Information on Invisible Disabilities

Many students have disabilities that are not immediately apparent, but still have significant impact on a student’s ability to study. Invisible disabilities may interact in complex ways that affect the student differently from day to day.

Invisible disabilities may include:
- Medical conditions like cancer, diabetes, epilepsy or respiratory conditions.
- Mental health disabilities like anxiety, depression or bipolar disorder.
- Neurological conditions such as migraine or traumatic brain injury.
- Print disability.
- Problems with dexterity e.g. OOS/RSI, injuries to fingers, hands, arms.
- Specific learning disabilities like dyslexia.
- Sensory problems like low vision or hearing impairment.

Examples of impacts of impairments:
- Fatigue, sleepiness, poor concentration.
- Poor organisational skills.
- Time away from lectures, hospitalisation.
- Spelling and other surface errors in written work.
- Difficulties with timed tasks e.g. tests and exams.

Ways staff can assist:
- Avoid making assumptions.
- Give students opportunities to talk with you early in the semester.
- Remember to treat disclosures with care.
- Use inclusive teaching practices e.g. face students when talking, write clearly, use easy to read print, consider learning styles of students, allow time for questions for clarification.
- Where necessary, seek advice from the relevant support service, as listed below.

Available support services for staff and students:
- Student Disability Services: Ph: 09 373 7599 ext 82936
  Email: disabilities@auckland.ac.nz
- Student Learning Services: Ph: 09 373 7599 ext 88850
  Email: sls@auckland.ac.nz
- Student Health & Counselling: Ph: 09 373 7599 ext 87681

Disclosure is voluntary:
Students may choose not to disclose their invisible disability because they
- Don’t want special treatment, or want to see if they can cope alone.
- Fear discrimination.
- Feel embarrassed about asking for help.
- Want to get to know staff first, and then decide whether to disclose.

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