

Disabilities Resources for Teaching Inclusively

by

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PREFACE

An estimated 428,280 students with disabilities were enrolled at 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions in 1996-97 and 1997-98. This information is from the August 1999 report, “An Institutional Perspective on Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education,” by the National Center for Education Statistics, which provides postsecondary education institutions with one of the most comprehensive overviews to date about enrollments of students with disabilities. The authors add that about three-quarters (72 percent) of the nation’s 5,040 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions enrolled students with disabilities in 1996-97 and 1997-98, and “almost all (98 percent) public 2-year and 4-year institutions enrolled students with disabilities” (Lewis & Farris, 1999, p. iii.).

The University of Massachusetts Amherst has a long-standing commitment to excellence in teaching and learning. Students with disabilities have long been members of our learning community and are recognized as making valuable contributions to it. The Center for Teaching (CFT) offers this guide to University instructors to:

- Support them in identifying key University resources and service providers related to the learning needs of students with disabilities.
- Provide selected introductory-level information to increase levels of comfort and candor between instructors, students, and campus-wide service providers.
- Offer teaching development strategies useful in meeting the learning needs of all students, and especially students with disabilities.

This guide is intended for a wide audience of individuals who teach postsecondary students. Therefore, we use the term “instructor” or “teacher” for the sake of simplicity. Also in the service of reaching a broader audience, we have made this guide as brief as possible. In fairness to the topic and the reader, we signal the modest nature of this guide and encourage you to seek the many resources of the University dedicated to supporting instructors and students with disabilities.

We recognize that teachers may have questions about making accommodations for students. The “Frequently Asked Questions” section near the end of this guide addresses the concerns that seem to be the most common. If you have questions after discussing needed accommodations with a particular student and after receiving the appropriate documentation about the student’s eligibility, please feel free to contact the student’s caseworker or the ADA Compliance Officer at the University’s Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office.

Joe Greer, Clinical Psychology graduate student, is owed a special debt of gratitude. He contributed enormously to the prefatory research and initial conceptualization of this guide.

Special appreciation is offered to six teaching and learning centers that generously granted permission to draw upon their work. These include the Ohio State University, the University of Florida Gainesville, the University of Maine Orono, the University of Minnesota Minneapolis, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and the University of Rhode Island.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions to this guide made by members of our University of Massachusetts Amherst community. Paul Appleby, ADA Compliance Officer; Pat Barrows, Program for Students with Psychological / Medical Disabilities; Pat Griffin, Social Justice Education; Anne Herrington, English; Madeline Peters, Disability Services; Patricia Silver and Kathy Weilerstein, Learning Disabilities Student Services; and Marvin Swartz, History, reviewed early drafts and offered valuable feedback. Fran Mues, English graduate student, provided essential guidance and editorial assistance. We also thank the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School for support to produce this guide.

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The University of Massachusetts Amherst, like many of our peer institutions, supports a variety of initiatives to enhance undergraduate and graduate education. Each year, the Center for Teaching (CFT) undertakes numerous projects to address instructional questions or problems identified by faculty members and departments. The CFT developed this guide at the request of individual teachers, the Graduate School, and the campus-wide services designed to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities. The purpose of the guide is to offer useful information and strategies to teachers to enable student learning. The guide can be used by faculty members who are interested in improving their own teaching, as a basis for discussion in department meetings, or as a quick reference guide for appropriate contacts and referrals.

FAIR ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Specific legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is particularly important in understanding the responsibilities of the University related to educational opportunities and accommodations for students with disabilities. The University has ensured that students with disabilities are able to receive equal and accessible education by appointing an ADA compliance officer within the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office (Baggett, 1994), establishing a broad network of campus-based student support services, recommending and implementing policies and procedures, and empanelling advisory councils and ongoing review committees.

In the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), the term “disability” refers to an individual with “. . . (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment. . . .” According to the ADA, major life activities that may be limited by a disability include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, and reproducing.

For additional information on federal and state guidelines, or the practices and policies of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, please contact the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office at 305 Whitmore Administration Building, 545-3464.

