

FAST FACTS FOR FACULTY

An educational tool for faculty on the go.
Designed to offer practical information to facilitate teaching & interacting
with diverse learners, including students with disabilities.

Spring 2006

Did you know? Nine to ten percent of all college students have a disability, a percentage that has tripled within the last three decades. This equates to almost a million students nationwide report having a disability (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

Impetus for "Fast Facts for Faculty" grew out of recent SJSU faculty survey and focus group findings. The predominant and recurring themes iterated by faculty participants include:

- * Uncertainty about how to communicate effectively with students with disabilities
- * Lack of disability knowledge and faculty responsibility under federal laws and statutes
- * A request for additional resources to aid in teaching/reaching diverse learners
- * Uncertainty about students' rights
- * Student inappropriate behavior due to mental health issues

The educational tool will be disseminated via e-mail and hard copy. Faculty overwhelmingly indicated a preference to receive disability information and updates via e-mail and printed sources.

Each "**Fast Facts for Faculty**" issue will unfold information relevant to the dynamic needs of professors in the classroom and the issues identified in the focus groups and survey outlined above. Content will be organized under three categories, namely Teaching & Learning, Legal Corner, and Communication & Interaction.

For more information about "**Fast Facts for Faculty**" or to pose a question to be addressed, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 924-6000 or info@drc.sjsu.edu.

Featured In this Issue

- ☞ How to handle excessive class absence regarding a student with a disability?
- ☞ Suggestions for approaching & communicating with a student at risk of failing your course.
- ☞ Tips to bolster professor-student communication & interaction
- ☞ Disability Green Sheet Statement S05-14
- ☞ How to identify if a referral to the DRC for a learning disability assessment may be warranted.

"In matters where disability is not an issue, treat the student as you would any other student" (Fichten et al., 1996, 7).



Brought to you by the Disability Resource Center
Administration Building, 110

Communication & Interaction

"Educate us on how to say or phrase things. Disability etiquette, language and also how to communicate [with students who have disabilities]. I get too many students that say they felt really bad [about] how it was presented."

*SJSU faculty
member
DRC hosted focus
group
March 2005*

Like other people, professors often feel ill at ease with their students who have disabilities. They worry about offending them, particularly in the area of offering too much or too little help or saying the wrong thing to a student they suspect may have a hidden disability. At times, professors may simply have no idea about what to do in specific situations (Fichten et al., 1996, 3). In a DRC sponsored focus group, one SJSU professor remarked, "Educate us on how to say or phrase things. Disability etiquette, language, and also how to communicate [with students with disabilities]. I get too many students that say they felt really bad [about] how it was presented" (Personal communication, March 2005).

Students with disabilities, like other students, have countless concerns about how to relate to their professors. Most students who have disabilities do not like to be treated differently or singled-out and are reluctant to discuss problems or ask for special consideration from their professors (Fichten et al., 1996, 3).

Here are some tips to bolster professor-student communication and interaction. First, ask yourself these three questions:

1. Am I making assumptions about what this student can or can't do?
2. Am I treating this student differently from his or her classmates? If yes, how?
3. What am I telling this student by my body language, facial expressions, and tone?

It is helpful to know that "in matters where disability is not an issue, treat the student as you would any other student" (Fichten et al., 1996, 7).

- ☞ If you are uncertain how to approach and communicate with students with disabilities not registered with the DRC who are struggling and at-risk of failing the course, refer to the suggested **Five Key Steps** on the following page.
- ☞ If professor-student communication is marked by tension and conflict, try the Mediation Center on campus and/or contact the DRC for advice.

Mediation Center

A trained, neutral third party mediator will facilitate communication between the professor and the student to identify the underlying issues & resolve the conflict. The mediator maintains an impartial viewpoint throughout the mediation session and does not take sides. The mediator's job is to facilitate the process; maintain a safe, comfortable environment; and coach participants in effective communication.

Contact Connie Hernandez-Smith, SJSU Mediation Center, Administration 264, 924-1089.

Five Key Steps

1. State what you have observed in the students' academic performance or classroom behavior. (e.g. I have noticed that the essay portion of exams seems to be a bit difficult for you. Perhaps there is some difficulty expressing yourself and all that you know in writing.)

2. Express a strength you have noticed in the student. (e.g. I can tell that this class is important to you by your good attendance and class participation).

Five key steps for **communicating** with a student

struggling or at- risk of failing in your course.

3. Relay to the student your motivation for asking him/her to meet with you. Statement of concern. (e.g. I am concerned that your knowledge of the course materials is not being demonstrated in your written work and exams. Your success in this class is important to me).

