Faculty FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

**Question:** How can I encourage students that may have disabilities to visit or register with Disability Services (DS)?

**Answer:**

Include a statement in your syllabus and make the announcement on the first day of class. Most professors read through the entire syllabus with their class. We suggest that the statement regarding Disability Services be read or at least highlighted. A sample syllabus statement is available on our website or upon request. You may also want to mention other support services on campus such as the Centers for Learning, University Counseling Services, and Health Services at the Wellness Center.

**Question:** What should I do if a student comes up to me right before, during or after class and hands me an Accommodation Letter?

**Answer:**

Tell the student in respect for her/his confidentiality you would like to meet during office hours during which the two of you can discuss the request further. This will give you both an opportunity to review the letter and discuss accommodations in depth if needed. During the visit, if needed, you can call the DS office at (978) 934-4574 for clarification.

**Question:** How do I approach a student who is having difficulty in the class and I suspect he/she may have a disability?

**Answer:**

You may not legally ask students if they have a disability but you can make inquiries about the nature of their difficulties. You may ask if they had difficulty before and how they were able to succeed in their classes. The student may voluntarily disclose the disability. At this point a referral to the Disability Services Offices is in order. If he/she does not disclose, you may simply tell the student that you notice he/she is having academic difficulty and encourage him/her to talk with you about gaining assistance, just as you would with any student.

**Question:** What do I do if a student requests an accommodation that is not on his/her Faculty Notification Letter (FNL)?

**Answer:**

Do not provide additional accommodations for which you have not received documentation from the DS office without talking with the Director, Assistant Director or a Support Counselor first. You could be setting a dangerous precedent.

**Question:** What should I expect to receive from a student with a disability requesting academic adjustments such as extended time on exams?

**Answer:**
You should be given a letter (Faculty Notification Letter) from the student that lists the approved academic adjustments that are determined and authorized by qualified Disability Services staff. Students are expected to remind you of those testing accommodations one week before the exam or quiz.

Question: What should I do if a student asks for more time on a test on the day of the exam?

Answer:

Give the student a choice:

1. The student takes the exam in class without accommodations. Have the student follow up with you after class during office hours to discuss future exams, or

2. The student doesn’t take the exam in class. Refer the student directly to DS to get information on the process of receiving accommodations and to determine eligibility for services. Request the student to follow back up with you during office hours.

Question: Is the information regarding a student’s disability and their needs for academic accommodations confidential?

Answer:

Completely! Instructors and teaching assistants must maintain a policy of strict confidentiality about the identity of a student with a disability, the nature of their disability, and the disability–related accommodations they require.

Question: Can I ask a student to disclose her or his disability to me?

Answer:

Absolutely not. We understand that this may be difficult for some individuals who teach; however, requiring that a student disclose her or his disability to you puts the university at great legal risk. Although you may be open to listening if a student chooses to explain her or his disability to you—without your actual or implied solicitation of information, it is very important that you communicate respect for the student’s privacy regarding the specific nature of her or his disability. In that vein, comments such as, “What’s wrong with you?” or “You look normal to me” or “Do you really need this?” are clearly inappropriate and put the University at great risk as they can be interpreted as discriminatory.

It is true that many disabilities covered by the law are not easy to detect visibly. Thus, it is important that verbal and nonverbal responses be monitored. If you ever suspect that a request for accommodation is not legitimate, contact the Disability Services Office immediately.

Question: What happens when the student registers at Disability Services?

Answer:
Students will be asked to provide documentation regarding their disability. Once received, the documentation will be reviewed for appropriateness based on guidelines recommended by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD). Upon review, a staff member in our office will conduct an Intake meeting with the student to discuss reasonable accommodations based on the documentation available. Students without appropriate or current documentation will be given appropriate referral, if the student so desires.

**Question:** How are instructors informed that a student is qualified to receive disability–related accommodations?

**Answer:**

A student who wishes to receive disability–related accommodations must register with the DS office before services are rendered (How to Register with DS). Once a student is registered, faculty must provide the academic accommodations that the DS office determines reasonable. The student provides each of their instructors with a letter written by the DS Office, which substantiates proof of the disability and identifies approved academic accommodations.

