, so may the need for special instructional strategies or accommodations. The use of such strategies will depend on how the disability is manifested at that particular time and may change throughout the semester.

## **Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf-Blind**

### **Strategies for working with Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind**

- *Have visual materials such as PowerPoint materials and lecture notes available to the students before class.* It is difficult to attend to the interpreter, speaker and visual prompts simultaneously.
- *Have captioned videos available.* Videos that are not captioned must be captioned before class. It is not appropriate for the interpreter or transliterators to interpret for the video. Doing so would deprive the student of the ability to attend to both the visual information and the message being conveyed. If faculty members wish to show visual media that is not captioned, procedures for requesting accessible media and the online form can be found at [http://ati.gmu.edu/media.cfm#CP\\_JUMP\\_2078](http://ati.gmu.edu/media.cfm#CP_JUMP_2078). Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI) asks for this at least 15 days in advance.
- Failure to allow for adequate lead time may result in the video not being captioned and opens the university up to complaints regarding accessibility. This policy includes YouTube videos and any required media being shown in the classroom or required to be viewed outside of class.
- NOTE: Each department has televisions with closed caption capabilities. 2
- *Treat all students equally.* Please keep in mind that although deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind students have special needs they should be treated the same as hearing students.
- *Interpreters are not always an accurate reflection of students when voicing for them.* Try to be patient when an interpreter voices for students. D/deaf, hard-of-hearing, and D/deaf-blind students have diverse communications skills. If the professor does not understand the student's question or statement, it is acceptable to ask for it to be repeated.
- *Be aware of "process time," which is the time required to process information into another language.* Faculty members are asked to be cognizant that there is a processing time of 5-10 seconds between what is said and the time that an interpreter signs the material to students.
- *Slow down.* While slowing down can be tough for faculty members, the rapid pace of instruction is one of the top areas of classroom concern by deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students.
- *Allow D/deaf students to have access to the first few rows in class on the first day.* Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind students frequently need to sit at or near the front of the room in order to have a clear view of the speaker, the interpreter, the captioning, and of any classroom materials.
- *Avoid pre-determined groups of deaf/hearing students to work together.* Before establishing groups, ask students privately for their preferences in group assignments.
- *When using a laser pointer please allow the pointer to remain on the object.* By allowing the pointer to remain positioned for an extended period of time, deaf and hard-of-hearing students will be able to locate its position, read the content there, and return their attention to the speaker (and an interpreter or reporter if present).

- *Avoid using pronouns as referents in the class.* Use of proper names is best. When speakers are more specific it helps all students, hearing or deaf, to understand.

### **Suggestions for Working with Sign Language Interpreters and/or Cued speech Transliterators**

**Interpreters** are specially trained professionals whose role is to facilitate communication between people who do not share a common language throughout the educational environment, both academic and extracurricular. While the interpreter is not an expert in the faculty member's field, the interpreter is an expert in communication between D/deaf and hearing individuals.

**Cued Speech Transliterators** resemble the function of a sign language interpreter except that the transliterators use a hand code, or cue, to represent each speech sound. Interpreters for D/deaf-blind individuals assist those who have both limited or no hearing and limited or no sight. There are several deaf-blind interpreting techniques, but most frequently the deaf-blind individual receives the message by placing his/her hands on top of the interpreter's hands and following the interpreter's hand movements.

Below are some tips that have proven helpful when working with sign language interpreters, cued speech transliterators or deaf-blind interpreters.

