

FAST FACTS FOR FACULTY

Academic Support and Disability Services

Most Frequently Asked Questions

EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Introduction

Although enrollment rates of students with disabilities in higher education are increasing, some faculty and teaching staff may not be aware of the many services and supports available to students with disabilities. In particular, instructional staff members may not always be aware of the types of accommodations available or what steps are involved in the accommodations process. The following is a list of frequently asked questions regarding the roles and responsibilities of faculty and teaching associates in providing accessible learning for students with disabilities. Although these questions address the most common of concerns, the issue of faculty and TA responsibility is situation-specific and as such can be difficult to define. As you are confronted with some of your concerns, keep in mind that the Office of Academic Support is the office on campus that determines appropriate accommodations. We hope that you find the following questions to be a quick and useful resource guide, but we encourage you to contact the Office of Academic Support when you are in doubt about how best to meet the needs of a student with a disability.

Q: Who is responsible for determining appropriate accommodations?

A: The Office of Academic Support is the office on campus that determines appropriate accommodations. The office bases their decision upon documentation collected from a student with a disability and the student's functional limitations.

Q: Are all students with disabilities registered with the Office of Academic Support?

A: No, it is likely that many students with disabilities have chosen not to be registered with the Office of Academic Support or they may not have met the eligibility criteria for services. In either instance, faculty do not need to provide these students with accommodations.

Q: What would be the best way to inform students in the class that I would like to help in facilitating exam accommodations or any classroom accommodations?

A: It is important that all faculty put a statement about accommodations in their syllabus. It should go something like this: "Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs."

Most Frequently Asked Questions

- Q: Am I required to provide exam accommodations to students who request it?
- A: Yes you are. Students with disabilities are protected by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504. This law requires that qualified students with disabilities get equal access to an education, and this includes exam accommodations.
- Q: A student has asked for accommodations. How do I know the student truly has a disability and needs accommodations?
- A: You may ask the student to provide you with a letter verifying that s/he has a disability. The student, if registered with the Office of Academic Support will be given a letter within 24 hours after a request is made.
- Q: I have a student in class who told me that s/he has a disability, but since that time has never requested any accommodations. Am I still responsible for accommodations?
- A: No, you are only responsible for reasonable accommodations if requested. In these types of situations, however, it would be appropriate to speak to the student privately to let the student know that you welcome the opportunity to discuss reasonable accommodations if the student is interested.
- Q: What are some of the types of exam accommodations available to students with disabilities?
- A: First of all, the exam accommodations are based upon the student's functional limitations and the documentation of disability that the student has provided the Office of Academic Support. Some of these accommodations include but are not limited to: extra time for exams (usually 50% extra time but in some cases as much as double time), a reader or scribe (a person who writes answers verbatim), a computer, a Brailed exam, an enlarged exam, an exam scanned onto a disk and use of computer (student uses voice, enlargement options, or spelling/grammar check), a distraction-reduced space, image enhancements (converting graphs, charts, and other types of images converted into raised-line format), and use of a closed circuit TV to enlarge print.
- Q: A student with a disability has requested that s/he take an exam at the Office of Academic Support. How do I know that my exam will be safe and that the student will get no unfair advantage?
- A: The Office of Academic Support has developed a very systematic and secure procedure for getting exams from faculty and returning them once the student has taken the exam. There are very rigid checking in and checking out procedures for exams, and no student is able to take an exam with appropriate accommodations without authorization. While exams are at the Office of Academic Support, they are kept in a locked file during the night. While students are taking the exam, they are monitored. Test studios have small windows to enable the staff to periodically view the students while they are taking tests. Occasionally, there are a few issues, however, the Office of Academic Support works diligently to rectify any problems.

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Q: Students with disabilities ask me to fill out “proctor sheets.” I have a million things to do. I don’t mind if they use exam accommodations, but do I have to fill out that form?

A: Yes you do! In order for students to arrange for exam accommodations at the Office of Academic Support, and in order for the Office of Academic Support to administer your exam to your student, you must quickly and totally fill out the “proctor sheets.” It is often very helpful to meet with the student so that you and the person requesting accommodations can fill the sheet out together and are on the same wavelength. Not only does the proctor sheet help facilitate the exam accommodation process, but it also helps the Office of Academic Support administer the exams using your specific requirements for the administration of the exam. You may, however, opt to administer the exam yourself to the student, but appropriate exam accommodations must be provided. This includes adaptive technology, a distraction-reduced space, reader/scribes, etc. if needed.

Q: When I have a deaf student in class, am I required to have an interpreter or real time captioner in the class too? My class is very crowded and also, the students sometimes watch the interpreter instead of me.

A: There is no question about it. You are required by law to have what is essential for the student to have equal access to an education, and this includes a sign language interpreter or real time captioner.

Q: A student with a disability has asked me for a copy of my notes and overheads. Do I have to give this to the student?

A: Some students with disabilities have difficulty taking notes. Sometimes faculty notes are only a brief outline of the actual lecture given. These notes may not be too helpful. It is important that you assist the student in getting access to class notes. You may want to help the student find a volunteer note taker in class by making an announcement in class without revealing the student’s name. If you have a graduate student in class to assist you and if this person takes notes, these notes may be another option. If you feel your notes are good, sharing your notes would be a third option. It may also be appropriate for some students to tape a class.

Q: I have a student who is having difficulty in my class. I think this student may have a disability. What should I do to help the student?

A: Talk privately with the student to discuss your observations. The student may reveal s/he has a disability. If this is the case and the student is registered with the Office of Academic Support, suggest that the student talk to his/her counselor in this office. The student may also be referred to the Office of Academic Support for diagnostic testing for a suspected learning disability.

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Q: Am I required to lower the standards of a required assignment because the student has a disability?

A: No, the standards should be the same for all students; however, some students with disabilities may exhibit their knowledge, production, and other course expectations differently than their peers. For example, a student with a learning disability in writing may produce an essay exam by using a computer or scribe rather than writing out an answer without the use of accommodations. The quality of the work should be the same.

Q: I have a student with a disability getting behind in his/her schoolwork. This student is missing a number of classes and has not handed in several assignments. Although s/he has taken a midterm and used accommodations, the student's grade is about a D. At this point, the student is not passing the class. Do I have a right to fail a student with a disability?

A: The student with a disability has the same right to fail as anyone else. Their work should be equivalent to their peers. It may be a good idea to discuss your observations with this student just as you would with anyone else in your class who is experiencing difficulty.

Q: I have a student who is blind in my chemistry lab. How is s/he going to participate and be graded in his/her lab work?

A: If possible, assist the student in getting a lab partner or assign a student assistant to work with the student with a disability. In either situation, the student who is blind should direct the assistant to carry out the functions of the lab assignment. If a volunteer lab partner cannot be found, suggest to the student that s/he needs to contact the Office of Academic Support as soon as possible for assistance in getting a lab partner. The speed in making these arrangements is critical so that the student will not get behind.

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