

Guidance for Faculty: Responding to Student Accommodation Requests

Faculty often encounter accommodation requests that may be new, unfamiliar, or outside typical expectations. The following guidance is designed to help instructors respond appropriately, supportively, and confidently while maintaining compliance with disability laws and institutional policies.

1. Start with a Supportive Mindset

- Assume the student is acting in good faith.
- Remember that students do not need to explain their disability to faculty.
- Approach the conversation with empathy, curiosity, and a commitment to supporting access.

Key reminder: Your role is not to judge the legitimacy of the disability or decide whether the accommodation is “necessary.” That determination belongs to the campus disability services office.

2. Refer to the Student Disability Services Office (SDS)

If a student brings an accommodation request you have not seen before—especially one that does not come with official documentation—gently direct them to the SDS.

You might say:

“Thank you for sharing this with me. To make sure you get the right support, let’s connect you with Student Disability Services—they can help determine appropriate accommodations, and then we can work together to make sure they’re implemented.”

Do not:

- Request medical records

- Ask the student to disclose their diagnosis
 - Unilaterally deny the request
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3. Review the Accommodation Letter Carefully

When you receive an official accommodation notice:

- Read it as a *minimum* set of requirements, not a menu of options.
 - If something seems unclear or poses logistical challenges, contact the SDS—not the student—to discuss possible adjustments or implementation strategies.
 - Remember that accommodations should generally be put in place immediately while concerns are being resolved.
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4. Focus on Access, Not Exceptions

When accommodations feel unfamiliar, it's helpful to reframe them as tools that provide **equivalent access**, not special treatment.

Ask yourself:

- *What barrier is this accommodation removing?*
 - *Does this allow the student to demonstrate their learning on equal footing with peers?*
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5. Maintain Confidentiality

Treat accommodation information as private educational data.

- Discuss accommodations with the student only when necessary and in a private manner.

- Do not discuss a student's disability status with others unless the student has given explicit permission.
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6. Communicate Clearly and Early

- Invite students to discuss their accommodations at the start of the term.
 - Use inclusive syllabus language such as:
"If you have or think you may have a disability and need accommodations, please contact Disability Services. I am committed to supporting equitable access."
 - When planning assessments or unique course components (fieldwork, labs, performances), proactively check with SDS about what accommodations are feasible.
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7. Ask Questions—But Ask the Right Ones

It is okay to ask:

- *"How can we best implement this?"*
- *"What parts of the course are most challenging for you?"*

It is **not** okay to ask:

- *"What's your disability?"*
 - *"Do you really need this?"*
 - *"Have you tried...?"* (unless the student invites that conversation)
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8. Reach Out When You're Unsure

If an accommodation seems:

- logistically difficult
- incompatible with a core learning outcome
- unusual or unclear

...contact the disability services office for clarification. They can help identify alternative ways to support the student while maintaining the integrity of the course.

Faculty should never modify or deny an accommodation on their own.

9. Adopt a Universal Design Approach When Possible

While accommodations address individual needs, **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** strategies can reduce the number of individual requests by improving access for the entire class.

Examples:

- Providing materials in accessible digital formats
 - Offering flexible deadlines within reason
 - Allowing multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning
 - Ensuring videos include captions
 - Structuring your course clearly with predictable patterns
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10. Remember the Shared Goal

All faculty, staff, and disability services professionals share the same aim: ensuring that every student has a fair and equitable opportunity to succeed.

Approaching new or unfamiliar accommodation requests with openness, collaboration, and flexibility strengthens student learning, complies with legal obligations, and builds a more inclusive academic environment.