**Question:** How can I encourage students with disabilities to talk with me about their accommodations?

**Answer:**

Announce at the beginning of the course that you are available to discuss instructional methods and appropriate accommodations with students who have disabilities. In addition, you may include a note to this effect on your course syllabus.

"The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (978) 934-4574 in University Crossings, Suite 300.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (978) 934-4574.”

**Question:** What is a reasonable academic accommodation?

**Answer:**

According to the US Department of Justice, a reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment that allows the student equal access to the learning opportunity. Reasonable accommodations do not fundamentally alter the technical requirements of a course. Reasonable accommodations are determined after reviewing the student’s documentation related to her or his disability. The DS Office determines which accommodations are reasonable based on the specific ways the student’s disability affects their ability to access buildings, information, or resources related to their academic experience. The student will provide you with a letter from the DS Office, outlining
appropriate accommodations. Academic accommodations include, but are not limited to: testing accommodations, adaptive technology services, and assistance in arranging other support services (e.g., interpreters, note-takers, scribes, and readers).

DS supports students with issues and situations related to advocacy and accessibility.

**Question:** Can I choose to accommodate a student who is not registered with DS and/or who has not provided me with the appropriate DS forms?

**Answer:**

Any exceptions that a professor chooses to make in her or his instructional and/or testing procedures is not deemed an accommodation of a disability. We all know that most professors choose to make exceptions for particular students from time to time (e.g., allowing a student to take a make-up test in the event of a family member’s death). However, any exceptions made based on a students alleged, but undocumented disability, can put the university at legal risk. In these cases, always ask yourself:

1. “Since accommodations for appropriately documented disabilities are made in the DS office, do I have some other legitimate reason besides the alleged disability for making an exception for this student?”

2. “Is it an exception that I would be willing to make for any other non-disabled student?”

**Question:** What if I do not agree with a recommended accommodation?

**Answer:**

The University of Massachusetts, Lowell is required by federal regulation to establish formal grievance procedures for providing prompt and equitable resolution of disagreements. The staff of Disability Services acts as liaisons between students with disability and their faculty members. If a faculty member has a concern regarding classroom or teaching accommodations, he or she is urged to discuss the concern with Disability Services staff immediately. Disability Services staff will review the concern against the mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act to determine whether and how the concern might be resolved.

If you do not believe that your needs are being adequately or appropriately met, you are encouraged to meet with a representative form Student Disability Services. They will work with you on a case-by-case basis to attempt to resolve your concerns when feasible within the limits established by law for the provision of reasonable accommodations.
Question: Is the extended examination time accommodation for students with disabilities fair to other students?

Answer:

The Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states: “The results of an examination should accurately reflect an individual’s aptitude or achievement level or whatever the test purports to measure, rather than reflecting an individual’s impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills.” The courts have held repeatedly that a lengthening of the standard examination period is an appropriate accommodation for some students with disabilities.

Question: Can a faculty member forbid a student with a disability to use an audio recorder in class?

Answer:

An instructor is required to allow a student to audio record the course if recording the class is determined to be an appropriate accommodation for a student’s disability. Audio recorders are specifically mentioned in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as a means of providing full participation in educational programs and activities. Students who are approved to have this accommodation must sign a Permission to Record form at the DS office. This form provides assurance that the student will protect the confidentiality of the recorded information. Contact the DS office with specific questions or concerns about audio recording lectures.

Question: Will I be required to give my personal notes or Power Point presentation to a student with a disability?

Answer:

Providing personal copies of professor’s notes or presentations cannot be mandated as an academic accommodation. However, if it is a professor’s customary practice to make (her or his) personal notes or presentations available to all students, it may be a reasonable accommodation for DS to provide the student with the notes in an alternate format (e.g., DS may enlarge the notes or record them in audio format—if appropriate to the disability).

Question: Can I be required to tutor a student as an academic accommodation?