Policies of the University of Massachusetts Amherst

The University of Massachusetts Amherst annually enrolls students with a broad spectrum of impairments and disabilities. Some of these disabilities or impairments may be immediately apparent; some may not be. Recently, the University published a set of guidelines titled “Procedures for Responding to Requests for Accommodations Required Under the Americans with Disabilities Act” (Office of the Chancellor, 1999). These procedures, developed by the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Disability Issues and approved by the Chancellor’s Executive Advisory Council (CEAC), describe the responsibility of the University and its members to make all programs and services accessible to and useable by persons with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate unless doing so would result in either:

- A fundamental alteration of the program, or
- Undue financial or administrative burdens. *

*For a more complete discussion of “undue financial or administrative burdens,” please refer to the “Procedures for Responding to Requests for Accommodations Required Under the Americans with Disabilities Act,” available from the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISABILITIES THAT AFFECT STUDENTS

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, disabilities most frequently reported by students were learning disabilities, followed (in descending order) by mobility or orthopedic impairments, health impairments, mental or emotional illness, hearing impairments, visual impairments, and finally, speech or language impairment (Lewis & Farris, 1999).

Descriptions of Disabilities

Some of the attributes listed below to describe disabilities or impairments can be present in many nondisabled students as well. The critical difference is the degree to which the symptoms affect and limit the individual. These descriptions are not comprehensive, but are offered to help teachers understand their effects on student participation in teaching and learning settings.

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are a heterogeneous group of disorders that affect the way a person acquires, perceives, and integrates information (Kerka, 1998). Specific manifestations may involve the following areas: listening, speaking, reading comprehension, writing, problem solving, or performing mathematical computations. Although learning disabilities constitute functional limitations, they do not necessarily represent the actual capabilities of an individual across different skill areas (University of North Carolina, 1997). Students with learning disabilities often have the same potential for academic excellence as their peers (Kerka, 1998). However, they often must work harder to achieve it because of difficulties in processing information and with short- or long-term memory. Students do not “outgrow” learning disabilities; rather, they develop increasingly successful coping strategies. Learning disabilities are distinct from communication disorders in that they are essentially difficulties with processing information; not with speech output.

Physical Impairments

Orthopedic disabilities include a wide range of conditions that may affect the neurological, musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, and respiratory systems. Impairing a student's mobility, energy level, and/or hand functioning, these disorders may occur at birth or result from a medical condition or injury. More specifically, the disabilities may be caused by such conditions as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, and spinal cord injury. In addition, individuals experiencing other medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, cancer, asthma) may also have certain physical limitations despite the hidden nature of their disability (Ohio State University, 1996).

Psychological and Medical Disabilities

Medical disabilities cover a wide range of disorders that often affect students in chronic and systemic ways (e.g., cerebral palsy, epilepsy, HIV / AIDs, arthritis, cancer, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, or muscular dystrophy). Psychological disabilities can cause individuals to appear drowsy, lethargic, inattentive, restless, or anxious. The more common types of psychological disabilities are:

Depression: This “major depressive disorder is characterized by feelings of worthlessness and guilt; difficulty in thinking or making decisions; and changes in weight or appetite, sleep patterns, or physical activity” (Unger, 1998, p. 32).

Bipolar Disorder: People with this disorder have mood swings that alternate between periods of severe highs and lows commonly known as mania and depression. In a manic state they may experience inflated self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, and distractibility. In a depressive state they may experience lowered self-esteem and an increased need for sleep (due to an inability to sleep).

Anxiety Disorders: Although there may be no identifiable cause, anxiety disorders can interfere with a person's ability to concentrate. Symptoms also include excessive worry, fear, dizziness, sleep disturbance, a racing heart, and panic.

Schizophrenia: Schizophrenia is a complex thought disorder in which a person may experience hallucinations, delusions, and/or withdrawal and social isolation.

Hearing Impairments

“Hearing impairment is a generic term indicating a hearing disability which may range from mild to profound; it includes the subsets of deaf and hard of hearing . . . [a] deaf person is one whose hearing disability is so great that he or she cannot understand speech through the use of the ear alone (with or without a hearing aid). A hard of hearing person is one whose hearing disability makes it difficult to hear but who can, with or without the use of a hearing aid, understand speech. Other definitions and classification systems may be based on time of onset (congenital or adventitious) or on the acquisition of language (pre- or post-lingual)” (Baggett, 1993, p. 20).

Visual Impairments

Disorders in the structure and function of the eye are manifested by at least one of the following: visual acuity of 20/70 or less in the better eye after the best possible correction; a peripheral field so constricted that it affects one’s ability to function; and a progressive loss of vision that may affect one’s ability to function. Examples include, but are not limited to, cataracts, glaucoma, nystagmus, retinal detachment, or retinitis pigmentosa (University of Florida, 1997).

