



Fast Facts for Instructors

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. 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 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 Disability Services Office (DSO) is the office on campus that determines appropriate accommodations. I hope that you find the following questions to be a quick and useful resource guide but encourage you to contact the Disability Services Office (DSO) at (803)643-6815, Rm 105 Student and Educational Support Bldg., 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 DSO is the office on campus that determines appropriate accommodations. The office bases their decision upon documentation collected from the student with a disability and the student's functional limitations (the degree to which the disability or condition limits one or more major life activity, such as seeing, hearing, learning, etc...., has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment).

Q: Are all students with disabilities registered with the DSO?

A: No, it is likely that many students with disabilities have chosen not to be registered with the DSO 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: "It is the University of South Carolina Aiken policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities as stated in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you would like to request such accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services at (803) 643-6815 in room 105 SES Bldg. to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities."

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 DSO, will be given an Accommodation Request Form at the start of each semester. This letter will state the accommodations approved by the DSO based on the documentation provided by the student. The specifics of the disability cannot be disclosed due to confidentiality.

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: A student with a disability has requested that s/he take an exam at the DSO. How do I know that my exam will be safe, and that the student will get no unfair advantage?

A: DSO staff have developed very systematic, rigid, and secure checking in and checking out procedures for exams, and no student is able to take an exam with accommodations without authorization. While exams are at the DSO, they are kept in a locked file during the night. While students are taking the exam, they are monitored at all times by DSO staff. If an issue should arise, the DSO works diligently to rectify any problems.

Q: Students with disabilities ask me to fill out the "Exam Proctoring Form." I have a million things to do. I do not mind if they use exam accommodations, but do I have to fill out that form?

A: Yes, you do! In order for the DSO to administer your exam to your student you must quickly and completely fill out the Exam Proctoring Form. 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 Exam Proctoring Form help facilitate the exam accommodation process, but it also helps the DSO 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. If you unable to provide appropriate accommodations or are unsure about what is appropriate, please work with the DSO to ensure that the student's accommodation needs are met.

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 DSO. 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), an enlarged print exam, or use of computer (for voice to text or text to speech programs, enlargement options, or spelling/grammar check), a distraction-reduced testing space, image enhancements (converting graphs, charts, and other types of images converted into raised-line format), or the use of a closed circuit TV to enlarge print.

Q: Am I responsible for scheduling exams or quizzes with DSO for a student who requests to have his/her exam proctored?

A: No, it is the student's responsibility to schedule with the DSO to have an exam proctored. Student must complete an exam proctoring form requesting to take an exam. The EPF is given to the professor for approval. The professor returns the EPF along with the exam to DSO office; either by the email address indicated on the form or may deliver to DSO in SES Bldg. Room 104.

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 instructor 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 feel your notes are good, sharing your notes would be a helpful option. It may also be appropriate for some students to digitally record the audio of a class or to take snapshots of the blackboard or overheads.

Q: A student in my class asked me for assistance getting notes. After I made these arrangements, the student has missed most of the lectures. Should he be getting these notes?

A: If a student with a disability regularly skips class, then he or she has no right to get notes on the days skipped. The note taker should be informed of this. If the student has a legitimate excuse for the absence, (for example illness, death in the family, etc.) handle the situation as you would with all other students.

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 DSO, suggest that the student talk to staff in this office. If the student is not registered, DSO staff can explore and discuss options for the student including outside referral sources for assessment and evaluation. You may always suggest that the student call the DSO at (803) 643-6815 for further information.

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 standard measuring the students 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 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: Am I required to provide accommodations for student who are enrolled in on-line classes?

A: Yes, students are entitled to applicable accommodations for on-line classes. This may include extended time on tests, assignments, and quizzes. The student must make available to the instructor a current accommodation plan which will include accommodations approved by DSO.

Q: Am I required to honor an accommodation plan that is presented by a student at any time during the semester?

A: Yes, A student may receive a diagnosis of a disability at any time during the semester and may register with ODS for accommodations. Accommodations are not retroactive and may only be provided to a student starting the day the accommodation plan is received by the professor.

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

A: To clarify any disagreement about a requested accommodation, you can contact the Disability Services Program Coordinator, Sandra Robinson.

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