

UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

The California Assessment System for Adults with Learning Disabilities consists of step-by-step procedures describing the assessment components, procedures, and criteria from the initial referral to the final eligibility decision. Increased consistency in eligibility procedures and a more equitable delivery of learning disabilities program services are the outcomes that result from standardizing the minimum eligibility criteria.

A comprehensive manual describes these program elements, which were formally put in place October 1, 1986, to identify students with learning disabilities in California's community colleges. First, however, it is important to present the definition of "learning disabilities" within the California community college system. This definition serves as the foundation for the entire identification and eligibility process.

LEARNING DISABILITIES DEFINITION

According to the Title V regulations, which govern the California Community Colleges, in accordance with the State Education Code and State and Federal legislative guidelines, the definition of a learning disability is as follows:

Learning disabilities in California Community College adults is a persistent condition of presumed neurological dysfunction, which may also exist, with other disabling conditions. The dysfunction continues despite instruction in standard classroom situations. Adults with learning disabilities, a heterogeneous group, have these common attributes:

- Average to above average intellectual ability.
- Severe processing deficit (subtest cluster analysis of the intelligence test reveals extreme highs and lows which "average out". Processing disorders typically affect the student's ability to process information due to deficits in auditory or visual processing, and/or short term, working or long term memory. This is essentially what makes an LD student of average intelligence different from a non-LD student of average intelligence.
- Severe aptitude-achievement discrepancy (one of the basic skills is below the student's own intelligence level).
- Measured achievement in an instructional or employment setting (one of the basic skills is at least average).

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES

Learning disabilities are the result of...

- Mental retardation or low IQ's (lack of intelligence)

No. People with learning disabilities can range in intellectual ability from below average through average to above average. A learning disability is not mental retardation.

- Emotional problems

Emotional problems can affect: anyone at some time in life; but they have nothing to do with learning disabilities.

- Laziness or lack of initiative

Often the opposite! A student with a learning disability has to be more motivated and to work harder especially in postsecondary education.

- Poor educational backgrounds

Educational backgrounds may vary but do not cause learning disabilities.

Also, learning disabilities are not...

- Immediately obvious

People with learning disabilities look just like everyone else. It is hidden disability.

- All the same

Learning disabilities affect different people in different ways. For example, not every person with a learning disability is dyslexic. Some only have difficulty with math (dyscalculia) or writing (dysgraphia)

- Curable

A learning disability is a lifelong condition. It does not go away and cannot be cured.