

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Roles and Responsibilities

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University students have the right to be free of discrimination because of disability; to receive fair and equitable treatment; and to receive educational accommodations which are reasonable, necessary, and appropriate on the basis of the specific disability.

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/accommodating-students-disabilities-roles-and-responsibilities-fact-sheet>

ACCESSABILITY SERVICES

Processes and Responsibilities

Collecting and Evaluating Documentation

- AccessAbility Services collects appropriate documentation of a disability from registered and qualified professionals in order to understand the functional limitations and impairments a student may experience as it relates to his/her specific courses and academic demands.
- AccessAbility Services evaluates documentation for validity and establishing disability status. This information will assist the University in understanding the functional impact of the disability on academic participation and assist our services in determining eligibility for accommodation services.
- A notice of a disability, condition, or diagnosis alone does not imply that accommodations are required.
- After assessing documentation, AccessAbility Services' intake coordinator determines a student's Eligible Accommodations, which are accommodations that may enable him/her to access, and equally participate in, their academic program.
- AccessAbility Services may ask for additional information from the student and or the registered professional for clarification necessary for provision of disability services at any time while registered with the office.
- AccessAbility Services works with the University's Student Awards and Financial Aid Office to verify disability status and provide confirmation that support student's access to financial aid (e.g., OSAP and BSWD).

Planning and Facilitating Accommodations

- Using the Eligible Accommodations list, AccessAbility Services' Advisors develop with students an Individualized AccessAbility Plan based on their program of study, specific courses, academic and professional goals, and the supports and resources available to them.
- AccessAbility Services provides direct support for the following accommodations: alternative format, exam accommodations, assistive technology, learning strategies, and Student Access Van.
- AccessAbility services assists students in obtaining disability-related supports as needed including: recruiting course note takers and tutors, securing ASL interpreters, securing appropriate on-campus housing, and referrals to support services.
- AccessAbility Services will advise additional academic accommodations to instructors that preserve the integrity and academic standards of the University while maintaining the essential requirements of a course or program. However, AccessAbility Services does not have authority to implement changes to academic programs (e.g., change the nature or weighting of assignments/exams, or approve the submission of late assignments).

Supporting the Instructors-Student Relationship

- AccessAbility Services notifies instructors of the accommodations that ought to be made in support of accommodating a student's needs within the classroom along with instruction on how the student can be supported.
- AccessAbility Services provides resources to faculty to support them in accommodating and working with students with disabilities.
- AccessAbility Services serves as a resource for Instructors regarding ways to reduce need for academic accommodations and in the determination of essential requirements.
- AccessAbility Services works with students and faculty to resolve disagreements regarding recommended accommodations.

Mandate

- AccessAbility Services acts in accordance with Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) guidelines related to academic accommodations for students with disabilities.
- AccessAbility Services preserve the integrity and academic standards of the University while maintaining the essential requirements of a course or program.
- AccessAbility Services ensures the specific rights and entitlements of students with disabilities are upheld, which are guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15), the Ontario Human Rights Code (Section 17, Subsections 1-4), the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA - Bill 118) , and University of Waterloo Policy 33: Ethical Behaviour.
- AccessAbility Services protects privacy and personal information. Personal information is collected in accordance with sections from the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA), sections 41.(1)(a), 41.(1)(b), and 41.(1)(c) allowing for the use of personal information and sections 42.(1)(b), -s.42(1)(c), and s.42(1)(d) allowing for the disclosure of personal information.
- AccessAbility Services regularly reviews and develops protocols to ensure the office is up to date with best practice and industry standards.

STUDENTS

Rights

- To be free of discrimination because of disability
- To receive fair and equitable treatment
- To receive educational accommodations which are reasonable, necessary, and appropriate on the basis of the specific disability
- To be accommodated with dignity and courtesy in classrooms and other areas on campus

- To expect that faculty, staff, and other students will use appropriate language, free of discriminatory or derogatory remarks regarding disabilities
- To expect that faculty and staff members will keep confidential any personal information that is shared with them in accordance with FIPPA
- To receive an individualized assessment of documentation
- To receive timely delivery of appropriate services, consistent with the notice provided by the student
- To be provided with a prompt equitable investigation and resolution of complaints

Responsibilities

- To self-identify your accommodation needs to AccessAbility Services by applying and registering with AccessAbility Services
- To provide the required documentation of your disability to AccessAbility Services. A list of required [documentation](#) is provided.
- To communicate your needs to AccessAbility Services early in each term (Term Check-in) particularly if you require sign language interpreters, in-class note-takers, course material in alternative format, exam accommodations or adaptive technology equipment as these require extra time to coordinate
- To adhere to the policies, procedures and deadlines for accessing accommodations and services. AccessAbility Services and University deadlines are listed here: [\[insert link to documents\]](#)
- To participate fully and actively in developing an Individualized Accommodation Plan and in the accommodations process.
- To check your UWaterloo email account AccessAbility Services' Online System regularly for updates and notices from the office.
- To meet curriculum standards once accommodation is provided.
- To contact AccessAbility Services if you need to cancel or reschedule a meeting with your advisor
- To maintain contact throughout the term with your AccessAbility Services advisor, particularly if changes or problems arise related to your disability and/or courses. If you drop courses for which exam accommodations have been arranged, please inform your advisor.
- To use borrowed equipment responsibly and respectfully, returning it by pre-determined deadline
- To manage your time – class work, attendance and study time. Although AccessAbility Services provides reasonable educational accommodations, you are responsible for your academic success.

