

# ***Accommodative Services Faculty Handbook***

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## FACULTY HANDBOOK FOR CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this publication is intended to clarify the legal obligations of the institution regarding students with disabilities and to provide other information which will assist faculty in providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities who follow Union's Policy. Union's faculty has been responsive to the needs of a wide variety of students and continues to show great flexibility in instruction and advising without diluting the quality or the expectations of the educational experience. Inevitably, questions regarding best practices and procedures are bound to arise.

Our hope is that this handbook will help our students receive the reasonable accommodation that they request and require in a consistent fashion, while at the same time it provides faculty with a clear explanation of the college's policies and procedures, as well as helpful tips on how to effectively provide the reasonable accommodations for qualified students.

Working with individuals with disabilities is a rewarding and challenging opportunity. Most individuals with these difficulties have worked very hard to make it to college despite impairments, yet some are better prepared than others for the transition to higher education. Thus, each student will present a unique combination of strengths and challenges to be considered in interacting with them. Working closely with them and engaging in a dialogue with the student and Accommodative Services with regard to what is working and what is posing a potential difficulty is often the best way to meet their needs, as well as yours as an instructor. Also, it's worth noting that some individuals do not view their conditions as handicaps or disabilities, but "differences" or "challenges." Thus, one may encounter variations of terminology in conversations with them and others. Federal regulations define such difficulties as "disabilities" and we will refer to them as such in this handbook for the sake of consistency.

The handbook provides an overview of Union's approach and the relevant legislation for the College and its faculty. It then describes procedures for providing classroom accommodations and also discusses some of the different types of accommodations and appropriate strategies. The handbook concludes with a discussion of some of Union's formal policies and contains an appendix with a more detailed discussion of specific types of disabilities for those faculty members who are interested. For additional guidance, including several brief videos that explain the various types of disabilities, check out [Faculty Resources](#) on the Accommodative Services webpage.

If there is a discrepancy between information contained in this handbook and the College's Policy on Students with Disabilities (found in the Student Handbook), as amended from time to time, the College Policy on Students with Disabilities will prevail.

## **UNION'S PHILOSOPHY**

Our philosophy at Union College is to integrate qualified students with disabilities into the College community and to encourage the growth of the individual in developing self-advocating strategies for living with their disability.

Union College is committed to fostering a supportive environment for all our students. The College strongly promotes this self-advocacy on the part of our students and encourages them to take primary responsibility to see that their needs are being met and that any issues or concerns are raised in a timely fashion.

Shared Responsibility As employees of Union College with compliance obligations under federal laws, faculty members assume a shared responsibility in providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. These laws are described briefly in the next section.

The College is responsible for implementation, and as employees faculty are required to adhere to policies and procedures in good faith. There may be considerable fruitful discussion on how disabilities are regarded under the law, but ultimately we all have a responsibility to meet our legal obligations. The primary responsibility for meeting the academic needs of individuals with disabilities through reasonable accommodations has been assigned to the Director of Accommodative Services. The Director can be a resource for faculty. By working together we can strive to provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in higher education. Should questions or concerns arise they can usually be addressed through discussions with the Director, who will consult with the Dean of Studies regarding academic issues.

This sharing of responsibilities to help meet the needs of our students has proved to be highly effective because of the efforts and flexibility of our faculty.

## **LAWS SUPPORTING THE NEED FOR SERVICES**

Our interpretation of our legal obligations at the college level is essentially about access and opportunity. Reasonable accommodations provide equal access and do not guarantee success. The use of eyeglasses is an example most commonly compared to

academic accommodations. Extended time allows a student the time needed to process and demonstrate what they know. Eyeglasses allow one to have the vision that they should normally have without a visual impairment. Similar to the use of eyeglasses, this accommodation allows the student the time to show what he or she knows without imposing a fundamental alteration of an academic requirement.

### **1973 Vocational Rehabilitation Act Section 504**

Colleges and universities nationwide have been protecting rights of students with disabilities since the 1973 Vocational Rehabilitation Act, specifically, Section 504, which states:

“No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States... shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

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

Unlike Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the ADA applies to employers, public services, public accommodations, communication providers and transportation providers regardless of whether they receive or benefit from federal funding. The ADA defines a person with a disability to mean a person who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
- has a record of such an impairment;
- is regarded as having such an impairment.

