Do You See What I See? 
Accommodating Students with Invisible Disabilities

Disability Services Information Session
January 30, 2007
What Are Invisible Disabilities?

- Invisible disabilities rank as the highest percentage of disabilities among college students.
- Learning disabilities are most recognized.
- Invisible disabilities also encompass psychiatric disabilities, ADD/ADHD, chronic health conditions, and autism spectrum disorder diagnoses.
Common Misconceptions

- Student does not “look” disabled so therefore they are “faking” it
- Students with invisible disabilities should not be considered “disabled”
- Students score 100 on every test so they can’t have a learning disability
- A person parking in a handicapped spot looks “normal” so they must be abusing this privilege
Experiences at UC Clermont

- Instructors frequently ask why students really need extended time on tests when they “ruin the curve”
- Instructors will tell me that most students who use accommodations are really just using the system and getting their MD to write down whatever the student wants
- Instructors tell students that making arrangements for accommodations are not a priority for them
Review of the Accommodation Process

- Student inquires about DSO services
- Student provides documentation
- Director interviews student
- Accommodation form developed
- Student shares form with applicable instructors
At UC Clermont, we have 20 students with an identification of “Learning Disability”

Students range in IQ scores by a margin of over 80 points (borderline intellectual functioning – superior intellectual functioning)
In Depth – LD

- Dysgraphia – difficulty with forming letters and words with a pen and has difficulty with handwriting
- Dyscalculia – difficulty understanding and using math concepts and symbols
- Dyspraxia – language comprehension doesn’t match language production
- Non-verbal LD – below-average motor coordination, visual-spatial organization, and social skills
- Dyslexia – may mix-up letters within words and words within sentences while reading, may have difficulty spelling correctly or reverse letters
Teaching Strategies - LD

- Alternate text
- Extended test time
- Distraction-reduced test environment
- Visual or hands-on learning
- Concise directions
- Calculators
- Reduce information into smaller sections
- Notetaking
In Depth – Psychiatric Disabilities

- At UC Clermont, 15 students have this designation
- Depression – characterized by a depressed mood most of each day, a lack of pleasure in everyday activities, insomnia, suicidal ideation, worthlessness
- Bipolar Depression – characterized by periods of mania and depression
- Anxiety – can interfere with a person’s ability to concentrate, can cause hyperventilation, panic, chest pains, etc.
- Schizophrenia – characterized by delusions and hallucinations in addition to depressed mood and flat affect
Teaching Strategies – Psychiatric Disabilities

- Extended test time
- Distraction-reduced test environment
- Advance notice of deadlines
- Flexible attendance policy
- Notetaking
- Understanding where the student is
In Depth – ADD/ADHD

- At UC Clermont, 30 students fit this category (many have a comorbid diagnosis of LD)
- A neurological impairment characterized by inattention, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity
- Students may appear disorganized, distracted, and lose things frequently
Teaching Strategies – ADD/ADHD

- Extended testing time
- Preferential seating
- Notetaking
- Alternate text
- Distraction-reduced testing environment
- Tape recorder
At UC Clermont, 4 students fit this category.

Wide range of conditions to include cancer, asthma, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, AIDS, arthritis.

Usually doesn’t directly affect learning unless there is an underlying neurological effect or side effects from medication.
Teaching Strategies – Medical/Chronic Illness

- Distance-learning courses
- Flexible attendance policy
- Class materials in electronic format
- Special furniture in classrooms
- Special equipment as needed
In Depth – Autism Spectrum Disorders

- At UC Clermont, students have not formally identified to the DSO but several AS students are enrolled in classes.
- A neurological impairment characterized by significant difficulties with language in social situations, poor social skills, and the presence of unusual or repetitive behaviors.
- Aspergers Syndrome describes an individual with average or above-average intelligence and can demonstrate an exceptional ability in a particular area of interest. Individuals have difficulty in social situations, lack appropriate eye contact, and can have rigid routines. They can also be overly sensitive to smell, sounds, and taste.
Teaching Strategies - ASD

- Preferential scheduling for classes
- Reduced course load
- Coaching opportunities
- Smaller classes
Universal Design

“Universal Design for Learning (UDL) refers to the process of making course concepts and skills attainable to a greater number of students, regardless of their differing learning styles, physical, sensory, organizational, and linguistic abilities. Rather than a ‘one-size fits-all’ approach, UDL stresses flexible delivery of content, assignment, and activities. UDL allows the learning process to be more accessible without singling out students with disabilities.”
Universal Design

- Use on-line content systems to allow students to pick-up material that they may have missed in class
- Use mentoring, study groups, etc. in addition to lecture
- Provide a comprehensive syllabus with CLEARLY identified course requirements, due dates, etc.
- Use handouts, manipulatives, and visual aids when appropriate
- Provide notes to all students
- Relate topics to real-life examples
- Ask for feedback regularly
- Allow students to demonstrate knowledge of material through alternate means
- Permit the use of technology (laptop, PDA)
- Select course materials early enough to arrange for alternate formats if needed
- Discuss potential safety concerns in a lab setting
- Give oral and written lab instructions
Resources

University of Washington, DO-IT
http://www.washington.edu/doit/

Ohio State University, FAME Grant
http://www.ohn.org/teaching_and_learning/ada/FAME_Content/f1_1_1.html

GCCCU Faculty Handbook
http://www.gccc.org/Faculty/SWD/Disabilities.cfm