ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS: THE BASICS

Types of Disabilities

Students registered with SAS may be registered in any of the following disability categories:

- Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing
- Low vision or legally blind
- Mobility or functional limitations
- Mental Health issues
- Learning Disability
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Concussion and Acquired Brain Injury
- Medical conditions

Students may also be registered for temporary disabilities such as a broken limb or short-term impairment after medical treatment or surgery. Assistance can be given to address the completion of academic work.

Students with disabilities meet the same admission criteria as all other students. They will also meet the same academic requirements and standards as all students, although the manner by which students with disabilities meet these may vary.

Accommodations

Academic accommodations are provided when students experience disability-related barriers in demonstrating their knowledge and skills. Accommodations provide equitable access for students with disabilities to meet the academic standards of their program. It's also possible for a student to have a disability and not require accommodation. For example, a student with a chronic health disability managed well by medication, diet and appropriate coping strategies, may decide not to register for these services. On the other hand, a student might register but not use their accommodations until they are required due to a change in the student's health.

Graduate students and second-entry professional students may require unique academic accommodations due to their personalized research and/or field work/practicum or other licensing requirements.

Essential Requirements

The provision of accommodations will not change the essential requirements of a course or program curricula.

"An appropriate accommodation enables a student to successfully meet the essential requirements of the program, with no alteration in standards or outcomes, although the manner in which the student demonstrates mastery, knowledge and skills may be altered."[1]

Instructors play a key role in the accommodations process by communicating what a student must know and demonstrate. When necessary, instructors assist with problem-solving based on their academic expertise. The question of fairness often comes up when providing students with alternate ways of performing academic tasks. Accommodations level the playing field to provide

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[1]Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2004). *Guidelines on Accessible Education* (ISBN: 0-7794-7191-1). Toronto, ON: Canada.

an opportunity for students with disabilities to complete certain tasks differently, while still meeting the essential requirements of the curriculum. Students with accommodations are expected to demonstrate the same knowledge and skill development as their peers.

If you believe that implementing the accommodations listed in a student's Letter of Accommodation will compromise academic standards, contact the Accessibility Advisor listed at the bottom of the letter. In some circumstances, the nature and degree of disability may mean that no accommodation would enable an individual to meet the essential academic requirements or behavioural expectations of a course or program. In these cases, the University is not required to accommodate. However, efforts must be made to provide all reasonable options.

Privacy & Confidentiality

A student's specific diagnosis is private medical information under Human Rights Code guidelines. Under no circumstances should you ask a student to disclose this information.

While some students are willing to talk about their disability, many others might be reluctant to do so. They might fear being denied opportunities or creating unwanted curiosity or concern. Encourage students to talk about the impact of their disability on their learning.

Because any category of disability contains a wide range of differences in how someone functions, knowing a student's type of disability isn't particularly helpful without the more detailed information provided during the intake process. This information describes additional challenges due to other conditions, family and social supports, past experiences of learning and areas of strength that can compensate for difficulties.

What the Student Accessibility Service Office Provides:

- a review of the student's medical documentation and needs to determine if academic accommodations are required

- a place for students to discuss their disability-related needs and the appropriate accommodations

- the development of an effective accommodation plan with the student

- ongoing support and problem-solving for disability-related issues that impact a student's academic and co-curricular experience (this frequently requires collaboration with instructors and staff)

- access to financial support (e.g. Bursary for Students with Disabilities) and referrals to other funding sources

- access to adaptive furniture, equipment and software

- coordination of specialized services such as sign language interpreting, etc.

Types of Accommodations

Accommodations depend on the impact of the disability within a particular program of study. They may include:

Classrooms

accessible classrooms and labs that are safe and provide appropriate supports

- sign language interpretation, note taking

- extensions on assignments/papers

- accessible materials in alternate formats (e.g. braille, large print, digitized text, voice-activated software, assisted-hearing devices)

Exams

- writing within a test/ exam space in which accommodations may be provided (e.g. fewer distractions, additional time, ability to take breaks or attend to physical needs)

- alternate formats like large print or braille

- adaptive furniture and equipment (e.g. use of keyboard for writing, screen-reading software)

Practicum/Placement

- guidance for requesting accommodations during practicum/placement

- development of safe, appropriate accommodations in the academic program and placement site

Research

- estimates of additional time that may be required to complete research (this plan can be reviewed and adjusted annually, if necessary)

- solving problems with graduate student funding packages for students who require additional time or a reduced workload

Outside the Classroom

- liaising with residences regarding disability-related needs

- referring students to campus and community resources

- peer mentoring and educational/support groups

- co-curricular programming in partnership with campus partners (e.g. navigating disability and disclosure in the workplace)