Nearly 55% of the students who receive services through the Office of Disability Services at UNI have a learning disability.

At this time, there is much confusion surrounding the definition of a specific learning disability as the cause of a learning disability is still unclear (McGuire & Shaw, 1991). Many of the current, working definitions have similar components, however, there is not a universal definition employed by all organizations and institutions.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) developed the following definition of learning disabilities:

“Learning Disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping condition (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences (Catholic University of America, 2004).

The College Committee on Disability Issues (CCDI) suggests that a learning disability occurs in individuals with average or above average intelligence and typically causes a significant discrepancy between the individual’s potential and achievement. Learning disabilities are neurologically-based information processing difficulties that are life long conditions manageable with appropriate support and direction (Conestoga College, n.d.).

Santrock (2003) states that a learning disability involves (1) having normal intelligence or above; (2) having difficulties in at least one academic area and usually several; and (3) having no other problem or disorder, such as mental retardation, that can be determined as causing the difficulty.
Learning Disabilities Continued:  
Educational Implications

There are many educational implications for students with learning disabilities. Students may demonstrate a significant discrepancy between theoretical understanding and their practical achievements in areas such as labs and field placements. They may have well-developed oral communication skills but demonstrate significant deficits in written expression. Speed of processing may be slow, so that students can not keep up to the pace of the class. Lecture material may not be retained, and in testing situations, remembering formulas to solve application questions may be a significant challenge.

Students may listen to content presented through lectures, understand and retain it, yet reading skills may be deficient. Deficits in word recognition, reading speed, and vocabulary can, in turn, affect reading comprehension and the ability to deal with large amounts of reading.

For some students, application courses where spatial reasoning, organization and following a sequence of steps in completing a “hands-on” project may be a challenge, while another student may misunderstand social cues and find it difficult to communicate their needs with professors and peers (College Committee on Disability Issues [CCDI], 2002).

Getting More Specific:  
How Learning Disabilities may affect student participation

- “In individuals with Reading Disorder (which has also been called dyslexia), oral reading is characterized by distortions, substitutions, or omissions; both oral and silent reading are characterized by slowness and errors in comprehension.”

- “A number of different skills may be impaired in Mathematics Disorder, including ‘linguistic’ skills (e.g., understanding of naming mathematical terms…and decoding written problems into mathematical symbols), ‘perceptual’ skills (e.g., recognizing or reading numerical symbols or arithmetic signs…), ‘attention’ skills (e.g., copying numbers or figures correctly…and observing operational signs), and ‘mathematical’ skills (e.g., following sequences of mathematical steps…)”

- When a Disorder of Written Expression is present, “there is generally a combination of difficulties in the individual’s ability to compose written texts evidenced by grammatical or punctuation errors within sentences, poor paragraph organization, multiple spelling errors, or excessively poor handwriting.”

- An Expressive Language Disorder may present difficulties in a “markedly limited vocabulary, errors in tense, difficulty in recalling words or producing sentences with developmentally appropriate length or complexity, and general difficulty expressing ideas.”

(American Psychological Association, 1994 [as cited in DiPaola et al., 2003, p. 8])
References


