

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are some examples of disabilities?

A: There are many things that could be considered disabilities. Some examples are reading and writing disabilities like dyslexia and dysgraphia; math disabilities like dyscalculia; psychiatric disabilities such as depression and anxiety; physical disabilities such as paraplegia; disabilities from injuries such as traumatic brain injury, just to name a few. The list could go on, but in each case, the person with a disability is limited in one or more major life activities. At college, accommodations are meant to level the playing field in those areas of limitation.

Q: How does the college determine if a student has a disability and can receive accommodations?

A: The student must provide documentation of the disability. Documentation must verify that the individual is a person with a disability as defined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and 2010. Drake requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations provide adequate documentation from an appropriately credentialed professional. Appropriately credentialed professionals may include but are not limited to: physicians, psychologists, audiologists or other licensed authorities as determined by the type of disability. Documentation must establish the need for accommodations in order for the individual to have full access to educational opportunities. Accommodations are set up through the office of Access and Success, and instructors are responsible for implementing the accommodations for students with disabilities in their classes.

Q: Do accommodations lower the standards of a class?

A: No, instructors are never required to lower academic standards or alter learning objectives for students with disabilities. All students, whether they have a disability or not, must meet the same educational standards. Accommodations don't lower standards, but instead help provide equal access to educational opportunities. One example would be extending test time for a student who has dyslexia or a processing disorder because more time will be needed for the student to read and understand the information on the test. Overall, accommodations can alter how an assignment is completed, but they cannot alter what is being tested on.

Q: Do students who use accommodations get unfair advantages over other students?

A: No. Accommodations are meant to level the playing field—to offer equal access to educational opportunities. They do not provide students with an unfair advantage. A student with a disability is substantially limited in one or more major life activities, such as walking, seeing, thinking, learning, etc. Through accommodations, however, these barriers are removed or reduced.

Q: Can instructors deny a student an accommodation if they don't believe it is fitting?

A: No, instructors cannot deny students the accommodations set forth by the Disability Services.. The student and the disability services staff member engage in an interactive process to determine accommodations based on the disability and its impact in the educational setting. Based on this documentation and discussion, along with knowledge of disability law, accommodations are put in place to allow students to have equal access to educational activities and opportunities.

However, there are some “unofficial” accommodations that are up to the discretion of the professor like flexibility with assignments. If you feel that an accommodation fundamentally alters an essential element of your course, please contact the office of Access and Success to discuss the matter.

Q: I can't find information on the letter of accommodation about what type of disability the student has. Can that information be shared with me?

A: The letter of accommodation will only provide a list of accommodations, not information about the student's disability. Students may choose to disclose information about their disability to you, but it is not required. Please do not ask students what their disability is, as it is their right to keep that information private.

Q: How do I receive letters of accommodation? From the disability service provider or the student? By email or paper?

A: The accommodation letter will now come through Starfish. Students are responsible for following up with professors to make sure faculty don't have any questions.

Q: Can I talk openly to students about their accommodations during class time?

A: No, accommodations are confidential. Make sure you do not discuss students' accommodations in front of other students.

Q: What is the difference between special education at the K-12 level and accommodations at the college level?

A: The biggest difference is that there is no special education services at college as there are in

high school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is what drives accommodations/modifications at the high school level, and it is geared toward “success.” At the college level, accommodations are driven by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the focus shifts from “success” to “access.” Modifications to assignments (such as a limited number of questions on a test or using notes on your test) are not allowed. The point of accommodations in higher education is to provide equal access. Success is up to the student.

Q: Do English language learners qualify for accommodations because of their language barrier?

A: English language learners do not qualify for accommodations based on a language barrier since they do not have a disability as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Of course, if an English language learner has a documented disability (not related to the language barrier), they could qualify for accommodations for that reason.

Q: Are all students with disabilities registered with Disability Services?

A: No, it is likely that many students with disabilities have chosen not to be registered with SDS or they may not have met the eligibility criteria for services. In either instance, instructors do not need to provide these students with accommodations. Please refer them to our office.

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. This law requires that qualified students with disabilities get equal access to an education, and this includes exam accommodations. If you need help with exam accommodations, please reach out to the office of Access and Success.

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 and refer them to our office.

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 instructor notes are only a brief outline of the actual lecture given. These notes may not be too helpful. It is

important that you assist the student in getting access to class notes. You may want to help the student find a volunteer note taker in class by making an announcement in class without revealing the student's name. If you feel your notes are good, sharing your notes would be a helpful option. It may also be appropriate for some students to digitally record the audio of a class or to take snapshots of the blackboard or overheads.

Q: What do I do with the "Notetaker" Accommodation?

A: Please try to recruit a student in your class to be a notetaker. During the first class, you will mention that a supplemental notetaker is needed for a student with a disability. It is important to keep the student's name confidential. After class, you can gather the email address of the volunteer and give it to the student requesting the notetaker. It is the student's responsibility now to get the notes. If you have trouble recruiting a notetaker, you may want to try sending an email or reaching out to students individually.

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, please refer the student to our office so we can set up reasonable accommodations.

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 standard measuring the student's work should be the same.

Q: How do I know if the student really does have a disability?

A: As stated above, all students registered with the Disability Services must have a documented disability. Documentation must be submitted and reviewed prior to the approval and implementation of academic accommodations.

Q: Do I have a right to see the student's disability documentation?

A: No. Documentation stating and describing a student's disability is confidential.

What does “flexibility with assignments” up to the professors discretion mean on an accommodation form?

A: Generally, students are expected and encouraged to meet deadlines for assignments and exams. However, similar to the flexible attendance accommodation, this accommodation may be considered reasonable for students with documented disabilities that are unpredictable and episodic in nature. The decision on flexibility with assignments is up to the faculty to determine. Faculty will decide the maximum allowance for an assignment/assessment extension that can be given without compromising the integrity of the course/program. If an assignment/assessment extension compromises the integrity of the course, the student and faculty are encouraged to consult with the Disability Services for a reasonable alternative.

Q: What should I do about a student with a disability who is misbehaving, threatening, or rude?

A: All students, with or without disabilities, must adhere to the Students Rights and Responsibilities Policy. If you have any questions about student conduct, please contact the Office of Student Conduct in the Dean of Students’ Office.

Q: Do we provide testing or assessments in the Access and Success Center

A: No, we work with students after they have documentation of their disability.

Q: Do I have any recourse if I disagree about requested accommodations?

A: To clarify any disagreement about a requested accommodation, please contact Michelle Laughlin, Director of Access and Success.