

*They face obstacles in body or mind,
but their strength of spirit and resolve keeps them on course
to achieving their college education.*

***Listening to
Students with Disabilities***

Student Perspectives..... 2

General Information and Suggestions for Working with Students with Disabilities..... 6

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Listening to Students with Disabilities...

“Sometimes it’s exciting, and sometimes it’s really stressful, and sometimes it’s hard, and sometimes it’s funny.

I had a moment here where I was really welcomed, but I also felt very vulnerable because my life has some challenges.

I like that they try to give students resources and all of the faculty, even the cleaning staff and security, has been super helpful and wanting me to succeed and friendly.

It’s taken me a lot of research to find the right resources. It would be nice if they were communicated a little better to students (especially those first arriving or transferring in). It feels taken for granted—‘You should already know that,’ about the services, when I didn’t. And more computer labs would be helpful.”

—first generation college student, low income, physical disability that restricts writing (carpal tunnel)

“I have had some really nice and helpful teachers. I also am in DSPTS so the disabilities center has been really accommodating and helped me.”

—female, 22 years old.

“Very difficult, having dysgraphia is hard enough. Then with ADD added on it just gets tougher.

(I like) no-handwriting based work. (I don’t like) classes that require mass amounts of handwriting.”

—male 20 dysgraphia ADD

“I think/know that it is extremely difficult to be this type of student.... 3 huge challenges, are the challenges of being a veteran with psychological & physical limitations from the war.

Start small and no matter your age or how many credits you have to finish, do not take on more than you can handle. Also, get a counselor in all areas you need one, ... advisors, mental health, veteran rep. I didn’t find out about half of the items until my instructor told me about them.

I like most of my instructors. When you get that one on one relationship with your instructor, and are treated more like a person than a #. Being able to have some one that really cares about you and wanting to really help you out.

(Some of the) office(s) and the way they treat you. You would think that a wounded warrior veteran with major disabilities and readjusting back to somewhat of a normal life would be treated with a little respect and a little heartfelt understanding.”

—male Psychological & Physical Challenges, Vet

“I was in an accident in 2007 with trauma to my head. My short-term memory is gone, and I have to try extra hard to get things into my memory. I’ll forget things, or say things backward. At times it’s difficult. I know where I was before the accident (where I could remember things naturally), and now it takes me a really long time. It’s frustrating. You remember your accomplishments and how easy it used to be. I used to just do it, but now I feel like I stop and start, and am sluggish, and, like, ‘what’s wrong with me?’”

Since I’ve been here, the High Tech Center has been very, very helpful. There’s no way I would have made it out in four semesters without the Center. I like that inside the Center you have your own personal rooms. I feel comfortable here.

I have to go over each chapter of reading four times. KURZWEIL really helps.”

—49, head trauma, dyslexia, academically challenged—I didn’t have all the tools I needed to start off.

“It feels okay. There’s not much struggle”

—Physical challenge

“I had an IEP in elementary through high school (meaning I have had my disabilities my whole life, my entire education). If faculty knew that, they might change some assignments, due dates.

Programs outside of class—Writing Center, Reading Center, Math Center—those are definitely helpful. I did the Leadership Initiative Program and I liked that. It kept me motivated, and I get better grades.”

—25, male, auditory processing disorder, transfer student, and curler (Olympic sport)

“Some of my challenges do make school harder. I think the teachers assume if someone has a learning disability they wouldn’t be in college so they don’t take it into consideration. Some teachers also don’t take mental challenges into account either.

I have been in a class where a teacher made fun of people who take medicine for mental reasons and it made me uncomfortable”

—young female that is new to college

“I have a visual processing disorder, dyslexia, and ADHD, so it’s time consuming to read.

I love Sac State and my experience has been fabulous. I can’t say every teacher was my favorite, but they were all fair and willing to work with me, and I appreciate that. The private study rooms in the High Tech Center have been invaluable to me to focus on studies and get help right then and there if I need it. Being able to record in my classes—all my teachers allowed it. Very helpful.”

—female, older student, returning to school, first generation college student, 3 car accidents (disabilities), visual processing disorder, dyslexia, ADHD

“It’s difficult, a struggle every day. School has never been easy for me. Receiving support hasn’t been easy. My old school was great. (A staff member) here in the center is great, but I see her struggling to find to find things for me, things that aren’t on the board, that are specific to me and my individual combination of disabilities. I always have to advocate for myself.

It takes me longer to do things due to my learning disability and OCD—my need to be perfect. It’s frustrating because I put my all in, but am not getting that support.

I love (a staff member) here (in the High Tech Center), she’s great. She reaches out to students to help with other students.

