

Creating Opportunities for
Successful Learning:

A Handbook for Faculty on Learning Disability Issues



UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

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Students enrolled in PSYC*1300, Fall 1999

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Any part of “A Handbook for Faculty on Learning Disability Issues” may be used in print or electronic (webpage) format with proper reference.

Explanation of Icons:

This handbook uses two icons



FAQ's = Frequently Asked Questions



FMI = For More Information (see Additional Resources, Pg. 43)

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Introduction

Julia Christensen Hughes, Director, Teaching Support Services
& **Bruno Mancini**, Co-Director, Learning Opportunities Program

We are pleased to provide you with this handbook – “Creating Opportunities for Successful Learning: A Handbook for Faculty on Learning Disability Issues.” This handbook is a component of the University’s Learning Opportunities Program (LOP) and is a specific response to a 1999 survey that found University of Guelph faculty would like to know more about:

- learning disabilities in general;
- faculty roles and responsibilities with respect to students with learning disabilities;
- University of Guelph policies regarding learning disabilities;
- the implications of learning disabilities for teaching, learning and assessment;
- the role of the Centre for Students with Disabilities (CSD);
- the Learning Opportunities Program (LOP);
- support available to faculty and their students.

The survey also found that while most University of Guelph faculty feel these issues are important, they have little time, if any, to address them. This handbook was designed with these needs in mind. Each of the above issues is addressed in a succinct manner and the format provides easy access to key information. Should you require a more in-depth account of any of these topics, we encourage you to follow-up with the resources listed at the end of the handbook.

In Fall '99, 48 University of Guelph students began receiving enhanced support through the LOP. Another 30-50 LOP students are expected to enter the University in Fall 2000. These are in addition to the approximately 100 other students with learning disabilities who are currently receiving support through the CSD. The number of University of Guelph students with learning disabilities is expected to continue to increase because more students with learning disabilities are entering higher education each year. It is our hope that by sharing this information with you, all of these students will have enriched educational experiences and that progress will be made towards the achievement of the LOP's goals.

LOP's goals are to:

- remove systemic barriers to successful participation in university education for students with learning disabilities;
- admit promising students with learning disabilities;
- give students with learning disabilities a solid foundation of skills and strategies;
- support faculty, staff and employers in their day-to-day connection with these students;
- raise awareness, acceptance and understanding of issues related to learning disabilities;
- evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts.

We are grateful for the funding we have received from the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF) of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Through this program, Teaching Support Services (TSS) has been able to develop educational materials (such as this handbook) and support faculty in the development of course enhancements that respond to the needs of students with learning disabilities (e.g., new course manuals, course web sites, assessment strategies).

Finally, we would like to acknowledge and extend our thanks to the following people: Carol Herriot who wrote most of the material; Jody Hendry for initiating the handbook project; Doug Schaefer for design and production, and Mary Ann Evans and Karen Korabik for their support and feedback. We also thank the students with learning disabilities who allowed us to reproduce here various metaphors they created in PSYC*1300 to express the experience of a learning disability.



FMI (see Additional Resources)

- ▶ Report to the Learning Opportunities Task Force Relating to the Services Provided to Students with Learning Disabilities in a Post-Secondary Educational Setting (1998).

Understanding the Nature of Learning Disabilities



For my metaphor, I chose to use a glass with holes in it. This is my reflection on learning disabilities. The cup represents the mind. It is hard to fill. The water represents knowledge. It is hard to fill a glass with water when it is full of holes. You can fill the glass but only to a certain level. There are certain ways to remedy this problem but they are difficult. You can plug the holes with your fingers when you are drinking, but sometimes the holes outnumber the fingers. You could seal the holes with gum, but gum only lasts so long. Is there a solution to this problem? You could put this glass in a larger one. This is the same as having someone help you. The glass may still leak but you will not lose the water. A person with a learning disability should always be looking for solutions to his/her problem, and he/she will find some help, but the problems, like the holes, will always be there.

M.M.



Description of Learning Disabilities

There are many descriptions and definitions of learning disabilities used in conjunction with programs for students with learning disabilities. The following description was provided by the Learning Opportunities Task Force for use with the University of Guelph's LOP pilot project.

Learning disabilities:

- are neurologically-based information processing difficulties;
- occur in individuals with average to above-average intelligence;
- typically cause a discrepancy between the individual's potential and achievement, although they should not be diagnosed purely on the basis of such a discrepancy;
- are life-long conditions manageable with appropriate support and direction;
- are diagnosed by a registered psychologist or an appropriately qualified professional, using a battery of tests.

For the individual, learning disabilities may present significant academic challenges, which often mask his or her understanding and potential.



FAQ's

How successful are students with learning disabilities compared to their peers?

