



## Strategies for Advising Students with Disabilities

When advising students with disabilities it is helpful to consider the impact a student's disability and need for accommodations may have on their academic progression. Disabilities may present challenges in obvious or in obscure ways. Below are some strategies for guiding students with disabilities during the advising process.

### General communication suggestions

- Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant to the conversation.
- Ask a person with a disability if that person needs help before providing assistance.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not through their companion or interpreter.
- Understand that not everyone uses eye contact.
- Use student first language. For example, "a student who uses a wheelchair" is more appropriate than "wheelchair student".
- Carry on a long conversation with an individual who has a mobility impairment from a seated position.
- Provide information in alternate means (e.g., written, spoken, diagrams).
- Do not interact with a person's guide or service dog without permission.
- Do not touch mobility devices or assistive technology without the owner's consent.

### When developing a schedule, consider:

- If the disability impacts mobility it may be difficult for students to have courses scheduled back-to-back; the student may be less able to travel across campus quickly.
- Students who utilize extra time on tests as an accommodation also need to avoid scheduling courses back-to-back.
- If the disability impacts alertness or requires a student to take medication, the student may need to schedule courses during certain times to align with medication effects.
- If the student has a learning disability or ADD/ADHD, the impacts of the disability may be mitigated by teaching style, course structure or organization. When multiple instructors are teaching the same course, it is helpful to suggest students look at course syllabi before choosing which section to take.
- Help students construct a balanced course load. This can make the term more manageable and promote student success. For example, a student with dyslexia may want to avoid taking several classes simultaneously that require extensive reading and/or writing.

# Questions to Ask Students Experiencing Academic Issues

## What specifically seems to be causing you the most difficulty?

Listen for specific issues that pose difficulty for students, especially issues that are uncommon for most students. While none of the following statements are definitive indicators of a disability, they could be a sign that something beyond normal academic issues are impacting the student.

- “It always takes me much longer to do my homework than my friends.”
- “I read thing several times and still don’t understand what I read.”
- “I can’t take more than ten credits and be successful.”
- “I know the material when I study but can’t show it on the test.”
- “I’ve never had enough time to finish my exam.”

## Have you struggled with this in the past?

- If the student says no, ask clarifying questions to determine if there are changes that may be impacting the student academically.
- If the student says yes, ask about strategies the student has used in the past, and how those strategies helped. Some students with disabilities learn useful strategies in the K-12 system that no longer produce the same results in college.

## What student support resources are you using?

If you are uncertain whether a student has a disability, mention Disability Services along with other campus support resources like the Writing Center, Counseling and Psychological Services, the Learning Assistance Program, the Outreach Center and Campus Ministries. Do not ask the student if they have a disability.

If a student does list Disabilities Services as one of their resources, be sure to ask the following questions:

- “Did you sign up for your accommodations this quarter?”
- “Are you using all the accommodations you have been approved for?”
- “Are there other accommodations you would like to discuss with Disabilities Services staff?”

If a student discloses their disability but is not accessing services or needs to address further accommodation issues, **refer the student to the Disability Services office**. Some students with disabilities do not seek out services when they begin college for a variety of reasons. It is helpful to remind students that accommodations in college are different than accommodations in high school. Reasonable accommodation in college is a mechanism for students to show what they are actually learning in the classroom; this can be important to their continued success in college.

**If you have questions call Disability Services at (206) 296-5740**