



The Instructor Series:
Accommodating Students with Disabilities
in Post-Secondary Environments

Accommodating Students with Disabilities In the Classroom



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This booklet is part of a three-part series designed to help college faculty and instructors understand their role in the educational accommodation process. Other booklets in this series include:

- **Facts on the ADA, Accommodations and Disability**
- **Accommodating for Disabilities Outside the Classroom**

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**This document is available in alternate formats upon request. Please contact the
Division of Adult Studies for more information.**



Notice: This document was created using the definitions and regulations from the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The ADA Amendments Act was passed in 2008 to address different interpretations of what constitutes a disability under the original act, stressing a broad scope of protection under the law. See <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/bulletins/adaaal.htm> for more information.

This document was supported in whole or in part by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, (Cooperative Agreement No. H324M980109). However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred. Note: There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please credit the source and support of federal funds when copying all or part of this material. This document is also available on the web for printing at: <http://das.kucrl.org/iam.html>

Instructor Responsibilities

"I had trouble writing six or seven journal entries a week, so I went to the professor and told him I was having trouble. He suggested that I speak them into a tape recorder. It worked out fine. It was his own adaptation. I didn't have to come to him and say, can I do this instead of this. "

A student with a visual impairment

"I have memory loss and sometimes I don't get it real quick. One day my professor asked me why I was staring at her. And I said, because I need to look at your lips when you are talking... your eyes, your movements, they tell me what you are saying."

A student with a head injury

Instructors Play Key Role

Instructors often have more contact with students than any other staff at the college. Because of this, instructors play a key role in the accommodation process. An instructor's main accommodation responsibilities can be summarized as the following:

- **Setting Academic and Conduct Standards**
- **Providing Notice**
- **Assisting with Implementation of Accommodations**
- **Confidentiality**

Program Enrollment Standards

Determining the essential requirements for admittance to an academic program and standards for academic performance is important. Each academic department is responsible for setting program enrollment

standards and standards for student performance and conduct. Within that framework, instructors usually set academic and conduct standards for their courses. In order to set these standards, instructors should be able to answer the following questions about their courses, instructional methods, assessments and performance.

Course

- 1) What academic skills must be demonstrated?
- 2) What prerequisite knowledge and skills will students need to possess in order to be successful in this course
- 3) What specific knowledge, principles, or concepts must be mastered?

Instructional Methods

- 1) What methods of instruction are non-negotiable?
- 2) Why are they non-negotiable? (For example, auditory presentation of musical compositions may be deemed absolutely necessary in a music appreciation class because of the designed nature and purpose of the course)

Assessment

- 1) What methods of assessing outcome variables are absolutely necessary?
- 2) Why are they necessary? (For example, a nursing student's proficiency in starting an IV must be assessed by physical performance because of skill development required by the major and /or licensing requirements)

Performance

- 1) What are acceptable levels of performance on these measures? (For example, 100% of program competencies

must be demonstrated; 85% of exam questions must be answered or performed correctly)

Do academic accommodations lower the standards for students with disabilities?

No. Academic accommodations are changes to a classroom environment or task that are necessary to provide equal opportunity to qualified students with disabilities. Accommodations are designed to assist students in overcoming functional limitations resulting from their disability. They are not used to lower the standards. Students with disabilities will still be responsible for meeting course and conduct requirements.

Providing Notice

A student with a disability may go to an instructor for assistance. Therefore it is essential that an instructor knows where to refer a student and understands how the accommodation process works.

Students should be referred to the Disability Support Services office. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires colleges to affirmatively notify students of their right to request accommodations. Instructors are encouraged to announce during the first class session that accommodations are available for students with disabilities. In addition, instructors should put one of the following notices on their syllabi or a statement very similar.

Longer Accommodation Notice

As required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, accommodations are provided to ensure equal opportunity for students with verified disabilities. If you have a disability that requires accommodations, contact Disability Student Services at:

Shorter Accommodation Notice

Accommodations are provided for students with verified disabilities. For more information contact Disability Student Services at:

Assisting with Implementation of Accommodations

Providing accommodations is a collaborative process. Sometimes it will be necessary for the instructor to provide input into the process. You may be asked to provide information about course requirements, instructional methods, assessment procedures, required performance standards.

The level of involvement you will have in the accommodation process will vary depending upon the following factors: the type of accommodation provided, the setting for the accommodation, the student's disability, and your comfort level in working with students with disabilities.

The following examples demonstrate varying levels of instructor involvement in the accommodation process. The examples are not designed to guide the selection of accommodations for a particular student.

Accommodations which require little or no involvement by the instructor

Note taker

A note taker, who may or may not be a student enrolled in your course, attends each class session in order to take notes for a student with a disability.