### **ACCOMMODATIVE SERVICES**

Accommodative Services coordinates assistance for students with disabilities in order to promote equal access to College programs and services. The office seeks to assist students and their families in making the necessary arrangements to facilitate full participation in academic and extracurricular pursuits. Union College’s adoption of policies is aimed at complying with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and applicable local, state and federal statutes regarding nondiscrimination against persons with disabilities.

Accommodative Services is located in Schaffer Library, Room 222. The Director, Shelly Harrington, is available for consultation and may be contacted by email at [harrings@union.edu](mailto:harrings@union.edu), or by telephone: (518) 388-8785, or fax: (518) 388-7175.

Eligibility for Services: Accommodative Services provides services for a wide variety of students who have documented disabilities. Any student who has a mobility impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment, head injury, a diagnosed learning disability, attention deficit disorder, or any other physical or mental impairment which substantially limits a major life activity, is eligible for reasonable accommodations. Students with chronic illnesses, e.g., diabetes, seizure disorder, and psychiatric disabilities may also be eligible for reasonable accommodations, so long as their conditions substantially limit one or more major life activities. The office determines who is eligible for services based upon the diagnosis, functional limitations, and the assessment of specific needs.

The student, or the prospective student, is interviewed, documentation is provided by the student, and reasonable accommodations are recommended and explained to the student. Students are encouraged to take an active role as their own advocate and make use of the services available to them on campus. However, the College cannot require a student to utilize reasonable accommodations.

Accommodation Letter: It is important that faculty refrain from providing academic adjustments to a student claiming a disability without an Accommodation Letter from Accommodative Services. Determining whether a condition rises to the level of being a disability is sometimes a complicated question, and the Director has been charged with that primary responsibility in accordance with College policy. Also, in the interest of fairness, Union College strives for consistency as to how accommodation decisions are made. The next sections of the handbook discuss procedures for accommodations in detail.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

It is appropriate to provide students with reasonable accommodations only if you have received an email notification (with Accommodation Letter) from Shelly Harrington outlining what the approved accommodations are. Should you have any questions or concerns about the nature of any accommodations outlined in the letter, please contact Shelly Harrington immediately. There is more discussion addressing procedural and policy concerns in the later sections of the handbook. Normally, accommodations will need to be provided unless the faculty member believes that they constitute a

substantial change or alteration to an essential element of a course or program or compromise the academic integrity of the expectations in the course.

The most typical accommodations requested and which we may be required by law to provide (given appropriate documentation) include:

- Extended time on in-class written examinations – Qualified students with documented learning disabilities are typically allowed time and a half, although there are a few students with approved double time due to the significance of their disability and/or the presence of comorbid conditions. Please discuss with the student his/her schedule and determine if the student should arrive early or stay late to complete the exam. Some students are concerned about confidentiality. It is important to take this into consideration when making arrangements. The Testing Center may also be able to assist with exam administration if scheduling conflicts arise. Contact [testingcenter@union.edu](mailto:testingcenter@union.edu) to enquire. (See the section on “Extended Time” under Helpful Tips.)
- Note taking Services - Note taking services are provided to approved students with a disability through the provision of hired note takers, use of Glean recording software or a SmartPen, or the use of a laptop for note taking. Occasionally, Accommodative Services may ask a faculty member to assist Accommodative Services in locating an academically strong and reliable student to take notes as a reasonable accommodation. This student is required to upload his notes into Accommodative Services' online portal, AIM; the student with a disability can access these notes by logging in to the system. This is all confidential. The student with a disability is still required to attend class and take general notes. In most instances, a student with a disability may use Glean recording software or a SmartPen for note taking purposes. Both Glean and the SmartPen allow a student to record class lectures. These students are required to sign a user agreement prior to use. Lastly, some students are approved to use their laptops for classroom note taking.

In addition, we have increasing numbers of students with requests for the following accommodations, which may qualify as reasonable accommodations.

- Distraction limited test-taking environment - Faculty are encouraged to provide approved testing accommodations, including a distraction limited testing environment, within their departments when possible because doing so often allows for easier access to faculty during exams should a student have questions; however, the Testing Center is available as an alternative resource for

eligible students. (See the “Helpful Tips” section below, the entry on “Distraction Limited Environment” for suggestions on setting up such an environment.)

