

Fast Facts for Faculty

Most Frequently Asked Questions

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 teaching 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 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 and TA 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 Office for Disability Services (ODS) is the office on campus that 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 the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at (724) 738-4877, 105 University Union 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 Office for Disability Services (ODS) is the office on campus that determines appropriate accommodations. The office bases their decision upon documentation collected from a student with a disability and the student's functional limitations.

Q: Are all students with disabilities registered with ODS?

A: No, it is likely that many students with disabilities have chosen not to be registered with ODS 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: "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 the Office for Disability Services at (724) 738-4877 in 105 University Union 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: ODS has on file for every student who is registered with our office and uses services, documentation of the disability. Prior to every semester, ODS will send an Accommodation Letter via e-mail for every student in your class(es) who is registered with our office. If you have not received this letter, please ask the student if they are registered in ODS. If they are, please ask the student to contact our office to send you a copy of their Accommodation Letter. If they are not, please direct them to our office so that we can determine their eligibility for 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 ODS. 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), a computer, a Brailled exam, an enlarged exam, an exam scanned onto a disk and use of computer (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), and use of computer software to enlarge print.

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

A: ODS has developed a very systematic and secure procedure for getting exams from faculty and returning them once the student has taken the exam. There are very rigid checking in and checking out procedures for exams, and no student is able to take an exam with appropriate accommodations without authorization. While exams are at ODS, they are kept in a locked file during the night. While students are taking the exam, they are monitored. Test rooms have door windows to enable the staff to periodically view the students while they are taking tests. Occasionally, there are a few issues, however, ODS works diligently to rectify any problems.

Q: Students with disabilities ask me to fill out "test proctoring forms." I have a million things to do. I don't mind if they use exam accommodations, but do I have to fill out that form?

A: Yes you do! In order for students to arrange for exam accommodations at ODS, and in order for ODS to administer your exam to your student, you must quickly and totally fill out the "test 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 proctor sheet help facilitate the exam accommodation process, but it also helps ODS 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 ODS to ensure that the student's accommodation needs are met.

Q: I've been debating about what book I want to use for my class, but ODS keeps asking me to select a book ASAP. Do I have to?

A: Yes you do. Students approved for alternate text and/or specialized reading software, have a legal right to equal access to their textbooks or any instruction as their peers. They need to be able to listen to taped or scanned textbooks at the same time as others in the class. In order for this to happen, ODS

will need to obtain and/or convert these materials into an alternate format suitable for each student. These steps require additional time which could contribute to a student getting behind in class if not obtained in a timely manner.

Q: When I have a student who is deaf in class, am I required to have an interpreter or real time captioner in the class too? My class is very crowded and 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 and therefore, may or may not be helpful. ODS does offer note taking services as an accommodation for students who are registered through our office and approved for this particular accommodation. We typically have success locating a student in the same class to serve as a note taker so that the student is provided with an extra copy of notes in addition to his/her own class notes. If we are unable to locate a note taker, we may contact you for your assistance. We may request you to identify a student in the class who takes good notes or to make an announcement in class that a note taker is needed in our office. Other options include teacher assistant or graduate student notes, sharing your notes, or 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 record class lectures with a tape recorder or other approved device.

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 ODS, suggest that the student talk to his/her counselor ODS. The student may also be referred to ODS for a suspected learning disability. Suggest that the student call ODS at (724) 738-4877 or stop by our office at 105 University Union 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 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 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.

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 ODS 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, please contact Natalie Burick, Director of the Office of Disability Services. She can be reached by calling extension 4810 or by e-mailing natalie.burick@sru.edu.

Important Note

This information is available in alternate format upon request. Please call the Office for Disability Services at (724) 738-4877.

It is also available at <http://www.sru.edu/ods> and Accommodate faculty resources tab at <https://sru-accommodate.symplicity.com/>.

Public requests for accommodations through the Office of Disability Services can be made by visiting the following link: https://sru-accommodate.symplicity.com/public_accommodation.

This publication is funded by the US Department of Education under project #738322. For additional copies or more information, please contact:

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