Learning Disabilities

Description of impairment

Students with learning disabilities generally have average to above average intelligence, but have specific difficulties acquiring and demonstrating knowledge and understanding. Students with learning disabilities have significant difficulties in one or more specific skill area (math computation, written expression, etc.) and have deficit information processing mechanisms. Learning disabilities are sometimes classified as "invisible" disabilities because they are not as readily apparent as other types of disabilities such as mobility impairments.

The effects of a learning disability can range from mild to severe. Often students with learning disabilities may also have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). Other disabilities such as psychiatric impairments may also be present.

Specific types of learning disabilities include:

- Visual perception problems – letter and word reversals, may confuse letters, numbers or symbols that are similar (i.e. b and d, g and q)
- Auditory perception problems – difficulty differentiating between sounds, unable to screen out background noise when listening to lecture
- Motor coordination problems – poor fine motor coordination, poor ability to listen and take notes at the same time
- Spatial perception problems – difficulty judging distances, difficulty following directions
- Memory problems – difficulty retrieving information stored in the brain; more difficulty with short term memory retrieval
- Sequencing problems – difficulty with the order and arrangement of letters and numbers, difficulty understanding the structure of a lecture, a reading passage, or a math equation

For students with learning disabilities, auditory, visual, or tactile information can become jumbled at any point during the acquisition, storage, organization, retrieval, use and /or demonstration of verbal or nonverbal abilities and skills, as shown in the following examples:

- a student with a learning disability may take longer to process written information and may need additional time to complete a test
- a student with a learning disability may find it difficult to organize and articulate ideas in a classroom environment and may need to make a video of a required in-class presentation

- a student with a learning disability may experience difficulties with specific processes and/or subject areas, such as understanding and being able to apply complex steps to solve algebraic equations or understanding and being able to readily apply verb conjugations in a foreign language and may require consideration of an appropriate math or foreign language substitution
- a student with a learning disability may have difficulty spelling and subsequently have difficulty creating or editing text or communicating in writing and may require the use of a laptop computer during an essay test or an essay portion of a test

A student with a learning disability typically has the intelligence to be a *successful student***, but may not have the necessary skills or strategies to be a** *successful learner***.**

Common accommodations provided in the classroom by instructor:

- access to class notes
- tape recordings of class lectures
- use of laptop for note-taking
- extended test time and/ or testing in a low distraction area
- alternative test formats/ arrangements (i.e. enlarged print, being able to answer questions on the test paper instead of a scantron sheet, being able to dictate responses, etc.)
- access to books in electronic format
- availability of lecture notes, learning materials, practice tests, etc. in electronic format
- use of spell checker or calculator, if appropriate

General classroom considerations:

- concise course syllabus
- providing written lecture outlines, copies of overheads, study guides before tests
- breaking larger amounts of information or new or difficult concepts into smaller parts or steps
- starting each class with an overview of materials to be presented; concluding each class with a brief summary/review of key points; providing time for questions
- reinforcing verbal directions in written format

- providing print copies of project descriptions, detailed instructions for a research paper, etc. if not already specified in the course syllabus
- including use of board, overhead projector, handouts, videos, group discussion, role-playing, etc. when presenting (All students benefit from seeing, hearing, and experiencing information, especially new information, when presented in such a manner.)
- visual, aural, and tactile demonstrations incorporated into instruction

For more information on working with students with learning disabilities go to: http://www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty and www.ldonline.org