- The interpreter will interpret everything that happens in the classroom (both spoken and signed), conveying the content and the spirit of the speaker. Speakers may speak using their normal rate. Speakers should direct all questions and comments to the D/deaf student, not the interpreter.
- Faculty members may be asked to provide the interpreter with materials relevant to the course, e.g. copies of the syllabus, handouts, an extra copy of the textbook, and lecture notes if possible. A permanent, armless chair will also be needed.
- Specialized terms, proper names, etc. will need to be provided to the interpreter before the class which will aid the interpreter in conveying the information to the deaf student accurately.
- Faculty is asked to use visual aids whenever possible. Writing new words, phrases, concepts and ideas on the board is helpful both to the interpreter and the students.
- Depending on the length and nature of the class, a team of two interpreters may be assigned to a class. The interpreters will alternate, according to time limits they have agreed upon. They will make the change as unobtrusively as possible, and it is not necessary for faculty members to stop the lecture during this change.
- Interpreters operate under a professional Code of Ethics. All information pertaining to the class will be kept confidential within the educational team working directly with the student. The Code of Ethics requires the interpreter to sign or voice everything seen or heard in the classroom. Speakers who ask the interpreter "not to sign this", place the interpreter in violation of the Code. Likewise, the interpreter will voice for the faculty member and/or class everything the D/deaf student signs with



the exception of brief questions specifically to the interpreter for communication clarification.

- If individuals will read in class, faculty members are asked to please remind them to slow down as reading tends to be done at a much quicker pace than extemporaneous speech. If possible, provide interpreters with a copy of the literature to be read in class.

## **Learning Disabilities/Cognitive Impairments**

### **Strategies for Faculty in Teaching**

Learning disabilities are neurologically-based disorders that affect the manner in which individuals with average or above average intelligence receive, process, retain and/or express information. A learning disability is NOT to be confused with generalized low ability. Learning disabilities are invisible, but may affect a student's performance in reading, writing, spoken language, mathematics, orientation in space and time and/or organization. The areas of difficulty will vary from one student to another.

The manifestations resulting from this disability may result in skill deficits in the following areas:

- spoken and written language skills
- reading
- abstract and general reasoning
- executive functioning (planning and time management)
- decoding and comprehension
- visual spatial skills
- mathematical calculation skills
- memory (long-term, short-term, visual auditory)

It is impractical and unnecessary to change a course structure to accommodate one student's needs in the classroom; however teaching with various modalities (verbal, visual and performance) may provide the support for a good cross section of students' learning styles. A combination is effective if there is more than one student in the class with a learning disability and will not be detrimental to other students.

Examples of accommodations for students with Learning Disabilities (but not limited to):

- Alternative exam formats
- Taped lectures
- Extensions on papers/projects on a case-by-case basis (as negotiated with the faculty member)
- Extended time (exams)
- Distraction free room (exams)
- Note taker / scribe
- Books on tape
- Use of Smart Pen

### **Strategies for Preparing for, Teaching and Communicating with Students with Learning Disabilities**

- Advance planning for the reading requirements of a course from semester to semester is especially helpful to students who need recorded audio presentations as

an alternative format. Lead-time is essential to provide the alternative medium in a timely fashion.

- Create a syllabus with due dates, reading assignments, additional AV or supplemental materials in the library collection, descriptions of projects and papers, grading & attendance policies or rubrics.
- Place the syllabus online as well as in print.
- Clearly define course requirements such as assignments and their deadlines. Be sure to provide advance notice of any schedule changes.
- Sharing lecture notes with a student in advance can be extremely helpful to support his or her visual and auditory preparation for each class.
- Encourage students to make appointments during office hours to discuss student's disability, the accommodations required,
- Office hours can also be used for individual discussion of assignments and questions about lectures.
- When presenting new or technical terms, it can be crucial for students with a learning disability to have them written on the board or supplied in handouts
- Guided notes, Power Point presentations, or notes put online at the end of class can improve the performance of all students. If students know the note framework will be available before class, they can download and print it out and use it as an outline. If the notes are online after the lecture, they can spend their time listening and responding to questions in class, knowing that the notes will be available later
- Break information into small steps while instructing on new tasks
- Paraphrase key points from the reading and lectures.
- Provide examples (and identify things that are not examples).
- During a lecture, pause occasionally allowing students to take the time to assimilate the information and catch up with note taking. Pauses can be used to erase a board or change a visual slide.
- Use analogies, illustrations, films, overheads, records, tapes.
- For large projects, provide step-by-step directions, bullet those directions, & give advanced notice of due dates (at least 2 weeks).
- Allow time for questions and clarification during or at the end of a lecture.
- Be flexible and willing to experiment. Recognize each learning disabled student's individual learning style and abilities.
- Announce information in both oral and written form whenever possible. This is especially true of changes in assignments or exams
- Talk distinctly and at an appropriate rate.
- Speak at an even speed; emphasizing important points with pauses, gestures, and other body language, helps students follow classroom presentations.
- Try not to lecture while facing the chalkboard.
- When talking, be mindful of the speed and audibility of your lecture.

