LEARNING DISABILITIES

Characteristics and General Information

A learning disability (LD) presumably is caused by a neurological disorder. This disorder interferes with taking in information (reading, auditory perception, visual perception); processing information (memory, comprehension, retention), and expressing information (writing, speaking). To qualify as having a learning disability, a student must demonstrate an average or better ability (intelligence) level and an average or better achievement level in at least one academic area. In addition, the student must also demonstrate either a significant discrepancy between intra-cognitive abilities, or a significant discrepancy between aptitude and achievement levels.

A person with a learning disability has probably experienced significant frustration in academic environments. The ways in which LD manifests itself often causes teachers, parents and others to decide that a person is lazy or not motivated, when in fact the person is struggling without success. Once students are identified as having a learning disability, they can begin to learn compensatory strategies that help them to learn more effectively and to partially overcome the deficits; however, it will always take more time and effort to succeed at certain academic tasks.

Possible Accommodations

- Extended time for exams
- Separate and individual test taking in CTLE, separate classroom or office, as appropriate
- Use of a note-taker or tape recorder in class
- Faculty sharing notes as is appropriate and feasible
- Alternative forms of testing and expressing knowledge (oral, dictation, essay exams instead of short answer or fill-in-the-blank)
- Use of a word processor for essays, or a calculator for math

Common Characteristics

Reading
- Slow reading rate
- Poor phonic skills, confusion of similar words
- Difficulty comprehending what is read
- Trouble identifying main ideas or determining what is important
- Difficulty remembering what is read

Written Expression
- Difficulty with sentence structure, syntax, grammar, but apt to be articulate with verbal language
- Spelling errors, especially with specialized vocabulary and foreign languages
- Letter reversals
- Compositions which lack organization
- Slow or very messy handwriting
- Inability to copy correctly from the board

Oral Expression
- Difficulty remembering spoken instructions
- Problems describing events or stories in sequence
- May misuse words, using a similar sounding word for the appropriate one
- Greater problems with grammar or ideas when speaking than when writing
- Problems expressing ideas which he/she understands

Mathematics
- Difficulty recalling basic math operations
- Problems with abstract concepts and reasoning
- Reversals and confusion of numbers and symbols
- Difficulty comprehending word problems
- Problems copying from the board or carrying across the columns

Organizational Skills
- Difficulty with time management
- May be slow to begin/follow through with assignments
- Lack of organization in note-taking and written assignments