



# COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

## Most Frequently Asked Questions

### Introduction

Enrollment rates of students with disabilities in higher education are increasing, and 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 University Disability Services (UDS) is the office on campus that determines reasonable accommodations. We hope that you find the following questions to be a quick and useful resource guide, but we encourage you to contact your local UDS office when you are in doubt about how best to meet the needs of a student with a disability.

- Bloomsburg – 043 Warren Student Services, or call [570-389-4491](tel:570-389-4491)
- Lock Haven/Clearfield – 205 Ulmer Hall, or call [570-484-2665](tel:570-484-2665)
- Mansfield – 147 South Hall, or [570-662-4150](tel:570-662-4150)

**Q:** Who is responsible for determining appropriate accommodations?

**A:** University Disability Services (UDS) 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 UDS?

**A:** No, it is likely that many students with disabilities have chosen not to be registered with UDS 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. The current recommended syllabus statement is on our website.

**Q:** Am I required to provide exam accommodations to students who request it?

**A:** Yes. Students with disabilities are protected by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). 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:** Every semester, registered students will submit a semester request to UDS through our

ACCOMMODATE portal. You will be notified of any students choosing to use their accommodations in your course through ACCOMMODATE and can view their Letters of Accommodation (LOA) at any point. If you have not received an LOA, ask the student if they are registered with UDS. If they are, ask the student to put in a semester request and UDS will process the LOA in ACCOMMODATE. If they are not, 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 he/she 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:** Exam accommodations are based upon the student's functional limitations and the documentation of disability that the student has provided UDS. 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 USB 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 he/she take an exam at UDS. How do I know that my exam will be safe and that the student will get no unfair advantage?

**A:** UDS uses ACCOMMODATE, a secure portal for accommodation management. This is where faculty upload exams. On the day of the exam, there are rigid check-in and check-out procedures for students. While exams are at UDS, they are kept in a locked file during the night. While students are taking the exam, they are monitored. Exam rooms have windows, mirrors, and some have video camera surveillance to enable the staff to periodically view the students while they are taking exams.

**Q:** ACCOMMODATE makes me answer a bunch of questions for exam requests. I have a million things to do. I don't mind if they use exam accommodations, but do I have to answer all of those questions?

**A:** Yes! In order for students to arrange for exam accommodations at UDS, and in order for UDS to administer your exam to your student, you must quickly and totally fill out the questions on ACCOMMODATE. Students are responsible to submit exam requests meeting all UDS timelines. UDS encourages students to take the exam on the same date and time as the class whenever possible. ACCOMMODATE will notify the professor of an exam request and ask you to upload your exam. Submit the requested exam with the instructions portion completed. Even if your exam is online and there is nothing to upload, you still need to provide the instructions on ACCOMMODATE. 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 unable to

provide appropriate accommodations or are unsure about what is appropriate, please work with UDS 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 UDS keeps asking me to select a book ASAP. Do I have to?

**A:** Yes. 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, UDS 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:** 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 and/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. UDS 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 a disability. If this is the case and the student is not registered with UDS, suggest that the student talk to the staff in UDS.

**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 the midterm was taken using 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:** Do I have any recourse if I disagree about requested accommodations?

**A:** To clarify any disagreement about a requested accommodation, please contact University Disability Services.