

Assisting a Student with a Learning Disability Access Services

Purpose: This vignette highlights the challenges facing students with undiagnosed learning disabilities and provides considerations for getting them assistance.

Student Vignette: Avery is a first-year college student with a declared major in political science. During Avery's second semester, she enrolled in Introduction to Statistics, a required class for the major. After her first test in the class, Avery comes into your office looking very upset. Despite studying for the exam for weeks and attending all review sessions offered by the instructor, she earned a C grade on the test. She told you this grade was very unexpected given that she has been doing well on the class homework, which she does with friends and frequently utilizes tutoring services. As you ask follow-up questions to try to learn more, Avery confides that she often has trouble understanding numbers and gets easily confused trying to solve math problems. She kept getting different answers to the same questions when she tried to check her work and kept missing numbers when writing equations or could not memorize equations correctly. When you ask if Avery has ever been tested for a learning disability, she tells you that she does not know where to start and the process feels overwhelming. Avery shares that she is scared to get labeled. She also worries about what her family might think and that this could create more stress for them.

Guiding Questions:

1. Have you encountered situations like this one? If so, reflect on what the situation was, how you handled it, and what you learned.
2. Describe the challenges Avery is navigating? What might you do to address these challenges?
3. What strengths of Avery's can be leveraged in this situation?
4. What campus resources exist to support Avery?
5. Given your role (e.g., academic advisor, program director, faculty, etc.), what might you do to support Avery? What additional information or resources might you need?
6. Reflect on the concept of ecological validation. How could the norms framing student interactions (holistic, proactive, strengths-oriented, and developmental) and the work of educators (collaborative and reflective) be leveraged to support Avery?
7. What policies and practices could be shifted to support students in situations like this? How might this shift occur?