- Use consistent pauses or voice inflections which can be effective in emphasizing important points. This is important in maintaining attention and encouraging participation.

## **Psychiatric Disorders**

A psychiatric disorder is an impairment that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines. There are more than 200 classified forms of mental illness. Symptoms may include changes in mood, personality, personal habits, decreased concentration, and/or social withdrawal. These behaviors persist over time; they are not in response to a particular event. Drowsiness, fatigue, memory loss, and decreased response time may result from prescription medications. Although many individuals with psychiatric disabilities are stabilized using medications and/or psychotherapy, their behavior and affect may still cycle. Below is a list of the more common conditions experienced by the students at GMU.

Depression

Post-traumatic Stress  
Disorder

Panic Disorders

Bipolar Disorder

Obsessive-Compulsive  
Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Schizophrenia

Anxiety Disorder

## **Strategies for working with students with Psychiatric Disorders**

There are many kinds of psychiatric disorders, varying significantly in their effects and symptoms. These conditions may not be static therefore as the condition changes, so may the need for special instructional strategies or accommodations. The use of such strategies will depend on how the disability is manifested at that particular time and may change throughout the semester.

## **Temporary Disabilities**

The Office of Disability Services offers a wide variety of policy directed services to students with temporary documented disabilities. However, services are extended to students with temporary disabilities only for the time that their access to Mason classes, coursework, and programs is significantly limited as a direct result of those disabilities.

**The eligibility process is the same as for permanent disability cases.** The ODS professional staff qualify students for services based upon a review of medical or psychological documentation as well as a one-on-one interview. When considering documentation we asked that a qualified professional provide a narrative which describes that student's functional limitations when attempting to engage classes, coursework, and programs provided by Mason. Simply, we ask that the narrative describes how a person is limited and to what degree is he or she impaired.

When a student qualifies for ODS services, one of our professional staff members will determine appropriate academic services and accommodations depending upon, once again, how and to what degree he or she is limited when attempting to engage the Mason environment.

Additionally, the ODS professional staff member will review with the student how he or she might best facilitate as well as modify the accommodations developed on his or her behalf. Then the student is responsible for requesting most accommodations well before any academic deadline has been set. That is, the student should bear in mind when reporting a clinical problem by which he or she is qualified for having a disability is not automatic. Likewise, the accommodations recommended by his or her physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist are not automatic as well.

Lastly, it is also the student's responsibility to follow the ODS policies and procedures for accessing accommodations as outlined in this section.

Temporary conditions include but are not limited to:

- Extended Illnesses – i.e. Mono
- Complications due to pregnancies
- Recoveries from surgeries that are extensive
- Short term injuries due to accidents including:
  - Broken bones
  - Sprains
  - Concussive Conditions

## ***VII. Resources & Links***

*Informational web sites that may be beneficial in working with students with disabilities.*

### ***General Information***

#### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

<http://www.ada.gov/>

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed July 26, 1990, is a comprehensive federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. This piece of legislation ensures equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, State and local government services, and telecommunications.

#### **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)**

[www.ahead.org](http://www.ahead.org)

A professional membership organization for individuals involved in the development of policy and in the provision of quality services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities involved in all areas of higher education.

