

One College Initiative

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Disability services at Augsburg College grew out of a desire to make the campus accessible to students with physical disabilities. Augsburg was providing services before it became a law that institutions were required to do so. Approximately ten years after physical access began to be addressed, the college saw that it needed to provide access to students with learning disabilities as well. The program has grown from serving 3 students with learning disabilities in 1980 to serving 150 students in the fall of 2006. Our student profile has expanded to include students with attention deficit disorders, psychiatric conditions, autism spectrum disorders, and brain injuries. Many students tell us that CLASS was the single reason they chose to come to Augsburg. Some very successful students have confided that, if it had not been for our services, they would not have been able to attend college at all.

Disabilities can affect people of any age, ethnicity, or economic background. The one thing that unites them is that they may need an accommodation to access the same education that a non-disabled student does. All students who use CLASS services have shown the potential to succeed in college-level courses. They are admitted to the college solely on their intellectual capacities and without regard to their disability. In many cases, a learning disability is just an extreme style of learning that does not easily adjust to another style. This is where a simple accommodation, such as textbooks available in an audio format, can eliminate a barrier and make a college education accessible.

CLASS gives students the tools that they will need to continue to learn once they leave Augsburg. In weekly meetings, Disability Specialists can work with the students to develop learning strategies, investigate technology options, and explore how their disability might affect them in the workplace. Simply by showing them what they can accomplish independently with accommodations, such as dictation software, CLASS assures students that their disability need not prevent them from doing many of the things they might not have considered possible before. Often these students, because they may have been thwarted in high school, blossom intellectually once we show them the tools they need to become fully engaged in learning. CLASS opens the doors to life-long learning by showing them that they actually can learn.

Often faculty may not have a clear understanding of why we provide accommodations to some students. One of the ways that CLASS addresses this is by providing opportunities for faculty to meet with the student and his or her specialist in the specialist's office to discuss the ways a student's disability may affect him or her. The result of these meetings is almost always an increased awareness on both the part of the faculty and the student about the teaching/learning process and it usually leads to a greater collaboration between the student and his or her professor. This also models for the students how they can discuss the impacts of their disability with others and advocate for themselves, for example, with their future employers. This leads to greater independence once they leave Augsburg College. And that is the main mission of Augsburg College: to graduate students who are prepared to serve the world.