Tape recorder

Tape recording class lectures and discussions may be a necessary accommodation for some students. If DSS approves use of a

tape recorder for a student, you must allow it. As a general rule, any classroom material which a student typically would take notes on, may be recorded. If you are concerned about copyright or academic freedom issues, it would be appropriate for you to work with DSS and the student to devise a contract which would specify how the tapes may be used (i.e. only for the student's personal use, during the duration of the current academic semester) and proper disposal procedures.

Accommodations which require the instructor to be minimally involved.

Assistive Listening Devices

Some students with hearing impairments use assistive listening devices in the classroom. Assistive listening devices amplify and transmit sound. Usually the person speaking wears some type of microphone, which transmits sound directly to a receiver being worn by the student. You may be asked to wear a transmitter or microphone during class. You may also need to restate questions or comments that are made by other students so that this information is transmitted to the student with the hearing impairment. In a small group (7-10) discussion class, it may be most effective to use a device that could be handed around the room or set in the middle of a table permitting each speaker to speak into the transmitter. However, you should discuss this with the student prior to implementing it in the classroom.

Adapting an Assignment

Sometimes accommodating a student can be as simple as adapting an assignment. For example, a student in a psychology course was required to keep a daily journal.

It was difficult for a student who was blind to keep up. First, she had to write the journal entry with her Perkins Braille first, then she had to get it transferred to written text so she could give it to her professor in a readable format. The professor suggested that the student speak her journal entries into a tape recorder and submit them on tape.

Extended Time on Tests

When a recommended accommodation is additional time on tests, an instructor may choose to proctor the exam themselves, or if this is not feasible, arrangements can be made to have the DSS office proctor the exam.

Accommodations which require more significant involvement by the instructor.

Testing in Different Format

In some circumstances an alternative testing method will be an approved accommodation for a student. An instructor may need to adapt an examination or permit an alternative method for recording answers.

Alternative methods of recording answers

Some disabilities make it very difficult to accurately fill out a Scantron or other computer scored answer sheet. On a multiple-choice exam an instructor may need to permit a student to circle his or her answers on the test document. The instructor will need to hand score the exam. Other examples include permitting a student to speak answers into a tape recorder or to type answers on a typewriter or computer.

Alternative testing formats

Permitting students to show their knowledge or mastery of the subject matter, by using an alternative testing method may be a necessary accommodation, provided that the change in method doesn't fundamentally alter the

education program. For example, permitting an oral exam in lieu of a written exam may be permissible unless the purpose of the exam is also to test the writing ability of the student. Likewise, permitting an essay exam in lieu of a multiple-choice exam or vice versa may be acceptable in some situations.

Adaptations such as these ensure evaluation of the student's achievement in the course, rather than reflecting the student's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills.

Providing Technical Vocabulary

Technical vocabulary may be unfamiliar to students and an interpreter. Preparing a list of such terms will help students and interpreters keep up with any lecture.

A Note about Course Substitutions & Waivers

Whether to grant a course substitution or waiver is a decision reserved for the school administration in consultation with the student, DSS, the instructor, and the relevant academic department. Requests for course substitutions or waivers must be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Waiver or substitution of a course may be an appropriate accommodation when it is being sought for non-essential courses.

Consider the following illustrations

If swimming is a required course and a student's physical disability prevents them from swimming, it would be appropriate to permit the student to take a course in health or wellness in place of the swimming class.

Two students with documented learning disabilities, that affect their ability to do math, have requested that they be allowed to substitute a logic or philosophy class in place of college algebra. Student A is a recreational

therapy major. Student B is a business major. Both students have completed a majority of the prerequisite classes for their program of study and both are in good academic standing. The committee reviewing these requests grants student A's request and denies student B's request for a substitution. This is permissible because the committee deemed college algebra essential to student B's course of study, but not essential for student A. Over half of the upper level business courses student B needed to take to complete her degree required college algebra as a prerequisite. Whereas none of student A's remaining classes required algebra.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of disability and accommodation related information is essential. All disability information that a student chooses to share with an instructor should be used only for arranging accommodations. An instructor must not disclose or discuss information about a student's disability or accommodations with other persons, unless the student has authorized the disclosure.

Having a disability revealed is often mentioned by students with disabilities as the situation they fear the most at school. No student wants to be labeled as different. If you reveal a student's disability to other students, you have violated the trust that that student has in you and the college and the results can be devastating for the student. Some disabilities will be obvious (e.g., a student in a wheelchair, a student who is blind), but there are many more disabilities that are not so obvious. These disabilities are usually only revealed to you so that the proper accommodations can be provided to give the student an equal opportunity to learn in your classroom.