Faculty in my department are understanding—they try, I see them try, but don’t always know how to support me.

Extra time on tests help. Some programs (like e-text and KURZWEIL) don’t work for me. I can’t get them to work at home on my laptop.”

—female, 26, bisexual, ADD, depression (I get really down on myself), a diagnosed learning disability, anxiety (that’s a big one).

“It is very hard to deal with the ... challenges (stated below) when immersed in a non-understanding school population. The same goes for professors that don’t understand circumstances.

Almost every class that is a challenge to me, I explain to the professor that I am having a hard time and their only help to me is try harder. You cannot group all students in the same category. I have gotten so frustrated that I have walked out of a office session b/c of the advice that was given to me.

(I don’t like) most teachers and their lack of effort. I expect more for my \$.

I do like the SmartThinking program that is available to students.”

—30 y/o, white, learning challenges, physical challenges, vet.

“As a student in my shoes, it doesn’t stick me out of the box too much, I don’t see I have any problems or false looks because my, not downfalls, but temporarily struggles. I only find difficulty in testing situations, I am hands-on so written tests loose my attention fast and I begin to panic.

Be confident in yourself, there are many people like you and a majority of the staff and students are quite kind and helping.

Talking w/ prof. and other students helps a lot w/ my slow learning and loss of focus in long classes. Open your mouth, ask for help and clarification.

Some professors do not care enough to help w/your needs, the learning test did not work for me I did not have a ‘Big Enough’ problem so some teachers won’t honor my testing skill difficulties.”

—female, 23, Hetero, dyslexia, anxiety

“I am a veteran, and working on the flight line (runways) damaged my hearing (loss of hearing and tinnitus, a ringing in the ears). I also have constant aches and pains all over my chest and body.

I have depression, anxiety, and OCD, which makes it hard to concentrate (presents a learning challenge). Some days are good, but most days are hard.

It is always hard to read for me, I have to read things over and over. For one person something might take 30 minutes, but for me it would take 60 minutes unless I had KURZWEIL.

Some of the professors are good and willing to work with you. But not all. I need someone to sit down and show me the steps, one by one, like reverse engineering. I have this professor who is doing that with me this semester.”

—male, 33, straight, returning student, psychological depression, anxiety, OCD, physical challenges. A returning student, too.

“Very difficult, very difficult. I couldn’t have gotten through it without these services.

(What works for me is) complete quiet, note-takers, KURZWEIL, SSWD counselors, the person who runs it..., and my learning disabilities counselor.....

—multiple disabilities

“Second year in college. I am female, 19 years old, and have anxiety, I don’t have the best vision or hearing and its challenging to me as a student.

Everytime I walk around campus I start to panic because there are a lot of people walking around campus.

The professors that I have had, show they really want to be there and care for their students.”

—No student specifics given other than what is stated above

“In the beginning when I first had paperwork from DSPS, I would want to wait a bit to watch the instructor to try to see what the response would be if I gave it. Because some teachers would be understanding and accepting, but others would be punishing, feel like I wanted to get out of schools work, like ‘how dare you want to take your test somewhere else’ or something.

(A staff member)...is pushing but gentle, I’m here because of her. She even called me at home.”

—learning disability, veteran, female, 45, some depression

“It is fun being a student here at sacramento state university”

—I am a first generation college student who is 18 years of age that has a disability and am active in Charity work

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity,” including disabilities related to sight, sound, speech, mobility, learning and cognitive processing, and physical and mental health.

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that one in five Americans has a disability, which corresponds to the National Center for Education Statistics findings of 19.4% of undergraduates reporting having a disability in the nation.

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitative Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability...shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity” of a public entity, including postsecondary education.

According to California State University Policy for the Provision of Accommodations and Support Services to Students with Disabilities, a disability refers to “a physical or mental impairment of an individual that limits one or more of the major life activities and requires either a record of such an impairment, or documentation of having been regarded as having such an impairment.” Broad categories for disabilities established for reporting purposes in California State University Policy are: Visual Limitation, Communication Disability, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Mobility Limitation, Acquired Brain Injury, Other Functional Limitations, Learning Disability, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Psychological or Psychiatric Disabilities. Students may have these types of disabilities, as well as others not listed here, and be eligible for services and accommodations.

Here at Sacramento State

To qualify for accommodations for disabilities, students must meet eligibility requirements with the campus Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) office. SSWD is responsible for evaluating and certifying, based on professional documentation, the existence of a disability and identifying and authorizing reasonable program access and/or academic adjustments and accommodations for students with verified disabilities. Reasonable accommodations do not include substantial changes or waivers of essential skills and knowledge of course requirements, but may include: The use of readers, note-takers, interpreters, test scribes, adaptive computers, calculators, tape recorders, and alternative testing methods or additional time on exams.

