College Students with Disabilities: An abbreviated guide for Faculty and Staff

This abbreviated guide is designed to assist faculty and staff in teaching and providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities.

The mandate to provide reasonable accommodation comes from Federal law and from the mission of Western Michigan University to provide an educational opportunity to all its students. WMU has charged several offices with the oversight of these responsibilities. DSS, 387-2116, serves students who have documented physical and psychiatric disabilities, as well as students with documented learning disabilities and related emotional issues.

The Office of Institutional Equity (OIE), 387-8880, acts affirmatively on behalf of qualified persons who have disability-related compliance issues in accordance with Federal and State guidelines and regulations. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires the university to provide reasonable accommodations that afford equal opportunities for students with disabilities.

Achieving reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities involves shared responsibility between students, faculty, and staff. Section 504 states that: "No otherwise qualified person with a disability in the United States...shall, solely by reason of disability, by denied the benefits of, be excluded from participation in, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

College students with disabilities: the law protects the rights of qualified individuals who have disabilities such as, but not limited to:

Blindness/visual impairment.
Cerebral palsy.
Deafness/hearing impairment.
Epilepsy or seizure disorder.
Orthopedic/mobility impairment.
Specific learning disability.
Speech and language disorder.
Spinal cord injury.
Tourette's syndrome.
Traumatic brain injury.

**Chronic illnesses, such as:**
AIDS.
Arthritis.
Cancer.
Cardiac disease.
Diabetes.
Multiple sclerosis.
Muscular dystrophy.
Psychiatric disability.

**Modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities can include, but not limited to:**
Removal of architectural barriers.
Services such as readers for students with blindness, visual impairments or learning disabilities.
Qualified interpreters and note-takers for students with deafness or hearing impairments.
Extra time and/or a quiet room to complete exams.
Exams be individually proctored, made orally, dictated, or typed.
Alternative formats for students to demonstrate course mastery.
The use of computer software programs or other assistive technological devices to assist in test-taking and study skills.
Attendance policy flexibility.

**Responsibilities of students with disabilities**
Self-identify concerning disability status to DSS and faculty in a timely manner.
Provide disability verification
Request accommodation.
Make necessary arrangements for accommodations, such as reserving rooms for tests.
Keep faculty and DSS apprised of changes in disability or need for additional accommodation.
Responsibilities of faculty/staff members

Meet with students who request accommodations to establish the means of providing these adjustments. While providing requested accommodations is mandated by law, faculty do not have to change the requirements of a course, alter the essential or fundamental nature of a course, provide accommodations retroactively, nor provide accommodations without reasonable timely notice. Contrary to what does not have to be accepted, faculty do have to provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities. All accommodations have been approved by DSS for the students and are deemed reasonable, but may be adjusted. For example: when a student requests to have copies of lecture materials before class, the material (PowerPoint, etc.) could be posted on-line prior to class so the student could print it, thus eliminating the need for faculty to print and provide the material.

Shared responsibilities

Students with disabilities have the first responsibility to report their needs to the faculty in a timely manner as faculty are not required to anticipate special needs. Faculty members should keep students in mind when making special class arrangements such as field trips. Faculty/staff should state on the syllabus that students inform them of their need for accommodation to ensure that those needs are met in a timely manner: "Any student with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations should contact the professor and the appropriate Disability Services office as soon as possible.”

This approach demonstrates to students that faculty are sensitive to and concerned about meeting the needs of ALL students. Such an invitation to discuss individual needs can go a long way toward encouraging the student with a disability to approach the instructor early.

What to expect if you have a student with a disability in your classroom.

If you do have a student with a disability in your classroom, we need your help and assistance so that the student may gain the full benefit of your course. If a student with a disability has identified her/himself with DSS, DSS verifies the disability and outlines requested classroom
accommodations through email. If a student with a disability does not need specific accommodations, but has a condition that may interfere with her/his coursework, the email will explain this (examples: diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, and cancer).

If you have a student with a disability in your class and you have not received a DSS email about the student, the student may not have chosen to notify the professor or may not know about DSS. If you feel comfortable referring the student to our office, please do so. Many students do not identify themselves prior to matriculation.

If the student is eligible for alternative testing (extended time, alternative format, and/or a quiet environment) it is his/her responsibility to request them in the departmental office, near the classroom, or at DSS. Faculty and/or office staff may fax the test to (269)387-0633, to deliver the test to the DSS office or email the test to DSS-Exams@wmich.edu

Keep in mind that students with disabilities are our best resource in our attempts to provide accommodations. They usually know what works for them. Students are encouraged to speak with professors during office hours to discuss their accommodations. During this discussion it is appropriate to ask related questions as to how the students’ needs may best be supported in your class.

Disability Services for Students
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5277
(269)387-2116 or Fax (269)387-0633
http://www.wmich.edu/disabilityservices

Office of Institutional Equity
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5405
(269) 387-8880 or Fax (269) 387-8860
http://www.wmich.edu/oie