Communication Disorders

Affecting speech and language, communication disorders can interfere with a person’s performance in academic, vocational, and social settings. More specifically, these disorders are distinct from learning disabilities in that they include impairments in voice, articulation, and fluency in the development of comprehension, and in the use of spoken and written systems (e.g., stuttering, voice disorders, aphasia, and motor problems) such as speech output. An individual may experience difficulties in the form

(phonology, morphology, syntax), content (semantic system), and function (pragmatic system) of language (Baggett, 1993).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Undifferentiated Attention Deficit Disorder (UADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are two terms commonly used. Students with UADD may be characterized by poor attention, impulsivity, disorganization, or restlessness. Students with ADHD may exhibit over activity and be characterized as easily distracted, disorganized, and having difficulty completing tasks. While anyone may exhibit these characteristics, only when these behaviors are present to an excessive degree, over time, and out of sync with normal age-related behavioral expectations do they fit the criteria referred to here. Researchers are uncertain as to what causes ADHD; however, implications for academic and social success in the University environment can be profound.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The student and her or his caseworker usually agree upon accommodations because, most often, it is the caseworker who has the required expertise to assess the learning-based implications of the student's disability and to match it with appropriate accommodations. Once agreed upon, these accommodations are then communicated to the instructor by the appropriate office or the student. This may be done by the use of University accommodation sheets, letter, or personal contact. It is the student's responsibility to:

- Initiate contact with the support service appropriate to his or her disability (see section "On-Campus Resources").
- Provide the documentation required to establish his or her eligibility for accommodation and to formally register for services.
- Collaborate with the appropriate service providers and University instructors to arrange for suitable and fair accommodations in a timely way.

Once an instructor has been notified of the requested accommodations, service providers are also available to instructors for consultation. While caseworkers cannot disclose confidential details about a specific student's disability, they can provide instructors with general information and guidance. If questions arise for an instructor in discussion with a student about requested accommodations, the first step is to contact the student's support services caseworker. These staff members work closely with individual students to determine and then advocate for suitable academic accommodations matched to their specific disability and can respond to questions about the requests.

Defining "Effective and Reasonable" Accommodation

Research and practice indicate that there are specific pedagogical strategies that, when matched appropriately to a student's disability, help to assure equitable access to the educational opportunity being offered by your course. The "Procedures for Responding to Requests for Accommodations Required Under the Americans with

Disabilities Act” (Office of the Chancellor, 1999) defines “effective and reasonable accommodation” to mean the following:

“Effective”

- Accommodations are consistent with the student’s documentation and are relevant to the identified disability.
- Accommodations result in testing the student’s learning, not the student’s disability.
- Accommodations are consistent with the student’s educational experiences regarding his or her disability.

“Reasonable”

- Accommodations are consistent with course content and stated objectives, and do not alter course and program requirements.
- Accommodations are consistent with established legal remedies.
- Accommodations do not (by themselves) increase the probability of earning a higher or lower grade in the course.

Knowing When You Have a Student with Disabilities in Class

It may come to your attention in several ways that a student in class may have disabilities. The most likely manner is that you will receive an academic accommodation sheet from the appropriate on-campus service provider. The accommodation sheet or accompanying letter will in narrative or checklist form outline the academic accommodations requested. This sheet also lets you know that the student has formally registered with the appropriate service provider and has been found eligible for University accommodations.

In some instances, the student may choose to self-identify and to approach you personally to discuss individual learning needs and seek your support. Ask if the student has contacted and registered with the appropriate on-campus service provider. If the student has not done so yet, suggest that she or he do immediately and ask to have an accommodation sheet forwarded by the caseworker.

A student’s performance or classroom behavior may raise indicators that she or he may have a disability. Many students with disabilities arrive on campus with a lot of insight and experience about how to ensure academic progress. It is possible, however,

that a student may reach college before seriously considering whether or not they have a disability (e.g., learning disability). Occasionally, a student may try to “tough it out” without seeking academic accommodations early in the semester in an effort to “blend in.” Therefore, for a variety of good reasons, consider talking discreetly with the student. Ask directly if he or she is aware of the student support services available on campus and suggest she or he explore the testing, counseling, and support options available to University students.