An Important Note

Not all students go through SSWD for services, and not all students with a disability are aware they have a disability. This section, as well as all of the other sections on Students with Disabilities, will refer to both students with documented disabilities and students who may struggle in college life due to conditions or disabilities related to attention and learning, psychological and physical health, and mobility, sight, sound, and speech.

What We Can Do

As faculty and staff, there is much we can do to help students with disabilities experience greater ease, success, and growth on our campus.

Understand Your Role on a Campus Committed to Equal Educational Opportunity for All

Sacramento State sees disability access as an institutional responsibility and the provision of reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities as a cooperative effort, involving administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

Campus policy on “Academic Program Access for Students with Disabilities” includes the following responsibilities:

Students

Provide documentation of disability to SSWD and meet with an SSWD counselor to request accommodations before classes start. Students should then contact faculty directly regarding the approved accommodations and provide the SSWD’s written verification within the first two weeks of classes or as soon as feasible for students who are certified later in the semester.

SSWD

Verify eligibility, assess, and then authorize reasonable accommodations. Work collaboratively with faculty to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided, and consult with faculty regarding accommodations for exceptional situations, such as lab workstations.

Faculty (any employee who has instructional responsibility)

Adopt practices that promote equal opportunity to students with disabilities, use teaching and evaluation methods that measure abilities not disabilities, and implement student accommodations, consulting with SSWD in a timely manner, if needed. Faculty should treat all matters related to students with disabilities as confidential, in accordance with law and policy.

Campus Staff

Facilitate requests from students, SSWD, or faculty regarding accommodations, which may include referral to SSWD for students not currently served by this office. Staff should treat all matters related to students with disabilities as confidential, in accordance with law and policy, but may consult with SSWD if concerned about a student as long as student confidentiality rights are not violated.

Understand the Terms for Disabilities

While there is some difference of opinion and individuals with disabilities will have their own preference, the following “Disability Etiquette: Tips on Interacting with People with Disabilities,” is a helpful starting point and was recommended for this writing:

Person First Language

When referencing people with disabilities, Person First Language (PFL) means to put people first, rather than the disabling condition, to place emphasis on the individual and not define or label that person in terms of the disability. Rather than saying such things as a “blind student,” “learning disabled individual,” or “deaf learner,” instead say: “Individual who is blind” or “individual with low vision,” “student with a learning disability,” or “student who is Deaf (or deaf)” for a student with profound hearing loss (with the first letter of the term capitalized or not in writing depending on the degree the student identifies with Deaf community), or “person who is hard of hearing” and “person who has hearing loss” may also be used (typically for someone who communicates with speech).

The PFL principle also applies when referencing groups. For example, you typically would want to say “people with disabilities” (not “the disabled”) or people who are blind (not “the blind”). The exception here is usually the “Deaf” or “Deaf community” is used to show identification or solidarity with folks who share a culture and language (sign), which is why the capital “D” is used. Notice that the wording was neutral in the prior examples (“person(s) *with*, who *is* or who *has*”). You typically don’t want to use wording that portrays the individual as helpless or to be pitied, such as “crippled with,” “afflicted by,” “wheelchair bound,” “suffers from,” or “is a victim of.” You also want to avoid euphemisms for disabilities (such as “differently abled” or “challenged”); these may appear condescending to some or imply that people cannot deal directly with their disabilities. Another term to avoid is “handicapped” (say “person or people with disabilities,” “accessible parking spot”). Lastly, say “people without disabilities” (and not “normal,” “healthy,” or “whole” people—even the term “able-bodied” may be in some cases problematic).

[From the [United Spinal Association, “Disability Etiquette: Tips on Interacting With People with Disabilities” \(PDF\)](http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf).
<http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>]

Identity First Language

There is a growing countermovement called Identity First Language (IFL), which argues that disability is a central part of one’s identity, and a culture and source of pride for many. In this view, PFL is seen as distancing people from their disabilities in a way that implies the need to do so—stigmatization of disabilities. Many people consequently prefer IFL, putting the disability identity first, as in “disabled student,” “autistic person,” or “Deaf people.” And some use both IFL and PFL, as some organizations choose to do, including those for people with disabilities.

When it comes to the question of which to use, then—PFL or IFL—the American Psychological Association states: “Both person-first and identity-first approaches to language are designed to respect disabled persons; both are fine choices overall.” This guidance is offered: “It is permissible to use either approach or to mix person-first and identity-first language unless or until you know that a group clearly prefers one approach, in which case, you should use the preferred approach.”