#### **Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology (DO-IT)**

<http://www.washington.edu/doi/>

DO-IT Center promotes the success of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education and careers, using technology as an empowering tool.

<http://www.washington.edu/doi/Resources/postsec.html>

List of websites to help faculty, administrators, and staff create accessible environments, programs, and resources for students with disabilities and help students with disabilities prepare for and succeed in college

#### **HEATH Resource Center**

<http://www.heath.gwu.edu/>

Online clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities.

#### **Office for Civil Rights**

[www.ed.gov/ocr](http://www.ed.gov/ocr)

Serve student populations facing discrimination and the advocates and institutions promoting systemic solutions to civil rights problems.

## ***Disability Specific***

### **Attention Deficit Disorders**

[www.add.org](http://www.add.org)  
[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

<http://www.autism-society.org/>  
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/>

### **Blind and Visual Impairments**

[www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)

### **Deaf/Hard of Hearing**

<http://www.pepnet.org/resources/deaf>

### **Learning Disabilities**

[www.ncl.org](http://www.ncl.org)

### **Mental Health/Psychiatric Disorders**

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>  
[http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about\\_mental\\_illness](http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about_mental_illness)

## ***Instructional Strategies***

### **Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI)**

<http://ati.gmu.edu/>

The ATI works collaboratively with other units within the Mason community to ensure equivalent access for individuals with disabilities to information technology and communications. This is achieved through the use of adaptive equipment and the provision of technical assistance to all university departments/units. The ATI also provides training and technical support to the university community regarding equivalent access to information technology.

### **CAST Universal Design for Learning**

[www.cast.org](http://www.cast.org)

CAST is a nonprofit research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals, especially those with disabilities, through Universal Design for Learning.



## **The ASD Project**

<http://webdev.usu.edu/drc/facultytraining/introo.htm>

This computer-based course is intended to develop an awareness about accommodating students with disabilities. In your role as faculty, there is a little background information that may be helpful. Studies have shown that students with disabilities can participate in higher education and compete favorably with other students.

## **VIII. FAQ's**

### ***1. What if I suspect a student has a disability but hasn't provided me with any documentation from the Office of Disability Services? Can I ask them if they have a disability?***

It is not a good idea to ask directly about a possible disability for a couple of reasons. First, the Americans with Disabilities Act states that a public entity may not make unnecessary inquiries into the existence of a disability. These inquiries usually relate to hiring or pre-admission screening, but when talking with students such inquiries should also be avoided. A direct inquiry such as this could also be considered intrusive or insensitive. You may simply tell the student that you notice she is having academic difficulty and encourage her to consider looking into the academic supports services on campus which includes ODS. We ask that you speak to the behavior you are noticing, for example, "I noticed you are struggling with....". In the Appendix section below there is a copy of a flyer listing all the academic support services.

### ***2. What if a student comes to me at the end of the semester and tells me they have a disability, but has not provided me with documentation from the ODS?***

If a student discloses that he or she has a disability, you may refer and encourage them to go to the ODS for support. Also, please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive. If a student has not supplied you with a faculty contact sheet from the ODS, you are not required to provide any accommodations or academic adjustments based on a student's disclosed disability. While these decisions are ultimately left to the professor's discretion, we recommend acceptance of this general guideline.

### ***3. What if I disagree with an accommodation that is provided by the ODS?***

Please call the ODS for assistance with any questions about a student's accommodations. For further explanation regarding legal obligations of higher education institutions to provide accommodations for students with documented disabilities, please refer to page 1 of this guide which discusses the ADAA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

**4. *When is a student required to submit their accommodation letter to me?***

Students can provide you with a faculty contact sheet at any time during the semester. However, please keep in mind that implementation of accommodations begins at that time, and are not retroactive.