General Techniques for Accommodation

Most of the kinds of accommodations called for in University classrooms are relatively simple to design and easy to implement. They usually do not require major changes in course preparation practices or teaching style, and the benefits typically enhance the learning environment for all students. The research of Dr. Patricia Silver, Director of Learning Disabilities Support Services at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, emphasizes that the integration of accommodation practices into the design of all University courses serves the dual purpose of inclusion and the enhancement of learning for all students (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn, 1998).

For example, efforts that ask students to reflect on their readiness to learn course content, to articulate their learning goals related to your course, and to share with you what challenges they anticipate in mastering the course content can unilaterally strengthen your ability to teach effectively. Such efforts become even more beneficial when teaching students with disabilities.

Academic accommodations address a wide range of learning experiences. Yet any accommodation can offer every student the opportunity to participate equitably in the learning process while allowing the instructor to maintain the same standards of rigorousness and the scope and breadth of learning outcome goals for all students. For example, some University instructors teach large classes, which can range from 50 to more than 500 students. Instructors of such courses face a daunting challenge to

communicate values and expectations to students in a meaningful way. In these settings, the effective use of the syllabus becomes essential. A few well-chosen words of support or invitation can help immensely to signal your commitment to students' success. Below we have identified selected examples of teaching-related behaviors that strengthen teaching in general as well as establish more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

Instructor-Student Relationship

As you know, establishing rapport with students is the cornerstone to effective dialogue. As the instructor, it is even more important that you take the lead in demonstrating your support of the academic progress of students with disabilities in your classes. Encouraging students to approach you to discuss their learning needs as they relate specifically to your course is just such a demonstration.

Many instructors have found it helpful to initiate a conversation directly with a student early in the semester. This provides an opportunity to review and agree on the accommodations sheet, to acknowledge mutual expectations, and to clarify course expectations and requirements at the threshold of the course. Some instructors have initiated such conversations with questions like the following ones:

- What would you like me to know about how you learn best?
- What can I do to optimize your opportunity to learn in this course?
- Can you suggest some ways in which I could modify the class activities described in the syllabus so that you could participate more effectively?
- Would you like for me to check with you periodically to make certain that you are getting the important content of the course? If so, how?

Having a student with disabilities in your course may be the first opportunity for you to reflect on your own attitudes and values about people with disabilities. To be able to teach most effectively, it is important to be aware of how your beliefs may be influencing interactions with students. Later, in the Frequently Asked Questions section of this guide, we discuss some commonly held attitudes. For example, many teachers have strongly held beliefs about what constitutes fairness, what it means to uphold

academic standards, and whether accommodations “coddle” students. The following checklist is offered as one means to encourage such reflection as you prepare for or teach a course.

Teacher Preparation Checklist

The following checklist offers questions and suggestions to consider during course preparation or teaching:

- In what manner might my attitudes and beliefs about people with disabilities be shaping my interactions with students with disabilities and student support service providers?
- Have I considered incorporating innovative teaching strategies that may benefit all students, and be especially helpful to students with disabilities?
- When a student discloses that she or he has a disability, am I prepared to engage with her or him directly and candidly?
- Do I have a statement in my syllabus encouraging a student with disabilities to discuss his or her learning needs and academic progress with me?
- Do I convey during class and office hours a general attitude of availability and willingness to help students who request academic accommodations?
- To what degree am I familiar with the range of on-campus disabilities support service providers?
- When I have a student with disabilities in my class, do I consult with on-campus service providers for ideas, strategies, and support in implementing appropriate accommodations most effectively?
- Am I prepared to follow through on suggested accommodations in a timely and meaningful way?
- If a referral seems appropriate, am I comfortable in encouraging students in a timely way to use appropriate support services?
- Do I seek and talk with other instructors about techniques they have incorporated in their courses, and offer to share strategies I have found useful?
- Are there periodic opportunities built into my syllabus to gather teaching-related feedback from students (especially those with disabilities)?

Adapted with permission from University of Maine, 1995

Asking reflective questions like those above when preparing or teaching a course helps establish an environment of respect and open communication with students. It may also help avoid misunderstandings and unintended conflicts. While some of these efforts do meet the specific needs of students with disabilities, they also work in general to foster

effective learning conditions for all students. For example, periodic checks with students over the duration of the course can be invaluable in helping a teacher assess all students' progress toward desired learning outcomes and enable you to infuse appropriate support measures in a timely way for students who need them.