The Testing Center provides exam administration services to students with approved testing accommodations. Specifically, the Testing Center offers a distraction limited environment (DLE) and extended time (typically 1.5x, and occasionally 2x, regular exam length) for written exams for students who are DLE approved. The Testing Center can administer and proctor exams for up to 16 students at a time. It is located in Schaffer Library, Room 222. For additional information on the Testing Center or how to schedule an exam, see [Testing Center FAQ for Faculty](#) or go to [Accommodative Services' Testing Center webpage](https://www.union.edu/accommodative-services/testing-center), <https://www.union.edu/accommodative-services/testing-center>.

- Laptop for essay exams - Some qualified students with documented disabilities are eligible to take essay exams on a “clean” word processing laptop. Accommodative Services has several laptops for this purpose. These laptops are not internet accessible and do not have any other documents on them. A student who wishes to use a clean laptop for an in-class essay exam, must reserve the laptop in advance, pick up the laptop from Accommodative Services 10 minutes before the exam, and return it immediately afterwards. Accommodative Services suggests that the faculty member save the typed exam to a USB/memory stick once the student has completed the exam. Alternatively, Accommodative Services will either print the exam and seal it in an envelope or email it to the faculty member. A student who is taking an essay exam in the Testing Center does not need to reserve and pick up a clean laptop prior to the exam. The Testing Center has several word processing laptops available that are kept onsite.

## **SYLLABUS STATEMENT**

When dealing with students and possible reasonable accommodations, it is important that there be clear understanding about both policies and procedures. We therefore strongly recommend that all faculty members include a statement in their syllabi regarding reasonable accommodations. Such a statement makes it clear to students that you are aware that some students require accommodations. It also will help them be more comfortable and forthcoming in contacting you. The written statement will be helpful should a student approach you later on with issues or concerns regarding possible accommodations.

Below you will find two examples of syllabus statements. You may adapt them or develop your own.

**Syllabus Statement:** If you have a specific disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, please provide a letter from Accommodative Services as soon as possible and then we can meet to discuss any necessary special arrangements. Untimely notice could result in a delay in the receipt of reasonable accommodations.

**Syllabus Statement:** It is the policy of Union College to make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and wish to request accommodations to complete your course requirements, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your request and/or contact Accommodative Services at 388-8785. No accommodations will be provided without a letter from Accommodative Services.

Additionally, if you typically do not allow students to use laptops during class, you should consider including the following statement in your syllabus to address the possibility that there may be one or more students in your class who are approved to use a laptop for note taking purposes: "Exceptions for the use of a laptop may be granted for compelling reasons at the discretion of the instructor."

Lastly, you are strongly encouraged to identify and determine how much attendance is considered an essential part of your courses. Accommodative Services may make recommendations to faculty about unique circumstances where reasonable attendance considerations would be beneficial. It is always good practice to clearly state on your course syllabus your attendance requirements.

## **HELPFUL TIPS**

Below you will find some discussion of how to best make arrangements for various types of accommodations. While many of you have had experience providing extra time on exams, some of you may not have yet had to deal with issues such as "alternate environment" or use of laptops for exams. These kinds of accommodations are becoming increasingly prevalent, and you will find suggestions for procedures listed below that will help make the provision of accommodations go more smoothly.

## **Extended Time**

Extended time on in-class written exams does not mean unlimited time. Extended time at Union typically means time and a half, although there are a handful of students who qualify for double time based on the severity of their disability. Allow double time only if it is listed on the letter from Accommodative Services. Discuss with the student at the beginning of the term how this will be arranged. Keep the accommodation confidential and handle it discreetly. The time allotted for the exam should not be extended due to tardiness. Many instructors have the students come a half hour early to begin the exam. About five minutes before class the professor will take the exam and hold it while others are coming in. As the other students come in, the professor will hand out the exams being careful to return the appropriate exam to the student in a discreet manner. If extended time is provided after the exam, try not to single the student out. The precise details of handling the matter should have been worked out in advance. If scheduling the exam with the extended time becomes a challenge or burden, the Testing Center may be able to administer the exam. Contact [testingcenter@union.edu](mailto:testingcenter@union.edu) to enquire.

## **Distraction Limited Environment for Test-taking**

Some students are approved for a distraction limited environment for test taking. As noted above, the Testing Center can administer exams for students approved for a distraction limited testing environment.

