What Does a Name Mean?

If the name is Disability Services, and you are a student qualified to receive accommodations through the office, it could mean academic success—unless the stigma of the name discourages you from actively utilizing services to which you are entitled.

In a recent *Chicago Tribune* article, Roger Allegra, program manager and director of business development for the Association on Higher Education and Disability, speculates that 10 to 15 percent of students he’s encountered in his 30 years working in disability services don’t ask for help when they enter college. For most people the reason is avoiding stigma, especially if they have psychiatric disabilities. “They don’t want to be looked at as different or feared,” Allegra said in the *Tribune* article.

Our experience at DCC confirms this, and, in fact, the number is much higher. Currently, close to 500 students are eligible to receive accommodations with us, but only 47 percent actually pick up their accommodation letters and use services we offer.

We have to ask, “Why?” Is it the name? While we have students who are completely comfortable with our office, there are others who refuse to disclose their need for accommodations to teachers and friends because they don’t like being labeled as “disabled.” It makes them feel as if there is something wrong with them, or they are not smart enough. Accommodations are for “those people.”

We’ve been conducting a survey this semester and so far have over 200 respondents—including disabled and non-disabled individuals representing a wide cross-section of high school and college students, educators, and parents. Seventy percent of all respondents view the word “Disability” as negative, while 90 percent view the word “Access” as positive, 87 percent view the word “Equity” as positive, and 84 percent view the word “Accommodation” as positive.

That’s why we’re putting a more positive spin on our office’s name. We’re still disAbility Services (with the emphasis on Ability). But Access and Equity is what we’re all about. *We promote Access to education,* giving students equal footing for academic and personal success.

**What We Offer for Students**

**One-On-One Academic Support** including, but not limited to, time management and organization, study skills, note taking, test taking, adaptive tech training, and academic advisement.

**Workshops/Group Work** based on student need: study groups can be customized for a particular subject or desired training.

**Technology** like CCTV, screen readers and magnifiers, speech recognition software, alternate text format, and self-editing software.

**What We Offer for Faculty**

**Instructional Support:** strategies are offered for effective disability-related teaching methods. In some cases, supplemental instruction of content material may be provided.

**Early Alert/Electronic Progress Reports** which allow faculty to provide early intervention warnings with specific feedback and suggestions that our professional tutors will use when they work one-on-one with students academically at-risk.
Cramming for Finals: A Crash Course on Testing Accommodations

Most students registered with our office receive extended time and an alternate testing location in our adaptive technology lab. Finals week is an exceptionally busy time, with virtually every spot in the lab filled with students taking their tests. Responsibilities for our secure testing process are shared by both the students and you, the faculty. Students need to identify themselves to you and present you with a written statement from our office indicating that they have been approved to receive specific accommodations. They need to coordinate their test schedule with both you and our office to allow them to take the test in an appropriate time frame during our regular testing hours (9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with no tests starting after 3 p.m).

Since it is so busy during finals, students should sign up for test times AT LEAST three days in advance, as we may not be able to accommodate test walk-ins. Students should present you with a pre-printed, secure testing envelope. You need to fill out the envelope, indicating the date/time the test should be taken, an “expiration date” if appropriate, and how you want the test returned—held in our office for you to pick up, or sealed and returned by the student. We do not recommend interoffice mail. The package should include the test, scantron, other pertinent materials used by students for tests in your classes, and any special instructions (Are notes allowed? Is it open book? Can they use a calculator?).

The testing envelope can be carried to our office by the student, or teachers may chose to send tests to us directly in the envelope or by electronic submission. English Professor Beth Kolp has used both approaches. “Sending tests and paper topics electronically is easier than walking them over in the busy moments before a class,” she said. But, she added, teachers must remember to do it unprompted. “The envelope, though cumbersome, lets faculty and student connect on an upcoming assignment.” While sometimes there are kinks to work out in the system, overall, it works reasonably well.

For information on the testing process, contact Linda Bertolozzi at 845-431-8056 or email bertoloz@sunydutchess.edu.

Students Can Access Read and Write Gold Across DCC Campus

Read & Write Gold is a powerful tool now available on student-access computers across campus to help all students maximize their learning potential. The program features text reading, voice dictation, research aids, and teaching tools to support students throughout the reading, writing, and learning process. Read & Write Gold helps writers with predictive spelling, word choice, dictionary, and thesaurus features and includes voice dictation that also reads aloud what students write to help them identify errors. Its computerized voices are considered among the most natural-sounding on the market.

“All students are eager for the added help that this software allows,” according to Frances Welsh. “Students use Read & Write Gold primarily as a screen reader for texts, exams, homework assignments, and research online via the Web highlighter.” The software’s text-reading capabilities allow students not only to hear a published work or tests out-loud, but also “to hear their own papers read back to them in hope of teaching students how to catch their own mistakes,” she said. “It can help with pronunciation of foreign languages, primarily Spanish, and for reading comprehension. We slow down the speed and have the student listen carefully to the story/text.” Read & Write Gold’s Speech Maker allows any text to be converted to MP3 or be transferred to a CD, IPOD or MP3 player of their own so that, before a test, students can hear their notes read aloud while driving, at the gym, or just at home doing chores.

The Texthelp option facilitates assignments, homework, and research papers. “We use Texthelp to brainstorm, create outlines, and catch phonetic spelling errors not usually found in Word,” said Welsh. For instance, some students may spell the word “acceptable” phonetically as “ah-septable,” or the word “accidently” as “aszadentlee”—spellings difficult for a traditional spell-checker to interpret. It can help cut down the confusion among words like “assure,” “ensure,” and “insure.” The Verb Checker helps students track proper tense throughout a paper. “Word Prediction helps them get started on any assignment or helps them get ‘unstuck,’ and Word Wizard helps students formulate ideas for papers and with research,” said Welsh. “Also there’s a great advanced dictionary that allows a student to stay within their documents without having them become distracted while looking up words on the internet.”

About Frances Welsh

As the Academic Tutor at Access & Equity, Frances Welsh helped countless students achieve academic success. Welsh, who has a Master’s degree in Mental Health Counseling, recently accepted a full-time counseling position at an agency in Orange County. Read and Write Gold questions should now be addressed to Scott McNeight, who works as a writing tutor with our office, the Writing Center, and Academic Services.

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Access & Equity Faculty Edition, May 2012

Page 2