(Please see the [American Psychological Association, Guidelines for Bias Free Language for Disability](https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/disability).
<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/disability>)

Understand the Impact of Society on the Lives of People with Disabilities

We live in a world where, historically, people with disabilities experienced denigration, discrimination, and even death. In today's world, stereotypes, false assumptions, and stigma continue to exist and are commonly encountered in the form of statements, actions, and reactions to people with disabilities in one's spheres of life, including the working world, medical care, and yes, higher education. Studies of students with disabilities on college campuses, and studies of college campus climate more generally, show this to be true. Such microaggressions against people with disabilities—much like those experienced due to sex, race, sexual orientation, language use, nativity, indigeneity, and more—hurt people and spaces. Microaggressions adversely impact physical health, psychological well-being, and learning, we know from research. And ableism—much like sexism, racism, ageism, and classism in our society—casts disabled people as inferior, serving to marginalize and constrain full opportunities, rights, and experiences in societal life, and diminish sense of identity and personhood.

An Older, Outdated View

Disability Studies scholars see ableism as grounded in what is called the “Medical Model of Disability.” In the medical world and society more generally, the tendency is to see disabilities as deficiencies in need of correcting or conditions in need of curing. Individuals with some disabilities may well want and need medical cure and treatment, such as people with disease and pain. But people with other types of disabilities may want no such thing—because they see the disability as a unique gift. For example, members of Deaf culture may decide against getting cochlear implants for hearing and those in the Neurodiversity movement argue that the differences in people with disabilities such as Autism are worthy of appreciation, rather than in need of correction or treatment. In the Medical Model paradigm, as well, disability is seen as the exception, as abnormal, yet 20% of the population has a disability currently and, indeed, almost all people will have a disabling condition in their lifetime, due to such things as accident, injury, illness, or age (making most “temporarily able-bodied”). Lastly, the place of needed remedy in the Medical Model lies with the medical professional to fix or the individual to learn how to adapt to spheres of life not built for them—when those spheres of life could be built for them or rebuilt for them—to remove barriers and increase equity and inclusivity.

A Newer, Needed Way

There is a newer paradigm called the “Social Model,” as well as other models that combine the prior view of disabilities with this one. In the Social Model, disability is seen as a form of diversity, not deficiency (the prevalent social construct)—and the place of needed change is society, in how people see, speak of, and treat people with disabilities and design places and spaces for them. While the older Medical Model views physical, emotional, or cognitive disability as internal to the person with these, the Social Model argues no, these are some of the many differences between human beings, and that disability comes from outside the individual. Simply put, society is what disables people in the physical barriers of the environment and attitudinal barriers of other people encountered in their daily lives. In this view, the disabilities are not the problem in need of fixing. As seminal Disabilities Studies scholar Simi Linton once noted, “While disabled people have problems, ... the society creates many of the problems that disabled people experience, and the society has a responsibility to address them.” And this is a matter of social justice.

Understand Our Students with Different Types of Disabilities

There are a broad range of disabilities and conditions, and with an accompanying range of circumstances and situations in which people live with disabilities. Students may have one or more disabilities within the broader areas of disability:

Students with Physical Disabilities

They have neurological conditions, orthopedic conditions, and health conditions that may cause physical ailments, and/or mobility impairment, vision problems, and/or difficulties with hearing or speech. Students with physical disabilities may have muscle coordination problems, muscle weakness, paralysis, or loss of limb(s) that impairs their mobility, while visual problems can range from complete blindness to partial sight loss or low vision, hearing problems may range from complete deafness to partial hearing loss, and speech problems can include inability to produce sound or difficulty in finding or producing words.

Depending on the nature and severity of the disability, these students may experience dizziness, nausea, debilitating pain, and/or extreme exhaustion, as well as have anxiety or depression due to their physical ailments or limitations. They may also feel discomfort or embarrassment in performing the functions in class that their peers have no problem with, a sense of isolation if other students are hesitant to interact, and a real disconnect from the majority who cannot fully understand what it's like to live with that physical condition or disability.

Students with Psychological or Psychiatric Disabilities

They have mental health disorders that include Depression, Anxiety, Bi-Polar Disorder, Schizophrenia, Post-Traumatic Stress, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. They may be officially diagnosed and receiving accommodations, with varying levels of self-acceptance and adaptation, or they may be just now experiencing the onset of symptoms and really be struggling to understand what is happening to them and why they no longer feel the way they used to.

These students have to deal with their psychological symptoms, as well as any accompanying physical symptoms (e.g., exhaustion, nausea, headaches, muscle tension or aches), all while trying to come to class and do their coursework. Any medication taken may have detrimental side effects as well that can adversely impact their learning and studies.

Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD

They are of average to above average intelligence, but have a learning disability, including dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory processing deficit and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Learning disabilities and ADHD often go hand in hand.

These students have difficulties with paying attention and/or reading, writing, listening, and studying, which impacts what they learn, how they learn, how they feel about learning, how well they do in their classes, and what their college experience is like. Their learning difficulties also likely affect navigating college life (understanding and completing student forms, applications

for financial aid, etc.), daily living (reading directions, paying the bills, etc.), and their vocation (what they end up doing or choose for a career). ADHD, too, can adversely impact all realms of life, from school to work and personal life. Learning disabilities and ADHD may also impact these students' self-esteem (how they see and feel about themselves). It is likely they have been told repeatedly throughout their lives that they are stupid or lazy when it comes to school.

Visible and Invisible Disabilities

Some disabilities are visible, shown through use of a wheelchair, cane, or service animal, while other disabilities are invisible, such as learning disabilities, ADHD, psychological and psychiatric disorders, and chronic pain.

Students with visible disabilities face the likelihood of stereotypes, skepticism about their capabilities, and pity that is not wanted or needed.

Students with invisible or hidden disabilities may face the confusion of their professors or classmates if they struggle or do or ask for things that seem unusual or unwarranted (e.g., “Why do you need campus cart services when you can walk and stand?” asked of a student with illness that comprises balance or causes extreme exhaustion or “Why can’t you just read this real fast—the answer to your question is right there” to a person with low vision in need of magnification), or even skepticism (e.g., “You seem just fine to me, so why do you get extended time on tests?” to a student with dyslexia who needs the extra time for a text-to-speech reader, where what is written is spoken for the student, which takes considerably longer for getting through test questions). These types of situations put the student in the position of having to decide whether to disclose something as personal as disabilities to people they don’t know well or are strangers, or just suffer the awkwardness.

Temporary and Permanent, Recent and Recurring Disabilities

Disabilities can be shorter-term, such as a broken limb or an illness that needs to run its course, or longer term, such as chronic health diseases or chronic pain, an amputated limb, or a learning disability.

Some disabling conditions have symptoms that are reoccurring or intermittent—come and go, improve or worsen—due to any number of circumstances, ranging from temperature to what one did the day or even week before, such as certain diseases like multiple sclerosis. Often in these cases of reoccurring symptoms or struggles, the student may worry that the instructor or other students doubt that they have a disability when they see the student on “a good day.”

Some disabilities are recent injuries or illnesses in the life of a student, such as a car accident necessitating physical therapy to begin to move again or a sudden stroke impairing cognition or language abilities. These students may struggle with acclimating to their altered personal and academic lives, and the process of getting accommodations and getting used to learning with them. Some students may have progressive illnesses that continually require more and greater accommodations as the condition worsens, and this, too, can take time to receive and become accustomed to in one’s learning.

Other students may have been born with or had the disability for much of their lives. They may come from a K-12 background where school staff knew what the disability was and what the student needed, and monitored progress to ensure the student was completing coursework—and then entered college life where the student must take the initiative to navigate the process for obtaining accommodations in course work, disclose to instructors what they need, and self-advocate with their professors or disabilities services if their accommodations aren't being met or aren't working. It should also be noted that depending on the type of disability and earlier educational experiences, some students may come to our institution with negative perceptions or feelings toward their educators, who may not have understood their disability, or toward education more generally, because the student struggled so hard in their studies, perhaps not knowing soon enough why, that they had a disability.

Diagnosed and Not

There are differences in diagnosis, as well.

Some students may be walking around with undiagnosed health conditions or disabilities, not knowing why they don't feel well, can't perform daily activities as they used to, or struggle in their studies. It is thought that millions of Americans have an undiagnosed learning disability, for example.

Some students may be under-diagnosed or incorrectly diagnosed in their conditions, and facing the confusion and uncertainty of not matching what they're being told and given for treatment or accommodations with what they may be experiencing or actually need to perform in personal and academic life. Fibromyalgia, for example, is often suspected to be a handful of other conditions first before an individual receives the accurate diagnosis.

Using Accommodations or Not

Some new students may have chosen to forego their accommodations once they hit college—wanting to be more like their peers or independent, sometimes successfully and other times not, as the intensity of college work in contrast to high school becomes evident. Some students may realize they do in fact need accommodations in the transition from lower-division to upper-division coursework, as well. Students in these cases may then have to scramble to complete the SSWD application for services process.