4. Share with the student a personal anecdote perhaps of a time that you may have struggled academically in a course or other area. (e.g. I had an Economics course in college that was extremely difficult for me. I ended up having to retake the course to pass it...)

5. Invite the student to stop by Admin 110 (DRC) to meet with someone if you suspect that they could benefit from a Learning Assessment. (e.g. Say: There is an office on campus that performs various educational tests to identify areas of learning strength and weakness and provides academic services & accommodations for students who are eligible.)

Teaching & Learning

Q: How can I identify if a student in my class may benefit from a *referral* to the DRC's educational psychologist for a possible learning disability assessment?

Many faculty have requested assistance identifying students in their classes who could benefit from a referral to the DRC for learning disability (LD) assessment. Contrary to disability legislation governing secondary schools, disability laws at the postsecondary level forbid university faculty and staff from asking a student if s/he has a disability. Instead, students with disabilities must self-identify by coming to the DRC. However, careful student observation on the part of the faculty can suggest if a referral to campus resources, including the DRC, may be warranted.

If you suspect that a student could benefit from a referral to the DRC for possible LD testing and services but are uncertain how to do so without offending the student or violating legislation, take note of the "signs" presented below and follow the suggested **Five Key Steps** on the previous page.

Warning signs of learning disabilities¹ in college students occur as a pattern of behaviors to a significant degree over time. Signs include, but are not limited to, the following:



Language/Mathematics/Social Studies:

- ❑ Tendency to misread information
- ❑ Difficulty summarizing
- ❑ Poor reading comprehension
- ❑ Difficulty understanding subject area textbooks
- ❑ Trouble with open-ended questions
- ❑ Continued poor spelling
- ❑ Poor grasp of abstract concepts
- ❑ Poor skills in writing essays
- ❑ Difficulty in learning foreign language
- ❑ Poor ability to apply math skills
- ❑ Difficulty expressing thoughts orally or in writing
- ❑ Difficulty remembering newly learned information
- ❑ Problems in peer and group interactions



Attention/Organization

- ❑ Difficulty staying organized
- ❑ Trouble with test formats, such as multiple choice
- ❑ Slow work pace in class and in testing situations
- ❑ Poor note taking skills
- ❑ Poor ability to proofread or double check work

1. Adapted from: <http://ericec.org/digests/e603.html>

Legal Corner

Green Sheet Disability

Statement:

The syllabus represents a mechanism to facilitate educational access for students with disabilities (SWD). Inclusion of a simple statement communicates available resources for SWD in a non-threatening way. In March 2005, San José State University Senate Policy S05-14 passed such a green sheet statement regarding disabilities, which reads as follows:

"If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment to meet with me as soon as possible or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with DRC to establish record of their disability."

By including this statement in your syllabus you are upholding the University's legal obligation, protecting yourself from future legal liability, and notifying students of a vital disability resource at the onset of the class.

Q: What do I do if a student registered with the DRC (or claiming to have a disability) is repeatedly absent from class?

First, it must be determined whether the reason for the absence(s) is indeed disability related. It is important to note that some students miss class often, whether they have a disability or not. SWD may miss classes for the same reasons as many other students. However, for SWD, there may be other causes beyond the student's control, which are indeed, disability related. These may include hospitalization, frequent visits to the doctor or to treatment, debilitating conditions impeding a student's ability to remain in the classroom, medication side effects of a debilitating nature, among others.

If the student attributes his/her class absence to a disability yet the student is not registered with the DRC or you have questions about whether functional limitations of the disability relate to the absence(s), it may be best to refer the student to the DRC to meet with a DRC counselor.

DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER

Location:

ADM 110

Hours:

M & T - 9 am-5pm

W - 10 am-5pm

Th & F - 8 am-4pm

Phone: 408.924.6000

TTY: 408.924.5990

Fax: 408.924.5999

Website: www.drc.sjsu.edu

DEAF & HARD OF HEARING PROGRAM

Location:

IS 222

Hours:

M & T - 9 am-5pm

W - 10 am-5pm

Th & F - 8 am-4pm

Phone: 408.924.6542

TTY: 408.924.5990

Fax: 408.924.1714

ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY CENTER & ALTERNATIVE MEDIA CENTER

Location:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, 2nd Floor

Hours:

Daily 8am-10 pm

(Hours subject to change)

Phone: 408.808.2123

Contact us at info@drc.sjsu.edu with any Q's OR "Fast Facts" topic ideas.