Students with learning disabilities tend to enter the University of Guelph with grades about 5 per cent below their non-LD peers and often continue to have lower GPAs. However, their retention rates and graduation rates are about 12 per cent higher than the general student population. Data collected by the CSD suggest that students who are in greater contact with the CSD have higher grades than their LD counterparts who do not maintain this contact.



FMI (see Additional Resources)

■■■■▶ Defining Learning Disabilities, University of Guelph, 1999.

Differentiating Learning Disabilities from Learning Difficulties

I exist with an intangible or rather invisible

disability that originates deep in my core... It is a shame that in the eyes of so many people, that which cannot be seen does not exist... thus I have had to learn to accept teachers' sympathetic smiles and kids' laughter.

G. D.

Many students have *learning difficulties*, which may stem from vision, hearing, health, or social-emotional issues, or lack of ability or opportunity. In contrast, the term learning disabilities is specifically reserved for students who have a **clear discrepancy between ability and achievement** that cannot be explained by these factors. This discrepancy typically has been longstanding in the individual and is attributed to neurological disorders that remain for the life of the individual. Manifestations include the student who may:

- have difficulty with the speed at which words are recognized and passages are read, yet given extra time can process and comprehend the material adeptly;
- produce well organized, insightful essays, but may need a proofreader to spot the many misspellings, insertions and omissions;
- be a strong and fluent reader, yet find it virtually impossible to take notes in class because of the rapid organization of auditory information that such a task requires.

Students with learning disabilities vary widely in their pattern of strengths, weaknesses, and compensatory skills. There is no one typical profile of a student with a learning disability as illustrated in the next section.



FAQs

How can I recognize if a student in my class has a learning disability?

Without a formal assessment you cannot know for sure.

However, common indicators include:

- a student who is very verbal, but cannot express his or her thoughts on paper;
- a student who learns well when shown, but cannot follow written and/or verbal instructions;
- a student who has excellent reasoning skills, but has trouble with auditory and/or visual memory;
- a student who works 2 to 3 times as hard as others, but his/her marks do not reflect effort or potential.

What should I do if I suspect that one of my students has a learning disability?

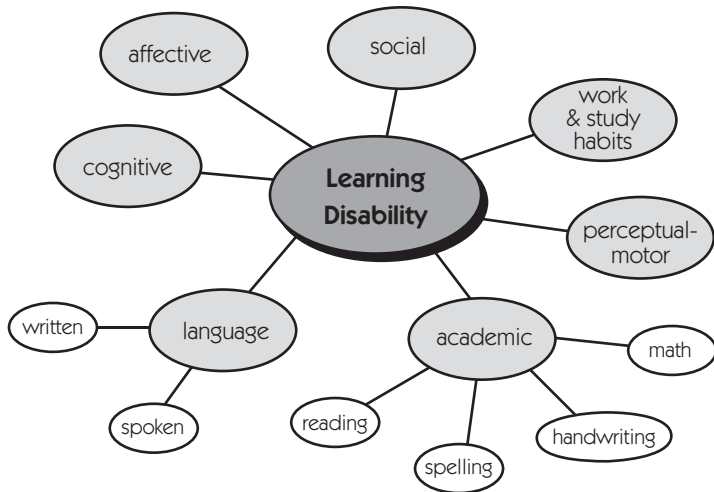
If you suspect that one of your students may have an undiagnosed learning disability and the student is ready to investigate his or her academic difficulties further, make a referral to the CSD for screening. The screening process allows the LD Advisor and student the opportunity to examine possible causes for academic difficulty. The LD Advisor may refer the student to a registered psychologist or registered psychological associate for a more in-depth assessment.

The Impact of Learning Disabilities

No two individuals share exactly the same type of learning disability. As each individual is unique, so too is their learning disability.

H.G.

The following diagram identifies areas potentially affected by learning disabilities.



Because of the heterogeneous nature of learning disabilities, each individual will exhibit a unique learning profile, and varying patterns and degrees of both deficits and strengths.



FAQs

What should I do if a student with a learning disability approaches me and asks for my help?

Students are usually in the best position to know what help they need. Ask what has worked for him or her in the past and if possible, provide an equivalent support. Students should be able to describe their areas of strength and deficit to you. You may also want to talk with the student's LD Advisor to understand the specifics of his or her learning needs.

Why don't students tell me about their learning disability?

Students are frequently embarrassed by their learning disability and have experienced situations in which they have felt ashamed because of it. It is not unusual for parents or teachers to have attributed their problems with academic tasks to laziness, poor effort, or stupidity. Some may have even have come to believe this of themselves. Students may also fear how you will react to them when they tell you, or that they will "blow it" when they attempt to disclose. Patient receptivity and interest on your part will help allay their apprehension.