Since it will likely be known from the beginning of the term if there is a student in your course who is approved for a distraction limited testing environment, we suggest speaking with that student to discuss testing location options and preferences. The ideal situation is a room located in reasonable proximity to the regular classroom, which will allow the faculty member to check in on the student. Experts recommend a quiet environment in which visual and auditory stimuli are reduced. Other possibilities include a faculty member's office, seminar rooms such as the Tracy Room or Humanities Seminar Room, etc. Faculty need to be comfortable with periodically checking in as opposed to having a proctor present at all times.

The following two considerations are important to keep in mind. First, students in an alternate environment must have access to the same information that is provided to students in the regular exam room (for example, an alteration of an exam question or special instructions); second, if the faculty member is willing to answer questions in the

regular exam, she/he must make sure that the student in the alternate environment has the ability to ask questions.

### **Laptops for Essay Exams**

ASO laptops are NOT internet-enabled, and may be used for approved students taking essay exams in the classroom. Students should reserve a clean laptop from the Accommodative Services Office at least 24 hours in advance of the exam by utilizing the Laptop Reserve Form on the office webpage. The student should pick up the laptop from the Accommodative Services Office (Schaffer Library - Room 222) 10 minutes prior to the exam unless the faculty member objects. If the faculty member is concerned about misuse of the laptop, he or she can pick up the laptop prior to the exam. Once the exam is completed the faculty member can save the exam on a USB drive or have the student immediately walk the exam back to Accommodative Services. The office will print the exam, seal it in an envelope and have the student return it to the faculty member's office. Should there be a time conflict, the office will walk the exam over within 24 hours or the faculty member can retrieve the exam from Accommodative Services. If an exam is scheduled for the evening, the faculty member should hold on to the laptop until the next day when Accommodative Services can retrieve it. If you have any questions, please contact Christine Mongelli prior to the exam.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY/REFERRAL**

Confidentiality Caution: All students, including students with disabilities, have rights under FERPA and the laws referred to above. The faculty are encouraged to refrain from making any statements or creating the implication that qualified students with disabilities, as a group, are any different from the general student population.

In most situations, it is not necessary that the faculty be informed of the nature of a student's disability, only the nature of his or her accommodations, in order to preserve the student's privacy. Faculty should refrain from enquiring about the disability and leave it up to the student to make a disclosure. On occasion, the Director of the Accommodative Services may determine the need to disclose educational information to a faculty member on a "need to know" basis.

Faculty should make reasonable efforts to be sensitive to students with disabilities. The following examples are to provide some guidance to faculty on how to properly address situations that may arise.

Examples:

- Do not ask the student to come to the classroom and then leave with the test in hand.
- Do not place the student in the hall or any other obvious place to take an exam because you want to be close to him or her in case the student has a question.
- Do not ask the student for documentation other than the letter from Accommodative Services.
- Do not discuss the student's needs or accommodations other than in a private place.
- Do not make comparisons between different students and their different needs.
- Do not use a grading standard that is different from the rest of the class.
- Do not give students with disabilities an advantage over the rest of the class; the letter of the law is to give equal access or equal opportunity through the recommended accommodations.
- At the same time, allowing students without accommodations extra time requires extending the allotted time for students with documented accommodations. Do not make assumptions about what is appropriate time for completing various academic tasks.

Referral: Faculty members are encouraged to refer students who advise them that they have a disability to Accommodative Services. Many faculty members find it useful to include in their syllabus a statement encouraging students to seek support from Accommodative Services if they have a disability and believe they may need accommodations in the class. We ask that faculty do not provide any accommodations that you do not offer to the entire class without an Accommodation Letter from Accommodative Services.

## **STUDENT RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

As stated earlier, the philosophy behind our approach to reasonable learning accommodations is to encourage students requesting an accommodation to be independent and self-advocate with regard to their education. Because of this, while applicable statutes (noted above) provide qualified students with disabilities certain rights, they also have responsibilities and we outline these below.

**Qualified Students with Disabilities at Union College have the right to:**

- Access to courses, programs, services, jobs, activities, and facilities available through the College;
- Reasonable, appropriate, and effective accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids determined on an individual basis;
- Appropriate confidentiality of student educational information pertaining to his/her disability with the choice of whom to disclose his or her disability to except as authorized by law;
- Reasonable access to course information made available in appropriate formats.