Some students may well qualify for disabilities accommodations, yet not know about the services available to them (e.g., they might have recently been in an accident or diagnosed).

Other students with a history of documented disabilities may be confused about how to obtain services at the university because they are new or transfer students, and there are significant differences between provisions at the high school and postsecondary institutional level, as well as differences between colleges.

The first step to students receiving services they may qualify for at Sacramento State is the student contacting SSWD. Faculty and staff can help students to get the help they need by increasing awareness of SSWD services, in general, and, in some cases, through specific recommendation to a student.

Understand What Students with Disabilities Experience

The National Center for College Students with Disabilities conducted a focus group study in 2019, and found the following:

Common Barriers for Students Included:

1. Student lack of awareness of campus disability services, difficulty navigating the process to obtain or use accommodations, insufficient accommodations, and having to take initiative, self-disclose, be informed, inform others, and advocate for themselves in a complicated system.
2. Instructor lack of awareness about the needs of the student and accommodation procedures, pushback against these, and failure to communicate clearly about or implement those accommodations for the student in a timely way.
3. Physical barriers to getting around the campus and into buildings and rooms, including in the library and housing, and gaps in services to students with disabilities that are available to other students.
4. Negative interactions with their peers and stigma with regard to disabilities.

These and other obstacles create “the added work of disability management”—

*“the cumulative impact of these barriers on their daily college experience,
or as one student described it,
‘the amount of work it takes to be a disabled student.’”*

Common Supports Included:

1. Easier procedures to apply for and receive accommodations, supportive staff, and accommodations that worked for the student.
2. Instructors who are informed about disabilities and accessibility, accepting and supportive of students, and who use a variety of teaching methods and flexibility in testing.
3. Campus communities for students with disabilities to find peer support, and larger campus spaces and events to create greater sense of community for people with disabilities.

[For further information, please see the National Center for College Students with Disabilities 2019 report by Sally Scott:
[“Access and Participation in Higher Education: Perspectives of College Students with Disabilities.”](http://www.nccsdonline.org/research-briefs.html)
<http://www.nccsdonline.org/research-briefs.html>]

Make Your Class Conducive to Students with Disabilities Doing Their Best

In light of what we know about students with disabilities and the difficulties they may face in higher education, there are steps we can take for greater equity, inclusivity, and student success in our classes and out on campus.

Give them a good start.

Provide course materials in advance for students who need accommodations. Students with certain disabilities often need things well before the course start date for conversion of materials into alternative media better suited to their individual needs, such as Braille or text-to-speech software that reads material for students with vision loss or students with print disabilities. This is why the student and/or SSWD may contact you before the start of the semester requesting course materials. Having ready your textbook and syllabus, at a minimum, and ideally any Canvas and web content, course packet, handouts, assignment descriptions, and slides—even if just for the first few weeks—gives students the peace of mind in knowing their accommodations will be in place. They then also have the lead time to get ahead with coursework that, for them, may take longer to read or complete than their peers, such as students with learning disabilities or chronic health or pain conditions.

Let them know you are here for them.

Be aware that students with disabilities may be reluctant or even dread having to disclose their need for accommodations to you, especially at the start of the semester, when they don't know you at all. In their educational background prior to coming here, they may have experienced instructors or school staff who treated their needs as an inconvenience or nuisance, who viewed them as deficient or a burden, or who regarded their test accommodations for extended time as cheating, rather than the extra time needed for equitable access. Some students may choose to wait until later in the semester to present their accommodation form, in order to feel more comfortable with the instructor, or to try to demonstrate their capabilities and character to the instructor first. Yet securing accommodations later in the term may hinder their performance and may be misperceived by the instructor as the student not having their act together coming into the course.

Include a statement in your syllabus inviting students with disabilities to discuss their needs with you and reinforce this in your spoken remarks on the first day of class. SSWD offers the following wording for your syllabus: "If you have a documented disability and verification from SSWD, and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible."

Include a more general statement in your syllabus and spoken remarks for the first day of class or in a welcome video inviting any student with questions, concerns, or struggles in the class to come to office hours or reach out to you. This will help students with accommodation forms to feel more comfortable presenting them to you. This will also encourage to come to you any other students with disabilities who may not know they have them and wonder why they struggle in their learning, or other students who may not know how to obtain their accommodations on this campus.

Utilize an in-class or online “Getting to Know You” student questionnaire at the start of the course that includes a question such as “Is there anything you’d like me to know about you?” or “Are there any challenges that you face in learning you would like me to know?” This, too, may help students with disabilities reticent about disclosing and students with unknown or undiagnosed disabilities to share with you what they may need or challenges to their learning.

