

PLuS Perspectives

Information about College Students with LD

Supported by a grant from the US Office of Education grant # P333A050044

What is a Learning Disability?

While there are many definitions for what a learning disability is, this one provides a good way for thinking about adults with LDs:

“Specific learning disabilities is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or non-verbal activities. Specific learning disabilities exist as a distinct handicapping condition in the presence of average to superior intelligence, adequate sensory and motor systems, and adequate learning opportunities. The condition varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity. Throughout life the condition can negatively affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and/or daily living activities.”

- Learning Disabilities Association (formerly Association for Children with Learning Disabilities)

“I’d have to say that to me having an LD is just being better at other things than what is ‘normal’ in our society. I’m an amazing artist and people person but I can’t spell and I have trouble getting my ideas out when I’m under pressure.

I just wish my professors would realize what my mother always says, that being fair is not giving everyone the same thing, but giving everyone what they need.”

- A DePaul Student

Successful People with Learning Disabilities

Stephen Cannell, novelist and television writer/creator (*The A-Team*, *21 Jump Street*, *Wiseguy*, *The Rockford Files*), has dyslexia. In an interview, Cannell discussed how a college professor influenced his career choice: “In my sophomore year at University of Oregon, Ralph Salisbury was my first creative writing teacher and he was so enthusiastic about his students that it made me enthusiastic. He really said that I had the talent to become a professional writer and he convinced me that if I wanted to, I could do it. That was the first teacher I ever had that looked past my misspellings and bad handwriting and looked at what I was actually writing. He said it was pretty good.”

Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko’s, struggled with reading, writing, and spelling in school. In an article, Orfalea described how one college professor had an impact on his education: “In my investment strategies class, my teacher almost failed me because I made so many spelling errors on his tests. When he found out I had LD, he announced to the class that I was ‘on the brink of brilliancy’ because he looked at my ideas instead of the spelling. The students were impressed after that, and they thought I saw the world a little differently.”



PLuS Perspectives Continued

Major Types of Learning Disabilities

Oral language disabilities involve difficulties with listening and speaking. A person with an oral language LD may have difficulty understanding what's been said or communicating thoughts and ideas orally to others. These difficulties tend to be in certain areas of oral language expression and reception, not across the board. Frequently, individuals with oral language problems will also have difficulty with written language.

Written language disabilities are thought to be the most common form of LD. This general category describes problems with reading, spelling and writing. Dyslexia is the most well-known LD in this category. Dyslexic individuals do not see words or letters backwards, but rather experience problems translating thought to language or language to thought due to differences in how their brain processes information.

Nonacademic learning disabilities can cause problems with socialization and daily life skills. A person with this type of LD may have problems perceiving or interpreting facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, or body language. The ability to respond in a social situation can be hindered.

I feel like since I have a learning disability people automatically think I am stupid. If I am just given that little extra time with no pressure I can do great work. I've made the Dean's List 5 different times and by no means consider myself stupid.

- A DePaul Student

My definition of learning disabilities is 1 or more difficulties in a certain area of the cognitive domains. This does not mean that a person is stupid or lacking in any way. However it does mean that they need help in figuring out better strategies in adapting to everyday life.

- A DePaul Student

DePaul University PLuS Program
2320 N. Kenmore Ave., SAC 220
Chicago, IL 60614
Phone: (773) 325-7166
E-mail: plusinfo@depaul.edu
studentaffairs.depaul.edu/plus/

Racial/ethnic percentages of college freshmen with learning disabilities attending four-year institutions, 2000**:

Racial/Ethnic Group	Percentage
White/Caucasian	81
African American	6
American Indian	2
Asian American	2
Mexican American	2
Puerto Rican	1
Other Latino	2
Other	4
Total	100

**Henderson, C. (2001). *College Freshmen with Disabilities: A Biennial Statistical Profile*. American Council on Education.