FMI (see Additional Resources)

➡ Refer to the handbook section on Teaching Strategies for Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities for further ideas about course design, assessment, and other teaching strategies that are particularly effective for helping students with learning disabilities.

Additional Challenges Faced by First Year Students

First-year students are often unprepared for the increased demands of university life. These demands can be especially challenging for students with learning disabilities. Some of the most common challenges and associated impacts are summarized below.

- **Decrease in structure and increase in independence**
Students with learning disabilities typically benefit from (or need) a well-structured environment. In high school their lives may have been managed by well meaning teachers and parents. Because the university environment does not provide this type of structure and support, they may encounter difficulties with time and task management, frustration and lowered self-esteem.

- **Increased level of cognitive demands**
Students with learning disabilities tend to be passive learners who lack metacognitive strategies (i.e., they lack understanding of “how to learn”) and may have information processing difficulties. Faced with demands

for higher levels of analysis and synthesis, students with learning disabilities can easily become overwhelmed.

○ **Desire to “do it on their own”**

First year students generally have unrealistic expectations of university life. Students with learning disabilities often believe university is a time to put aside their disability issues and try it on their own (i.e., they do not seek accommodations for coursework or exams). Despite their willingness to put in extra work, those with learning disabilities (particularly those who decide to try a full course load) can run into academic difficulty.

○ **Lack of effective study skills**

Like many first year students, students with learning disabilities often lack study skills and other strategies needed to be successful at university. In addition, because of their learning deficits, they may not develop these critical skills at the same rate and to the same degree as their non-disabled peers, and may have more difficulty generalizing and applying them.

Assessment of Learning Disabilities

Finding out more about my learning disability

through my assessment was one of the greatest reliefs of my academic career. The assessment explained why (in public and high school) I was placed in classes with people who were very disabled, even mentally retarded, yet I associated with students who were the brightest and most academically successful...Finally I had a document to confirm all my suspicions that the grades I was receiving in high school were not a reflection of my ability.

N.M.

The assessment of a learning disability is a comprehensive and exhaustive process that takes time, expertise and good clinical judgement. Assessments are undertaken by qualified professionals using a battery of tests that examine such things as intellectual and academic functioning, information processing, social-emotional functioning and other determinants of learning ability.

At the University of Guelph, we ask that assessments be current in order to understand each student's level of functioning. We also ask that recommendations for appropriate accommodations be included in the assessment report. The Learning Disability Advisor carefully reviews all assessments to ensure that they meet the criteria set out by the University and so that CSD staff can answer faculty questions regarding each student's learning needs.



FAQs

How do I know if one of my students has been formally diagnosed and isn't just claiming to have a learning disability?

All students with learning disabilities requesting support and/or accommodation through the CSD must register with the Centre each semester. Students meet with an LD Advisor early in the semester and a letter is written to each instructor outlining appropriate accommodations for the course. Students are asked to share these letters with their instructors early in the semester.

Some students with learning disabilities may choose not to register with the CSD, or do not know that this letter is required. Faculty are under no obligation to accommodate these students. If a student approaches you without a letter from the CSD, claiming to have a diagnosed learning disability and requests accommodation, the student should be referred to the CSD.

Does the CSD ever recommend accommodation without formal documentation or while an assessment is being undertaken?

All students who request support and/or accommodation from the CSD must provide formal documentation, signed by a qualified professional who supports the diagnosis of a learning disability. However, in some circumstances students may have outdated or weak documentation. In such cases, where the LD Advisor strongly believes that the student can obtain a diagnosis of a specific learning disability, that student may be provided with

some accommodation until their documentation can be verified or updated. Such accommodations are limited to extra time for exams and writing the exam in a room apart from the rest of the class. Where a student is being provided with limited accommodation as outlined above, this is clearly stated in the student's letter.



FMI (see Additional Resources)

- |||▶ Guidelines for the Documentation of a Learning Disability, University of Guelph (1999)

- |||▶ Association for Higher Education Guidelines for the Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults (<http://www.ahead.org/ldguide.htm>)

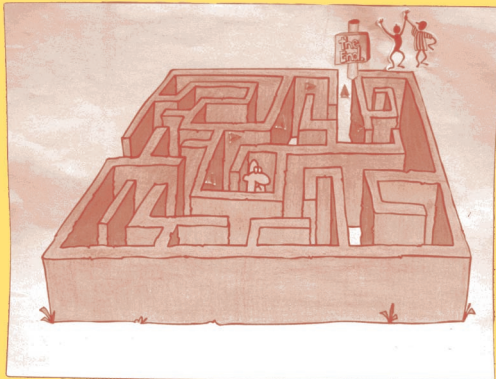
Programs, Services & Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities



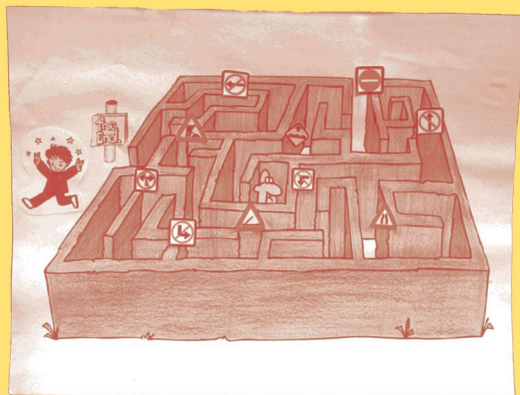
Having a learning disability is like being in a very large maze. There is only one way out and there are many different paths to take...A student with a learning disability needs a sort of guide who has taken the same path in their own life...The guide knows exactly what corners to turn and perhaps is even able to see patterns in the maze that the student does not recognize. By teaching these patterns and directing the students with a learning disability, the student can choose which route is best for him/her. It is often the case that for such a student there is only one path to take and once he/she recognizes it, the road ahead is clear and the confusion lifts.

S.H.

A Brain Without a Learning Disability



A Brain With a Learning Disability



J.R/S.S.

Programs and Services

Students with learning disabilities can receive support through a variety of programs and services including those offered by the Centre for Students with Disabilities (CSD) and the Learning Opportunities Program (LOP).

Centre for Students with Disabilities

Ext. 6208, University Centre, 3rd Floor

The CSD offers a variety of resources and services to students with learning disabilities, as well as to those who have hearing, vision, medical, physical or psychological disabilities. Advisors provide support and referral and ensure that recommended classroom and exam accommodations are available to the student. LD Advisors are available to deal with LD-specific issues (see below). Other supports provided by the CSD include writing tutors, note takers, library support, adaptive technology, and examination rooms and supervision.

Learning Opportunities Program

Ext. 8312, University Centre, 3rd Floor

In addition to the programs and services provided through the CSD, students in the LOP participate in:

- PSYC*1300 - Learning Disabilities: Experience to Understanding;

- Summer Transition Program;
- LOP Orientation;
- ongoing monitoring of progress with the LOP advisor.

All LOP students are also eligible to participate in the LOP Career Preparation and Workplace program and an interactive webpage and conferencing system.

The Role of the Advisor to Students with Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities are encouraged to meet with a LD Advisor through either the CSD or LOP. The LD Advisor carefully reviews all documentation provided by the students to ensure that it meets the criteria developed by the University of Guelph. The Advisor is also available to discuss issues such as course selection and housing needs. Where appropriate, the Advisor may encourage students to consider a reduced course load. Once courses are selected, the Advisor works with each student to negotiate accommodation recommendations and to help him or her develop an action plan for the semester.

The Advisor also provides ongoing support and consultation throughout the semester. This may involve assistance in developing learning or compensatory strategies, or reconsidering the recommended accommodations. When requested, the Advisor may refer a student to other professionals on campus, such as personal counsellors, career services staff, academic advisors etc.

I would always try to make up excuses when my friends finished work before me or better understood what the readings meant. I used the “I’m not feeling well” or “I just didn’t do it” lines. But I really did do the work. Sometimes I would have to do twice as much work as my classmates just to be at the same academic standard. I had no confidence in myself and I found it harder to socialize with my peers and teachers. I felt like I was in a world of my own, all alone.

Over the summer of grade 12 I was diagnosed with a learning disability... Most of my teachers were helpful in giving me extra time on tests but that was all. Most of my teachers did not believe in disabilities unless they were disabilities they could see with their eyes. They would help me for a while, but then felt they had done their good deed and treated me just like everyone else, and I felt like I was in that lonely world again.

Then I was introduced to the Learning Opportunities Program at Guelph. I was able to understand my disability better, meet people who were at University to help students like myself, and most importantly, meet other students with learning disabilities. Once in a world alone, I was surrounded by people I could talk to and relate to.

M.M.



FMI (see Additional Resources)

▶ Learning Disabilities Program Information Sheets,
University of Guelph (2000)

Accommodations

Students with learning disabilities often require and are provided with accommodations. Accommodations are methods of circumventing areas of disability such as having text books on audiotape, providing extra time to process exam questions etc. Accommodations are meant to provide students with learning disabilities with “equal” opportunities for success. They are not designed to give students with disabilities an unfair advantage.

Determining Appropriate Accommodations

One of the greatest challenges for advisors working with students with learning disabilities is determining what are reasonable accommodations. Advisors have an obligation to ensure equal educational opportunity for students with learning disabilities while at the same time protecting the integrity of the University’s courses.