**Qualified Students with Disabilities at Union College have the responsibility to:**

- Meet the College's qualifications and essential technical, academic, and institutional standards;
- Identify themselves in a timely manner as an individual with a disability when seeking an accommodation;
- Provide documentation from an appropriate source that verifies the nature of the disability, functional limitations, and the need for specific accommodations;
- Follow specific procedures for obtaining reasonable and appropriate accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids.
- Utilize reasonable accommodations in a manner that protects the integrity of the academic process.

Should you as a faculty member have concerns about students with regard to any of these items, do not hesitate to contact Shelly Harrington.

**FACULTY RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

Since providing for students with learning accommodations is a shared and collaborative process, the most important thing is to maintain a dialogue between the faculty member and the Director of Accommodative Services. It is important to distinguish between the provision of the accommodations and their potential impact on

the curricular goals of the course. Should there be issues involving the nature of the curriculum and how it is affected by the accommodations, the Dean of Studies can assist as the liaison with Academic Affairs.

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

- Maintain the College's Academic standards;
- Ask the student to complete the accommodation request process before providing accommodations;
- Ask a student to meet with them to discuss the student's need for reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids;
- Consult with the student and Accommodative Services about the selection of equally effective and appropriate accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids;
- Deny a request for accommodation if the student has not been approved for such accommodation;
- Refuse to provide an accommodation, academic adjustment, and/or auxiliary aids that is/are inappropriate or unreasonable because they may:
  - Constitute a substantial change or alteration to an essential element of a course or program; Lower academic standards or outcome expectations;
  - Result in an unfair advantage;
  - Pose a direct threat to the health and safety of themselves or others; or
  - Pose an undue burden.

The section on Appeals Procedures describes the process of appeal for a student who is dissatisfied with how a recommendation is being handled.

Note: Please note that accommodations such as extended time on exams, alternate testing environment and laptops for essay exams are normally not subject to refusal.

**Faculty at Union College have the responsibility to:**

- Strive to provide that College courses, programs, services, activities, and facilities, when viewed in their entirety, are offered in the most integrated and appropriate settings;
- Work with Accommodative Services to recruit note takers;
- Make themselves available to students to discuss accommodations, clarify information, recommend ways to secure tutors, etc.;
- Evaluate students on their abilities, not their disabilities (except where such skills are the factors that the evaluation purports to measure);
- Reasonably accommodate a student's disability-related need for access to course information;
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality of student educational records concerning students with disabilities except when disclosure is required or authorized by law or authorized by the student;
- Make a good faith effort to place book orders in a timely manner to allow for books to be tape recorded or reproduced in alternate format;
- Provide the student or Accommodative Services with a syllabus or reading schedule upon request for the purpose of having the book converted into an alternate format.

**Classroom Behavior\*:** All students must adhere to the college code of conduct regardless of whether they have a disability. Should a student behave in a manner that interferes with or disrupts the educational process, the faculty member should, depending upon the situation, contact (i) Campus Safety if a student's behavior is threatening to him/herself or others, including the faculty member; or (ii) the Dean of Studies; or; (iii) the Dean of Students Office for other behavioral infractions.

\*Please note that the College has a separate memorandum on the topic of Classroom Behavior available in the Dean of Studies Office.

## **APPEALS PROCEDURES**

While the majority of recommended classroom accommodations, such as extended time on non-performance based assessments, alternate testing environment, and the use of laptop during essay exams, are of a nature where there is normally no question about whether the accommodation is reasonable, situations could arise where the faculty member has concerns that the recommended accommodation compromises the academic integrity of the curriculum and the expectations from students in the course.

As described above, requests for reasonable accommodations are based on documentation submitted by a student, in accordance with College policy, to Accommodative Services and careful review by the Director of Accommodative Services and possibly others, if necessary. To safeguard the student's privacy, in general, Accommodative Services will not disclose the nature of the disability to the faculty unless there is a specific need to know. When beneficial to the faculty/student academic relationship, students are encouraged to self-disclose.

A faculty member has the right to challenge an accommodation request if he/she believes the student is not qualified or the accommodation would result in a fundamental alteration of the program. When agreement cannot be reached between the student and the faculty member, we encourage the faculty member to discuss the matter with the Director of Accommodative Services and the Dean of Studies.

If a student disagrees with a faculty member's decision about the appropriateness of an accommodation, the student has a right to appeal this decision according to the following guidelines, which appear in the Faculty Manual and the Student Handbook. In most cases, resolution is swiftly achieved through informal collaboration between Accommodative Services, the student, the faculty member, and in some instances, others, such as the Dean of Studies.

