

# **Information Sheet for Students with Learning Disabilities**

All students have unique learning styles with varying combinations of strengths and weaknesses. When students are hampered in their intellectual development by specific impairments in their ability to acquire, retain, understand, organize, or express information, this impairment is often referred to as a learning disability.

One of St. Stephen's University's goals is to provide a welcoming, supportive, environment for students with learning disabilities. This information sheet is provided to help such students (and any friends or family advocating on their behalf) thrive during their learning experience with us by ensuring that students, faculty and administration all work together to lessen the obstacles resulting from learning disabilities. Recognizing that no one is served when standards are lowered, the university expects that creative strategies can be found to overcome impediments so students can succeed in fully meeting learning objectives. The teamwork required for this success will work most smoothly if those involved take note of the following responsibilities:

## **Student Responsibilities:**

- to bring the nature of their learning disability to the attention of the Student Life Coordinator so that s/he can work with students to plan and communicate any appropriate accommodations
- to provide documentation to support an accurate assessment of their disability
- to approach any faculty member in whose course they require special consideration in regard to such matters as seating, assignments, testing, etc.
- to contact the Student Life Coordinator for assistance in communicating any concerns arising from difficulty in working with a professor

## **Administration Responsibilities:**

- to ensure that applications which include mention of a learning disability will be drawn to the attention of the Student Life Coordinator
- to ensure that the Student Life Coordinator will be available to meet with students with learning disabilities to discuss strategies and options. In some cases this discussion may result in a written Learning Plan which a student will present to faculty at the beginning of courses
- to provide access to a tutor (when possible) or otherwise help to facilitate remedial help
- to inform students of such options as Canada Study Grants and resources such as books on tape
- to encourage students to take responsibility for communicating their needs with relevant faculty
- to advocate for students and assist faculty in exploring options when difficulties arise

### **Faculty Responsibilities:**

- in response to needs brought to their attention, to work with students to find the best ways in which the learning objectives of their course can be met, impeded as little as possible by the disability in question
- to consult with the Student Life Coordinator and/or Academic Dean when necessary to determine fair responses to student requests
- to treat students with dignity and respect as full and equal members of the class
- to use discretion when speaking about learning style issues in the presence of other students

**Some ideas from the Steps Toward Employment Program (STEP) at UNB ([www.unbf.ca/studentservices/step/disabilities.html](http://www.unbf.ca/studentservices/step/disabilities.html)) :**

### **Students with Learning Disabilities**

Since each student with a learning disability is unique, students can provide valuable information regarding the type of academic adaptations that work best for them.

Typical accommodations for a student with a learning disability may include:

- Seat location
- Note-taker or digital recorder
- Extended test time (time and a half)
- Alternative location for a test
- Directions and deadlines given both orally and in writing
- Visual aids when possible
- Provision of written lecture or board notes
- Use of word processor to take test.

**Suggestions for working with various types of learning disabilities include:**

### **Auditory Difficulties**

Some students may experience difficulty integrating information presented orally and may not be able to follow the logic and organization of lecture. Faculty can help by doing the following:

1. Providing students with a course syllabus at the beginning of the semester
2. Permitting the student to digitally record the class so that they are able to listen to the class discussion more than once
3. Outlining class presentations and writing new terms and key points on the chalkboard or overhead transparencies
4. Providing students with a written copy of major points, models, outlines, etc.
5. Paraphrasing abstract concepts in specific terms, and illustrating them with examples, personal experiences, hands-on models or visual tools such as charts and graphs.

### **Memory Processing**

Memory sequencing difficulties may interfere with the student's execution of complicated directions. Faculty can help by:

1. Keeping oral instructions logical and concise
2. Repeating or rewording complicated directions.

### **Testing accommodations**

A learning disability may affect the way a student should be evaluated. If so, special arrangements may be necessary.

1. Allow the student to take tests in a separate, quiet room with a Proctor. Students with learning disabilities may be sensitive to distractions.
2. Grant time extensions on exams and written assignments when there are significant demands for reading and writing skills.
3. Permit the use of assistive tools such as calculators, spellcheckers, or other materials that will assist students.
4. Allow the student to use a reader, word processor, or tape recorder.
5. Consider alternative test designs. For example, some students with learning disabilities may find essay formats difficult; students with visual perceptual problems may have trouble with tests requiring them to visually match different items.
6. Consider alternate or supplementary assignments to evaluate a student's mastery of the course material. Taped interviews, slide presentations, photographic essays or handmade models may lead to more accurate measures of the student's knowledge.

### **Other Resources:**

- Learning Disability Resource Community: [www.ldrc.ca](http://www.ldrc.ca)  
Learning Disabilities Association of Canada: [www.youth2youth.ca](http://www.youth2youth.ca)