As a result, accommodations are recommended with careful consideration to the following:

- the nature and severity of the learning disability;
- the requirements of the course of study (format of exam, objectives of the course, method of instruction);
- the learning and compensatory strategies developed by the student;
- the individual needs of the student.

Not all accommodations are necessary for every student with a learning disability. Indeed, some students do not require any accommodation at all, or minimal accommodation depending on the particular situation. The need for specific accommodations may change over time as the student develops compensatory strategies, or as the demands of a particular course, task or faculty member change. Some of the most commonly recommended accommodations for exams include extra time, a separate room, and the use of word processing software. In-class accommodations may include note takers to supplement the student's own notes, or hard copies of the instructor's overheads.



FAQs

What do I do if I disagree with the recommended accommodations?

If you have questions about the accommodations recommended for a student in your course, contact the CSD and speak with the student's Advisor. These discussions can be very useful for clarifying misunderstandings and reaching mutually acceptable solutions.

What role do note takers play in supporting students with LD? How can I help find note takers in my class?

Students with learning disabilities typically have great difficulty taking notes. Many experience difficulty processing auditory and/or visual information quickly and accurately (i.e., depending on their area of deficit). In addition, slow handwriting may make taking effective notes virtually impossible.

Students who have note takers have a responsibility to attend class and continue to take notes. The note taker provides a set of notes to supplement those taken by the student. Students with learning disabilities often find that this results in them becoming better listeners, processing the material more effectively, and in many cases becoming better note takers themselves.

The CSD may request that you make an announcement early in the semester to assist in finding a volunteer. Note takers tell us that they themselves have become better listeners and note takers as a result of their role.

Examinations and the CSD

Many students with learning disabilities require some form of exam accommodation (e.g., quiet room, longer time, computer assistance). Often this results in the exam being written at the CSD. In such cases, the procedures listed below are followed.

- Students are required to provide the CSD with a Special Exam Request Form (SERF) signed by the instructor at least one week prior to midterms and several weeks prior to finals. The SERFs are kept on file in the CSD for one year.
- Three days prior to the exam the CSD will contact the department and arrange for the exam to be picked up.
- The day before the exam a CSD courier will arrive and bring the exam back to the CSD where it is recorded and secured under lock and key.
- When a student arrives for an exam, a proctor will escort the student to a room and give him/her the exam.
- Exams taken in the CSD are carefully invigilated. There are windows in the exam room doors and the group room is electronically monitored. All materials taken into the

exam rooms, such as pencil cases, are checked. Students are also regularly checked during the exam and exam papers are randomly searched for disallowed material.

- After the exam is completed, it is again recorded and secured under lock and key.
- Exams are returned to the departments by courier the day after they are written, or sooner if special arrangements have been made.



What happens if a student is suspected of academic misconduct?

In the event that a student is suspected of academic misconduct (e.g., questionable material is found), the student is allowed to finish the exam, but the material is confiscated and the course instructor is called. The material is returned to the course instructor along with the exam and a written report describing the incident. It is left to the course instructor to determine what should be done.

Rights & Responsibilities (Faculty, CSD, Students)



This poem reflects my opinion that it is really stressful, hard, and at times disappointing to have a learning disability, but no matter what, you can't give up.

J.B.

Barriers, low blows, upper cuts
You're on your own
Questions of life and worth

Disappointment of results
Work caused blood, sweat and tears
Mind can only do what it is capable

Stress in body and mind
Hopelessness is many
Why go on?

Go on cause what else is there?
Life is a challenge for everyone
Hard for some

But you get nowhere without effort
Have to recognize the set back
Work harder if not for you, to prove others wrong

Can't make it where you're going if you don't know

Who you were
Who you are
Who you want to be
And who you can be!

Rights & Responsibilities

The following rights and responsibilities statements are adapted from *Students with Disabilities: Policies and Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs*, a report developed by the University of Guelph (December, 1994). These guidelines provide the University of Guelph with a framework for upholding its obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code (1981) which “prohibits discrimination on the grounds of handicap.” The Code states that:

- “Services, goods and facilities cannot be denied to someone because they have a disability”;
- “The needs of persons with disabilities must be accommodated in a manner which most respects their dignity, if to do so does not create undue hardship”.

The phrase “respects their dignity” means that the University must respond to students with learning disabilities in a manner which recognizes their right to privacy, confidentiality, comfort, autonomy and self-esteem, maximizes their integration, and promotes their full participation in the University community. The University sees the provision of advocacy, support services and accommodations as a shared responsibility amongst all members of our community. The University is also committed to upholding the rights and responsibilities outlined below.

Rights

- Qualified students with disabilities are guaranteed the right to an education at the University of Guelph, and in the program of their choice.

