



# Most Frequently Asked Questions

## EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Adapted from materials developed through the Ohio State University Partnership Grant  
*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 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 accommodation process. The following is a list of frequently asked questions regarding the roles and responsibilities of faculty 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 offices providing disability services on each campus are the offices that determine appropriate accommodations. For students with psychological or physical disabilities, the responsible offices are the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at Foothill and Disability Support Services (DSS) at De Anza. For students with learning disabilities, the responsible offices are the Student Tutorial Evaluation Program (STEP) at Foothill and the Educational Diagnostic Center (EDC) at De Anza.

We hope that you find the following questions to be a quick and useful resource guide, but we encourage you to contact the disability services office on your campus 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 disability services offices on each campus have the legal obligation and the professional expertise to determine appropriate accommodations. The professional staff of counselors and learning disability specialists has been designated by the District to do so. They base their decisions upon documentation collected from a student with a disability and the student's functional limitations. Faculty should not provide ad hoc accommodations without consultation with the disability services specialists on their campus.

**Q:** Are all students with disabilities registered with disability services?

**A:** No, it is likely that some students with disabilities have chosen not to be registered or they may not have completed the required documentation and intake process to establish eligibility. In either instance, faculty should not 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 other 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 based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact...(Foothill or De Anza disability services office)\*... to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities..” \*Foothill: DRC, Room 5801, (650) 949-7017. De Anza DSS, Seminar 2A, (408) 864-8753 or EDC, LCW110, (408) 864-8838.

**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:** Some students will bring a referral sheet to you. If not, you can ask the student to provide you with a letter verifying that s/he has a disability. The disability services office on each campus has a file for every student who is registered with them and who uses services, and maintains the documentation of the disability. If requested, the student will provide a verification letter. All testing accommodations are preceded by an authorization letter to you from the disability services office.

**Q:** As an instructional aide, students sometimes ask me about accommodations in the lab. What should I do?

**A:** Treat the student with the same consideration you would other students who need some additional help in your lab. If the accommodation exceeds the usual help you would extend, students can be referred back to the classroom instructor, lab supervisor or the disability services office. If there is special assistive equipment in your lab, be sure you have some basic training in how to help students use it, as you would help other students with equipment. When in doubt about a situation, check with your supervisor and/or disability services.

**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. 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, Brailled or enlarged print, an exam scanned onto a disk and use of computer (for voice input, enlargement options, or spelling/grammar check), or a distraction-reduced space.

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

**A:** Each campus has developed a systematic and secure procedure for getting exams from faculty and returning them once the student has taken the exam. There are rigid check-in and checkout procedures for exams. No student is able to take an exam with appropriate accommodations without authorization. While exams are at disability services, they are kept in a locked location. Students must sign an Integrity Agreement and agree to adhere to posted exam rules. While students are taking the exam, they are carefully monitored. Faculty instructions for permissible test materials are followed strictly. When, on a rare occasion, there is a concern about the integrity or security of a specific exam administration, the staff informs the instructor promptly.

**Q:** Students with disabilities ask me to fill out test forms and to return tests to the disability office. I have a million things to do. I don't mind if they use exam accommodations, but do I have to fill out these forms and bring exams over?

**A:** Yes you do. In order for students to arrange for exam accommodations, and in order for the offices to administer your exam to your student, you must fill out the forms and promptly deliver the tests prior to the student's exam appointment, or make other arrangements to ensure the test is delivered. The forms help facilitate the exam accommodation process, and help the offices 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 are unable to provide appropriate accommodations or are unsure about what is appropriate, please work with the disability services offices to ensure that the student's accommodation needs are met.

**Q:** I've been debating about what books or videos I want to use for my class, but I keep being asked to select them and turn in my book order ASAP. Do I have to?

**A:** Yes you do. Students who are print impaired have a legal right to equal access to their textbooks and other classroom instructional materials as their peers. These materials may need to be scanned to disc, printed in Braille or large print, or tape-recorded. The Alternate Media Specialists on each campus coordinate the outside ordering or the in-house production of these. Videos must be captioned to be accessible to Deaf students. Students need to be able to listen to taped or scanned textbooks, have their Brailled or large print copies or view videos at the same time as others in the class. By delaying the selection of materials, students may not be able to get their materials converted to an appropriate format in a timely fashion. This means that they may have to start the

quarter without access to essential instructional components. None of us want to contribute to a student getting behind or failing a class.

**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 feel your notes are good, sharing your notes would be an option. Many faculty and departments 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.

**Q:** A student wants me to announce their request for a notetaker without revealing their identity. Why the secrecy?

**A:** Students with disabilities are afforded strict privacy protections. Faculty cannot divulge the disability status or accommodation needs of any student to other students or staff, without the individual's permission. Confidentiality should be safeguarded with the utmost care and conversations about disability-related issues should occur with discretion and respect for individual privacy rights.

**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 disability services, suggest that the student talk to his/her counselor in this office. If the student is not aware of them or registered with these services, make a referral. The student may also be sent to the DRC at Foothill or the EDC at De Anza to explore whether diagnostic testing for a suspected learning disability is appropriate.

**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 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 disability 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.

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

**A:** To clarify any disagreement about a requested accommodation, you can first contact disability services. Start with the student's disability counselor, but you are also free to talk to the dean.

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This Fact Sheet is available in alternate format upon request. Please call the Alternate Media Specialist for your campus.

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Foothill: Steven Sum (650) 949-7673, [sumsteven@foothill.edu](mailto:sumsteven@foothill.edu).

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