### **Appeals Protocol for Accommodations with Regard to a Class or Program Requirement:**

If a dispute arises as to whether reasonable accommodations consistent with the recommendation of the Director of Accommodative Services are being provided in a course, the student will contact the Director, who will contact the professor for clarification. The Dean of Studies will be informed and will consult with the faculty member and/or the Department Chair if appropriate. The Dean must determine whether the requested accommodation represents a fundamental alteration of the academic

goals of the course or pose an undue burden. After consulting with the Director of Accommodative Services and informing the ADA Compliance Officer, the Dean will communicate his decision to the student. There will be no further internal appeal.

If a student's concern is with a college-wide requirement rather than a specific course or departmental requirement, then the matter does not directly involve faculty members.

### **Appeals Protocol for Accommodations with Regard to a College-Wide Requirement:**

If the dispute concerns a college-wide academic requirement, then the student may appeal to the Dean of Studies, who will consult with the student, appropriate faculty, administrators, or committees in reviewing the appeal. The Dean's decision will be communicated to the student. Within 10 days of being notified of the Dean's decision, the student may appeal to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The Vice President may consult with the Dean and/or anyone else in reviewing the appeal. The Vice President's decision will be communicated to the student. There will be no further internal appeal.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is worth pointing out that there has not been a situation in recent memory where the issue of accommodations has not been worked out through the means of collaboration and discussion amongst the faculty member, the Director Accommodative Services, and the Dean of Studies.

We hope this Handbook will help to continue this collaboration, as faculty members will be better informed with regard to the issues and practices in providing reasonable accommodations. The information in this Handbook will provide a starting point for further meaningful dialogue regarding this increasingly important aspect of student success at college.

Many faculty members have expressed a desire to be better acquainted with the specific nature of various disabilities, so that if a student has self-disclosed they will be better able to address the needs of the student and to assist them on an individual basis, depending on the particular challenges the student faces. The Appendix contains information that hopefully faculty members may find of use with particular students and situations.

## USEFULCONTACTS

Shelly Harrington, Director of Accommodative Services, [harrings@union.edu](mailto:harrings@union.edu), x8785

Michele Osborn, Interim Dean of Studies, [deanofstudies@union.edu](mailto:deanofstudies@union.edu), x6234

Kate Schurick, Dean of First-Year Students, [schurick@union.edu](mailto:schurick@union.edu), x6061

Marcus Hotaling, Director of Counseling Center, [hotalinm@union.edu](mailto:hotalinm@union.edu), x6161

Angela Stefanatos, Director of Health Services, [stefanaa@union.edu](mailto:stefanaa@union.edu), x6120

Joseph Johnson, Director of Writing Services, [johnsonj@union.edu](mailto:johnsonj@union.edu), x6680

For individualized tutoring, please contact the appropriate department.

## **APPENDIX : BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DISABILITIES**

As of Fall 2022, Union has over 260 students with documented disabilities who are requesting accommodations. The disabilities are primarily learning; however, they are quite varied. Moreover, many students are presenting with comorbid conditions - that is, more than one disability.

Below are some descriptions of commonly found disabilities among our students. Brief videos that explain the various types of disabilities may also be found at [Faculty Resources](#) on the Accommodative Services webpage. There has, in particular, been an increase in students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Students with this disorder may pose a particular challenge and you are likely to be notified that you have a student with ASD. Strategies may vary from student to student, so this is best discussed on an individual basis with Shelly Harrington.

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

ASD is a developmental disorder that is often characterized by social interaction deficits, impaired communication skills, and atypical behaviors. It is sometimes referred to as “high functioning autism.” Tony Attwood, one of the foremost authorities in the field of ASD (formerly referred to as Asperger’s Syndrome), describes it as: “A neurological disorder that affects one’s ability to understand and respond to other’s thoughts and feelings.”

The following characteristics may be present in an individual with ASD. Due to the diversity and complexity of this disability, some of the characteristics or problems discussed may not be evident in a particular individual. An understanding of these characteristics is important, because the behavior of these individuals is frequently misinterpreted. Many behaviors that seem odd or unusual are due to the disability and not the result of intentional rudeness. These students tend to be extremely literal and are likely to respond to what you say rather than what you mean.