- The University of Guelph holds the right to admit students to its programs and courses.
- The University of Guelph holds the right to grant degrees to those who have met its requirements.

Responsibilities

The **University of Guelph** has the responsibility to:

- respond effectively to the request for accommodations and provide physical access to all its facilities and services.

The **Centre for Students with Disabilities** has the responsibility to:

- review all documentation to ensure its validity and make recommendations as to appropriate services and accommodations;
- coordinate programs to assist students with disabilities, in conjunction with other University offices and faculty members, to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are addressed;
- provide resources to faculty to support them in accommodating and working with students with disabilities;
- work with students and faculty to resolve disagreements regarding recommended accommodations.

Students with disabilities who are accepted into the University of Guelph have the responsibility to:

- identify their unique needs (with the support of the CSD);

- provide relevant psychological or medical documentation to the CSD in order to demonstrate eligibility for accommodations and to access services;
- ensure that sufficient notice is given to enable the University to make the necessary accommodations for their disabilities;
- work with the appropriate faculty member and the CSD to resolve any disagreements regarding accommodation.

Faculty members have the responsibility to:

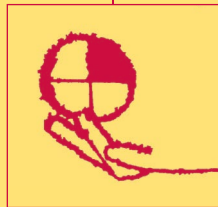
- work toward understanding the nature of the needs of students with disabilities and the accommodations required;
- establish and clearly communicate course objectives (supported by the academic department and the program committee) and determine if the requested accommodations jeopardize these objectives (in conjunction with the CSD);
- adhere to students' requests for those accommodations and services that are substantiated by the CSD;
- work with students and the CSD to resolve disagreements regarding accommodation.



FMI (see **Additional Resources**)

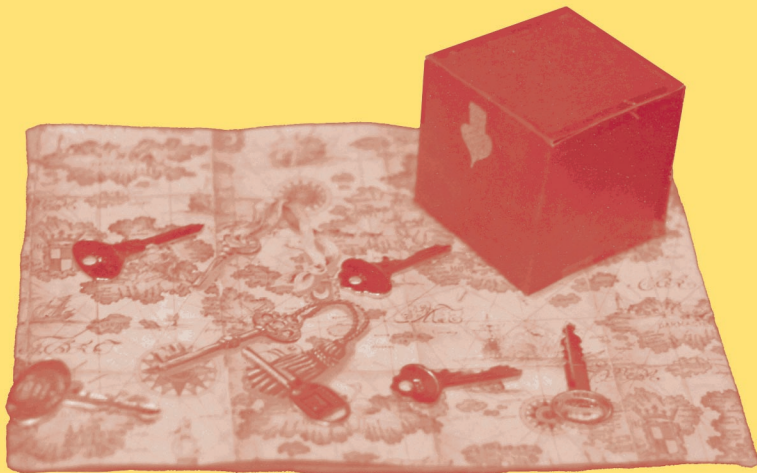
▶ Students with Disabilities: Policies and Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs, University of Guelph (1994)

Teaching Strategies for Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities



My visual metaphor is based on how students with learning disabilities come to realize which method is most effective for them. The box symbolizes the hidden skills that will be effective for the individual, however, the individual cannot unlock these specific skills without trying many different keys (each key signifies a strategy to be used). Only then when you find the strategy best suited to your needs (which may take many years for some people) will “the key” unlock specific compensatory skills—“the little black box” which makes time devoted to learning and studying simplified and more efficient. Although learning is a great challenge for those with LD, learning becomes more manageable and can at this point be looked upon as a positive experience.

S.H.



Teaching Strategies

There are many teaching strategies used by University of Guelph faculty that are especially helpful for students with learning disabilities. These strategies provide students with the opportunity to:

- fully understand what is expected from the course;
- have a thorough understanding of how to adequately prepare for each class session;
- communicate with faculty members, teaching assistants, and peers in a non-threatening environment;
- learn using a variety of materials and activities;
- learn in an active manner;
- work at one's own pace;
- receive regular feedback on performance and ideas;
- monitor their own learning and course progress.

Suggestions for achieving these outcomes are provided in the pages that follow.



▶ Visit the TSS web site (www.tss.uoguelph.ca)

Getting Started

Sometimes when things feel like they're at their worst, I forget that there is hope. That is one thing I can't afford to lose.

J.S.

Students with learning disabilities often have difficulty with the organization of concepts and ideas. As a result, they may require extra time, guidance and support to process the information effectively. This can be facilitated by providing:

- **A well-written course syllabus available well in advance of the first class**

Clearly articulated learning objectives can help direct student effort. In addition, basic information (e.g., text, articles, assignment time lines and due dates) can help students to prepare for the course (e.g., scan their readings into a computer, identify areas of potential difficulty, plan their time). Students also appreciate information that clarifies the instructor's expectations and types of assistance that may be available, should they need it.