Answer:

Students with disabilities are to be given equal access to you as are your other students. Tutoring is not considered to be an academic accommodation by the Office of Civil Rights. However, any student with a disability who chooses to obtain the tutoring services generally offered by the University, has the right of equal access to those services.

Question: Can I refuse to accommodate a student who presents an Accommodation Letter?

Answer:

If you have questions about the validity of a letter presented by a student, you are urged to contact the DS office. Although we cannot disclose the specifics about a student’s disability without the student’s consent, we can review the files and tell you if the forms you were presented were originated from our
office and if the accommodations listed are in fact the accommodations granted. If discussions with our staff indicate that the forms were not originated from our office, or the forms have been inappropriately altered, you are not obligated to accommodate the student at that time and a disciplinary referral may be made to the Dean of Students.

Also, our office may be able to discuss with you in general terms about the rationale behind certain accommodations without disclosing specifics about a particular student’s disability.

**Question:** How do I accommodate a student whose disability causes them to miss class?
**Answer:**

Determine to what extent class absences may fundamentally interfere with the student completing your course objectives and learning outcomes. Consult with the DS office about note–taking services, exam accommodations, and any other support services that may be needed. It is important to note that you must not lower your academic expectations; ultimately, the student is responsible for gaining the knowledge and skills required in the class.

**Question:** May I fail a student with a disability?
**Answer:**

Yes. The laws mandate access to education for students with disabilities, not guaranteed academic success. When a faculty member has provided reasonable academic accommodations, all that is required to comply with the law, and the student does not meet the course requirements, then failing a student is proper and lawful. The following is a compliance checklist that may be helpful:

- Stand by academic standards and freedoms, which include full and equitable access to academic programs.
- Provide verbal and written notice to your students of your willingness to accommodate.
- Communicate clear and concise expectations for performance to your students.
- Distinguish between essential and non–essential components of the course.
- Respect requests for reasonable accommodations.
- Permit students to use auxiliary aides and technologies that ensure access (examples: note takers, sign language interpreters, readers, scribes, research assistants, tape recorders, assistive listening devices).
- Assure that your course materials, whether printed or electronic, are accessible and available in alternative formats (examples: computer electronic text, large print, internet, CD/cassettes).
- Consult with the DS office if you have questions when a student requests accommodations or on how to provide an accommodation.
- Keep student disability–related information strictly confidential.
**Question:** Are you also the ADA coordinator for faculty and staff?

**Answer:**

No. Faculty and staff with disabilities desiring accommodation should contact Clara Orlando, Director of Equal Opportunity and Outreach at (978) 934-3560.

**Question:** What are the differences between "low vision", "visual impairment", and "blindness"?

**Answer:**

Standard vision is measured as 20/20. A person is considered "visually impaired" if he can see no better than 20/70 with correction in his better eye. This means the person can see at 20 feet what people with standard vision see at 70 feet. If an individual’s vision is no better than 20/200, he is considered "legally blind". A person is also "legally blind" if his central vision is no greater than 12 degrees (i.e., he has limited peripheral vision and appears to be seeing things as if looking through a tube or straw). A person is typically referred to as "totally blind" or "black blind" if he has no usable sight. "Low vision" or "limited vision" usually refers to someone who has a visual impairment but is not totally blind.

**Question:** What are strategies that can be used by students with low vision to access printed materials?

**Answer:**

Printed material can be enlarged with a photocopier for a student able to read large print. Textbooks can be scanned and accessed by a computer with speech and/or magnification software. A closed-circuit television (CCTV) can enlarge the printed material for a student. A reader may read material aloud to the student or provide taped recordings.

**Question:** How can a student who is blind follow a video?

**Answer:**

If all essential information contained in the video is provided verbally and if another person watching the video describes important visual content, the student who is blind can benefit from the video. Ideally, videos are available with audio description, which include extra spoken content.