Create a warm, welcoming climate in the classroom, on-ground or online, and show approachability in your demeanor so that students feel more comfortable coming to you with their letter of accommodations needed or asking questions or expressing concerns regarding their learning needs.

Get their accommodations done right.

Understand that provision of accommodations should occur as seamlessly and naturally as possible—for the sake of the student. We all want to do our part to make the extraordinary gift of higher education accessible to all. That said, we may sometimes fumble about in our implementation of accommodations if we don’t give advance thought to how to most effectively accomplish what we need to say or do.

Remind yourself every single time you are about to enter a classroom or meeting with the student, on-ground or online, until considerations regarding their accommodations each day of your class become customary.

Be sure to get exams for students with that accommodation arranged online or to the campus Testing Center in a timely manner, so that the student doesn’t have to worry or stress about their test accommodations, on top of the importance of the exam itself.

Be aware and strive to mitigate the fact that in the on-ground classroom testing situation, students with extended test time are often made conspicuous by their absence or departure from the class on the test day—and other students may regard extended time or a distraction-free environment with which to take the exam as unfair. Some students may not realize that students with less visible disabilities (such as poor vision or other vision disturbances and learning disabilities) may require alternate means and how much longer reading an exam or answering exam questions this can take, or how other students with ADHD or psychological disabilities (such as anxiety) may need a quiet room alone to best perform on an exam.

Request volunteer class note-takers, when needed, in a way that makes clear to all students that they will be doing a valuable service for a classmate who faces greater challenges to the coursework than most do because of a disability that makes difficult hearing, seeing, processing, and/or writing lecture information (without identifying that student with the disability, of course). Students who need note-takers will say how disheartened or embarrassed they feel when an instructor requests this service in an unenthusiastic or awkward way. It’s also wise to follow through to make sure that the student is, in fact, receiving all class notes in a timely manner.

Remember that as faculty and staff at an institution of higher education, we are well-positioned to create greater awareness and inclusivity for people with disabilities, and part of honoring accommodations is normalizing the need for these for an equitable classroom for all in the eyes of the student with disabilities and their classmates. This may help those students with documented disabilities reluctant to use their accommodations because they want to be like their classmates and as independent as possible or to avoid any potential misperception from their classmates who may then identify them with a disability. And research tells us that when students accept their disabilities, they are more likely to persevere and succeed academically.

Keep an eye out.

Check in with the student to see how they are doing in their learning. Some students may be reticent or reluctant to let the instructor or staff know when their accommodations aren't working, and some may have a more recent disability or one that changes, and are learning what works with accommodations. Students are typically encouraged to be active in their learning and proactive in advocating for their needs, but some students may not do so.

Work with the student to monitor the effectiveness of accommodations, conferring with SSWD as soon as possible if questions or issues arise. Use SSWD as a resource to help you to ensure accommodations are effectively in place.

Be aware that students whose accommodations include the use of alternative media formats typically find the use of such specialized computer hardware or software takes more time than traditional reading. Additionally, it often takes a whole semester of training in the campus SSWD Assistive Technology Lab for students to become comfortable using these formats, especially if they have never used them before.

Don't hold back.

Keep in mind that accommodations for students with disabilities are meant to ensure equitable opportunity for educational attainment for students with verified disabilities. Accommodations do not limit or compromise the rigor or scope of the course requirements or learning objectives. Students are accountable for the same work done and at the same level as their classmates, but there may be needed changes to course materials in an alternative format or other adjustments for physical limitations or learning and psychiatric disabilities.

Note, also, that the students, too, usually have a real need for individual autonomy, competence, and full inclusion in a world that is prone to underestimating their abilities or assuming they can't or don't want to do as much as their peers. All of this means that once the accommodations are effectively in place, students with disabilities should be able to learn, perform, and succeed in your class as much as any other student.

Maximize student learning.

Consider what you might do, above and beyond accommodation, in terms of course format, teaching style, assignment options, and so on to help the student to fully engage and perform in your classroom. You will likely find, as many instructors do, that making a needed change stretches your teaching skills and enhances the instruction for all.

Encourage the student as you would any other to do internships, work experience/work-based learning, service learning, independent studies, and graduate school.

Maximize your learning.***Learn more about campus disabilities services.***

SSWD serves as a resource for faculty and staff. You may consult with the office directly or look over the website, which provides further information regarding the needs of and support services for students with disabilities on our campus, including a Working Together: Faculty Handbook.

[SSWD Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/)

<https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/>

Learn more about students with disabilities.

