

# Learning Disabilities FAQ

## ***What is a Learning Disability?***

A learning disability is a condition, genetic or organic, that creates a neurological deficit that impairs the central nervous system. A learning disability acts as a barrier to receiving, processing, and/or expressing information. Not every individual has the same effects, even if they share the same disability as a classmate.

## ***How do you get a Learning Disability?***

You are either born with it, or experience some type of injury or illness that affects certain areas of the brain. The problems with learning are not a result of educational disadvantage, emotional/psychological disturbance, physical disabilities, or limited ability. Examples would include but not be limited to:

- ❖ Hearing
- ❖ Seeing
- ❖ Walking
- ❖ Talking
- ❖ Learning
- ❖ Breathing
- ❖ Sleeping
- ❖ Performing manual tasks
- ❖ Working
- ❖ Eating

## ***Does being LD mean I have low intelligence?***

No, not at all. In order to be classified as Learning Disabled, a person must have at least average intelligence. Learning Disabilities are not a question of limited ability, but of the means in which one accesses information. The LD student may process slower than non-LD students, but with accommodations, the student can perform on or above level. Students with learning disabilities experience frustrations with learning that make school difficult even though they have the aptitude to succeed.

## ***What is ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)?***

ADD is a condition of the portions of the brain that filter stimuli. A person with ADD is unable to filter out or give appropriate priorities to the stimuli they receive. This makes it hard for the individual to focus and concentrate. Too many distractions will render this person unable to perform high level thought processes.

***How can you find out if you have a Learning Disability?***

First, speak with the campus counselor. He can help you determine if you have learning disability traits. The counselor will then provide you with references in order for you to get tested.

***Does a student who identifies him or herself to the College as having a physical or learning disability automatically receive support services from the SRC?***

Prior to receiving assistance from the Students with Disability Services, a student must present from a qualified professional source documentation of a disability, which interferes with a major life function. A professionally verified disability means a condition certified by a licensed physician, psychologist, audiologist, speech pathologist, rehabilitation counselor, learning disability specialist, or other appropriate professional. The Director of Learning Resources then reviews the documentation for completeness and severity of the disability and makes a determination of the kind of accommodations the student needs.

***What is involved in LD testing?***

Individuals seeking testing are given comprehensive cognitive and achievement tests that evaluate ones verbal and quantitative skills. Testing must have been conducted within the last three years in order to be valid, High School IEP or 504 plans are not accepted.

***What services are available for students with Learning Disabilities?***

The Students with Disabilities Services, located within the Student Resources Center, provides a variety of services including a space for proctored untimed exams, arranges for class notes, books on alternative media, tutors, and assistance in time management.

***Do I, as the instructor, have the right to know the nature of a student's disability?***

The information regarding a student's disability is confidential and should only be shared when there is compelling reason for disclosure. The U.S. Department of Justice has indicated that a faculty member generally does not have a need to know what the disability is, only that it has been appropriately verified by the office assigned this responsibility on behalf of the institution. Students may submit their verification to the SRC without disclosing to the professor the specific nature of their disability. Upon a student's request for accommodations, the college and the professor are required by law to properly accommodate the student. However, a student can sign a release of information form, which will allow us to share information about his/her disability with a faculty member. In addition, if the student decides, he/she can disclose this information to his/her professors directly.

***Do I have the right to know which students in my classes have disabilities?***

All students have the right to keep their disability confidential. However, in order for students to receive accommodations in a class, they need to identify themselves to the professor and to follow the compliance guidelines.

***How do I verify the eligibility of a student who simply tells me that he or she is disabled and requires accommodations?***

Only when Students with Disabilities Services, located within the SRC, sends written notification should a professor make accommodations for a learning disability. SDS will certify disabilities and determine whether a student qualifies for academic accommodations and support services and has presented the necessary documentation or have been assessed and verified. At the request of the students the SDS will then notify faculty of appropriate accommodations.

***Will most students with disabilities (who are already aware of their disability) identify themselves to their professors at the beginning of the semester?***

Some students choose not to identify themselves, thereby choosing not to utilize prescribed class/test modifications, for various reasons. Other students may be involved in the semester and may find they are eligible for support services in the middle, or even at the end, of the semester. It is important to realize that any student requesting classroom accommodations must make timely requests for appropriate accommodations.

***How are accommodations determined for the student with a learning disability?***

Modifications are determined on an individual basis after considering the specific learning disability, the course requirements, and past academic experiences. Modifications are designed to provide an equal educational opportunity, not to give the student a competitive edge.

***What is a Reasonable Accommodation?***

Reasonable accommodations are adjustments that are determined by the Student with Disabilities Services Director and the student. They are designed to minimize the impact of the disability by enabling the student to compete on an equal basis. Accommodations are not intended to lower academic standards or provide anyone with an advantage over other students. **The provision of reasonable accommodations, for students who have self-identified, are registered with the college counselor for students with disabilities, and provide necessary, appropriate documentation is a legal responsibility of each faculty member.** Students are required to present an accommodation letter to each instructor. Letters are reissued each semester, upon request from the student. Faculty members are not required to, nor should they provide

accommodations for students who have not presented a letter from the counselor. If a student identifies as having a disability, requests services, and is unable to provide the accommodation letter from the counselor, the student should be referred to the Director of Learning Resources.

***How does the SRC justify extra time on tests for students with learning disabilities? It seems unfair to the other students, who would probably improve their scores as well, if they were allowed additional time.***

Various factors account for the need for extra time on tests for students with learning disabilities. These include: a) speed of processing; b) difficulty with the mechanics of spelling, punctuation and syntax; c) visual perceptual deficits; and d) reading comprehension deficits. Research (@ UC Berkeley, 1991 and the University of Toronto, 1993) on the effects of extended time on exams has shown dramatic improvements for students with learning disabilities, but only marginal improvement for students without learning disabilities. Rather than providing learning disabled students with an unfair advantage over other students in the class, extended time for exams allows these students to demonstrate their level of mastery of the course objectives, rather than reflecting their learning disabilities. In other words, it "levels the playing field."

***As a professor, can I be assured that students who take exams for my classes at the SRC Office are being monitored closely enough to prevent cheating?***

The SRC staff monitors students who use test accommodations through the SRC closely. Alternate arrangements can be made with the Liberal Arts department through Marsha Hopkins by a professor filling out the "Request for Proctoring Service" form completely, this lets the SRC staff specifically how to proctor that exam (for example, no books or notes, but calculators are permitted). The student leaves all materials other than those specified on the form by the professor with the SRC office.