

Psychiatric Disabilities

Students with psychiatric disabilities experience significant emotional difficulty that may or may not have required treatment in a hospital. With appropriate treatment, often combining medications, psychotherapy and support, the majority of psychiatric disorders are cured or controlled.

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that many people in the United States have some form of psychiatric disorder. However, only one in five persons with a diagnosable psychiatric disorder ever seeks treatment due to the strong stigmatization involved.

Some common psychiatric disabilities are depression, bipolar disorder (manic depression), anxiety disorders and schizophrenia.

Some Considerations

- Trauma is not the sole cause of psychiatric disabilities; genetics may play a role.
- Psychiatric disabilities affect people of any age, gender, income group and intellectual level.
- Most people with psychiatric disabilities do not exhibit disruptive behavior.
- Eighty to ninety percent of people with depression experience relief from symptoms through medication, therapy, or a combination of the two. Depression is a variable condition that may fluctuate during a person's lifetime.
- Common accommodations for students with psychiatric disabilities are alternate methods to complete assignments, time extensions for exams, a low-distraction environment for taking exams, taped lectures, provision of advance copies of syllabi and consultations for study skills and strategies.

Instructional Strategies

- Include a disability access statement in the course syllabus such as: "To obtain disability related accommodations and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact Access Services as soon as possible by calling (507) 457-1465."
- Spend extra time with the student, when necessary, and assist the student in planning assignment sub-phases and in time management by scheduling follow up at specified intervals.
- Be flexible with deadlines. A written agreement specifying the accommodative extension is helpful in most cases.
- Allow the student to record lectures.
- Assist the student in finding effective peer note takers from class.
- Clearly define course requirements, the dates of exams, and when assignments are due. Provide advance notice of changes.

- When in doubt about how to assist the student, ask him or her as privately as possible without drawing attention to the student or the disability.

These guidelines were adapted from guidelines used by the Division of Disability Resources & Educational Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.