#### **General Characteristics**

- Frequent errors in the interpretation of body language, intentions or facial expressions of others
- Difficulty understanding the motives and perceptions of others

- Problems asking for help
- May show motor clumsiness, unusual body movements and/or repetitive behavior
- Often have difficulty with the big picture, perseverate on the details (can't see the forest for the trees)
- Difficulties with transitions and changes in schedule
- Wanting things "just so"
- Problems with organization (including initiating, planning, carrying out and finishing tasks)
- Deficits in abstract thinking (concrete, missing the "big picture", focusing on irrelevant details, difficulty generalizing)
- Unusual sensitivity to touch, sounds, and visual details, may experience sensory overload

### **Attention Deficit Disorder(ADD/ADHD): Paying Too Much Attention to Everything**

Most people think that ADD/ADHD, with or without hyperactivity, is a condition that prevents an individual from paying attention. Actually, it is a neurological dysfunction that prevents an individual from effectively screening out distractions, so attention is paid to just about everything in the immediate environment. Common symptoms of ADD/ADHD are lack of attention to close detail, "careless" errors, lack of task persistence, appearing to not listen, difficulty following through on complex projects to the end, organizational problems, forgetfulness, and distraction by events that would not affect most people. These symptoms can be combined with impulsivity and, when hyperactivity is a pronounced feature, the condition is called AD/HD, or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

While diagnostic criteria in the medical profession do separate ADD from AD/HD, there is a diagnosis of combined type which would include all symptoms listed. It is important to understand that ADD/ADHD are not learning disabilities but separate conditions that result in a deficit in performance. Barkley (1997) makes the meaningful distinction that "AD/HD is not a disorder of knowing what to do, but of doing what one knows." While a learning disability is usually a deficit in skills that can and must be taught, such as reading or arithmetic, attentional disorders commonly present a profile of intact basic skills with difficulty demonstrating them. Many individuals with ADD/ADHD are awarded

the “bright but lazy” appraisal by family members and educators alike. In addition, the kinds of interventions helpful for students with ADD/ADHD are not the same as those for students with learning disabilities. Not all students find that medication resolves their problems with inattention, although it can be a helpful part of a more comprehensive treatment program, including coaching and counseling. It seems to some that ADD/ADHD has become the latest “fashionable” disorder, and there are those who doubt its existence at all. The medical community does employ accurate testing procedures for ADD/ADHD, but these must be applied methodically and comprehensively. When they are, diagnosis can be trusted.

### **Students Who Have A Learning Disability (LD)**

A learning disability is a general term for a number of specific disabilities.<sup>1</sup> A learning disability affects the manner in which individuals with normal to above average intelligence take in, retain or express information. The incoming or outgoing information may become scrambled, diverted or delayed in one of the following areas: reading comprehension, written expression, spelling, math computation and problem solving, organizational ability, time management, visual, auditory and/or tactile perception or spoken language. A learning disability is intrinsic to the individual student and is presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. A learning disability may occur concomitantly with other disabilities but is not the result of them. These disorders are not “curable”, but accompanying processing problems can be compensated for by helping individuals discover alternative modes of learning. The majority of individuals have average to above-average intelligence. High aptitude and low achievement is the typical learning disabled profile in diagnostic test results.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) does not apply to colleges, it defines “specific learning disability” as:

“A specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations.” *Pub. Law 108-446, sec. 300.8(c)(10)*.

This definition was later expanded by The Learning Disabilities Association as follows:

“Specific learning disabilities is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or nonverbal abilities. A specific learning disability exists as a distinct handicapping condition and varies in its manifestations in degree of severity. Throughout life, the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and/or daily living activities.”

Students with these difficulties may also exhibit a variety of behaviors such as inattentiveness and restlessness or may seem easily disorganized, forgetful, confused or self-conscious. Some learning disabled students may have often been told that they are lazy. Many learning disabled students often believe it. They have found that no matter how hard they try, they cannot improve their grades. Many times these students have low self-esteem resulting from the negative feedback and their own perceptions of failure to perform adequately. Many college students with learning disabilities are able to succeed in the course work with little or no accommodations until they reach the more demanding upper division courses.

### General Characteristics of Learning Disabilities (LD)

- LD adults have average to above-average intellectual ability.
- There is a discrepancy between achievement and potential with uneven abilities within the same individual. There are often marked discrepancies between oral contributions in class and in-class essays, exams and/or papers.
- Each LD adult has a distinct combination of abilities and deficiencies and, therefore, a unique profile. Some areas of functioning will be average, above-average or even in the gifted range, while deficiencies will vary from minimal to severe.
- LD adults have processing deficits.
- Listening deficits (auditory): Because some LD adults misperceive what they hear, they misunderstand or do not comprehend what is being said.
- Perceptual problems (visual): Others have difficulty seeing accurately what is before them. Reversals, rotations or inversions of numbers and/or letters still plague some LD adults, especially when they are under pressure.