- **A positive first class meeting**

The first class meeting can be critical for creating an inclusive classroom environment. Students are more likely to disclose their difficulties, ask questions and seek help if instructors and other students are viewed

as approachable. Introducing oneself, using name cards, photographing the students to help commit their names to memory, and having students introduce themselves to the class or those sitting near them are some of the approaches used by University of Guelph faculty to create positive learning environments.

○ **A clear introduction to course concepts**

Connecting and integrating information can be difficult for some students with learning disabilities. Students benefit when a context or a clear introduction to the subject is provided at the beginning of a course. This information should include links to other courses the students may have taken, or experiences they may have had.

In-Class Instruction

Students with learning disabilities may require additional time to read and process overheads, and to organize and record lecture content. Some may be confused about what to write down, find writing and/or printing slow and arduous, and experience difficulty in their ability to sequence and/or integrate material. Also, because they may have deficits in one or more learning modalities a multi-sensory learning and teaching approach can be highly beneficial. Students who use a variety of senses are the most effective learners; they are able to draw on areas of strength to compensate for areas of weakness. Strategies faculty use for helping with these issues and compensating for their students' difficulties are listed below.

○ **Being organized and emphasizing key points**

- beginning each class with an outline of material to be covered;
- connecting the current class with information previously covered;
- presenting ideas in a logical sequence and making the logic explicit;
- reinforcing main ideas through voice modulation and emphasis (e.g., “The key finding was...”, “It is critical to appreciate that...”);
- writing key words on the black board or overhead;
- concluding the class by having the students summarize key points (e.g., asking, “What are the three most important things you’ve just learned?”);

- planning and pacing the class to avoid rushing or speaking too quickly.

○ **Using a variety of learning and teaching approaches**

- varying the teaching/learning approach at least every 20 minutes;
- using active learning strategies (e.g., problem solving, debates, case studies, small group discussion, effective questioning, games, role plays, demonstrations);
- using multi-media (e.g., video, audio, blackboard, overheads, presentation software).

○ **Being aware of student needs and supporting areas of difficulty**

- using frequent pauses to allow students time to process what they've heard or read;
- having students move around during class time (e.g., stretch breaks, having students assist with demonstrations, student presentations, forming groups);
- asking questions that check for comprehension;
- clarifying points of confusion when they arise;
- reading aloud key text on overheads to assist students who read more slowly or benefit from auditory input;
- providing copies of course notes and overheads (either partial or complete) in a course pack, on reserve at the Library, or on a course web site so students can focus on what is being said and done, as opposed to recording content.



FMI (see Additional Resources)

- ▶ National Centre for Learning Disabilities Inc. Enhancing the Performance of Adult Learners with Learning Disabilities (<http://novel.nifl.gov/nalld/Feedback.htm>)

Evaluation & Assessment

Completing assignments and writing exams are stressful experiences for most students. Students with learning disabilities often face additional challenges such as concentration, organization, and reading and spelling difficulties, which make evaluations even more stressful. Techniques that help alleviate stress and provide students with the opportunity to fully demonstrate their understanding of course material include:

- **Multiple tests or assignments (i.e., rather than one or two major exams)**

Students with learning disabilities may demonstrate mastery of material more effectively if they are given the opportunity to process, learn and apply course content in smaller chunks.

- **Variety in assessment methods (e.g., projects, essays, exams, presentations, interviews, class participation)**

Given that students with learning disabilities often have diverse profiles, they are frequently better able to demonstrate their learning in some assignment or examination formats than others.

- **Clear questions**

Students with language-based learning disabilities frequently have difficulty understanding the wording of questions on exams. Avoid complex sentence structures, double negatives, and imbedded questions.

○ **Practice exam questions**

Student preparation is enhanced when faculty present similar question formats in class, discuss what they mean by the terms in the questions, and provide sample answers. Placing old exams on reserve in the library or developing on-line tutorials can also help students monitor their own progress. Students with learning disabilities can be unaware of how much they've learned and how much they still need to know.

○ **Detailed and timely feedback**

Helping students understand where they may have gone wrong and how to avoid similar errors in the future makes evaluation a learning tool. Providing positive feedback makes evaluation a motivational tool.

○ **Clear and appropriate time lines**

Students with learning disabilities often have weak time and task management skills. Knowing deadlines is an essential first step, particularly given the additional time that may be needed to compensate for areas of deficit. For major assignments, time lines that break down the assignment into smaller units, each with its own deadline, can be particularly helpful. Providing sufficient time helps ensure that student grades are more reflective of the mastery of course concepts than of the ability to work quickly.



