

Most Frequently Asked Questions

Educational Access for Students with Disabilities

Learning Resources Department
Improving the Quality of Education 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 instructors in providing accessible learning for students with disabilities. Although these questions address the most common of concerns, the issue of instructor 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 Student Services Office 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 Student Services Office 770-228-7348 when you are in doubt about how best to meet the needs of a student with a disability.

What is the ADA?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a comprehensive national mandate designed to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Who Is Qualified As Disabled?

Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as walking, seeing, breathing, working and learning. Examples include orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, emotional illness, learning disabilities and HIV disease.

How do I know what test accommodations to provide?

Students, approved for test accommodations, should provide you with a letter from Student Services indicating the testing accommodations needed. Test accommodations may include but are not limited to: extended time, low distraction environment or private room, use of a computer, large print, scribe or reader. Specific accommodations are specified in the letter.

Who is responsible for determining appropriate accommodations?

The Office for Student Services 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.

Are all students with disabilities registered with Student Services?

No, it is likely that many students with disabilities have chosen not to be registered with Student Services or they may not have met the eligibility criteria for services. In either instance, faculty members do not need to provide these students with accommodations.

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?

It is important that all faculty members put a statement about accommodations in their syllabus. It should go something like this: "Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact Student Services at 770-228-7348 to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities."

Am I required to provide exam accommodations to students who request it?

Yes you are. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, protects students with disabilities. This law requires that qualified students with disabilities get equal access to an education, and this includes exam accommodations.

A student has asked for accommodations. How do I know the student truly has a disability and needs accommodations?

You may ask the student to provide you with a letter verifying that s/he has a disability. The student, if registered with Student Services, will be given a letter within 24 hours after a request is made. Student Services has on file for every student who is registered with the office and uses services, documentation of the disability.

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?

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.

What are some of the types of exam accommodations available to students with disabilities?

First of all, the exam accommodations are based upon the student's functional limitations and the documentation of disability that the student has provided Student Services. 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, 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.

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.

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.

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?

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. Some distance learning faculty have developed website guided notes. This has been extremely helpful to many students who lack the ability to keep up the pace in taking thorough notes. It may also be appropriate for some students to tape a class.

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?

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 Student Services, suggest that the student talk to his/her counselor in this office. The student may also be referred to Student Services for diagnostic testing for a suspected learning disability. Suggest that the student contact Student Services for further information.

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

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.

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?

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.

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?

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 Student Services 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.

Do I have any recourse if I disagree about requested accommodations?

To clarify any disagreement about a requested accommodation, you can first contact Student Services. If there continues to be conflict, you can contact the Griffin Technical College ADA Coordinator.

What are the limitations to accommodating students with disabilities?

Faculty are chiefly responsible for providing academic adjustments to students with disabilities in their classes. Instructors are never asked to lower academic standards or to provide adjustments that are excessive, but they are expected to make reasonable accommodations. If a faculty member does not provide academic adjustments, students with disabilities will be at an academic disadvantage.