Long- and short-term auditory and visual memory deficits are also quite common. Some LD adults have difficulty remembering what they hear. For some, verbal information, such as complex oral directions, is difficult to retain. For others, numerical information like distances, population size, or dates may not be retained. Remembering a series of letters, which is especially necessary in spelling non-phonetic words, requires adequate long-term visual memory. The high proportion of LD adults who are poor spellers attests to the persistence and frequency of this type of memory deficit (Vogel 1990).

We list some different characteristics that students with certain types of disabilities may exhibit. Academic Characteristics Exhibited by Students with Learning Disabilities  
Certain limitations or characteristics may exist; however, not all students with learning disabilities will demonstrate all problems.

## READING SKILLS

- Poor word analysis and recognition
- Slow reading rate
- Problems in inferential or literal comprehension
- Difficulty identifying the main idea or theme
- Difficulty retaining information read
- Confusion of similar word sounds (Valenti 1989 and Vogel 1990)

## WRITING SKILLS

- Preference for manuscript rather than cursive
- Overuse of the printed form of the upper case
- Overly large or cramped handwriting
- Poorly formed or illegible letters
- Spelling errors, especially in a foreign language
- Difficulty with sentence structure
- Difficulty with organization of thought
- Slow writing ability under timed constraints (Valenti 1989 and Vogel 1990)

## MATHEMATICAL SKILLS

- Difficulty with fundamental operations and an incomplete mastery of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division
- Reasoning deficits
- Reverses numbers
- Confuses operational symbols
- Problems with abstract concepts
- Problems figuring out calculations mentally
- Difficulty keeping columns
- Associated non-verbal disorders such as problems in left-right and spatial orientation (Valenti 1989 and Vogel 1990)

## ORAL LANGUAGE SKILLS

- Difficulty expressing ideas out loud
- Difficulty remembering or understanding oral instructions
- Difficulty concentrating on long lectures
- Difficulty sequencing ideas correctly or describing events
- Vocabulary weaknesses
- Word-finding difficulties
- Slightly slurred speech, especially when fatigued
- Difficulty learning to speak a foreign language (Valenti 1989 and Vogel 1990)

### **Students with a Psychological/Psychiatric Disability**

Some individuals in the college setting may have disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety or Panic Disorder, Depression, Bi-Polar (a/k/a Manic Depressive) Disorder, etc. These students usually are intellectually intact, yet their disorder and/or medication may interfere with the everyday responsibilities they must attend to as students. They may need extensions on assignments or even leaves of absence for intermittent treatment. Some medications can interfere with academic skills, especially during changes in type or dosage.

Students who are documented as functionally limited by these conditions by licensed psychologists or psychiatrists fall under Section 504 and ADA Federal Regulations and must be accommodated in the educational setting. Aberrant or disruptive behavior that interferes with the general teaching- learning process for all is, of course, an exception. Students attempting to cope with both the rigors of the college experience and managing such disorders need a good deal of understanding and encouragement. A feeling of safety and support in their learning environment is crucial to their success.

### **Additional Disabilities (physical, visual, hearing)**

While the presence of these disabilities has been less common at Union, we have had students with the following:

- Students with mobility impairments may need the following accommodations to assist them in their educational efforts: campus map, note takers, tape recorders, writers, typists, preferential seating, wheelchair space, and accompaniment by a personal caretaker.

- Students who are blind may need the following accommodations to assist them in their educational efforts: Kurzweil reading machine, note readers, raised line drawings, readers, relief maps, slate and stylus, talking calculators, tape recorders, voice computer equipment, preferential seating, large print books and magnifiers.
- Students who have a visual impairment may need the following accommodations to assist them in their educational efforts: closed circuit TV, magnifier, enlarged handouts, image and enlarging computer equipment, preferential seating.
- Students who are hearing impaired may need the following accommodations to assist them in their educational efforts: desk location, visualize information, FM loop, auditory trainer, interpreters, note takers, preferential seating, self-carbon note taking paper and the instructor to speak facing toward the class.