

# Disability Services FAQ

## What is a Disability?

A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual.

- *Major Life Activities:* The phrase major life activities refers to normal functions such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.
- *Physical Impairment:* A physical impairment includes any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following bodily systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory and speech organs, cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin and endocrine.
- *Mental Impairment:* A mental impairment includes any mental or psychological disorder such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.
- *Learning Disabilities:* A learning disability is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders occur in persons of average to very superior intelligence.

## 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. 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. 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

### **I have a disability, how will this affect my application and admission process?**

The College will make admission decisions using criteria, which do not consider an individual's disability. Thus, the Otis College of Art and Design will not impose or apply admission or eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out individuals on the basis of their disability, unless such criteria is necessary for the provision of the program, service or activity being offered. The College believes that this carries out the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Students with disabilities desiring to enroll in Otis College of Art and Design must be able to meet the minimal standards of the College.

Otis College of Art and Design does not engage in any affirmative action programs for students with disabilities, nor does it consider a student's disability in evaluating admission criteria. It is, of course, within the student's discretion to inform the Admissions Office of a disability if they wish. If this choice is made, the College will not discriminate against the student on the basis of the disability and will make reasonable accommodations when necessary.

### **I've been accepted at Otis College of Art and Design, and I have a disability... what do I have to do to receive accommodations?**

If you have a disability, or if you suspect that you have a disability, the first place to go is Disability Service (DS), located in the Office of Student Affairs. Students with disabilities have the responsibility of contacting DS for an intake interview to assess their needs prior to their first semester of enrollment at Otis College of Art and Design. You should not assume that the College knows any information about your disability because it was included in your application for admission. You are not entitled to any accommodations until you have met with a member of the DS staff. If you have the necessary documentation pertinent to your disability, it must be provided at this time. If you do not have any documentation, or if your documentation is insufficient, DS staff will go over our "Guidelines for Disability Documentation" with you, and then refer you to an appropriate professional for evaluation.

## **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 sometimes 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. The counselor 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.

## **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?**

Disability Services, located within the Office of Student Affairs, provides a variety of services including proctored exams, class notes, and sign language interpreters.

## **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 DS 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. If the student decides, she/he can disclose this information to his/her professors directly, but it is not a requirement for accommodation.

### **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 College and to follow the compliance guidelines. Disability Services will notify instructors of students who have requested accommodations.

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

Only when Disability Services, located within the Office of Student Affairs, sends written notification should a professor make accommodations for a disability. DS 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 student, DS 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. However, once a student has requested accommodations, instructors will receive their notification usually within two weeks.

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

Reasonable accommodations are adjustments that are determined by the paperwork submitted by the student, the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs 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 Disability Services, 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 Disability Services. If a student identifies as having a disability, requests services, and is unable to provide the accommodation letter from DS, the student should be referred to the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs.

**How does Disability Services 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 proctored exams for my class are being monitored closely enough to prevent cheating?**

Disability Services monitors students who use test accommodations closely. Arrangements can be made by filling out the "Request for Proctoring Service" form completely; this lets DS know 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 Disability Services.

## **How do I contact Disability Services?**

Disability Services is located in Ahmanson 205, within the Office of Student Affairs. You can contact the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at 310-846-2554, or by email at [ds@otis.edu](mailto:ds@otis.edu) or [cbranch@otis.edu](mailto:cbranch@otis.edu).