Disability Services: Guidelines for Faculty

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 support 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 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 JHU disability services administrator 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 EP’s disability support services coordinator, Mark Tuminello, when you are in doubt about how best to meet the needs of a student with a disability.

Who is responsible for determining appropriate accommodations?
Disability services at the Office of Institutional Equity on the Homewood campus is the office that determines appropriate accommodations. The office bases their decision on documentation, collected by EP’s disability support services coordinator, from a student with a disability and the student's functional limitation(s).

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

What would be the best way to inform students in class that I would like to help in facilitating exam accommodations or any classroom accommodations?
It is recommended that all faculty members put a statement about accommodations in their syllabus. It should read along the lines: "Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact Mark Tuminello at mtumine2@jhu.edu, to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities."

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

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 the disability services office, will be given a letter after a request is made. The disability services administrator has on file documentation of the disability for every student who is registered with the office and uses services.
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?

Exam accommodations are based upon the student's functional limitations and the documentation of disability that the student has provided to the disability services administrator. 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 twice the normal time), a reader or scribe (a person who writes answers verbatim), a computer, a Braille-based exam, an enlarged exam, an exam scanned onto a disk and use of a computer (the 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), or use of a closed circuit TV to enlarge print.

I've been debating about what book I want to use for my class, but the disability services provider keeps asking me to select a book ASAP. Do I have to?

Yes, you do. It takes many hours to convert a textbook and sometimes longer, depending upon the technical nature of the course. The administrator may have several requests for books or other reading assignments converted to audio files or Braille, or scanned onto disk. Students who are print impaired have a legal right to access their textbooks, or any instruction as their peers do. They need to be able to listen to taped or scanned textbooks at the same time as others in the class. By delaying the selection of textbooks, disability services may not be able to get books converted to an appropriate format in a timely fashion. This means that students may have to start the quarter without access to their textbooks.

When I have a deaf student in class, am I required to have an interpreter or real time caption provider in the class too? My class is very crowded; the students sometimes watch the interpreter instead of me.

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 caption provider.

A student with a disability has asked me for a copy of my notes/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 feel your notes are good, sharing your notes would be another 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.
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 disability services, suggest that the student talk to the coordinator in the disability services office. The student may also be referred to the disability office for information about diagnostic testing for a suspected learning disability.

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 the answer without the use of accommodations. The quality of 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 the disability services office 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 your disability support services coordinator. Start there, but you are also free to talk to the director of disability services for the university:

For further information please contact:
Mark Tuminello, Disability Support Services Coordinator, Engineering for Professional, 410-516-2306, mtumine2@jhu.edu.

For questions or concerns regarding University-wide disability issues, please email, Abigail Hurson, University Disability Services Officer, ahurson@jhu.edu.

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