

Disability Accommodation Procedure for Students

Federal and state disability laws mandate that universities make the necessary modifications to their academic requirements to ensure that they do not discriminate or have the effect of discriminating against qualified students with disabilities.

To be considered a “qualified” individual with a disability, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that a student meet the academic and technical standards for admission and continued participation in a university’s education program or activity. Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) define an individual with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a history or record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. Examples of recognized disabilities include but are not limited to, blindness, deafness/hard of hearing, learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, chronic medical conditions, and mental health conditions.

Students with disabilities, the office of Student Disability Services (SDS) and course instructors all have roles in the classroom accommodation process.

The role of students in the disability accommodation process:

Students who wish to use disability accommodations must self-identify to SDS and provide disability documentation at their own expense. Documentation must meet established university guidelines. Upon request, the SDS office provides registered students with an accommodation notification letter for their instructors. These letters list the approved accommodations for the student. Students must give the notification letter to the instructor and discuss their specific needs for access in the course. Students are responsible for providing sufficient notice to allow the faculty member to make the necessary accommodation arrangements.

The role of Faculty in the disability accommodation process:

Faculty members are responsible for ensuring equal opportunity for students with disabilities in their courses by providing the accommodations identified on the accommodation notification letter prepared by SDS for students. Accommodations are approved for the broad academic environment. If an accommodation approved by SDS would fundamentally alter the academic structure or essential requirements of the course, the instructor should contact SDS as quickly as possible to discuss a modification to the approved accommodation. Timeliness is important to the accommodation process because it may affect the student’s ability to remain in a course.

Faculty members should provide disability accommodations only for students who have provided notification letters from SDS. Students who request accommodations without an accommodation notification letter should be directed to the SDS office to learn about the university’s disability accommodation procedure. The exception to this procedure is students with obvious physical disabilities who may have immediate need for access (e.g. a student using a wheelchair who may need a table rather than a desk in

a classroom). Those accommodations should be made immediately and the student should be directed to follow up with the SDS office.

It is reasonable to expect two weeks notice of accommodation requests. However, if arrangements can be provided with less notice, a faculty member should do so. **A small number of students registered with SDS have episodic health conditions in which they may experience unexpected episodes such as seizures or systemic flareups. These episodes may require accommodations such as flexibility with an absence policy and/or the opportunity to take a make-up exam.** Students should disclose the potential for the need of this type of accommodation at the beginning of the semester.

When the instructor includes a statement about the accommodation procedure of the course in the syllabus, the university and the instructor are ensuring that students are well informed of their rights and minimize the potential for last minute requests for accommodations. Faculty members are encouraged to use the statement below:

Note to students with disabilities: If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, provide the (Instructor, TA, Course Coordinator) with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Students are expected to give two weeks notice of the need for accommodations. If you need immediate accommodations, please arrange to meet with your (Instructor, TA, Course Coordinator) within the first two class meetings.

The role of the SDS in the disability accommodation process:

The SDS staff reviews disability documentation and determines eligibility for disability services and accommodations that ensure equal opportunity and non-discrimination. SDS will confer with the student and instructor about accommodations unique to a specific course to ensure that essential requirements are met while disability barriers are addressed. SDS addresses access needs by providing accommodations such as adaptive equipment, laptops for exams, lab assistants, alternate format materials, assistive listening devices and note taking assistance.

Confidentiality:

Students have the right to confidentiality of their disability status. Instructors may share accommodation information with academic support staff for the purpose of the provision of accommodations. Instructors should refrain from making any disability related comments in front of the class or in presence of other students, faculty or staff who are not directly involved in the accommodation process. Disability documentation is maintained in the SDS office and should only be reviewed by the SDS staff.