- To contribute towards a positive, welcoming, and inclusive environment in AccessAbility Services

FACULTY/INSTRUCTORS

Rights

- To determine course content and methods of instruction
- To ensure that the academic integrity and standards of the course are not compromised
- To fail any student who has not passed or mastered course content
- To discuss any particular accommodations with AccessAbility Services if you feel that the accommodations compromise the integrity of the course
- To consult with AccessAbility Services staff and other professionals, on or off campus, to determine how best to accommodate students with disabilities in your course

Responsibilities

- To educate themselves about the University's academic accommodation process
- To interact with students in a non-discriminatory manner
- To engage in the accommodation process and to provide appropriate accommodation to the point of undue hardship
- To design and develop new or revised courses or curricula that is inclusive and addresses the needs of persons with disabilities
- To ensure the specific rights and entitlements of students with disabilities are upheld in their class, which are guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15), the Ontario Human Rights Code (Section 17, Subsections 1-4), the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA - Bill 118) , and University of Waterloo Policy 33: Ethical Behaviour
- To accept that accommodation requests made by AccessAbility Services are based on appropriate documentation from a registered and qualified professional, which the student has supplied to AccessAbility Services which as then been assessed for validity and relevance
- To accommodate students with disabilities as determined by AccessAbility Services. You are to know the type of accommodations to provide, but not the nature of the disability
- To enlist the help of AccessAbility Services to gain knowledge of specific disabilities and appropriate accommodations for the disability within the terms of legislation
- To create an equitable environment where respect for the dignity of the persons with disabilities is upheld, and respect for confidentiality are realized

- To indicate your willingness to support students with disabilities with disabilities registered with AccessAbility Services. Such a statement is included in University of Waterloo's standardized course syllabus.
- To work with students and AccessAbility Services to resolve disagreements regarding accommodations
- To provide AccessAbility Services with a copy of your exams 2-3 business days in advance when AccessAbility Services is administering your in-class scheduled tests/exams
- To check your UWaterloo email regularly for correspondence from AccessAbility Services related to accommodations
- To take a proactive approach in addressing disability related issues and create a learning environment that is inclusive for students with disabilities

What are Reasonable Accommodations?

- Reasonable accommodations refer to modifications or adjustments to a course, program, service, activity, or facility that provide a qualified individual with a disability an equal opportunity to obtain the same benefit, or to attain the same level of achievement or to enjoy equal benefits and privileges as those available to a similarly situated individual without a disability
- Post-secondary institutions are obligated to make reasonable accommodations only to the known limitations of otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities. Accommodations are modifications that break down unnecessary barriers that then allow an individual to meet articulated essential components of a course. Accommodations are not modifications that alter the essential component of a course.
- According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003): Educators must provide accommodation, up to the point of undue hardship, to enable students to meet the essential requirements (p.62). It is not discriminatory to refuse an [accommodation] because a person is incapable of fulfilling the essential requirements. . . . However, a person will only be considered incapable if the needs of the person cannot be accommodated without undue hardship. (p.10)

What are Essential Requirements?

- Essential Requirements is a specific term used in human rights legislation, referring to the bona fide requirements of a task or program that cannot be altered without compromising the fundamental nature of the task or program
- Determining what is an essential requirement and what is not is critical in distinguishing requirements that cannot be accommodated from what can and should be altered. This includes course requirements and standards.
- According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003): Terms that have been used [to describe essential requirements] include indispensable, vital, and very important. Thus, a requirement should not lightly be considered to be essential, but should be carefully scrutinized.
- "Essential" can be defined by two factors: 1. the skill must be demonstrated *to meet the objectives of the course*; and 2. the skill must be demonstrated *in a prescribed manner*.
- To assist with determining whether a requirement is essential, you may want to dialogue around the following questions:
 - Is the requirement established in good faith (as opposed to habit, tradition, ease)?

- Is the requirement rationally connected to the job or purpose it is intended for?
- Is there evidence to support that the requirement is essential?
- Is the requirement socially constructed such that it excludes specific groups for a reason that is irrelevant based on assumptions about function or the group?

It may likely be an essential requirement that a student *master* core aspects of a course curriculum. It is much less likely that it will be an essential requirement to *demonstrate* the mastery in a *particular format*, unless mastery of that format (e.g. oral communication) is also a vital requirement of the program. In contrast, non-essential duties would not detract from the main purpose of the course or program if they were not done or done in a different manner.
(p.62)