

# PLuS Perspectives

## Information about College Students with LD

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### Disclosure & Self-Advocacy

Unlike students in primary and secondary education, college students with learning disabilities or AD/HD can choose to disclose or not to disclose their disabilities. This choice can be difficult. In their prior educational experiences, students with LD may have felt stigmatized because of their disability. They may view college as an opportunity to "make it on their own" without the label of LD or AD/HD. However, students will not receive accommodations unless they disclose their disability to the appropriate college officials. College students with LD or AD/HD must learn how to advocate for themselves in a way which enables them to get their needs met while protecting themselves from the emotional damage of being stigmatized.

#### Why is Disclosure a Difficult Decision?

Negative experiences with disclosing a learning disability or AD/HD can have a profound impact on an individual. Robert, a professional educator, vividly recalled the response of his dean when he revealed that he was withdrawing from graduate school due to his dyslexia:

*"And when I withdrew, I remember it very clearly....I had to go see the dean....He wasn't sympathetic at all about the whole situation....I did say...one of the main reasons I'm withdrawing is because of my dyslexia. And he picked up on that and...he almost berated me for it! Why didn't you tell us when you came in?....I felt belittled for it...the message that I received was that I was a bad person because I did what I did, and I was what I was." (Valle et al., 2004, p. 8).*

From: Jan W. Valle, Santiago Solis, Donna Volpitta, and David J. Connor. (2004). The Disability Closet: Teachers with Learning Disabilities Evaluate the Risks and Benefits of "Coming Out." *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37:1, 4-17.

#### The PLuS Program and Disclosure: Confidentiality Policies

PLuS is committed to keeping disability-related information in accordance with state and federal laws. Under these laws disclosure may be permissible on several occasions; however, it is not required, nor is it a duty. PLuS respects each student's choices and decisions regarding disclosure of their disability. Based on these principles, PLuS' policies regarding confidentiality are as follows:

- All records, information, and participation status of students will be shared only with those individuals to whom the students disclose themselves, and for whom the students have provided PLuS with a signed release of information form. Disclosure is defined as to permit access to, or to release, transfer, or to communicate personally identifiable information contained in education records to any party, by any means, including oral, written or electronic means.
- PLuS will honor all other legal requests in person, and in the student's presence only.
- The only exceptions to these policies are requests made by law enforcement officers, or by DePaul University staff or faculty when the student's academic status is in jeopardy (e.g. probation). These requests will be honored immediately, and the student will be informed of the nature of the request, and the information shared.

#### Notice of Disability

One very important aspect of the laws regarding students with disabilities in the post-secondary institution is that it is the students' responsibility to give notice of disability to initiate accommodations; this notice should be given to the appropriate offices of the institution which have been established to handle students' with disabilities records and requests. Until students identify themselves as students with a disability, they are not entitled to any accommodations. Even though there is no time limit as to when they can do that, requests should be made timely, to ensure delivery of the accommodations. At DePaul University students with disabilities may disclose and request accommodations from the Office for Students with Disabilities and from the PLuS Program.



# PLuS Perspectives Continued

## *Promoting Self-Advocacy*

Many college students learn to become effective self-advocates as part of their post-secondary education. Researchers have found that "Indications suggest that an individual's ability to self-advocate may be a powerful influence on personal and career processes and success" (Gregg and Hoy, 1997, p. 1). Students with LD and AD/HD may be hesitant to self-advocate for their disability-related needs due to previous negative experiences of disclosing their disability, or communication difficulties which arise from having LD or AD/HD. Working with the PLuS Program, faculty and staff can help to create an environment which invites students to express their needs without the fear of being dismissed or ridiculed.

Noel Gregg and Cheri Hoy. (1997). Consumers Empowering Consumers. *LINKAGES, Linking Literacy & Learning Disabilities*, 4:2, 1-4.

### **How the PLuS Program Helps**

The PLuS Program is committed to both advocating on behalf of students with LD and AD/HD and helping those students to become effective self-advocates. To this end, PLuS works with students in the following ways to build successful self-advocacy skills:

- PLuS encourages students requesting accommodations to talk to their professors early in the academic term about their specific needs.
- When needed, PLuS staff members coach students on communication strategies to handle meetings with faculty or staff. One strategy which staff and students might employ is to create a bulleted list of items to discuss so that the meeting stays on track.
- The PLuS staff helps students to develop advocacy skills in social situations by discussing options for handling various issues with faculty, staff, and peers.

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### **How Faculty and Staff Can Help**

- Faculty can invite disclosure by including a statement about disabilities in syllabi and by making an oral statement in class.
- University staff can invite disclosure by posting welcoming signage that encourages students to ask for help and information.
- When students disclose their disability, avoid negative body language or skeptical questioning. Listen carefully and indicate a willingness to talk further. Thank them for disclosing the information early in the term to avoid possible problems.
- Ask to see their PLuS program documentation in a friendly and matter of fact way.
- Many students in PLuS work with a clinician. If appropriate, discuss the possibility of establishing contact with their clinician.
- Faculty should make sure that they are familiar with the exam proctoring procedures of the PLuS Program to ensure that the process flows smoothly among students, faculty, and the PLuS staff. Details of this procedure can be found at the PLuS website (Documents and Forms-PLuS Forms-Exam Proctoring Procedures). The direct link is [http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/plus/documents\\_forms.html](http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/plus/documents_forms.html).