FAQs

Should students with learning disabilities be marked differently?

Having a learning disability does not imply that the essential requirements of any course should be modified or watered down. To do so would undermine the integrity of the course. The challenge for students with learning disabilities (and their Advisor) is to find creative ways to **learn** the material and **demonstrate** this learning to instructors. By providing accommodations such as oral supplements to exams, writing short answers to multiple choice questions, using a computer with a spell check to write essay questions, or additional time, students with learning disabilities may be able to more effectively demonstrate what they have learned.

Educational Technology

Used effectively, emerging educational technologies can be valuable teaching tools. For example, through e-mail, a course listserv, or a web-based conferencing system students can receive timely information about course work and assignments, join a group discussion or post questions to the course instructor or TA. Students with learning disabilities may find electronic communication to be much less threatening than a face to face exchange. In addition, this medium, unlike the classroom, provides students with ample time to reflect on questions asked and process information, before constructing their response.

Other web-based technological enhancements include:

- **web-based quizzing**, which can provide students with the opportunity to monitor course progress and practice particular examination formats;
- **calendars** to help students stay on track with class preparation, assigned readings and course assignments;
- **alternative learning formats**, such as video, 3-D and animations, which can help students understand difficult course concepts;
- **lecture notes or outlines** made available through the course web site, minimizing the need for note takers.

Along with the growth in web-based technology there has been a comparable increase in adaptive technology. This includes voice recognition software, print to voice scanners, screen readers, and organizers as well as the more familiar spelling and grammar checkers. This technology is available for student use in the CSD and the Library Centre for Students with Disabilities.

Additional Resources



Resources and Recommended Web Sites from the CSD

The CSD maintains a collection of materials on learning disabilities including books, journal articles, videos, and policy documents. If you would like to have a copy of or borrow any of the items listed in this section please contact Carol Herriot, LD Specialist, at the Centre for Students with Disabilities. Items for distribution will be mailed directly as available. For items to be loaned, you will be contacted to arrange a loan period.

The CSD also maintains a list of recommended web-sites. We encourage you to visit the following:

Association for Higher Education Guidelines for the Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults

<http://www.ahead.org/ldguide.htm>

Centre for Students with Disabilities, University of Guelph

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/csdc/csd>

International Dyslexia Association

<http://www.interdys.org>

LDOnline

<http://www.ldonline.org>

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

<http://edu-ss10.educ.queensu.ca/~lda>

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

<http://www.ldao.on.ca>

Learning Opportunities Program, University of Guelph

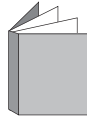
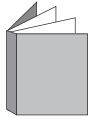
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/csdc/csd/lop>

National Centre for Learning Disabilities Inc.

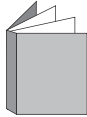
<http://www.nclld.org>

**National Centre for Learning Disabilities Inc.–Enhancing
the Performance of Adult Learners with Learning
Disabilities**

<http://novel.nifl.gov/nalld/Feedback.htm>



Order Form



Order Form

Please photocopy, complete, and mail this form to Carol Herriot, LD Specialist, at the Centre for Students with Disabilities.

Information Packages:

Defining Learning Disabilities, University of Guelph, 1999

(14 pages)

Presents various definitions of learning disabilities and the areas with which students with LD often have difficulty.

Guidelines for the Documentation of a Learning Disability, University of Guelph, 1999 (2 pages).

Outlines the components necessary for a valid documentation of a learning disability and the need for accommodation.

Learning Disabilities Program Information Sheets, University of Guelph, 2000, (12 pages).

Information sheets describing components of the LOP and the CSD, and the LOTF operational definition of LD for determining the eligibility of students.

Report to the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF) Relating to the Services provided to Students with Learning Disabilities in a Post-Secondary Educational Setting, 1998, (24 pages).

A LOTF study of services and attitudes regarding students with learning disabilities and barriers faced by them in Ontario universities.

Students with Disabilities: Policies and Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs, University of Guelph, 1994 (12 pages).

Outlines relevant section of the Ontario Human Rights Code and policies for facilitating the accommodation of students with disabilities. _____

Available for Loan:

Learning Disabilities: Experience to Understanding, 1999. The course pack of readings used in PSYC*1300 _____

Video: Challenges Facing LD College Students, B.C. Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour (21 min) _____

Video: Instructional Strategies for LD College Students, B.C. Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour (22 min) _____

Video: Transitions to Postsecondary Learning for Students with Learning Disabilities & Attention Deficit Disorder (Eaton Coull Learning Group Ltd.(47 min) _____

Video: Understanding Learning Disabilities: How Difficult Can it Be? Eagle Hill School Outreach (70 min) _____

Name: _____ Ext: _____

Department: _____

E-mail: _____

Notes

