

BRIEF 2: UNDERSTANDING HIDDEN DISABILITIES

“Hidden disabilities” are disabilities that may not be apparent simply by looking at a person. The most common hidden disabilities in postsecondary settings are Learning Disabilities and Psychiatric Disabilities. More information about these disabilities is given below. Other hidden disabilities include, but are not limited to Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Hearing Impairment, and health-related disabilities such as Diabetes and Autoimmune Disease. It is important to remember that like more visible disabilities, the impact of a hidden disability will vary from individual to individual. It is important for you to speak with individual students to find out how their disability is impacting them and how you can work together to accommodate their needs in the classroom.

Definition of Psychiatric Disability

A clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs and is associated with: a) present distress or discomfort, b) disability (e.g., impairs one or more areas of functioning OR c) a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom

Symptoms of Psychiatric Disability

Chronically missing class, assignments consistently late, extreme highs or lows in mood, high anxiety level, problems concentrating or remembering, marked personality change, thinking or talking about suicide, denial of obvious problem

Strategies for Faculty and Staff for Students with a Psychiatric Disability

Know campus and community mental health resources, encourage students to ask for help from the Disability Student Services office, work cooperatively with students, connect students with disabilities to each other, be open to and aware of problems and solutions related to disability and mental health

Definition of a Learning Disability

A disorder that impairs the ability to acquire and use skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing or math. These difficulties occur at the level of the central nervous system and involve peculiarities or idiosyncrasies in perceiving, understanding and using verbal or nonverbal information.

Symptoms of Learning Disabilities

Experiences difficulty adjusting to new settings, works slowly, has poor grasp of abstract concepts, either pays too little attention to details or focuses on them too much, misreads information

Common Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities

Extended time on tests, quiet rooms for testing, note takers in class, access to a computer to take exams, multi-modality instruction, flexible assignments, flexible deadlines.

Please feel free to distribute with the following acknowledgement: Teaching All Students, Reaching All Learners, Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, HI.

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