**5. *What if I have provided the accommodations provided by the ODS but the student is still struggling in my class?***

If you are concerned that a student is not succeeding in your class despite your implementation of accommodations, we encourage you to first talk with the student to discuss these concerns. If you feel a discussion with an ODS staff member would be helpful, please contact us and we will assist you. Also, it may be helpful during your conversation with the student to ask if he or she would like to involve an ODS staff member in addressing the issue. Ultimately, all students are expected to meet the same academic requirements and should be assigned grades by the same standards, regardless of disability. While we strive to guarantee equal access for students with disabilities, we cannot guarantee success.

**6. *A student who is registered with the ODS is being extremely disruptive in my class, and I'm not sure how to handle the situation. What should I do?***

While there may be instances where a student's disruptive behavior is related to their disability, if the behavior is disruptive in a way you're not sure how to handle, you can make a referral to the Office of Student Support and Case Management (OSSCM). Please see their website for further details about their role, policies, and procedures. <http://osscm.gmu.edu/>

**7. *What do I do if I am seriously concerned about a student's well-being? I know he or she has a disability. Who should I contact?***

If there is a life threatening emergency, call 911 immediately. If there is an emergent situation and crisis intervention is needed, you can also call Counseling and Psychological Services at 703-993-2380.

**8. *Is my intellectual property at risk if I provide a copy of lecture my in any form to the student?***

No, ODS has the student sign a Professor Lecture Agreement form that states:

Some students with disabilities require Professors Lecture notes in order to ensure access to the course work for their personal study only (84.44 of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 P.L. 93-112, amended P.L. 93-516). Lectures notes for

this purpose may not be shared with other people without the consent of the professor. Lectures notes may not be used in any way against the faculty member. Information contained in the lecture notes is protected under federal copyright laws, and may not be reproduced, published, posted, or quoted without the express consent of the lecturer and without giving proper identity and credits to the lecturer. Lecture notes must be destroyed at the end of the semester once the exam for the course has been given or by the last date of scheduled exams for the semester if no exam is to be held for the course.

**9. *What is the procedure for using the testing center?***

Please refer to Section V, page 16-20 of this guide.

**10. *What is the role of an interpreter?***

For detailed information about the role of interpreters in the classroom, please refer Section VI, Page 32 of this guide.

## IX. Appendix

# GMU Academic Support Services

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### **Learning Services**

*Provides study skills workshops, academic skills program, and academic counseling.*

**Student Union Building I, Room 3129**

<http://caps.gmu.edu/learningservices/>

703-993-2999

### **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**

*Provides individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs.*

**Student Union 1, Room 3129**

<http://caps.gmu.edu/>

**703-993-2380**

### **Office of Disability Services (ODS)**

*Assists students with disabilities to obtain reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids, and support services.*

**Student Union 1, Room 2500**

<http://ods.gmu.edu>

[ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu)

703.993.2474 or 703.993.2476 (TTY)

### **Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI)**

*Provides Assistive Technology assessments, support and training. Also provision of accessible text. The referral process is initiated through the Office of Disability Services.*

**Aquia Building, Room 238**

<http://ati.gmu.edu>

[ati@gmu.edu](mailto:ati@gmu.edu)

703-993-4329

### **The Writing Center**

*Free writing support and writing workshops.*

**Various locations (see website)**

<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

[wcenter@gmu.edu](mailto:wcenter@gmu.edu)

### **Math Tutoring Center**

*Free tutoring for freshman/sophomore math courses (up to MATH 290).*

**Johnson Center room 344**

<http://math.gmu.edu/tutorcenter.htm>

703-993-1483

### **Tutor Referral**

*Recruits and maintains a tutor referral program.*

<http://caps.gmu.edu/learningservices/tutorreferral.php>

703-993-2999

### **Career Services**

*Provides assistance in academic/career decision-making and goal setting.*

**Student Union I, Room 3400**

<http://careers.gmu.edu/index.cfm>

703-993-2370

