

Advising Students with Disabilities

A student with a disability may have a variety of issues related to their disability they should consider when being advised. In order to encourage these students to tell you of their disability-related needs, please tell your advisees “If you have a disability and believe it will impact the courses you plan to take or your class schedule, please feel free to share it with me. Such information will be kept confidential.” Remember not to pressure a student to share his or her disability with you, but it is alright to open up the conversation using the previously mentioned statement.

If an advisee discloses to you that s/he has a disability, you should consider the following specific topics.

1. Course Selection & Load

Students with disabilities need to independently manage their disability and recognize their strengths and limitations. For students with cognitive disorders (e.g., learning disabilities and AD/HD), they may have to learn how to effectively study, manage time, and remember homework assignments and test dates without reminders and/or assistance from parents or high school resource staff. Students with disabilities should take into consideration the following factors when creating a schedule:

- Number of hours in which they are enrolled;
- Style of course it is (e.g., lecture, discussion, lab, etc.);
- Exam formats (e.g., essay, multiple choice);
- Size of the class; and
- Amount of work required in each class. Students are encouraged to vary their courses in order to avoid placing themselves in a situation where they are required to take a number of classes that focus upon the challenges of their disability (e.g., 4 reading-intensive courses for a student with a reading disorder). Students are also encouraged to create a schedule which allows them to balance their academics with other areas of their lives so they can be engaged and successful in both. **Typically, 12-15 hours is a good starting point.**

2. Timing of Classes

Students with disabilities should consider when their courses are scheduled. Encourage students to think about what time of day they perform best, both with alertness to pay attention and participate in classes, as well as to complete class readings and homework assignments. Also, they should consider whether they want to take MWF classes that meet more frequently but require less time per day, or TTh classes that don't meet as often but last longer. Lastly, encourage students to think about any current medications they may be taking and how these may affect their sleep and/or study habits. (Again, students should not feel pressured to disclose that they are taking medication.) Students who require a routine doctor appointment will also need to consider the time of day they choose to take their classes in order to construct a schedule which will allow them to maintain these appointments.

3. Time between Classes

The amount of time scheduled between classes should also be taken into consideration by students with certain disabilities. For example, students with mobility impairments should construct a schedule that allows them enough time to get from one class to the next. Additionally, students who use extended time for exams and quizzes should consider avoiding back-to-back classes in order to guarantee this accommodation will not interfere with another class. Some students may also need to schedule breaks to eat because their medicine requires it or they need to maintain blood sugar levels.

4. Academic Requirement Modifications

Students with disabilities may occasionally be allowed modifications to the academic requirements of a program as an accommodation due to the nature of their disability and how it affects their ability to meet such requirements. Decisions regarding such modifications are determined through DSS in conjunction with the DRC (faculty committee) and Academic Affairs administrators.

If a student mentions that he or she cannot take a PE class, for example, let the student know that this type of modification is determined through DSS. Encourage the student to contact DSS right away as these types of disability-related requests may take a while to evaluate and determine appropriate next steps.

A student who mentions that they are already approved for a course substitution should also be advised to contact DSS right away to discuss the situation. If the student has already worked with DSS regarding the situation, it should be reflected in his/ her program evaluation.

Additional online resources for Faculty Advisors and other academic advisors include the following:

- National Academic Advising Association's *Advising Students with Disabilities*
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/disability.htm>
- DO-IT's *Equal Access: Universal Design of Advising*
http://www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Academics/equal_access_adv.html
- UC Berkley's Teaching Students with Disabilities
<http://www.dsp.berkeley.edu/teachstudentswithdisab>

Should you have any questions regarding advising students with disabilities, please feel free to contact DSS by phone at extension 3878 or by email wjimene@callutheran.edu.

Contents of this hand-out have been revised from Student Accessibility Services- Trinity University