The more we know, the better we can serve our students. This project offers the following sections regarding students with disabilities at the:

[Listening to Students Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/spotlights/listening-to-students.html)

<https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/spotlights/listening-to-students.html>

Listening to Students with Physical Disabilities

Listening to Students Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

Listening to Students with Hearing Limitations

Listening to Students with Mobility Limitations

Listening to Students with Speech Limitations

Listening to Students with Learning Disabilities

Listening to Students with ADHD

Listening to Students with Psychological Disabilities

Listening to Students with Disabilities in Online Learning 2021

Learn more about accessibility for your sphere of responsibility on campus.

Designing your materials and course learning with accessibility in mind can, truly, benefit everyone, and assure equitable learning for students with disabilities. And as many argue, greater accessibility in higher education is a matter of social justice. Further campus information about how to make your materials more accessible yourself, or schedule an appointment for one-on-one consultation in person or online via Zoom, may be found at:

[Accessible Technology Initiative Website](https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/ati/)

<https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/ati/>

Campus Resources

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD)—

Offers a wide range of support services to ensure students with disabilities have equal access and opportunity to pursue their educational goals. Application instructions are provided on the website for students with mobility or other physical disabilities, blindness/visual impairment, psychological disorders/cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities, and ADD/ADHD, and students who are deaf/hard of hearing. Services and accommodations for students may include, but are not limited to: specialized educational materials, adaptive equipment, adaptive computer training and use, note-taker services, testing accommodations, consultation with faculty for students with special academic needs, library assistance, disability management advising/counseling, on-campus housing accommodation, and graduate and professional program assistance and information referrals. Students with questions and faculty with inquiries or wanting to make a referral will find further information, including virtual open hours, on the website.

[Email SSWD](mailto:sswd@csus.edu) sswd@csus.edu

Phone: (916) 278-6955

[SSWD Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/) https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/

Assistive Technology Lab (ATL)—

Provides technological services to students with disabilities referred by SSWD counselors/specialists, including: a lab with alternative access to computers for students with disabilities to work on coursework and a training room for students to receive instruction on the adaptive technology appropriate to the student's disability (such as screen magnification and reading, scan/read programs). The ATL also provides consultation and assistance to faculty to convert course textbooks, syllabi, exams, class web content, slides, and handouts into alternative formatted instructional materials for students (such as Braille).

Phone: (916) 278-7915

[Email](mailto:ATL@csus.edu) ATL@csus.edu

ATL Computer Lab: Academic Information Resource Center 2011B

Maryjane Rees Language, Speech and Hearing Center—

Offers speech, language, and hearing services for people with communication challenges and/or cognitive disorders, including but not limited to: hearing loss, reading disorders, speech sound disorders, stuttering, cleft palate, voice disorders, and conditions associated with stroke, brain injury, concussion, progressive disorders, and other neurological impairment. Services are free to all, and those interested may get further information on the website, call, or stop by.

[Center Email](mailto:speechclinic@csus.edu) speechclinic@csus.edu

Phone: (916) 278-6601

[Center Website](https://www.csus.edu/college/health-human-services/community-services/language-speech-hearing-center.html) https://www.csus.edu/college/health-human-services/community-services/language-speech-hearing-center.html

TRiO Student Support Services Program (through SSWD)—

Provides to students with disabilities, who meet TRiO eligibility requirements and are in need of academic support to better stay and succeed in college, services that include: supplemental instruction, tutoring, adaptive equipment, readers, note-takers, proctors and test arrangements, specialized instruction materials, individualized counseling, transition coaching, assistance with graduate school admission, and more.

[TRiO Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/student-resources.html) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/student-resources.html>

Counseling (Student Health and Counseling Services)—

Helps students to cope with such things as stress, academic difficulties, cultural adjustment, relationship issues, anxiety, depression, bereavement, post-traumatic symptoms, questioning sexuality and coming out, eating disorders, addiction and alcohol abuse. The privacy and confidentiality of all who use Counseling Services is maintained fully within the bounds of law and professional ethics.

Phone: (916) 278-6461

[Counseling Services Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/>

Students in an immediate crisis should contact 911 or the Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Students with urgent concerns who would like to speak with someone as soon as possible should call the 24-Hour Counseling Services phone number above and here: (916) 278-6461.

Students who want to receive ongoing counseling or explore if counseling is right for them may schedule an appointment through the online Patient Portal (after 6 pm is best, when appointment slots become most available). This typically begins with a consultation appointment, where the student can talk about their concerns and receive support and feedback. Many students find that they feel better and their needs are met in just one session. Students who want to continue counseling may choose individual counseling in follow-up single session appointments (to meet their needs in the moment) or short-term individual therapy (more than one session with the same mental health clinician), or other options, as well. Counseling is available to all students, and done virtually, through Zoom.