**Question:** How can a person with a visual impairment participate in a class that is computer based?

**Answer:**

A student who has some usable sight may be able to use the computer with screen magnification software and a large monitor. A student with little or no usable vision would benefit most from a screen reading software. The student should know what accommodations will work for them and should be consulted as early in the class as possible so they do not fall behind. Unfortunately, screen readers don’t work with all software available, so if you plan on having the student use specialized software, please make the student aware so they can test it with their screen reader as soon as possible.

**Question:** In what format can a student who is blind turn in written assignments?

**Answer:**
In most cases, a student who is blind will type written assignments using a computer that is equipped with speech output software. In rare circumstances, a student may require a scribe to write his or her answers. This can occur when there are problems with the computer software, inaccessible materials (involving things like math or symbols), or the student has limited mobility which prevents them from typing.

**Question:** What can I do to make sure a student who is hard of hearing can access spoken information in a large lecture?

**Answer:**

Do not turn your back to the group. Avoid lecturing against a window since the light through the window may throw a shadow over your mouth, making lip-reading difficult. Finally, avoid obscuring your mouth with books, hands, or other materials. If another student in the class asks a question in front of the whole class, be sure to repeat the question before answering it so the student who is hard of hearing can benefit from hearing it.

**Question:** How do I grade written essays when syntax and grammatical errors are evident for students who have a hearing loss and use American Sign Language (ASL)?

**Answer:**

English is a second language for many people who are deaf, and therefore, presents unique challenges for the student and professor when written assignments are evaluated. For students who rely on ASL, transferring thoughts to a written form is difficult because ASL does not have verb tenses. You must provide a reasonable accommodation for a disability, but should not lower your academic standards. Correct the students' grammar and syntax and assist the student in developing their English skills. You may wish to refer the student to the Centers for Learning.

**Question:** How do individuals with hearing impairments communicate by telephone?

**Answer:**

There are three different kinds of technology used for telephone communication. TTY, TDD and TT are acronyms used interchangeably for mechanical teleprinter equipment which consists of a small keyboard and visual display. This equipment is used by a person who does not have enough functional hearing to understand speech even with amplification. Amplification devices can be added to telephones to allow people who are hard of hearing to benefit from enhanced volume. A third method is through a relay system where only the person with a hearing impairment has a TTY/TDD/TT and an operator relays the message to the hearing party.

**Question:** What are Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)?

**Answer:**

This device consists of a microphone/transmitter positioned close to the speaker’s mouth that sends the speaker’s voice through the air or by cable to the receiver worn by the student. ALDs can provide clear
sound over distances, eliminating echoes and reducing the distraction of surrounding noises, allowing the student to more easily attend to the instructor.

**Question:** Do I need to make any special adjustments in a laboratory for a student who is deaf?

**Answer:**

Yes. Provide written instructions, captioned video instructions, and/or demonstrations prior to the lab. Safety procedures should also be reviewed with the students and visual lab warning signals (e.g. flashlights) need to be in place. It may also be helpful to provide preferential seating so the student can easily view demonstrations and watch the instructor. It is important to remember that students who use a sign language interpreter or read lips may have difficulty simultaneously observing a demonstration while watching the interpreter or reading lips. Discuss lab activities with the student, as they are the best source of information about their needs.

**Question:** How can I improve the accessibility of my lab for a student who uses a wheelchair?

**Answer:**

Principles of universal design promote access for individuals with a wide range of abilities and disabilities and should be considered when planning and organizing the physical environment. Examples of basic universal design guidelines you can readily implement include the following:

- Make sure all routes to the lab are wheelchair accessible.
- Keep aisles wide and clear.
- Provide at least one adjustable table or work space.
- Make sure controls for computer and other equipment can be reached by someone sitting in a wheelchair.

**Question:** In an emergency evacuation, what is my responsibility for a student who uses a wheelchair or who has another mobility impairment?

**Answer:**

Inform the student about emergency procedures. Work with the student and the DS office to develop a clear evacuation plan.

**Additional Information**

Please contact the Disability Services office, at (978) 934-4574 or visit University Crossings, Suite 300.

*These FAQ were adapted from the Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi.*