The following sections offer more suggestions regarding the development of your syllabus, accessibility, attendance and promptness, testing and evaluation, and inclusive teaching strategies. These suggestions may help teachers anticipate common issues and be prepared generally to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Syllabus Information

Adapted with permission from University of Florida, 1997

A syllabus prepared and available well before the start of the course offers worthwhile benefits for everyone. However, such an effort makes a substantial difference in the learning experiences of students with disabilities. Considered a contract between the instructor and the student, a well-written syllabus plays an integral part in supporting the learning goals for any course.

A well-written syllabus also helps an instructor to plan ahead of time for all class-related events (e.g., lecture, labs, field trips, internships, and workshops) and ensure that accommodations will be in place on the given day. The accommodation may include a review of architectural barriers, as well as related aspects of the overall classroom environment (e.g., lighting, ventilation, or electrical outlets).

If the syllabus is in hand early on (generally four to five weeks before the first class), students and support service personnel can make arrangements in a timely way for accommodations that may require lead time (e.g., arranging for a note taker or interpreter, having texts read onto tape, or providing students who need it the extra lead time to cover large amounts of assigned reading). Additionally, if instructors are not available before

class begins (e.g., due to research, travel, or sabbatical commitments), the syllabus can be left on file with the department.

Syllabus Preparation Checklist

- Name and contact information of the teacher.
- Information on office hours and location.
- A brief statement indicating your support of appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities and an invitation to students to talk with you directly.
- A list of course goals and learning objectives.
- Course policies, expectations, and procedures.
- Tentative timelines for assignments, tests, and projects.
- A list of required and optional reading assignments.
- Materials on reserve (location and procedures for access).
- Descriptions of assignments and projects (the more detail the better).
- Grading and evaluation methods.

Accessibility

A recent national study showed that the accommodations most frequently offered by post-secondary institutions to students with disabilities include: alternative examination formats or additional time, tutors, readers or note takers, registration assistance, adaptive equipment (e.g., listening devices or talking computers), textbooks on tape, and sign-language interpreters (Horn & Berktold, 1999). All of these options, and more, are available at the University. The important first step is to ascertain early on what the specific accommodations recommended by your student's caseworker include.

Additionally, based on their prior experiences in school, students with disabilities can very often offer excellent practical suggestions about how you can help them to better manage their disability and schoolwork. Ask the student if there are any particular activities that she or he anticipates needing help with to succeed. Consider reviewing the syllabus with the student to describe the teaching strategies you anticipate using over the duration of the course. For example, do you rely on overheads, visual aids, small group assignments, showing videos, or student presentations?

At this point, it may prove useful to discuss topics such as the following with your student:

- Have you received or will you want particular information or verification from the student and his or her caseworker prior to implementing accommodations?
- Will she or he need classroom-based accommodations on a regular basis (e.g., particular seating, note taking, tape recording)?
- Will you need to make any arrangements for special events (e.g., field trips or tests)?

As a teacher, the following questions may be helpful to consider:

- Are there any specific pedagogical adjustments that you may want to consider infusing into this course?
- Do you regularly verbalize descriptively what is written on the board or overhead projector? Or conversely, do you provide visual cues for lecture-based material?
- How will you know that you are maintaining high expectations for all students, and your standards of excellence, while incorporating the appropriate accommodations?
- Might you want to seek advice from other instructors who have had experience working with students who have the same or a similar disability?

Portions adapted with permission from University of North Carolina,
Chapel Hill, 1997

The course instructor must agree on accommodations requested by students. Even under the best of circumstances, conflicts may arise between a teacher and a student requesting accommodations. Having a conversation, as suggested above, may help you identify some difficulties early in the semester. If you have questions or reservations about requested accommodations that are not resolvable in dialogue with the student, please contact the student's caseworker. If concerns persist, teachers can also consult with the ADA compliance officer in the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office.

Attendance and Promptness

Depending on the student's particular disability, instructors may be asked to be flexible about attendance and tardiness policies. For example, some students may have difficulty meeting a strict timetable because of assistive devices, transportation obstacles,

medications, or other impediments. Additionally, some students may need to arrive late or leave early in order to meet transportation schedules. Under such circumstances, talk to the student about how you might work together to minimize the impact this may have on their learning opportunities as well as on the dynamics of the classroom-learning environment. Your flexibility with related policies may be of tremendous support to the student.

Testing and Evaluation

The goal of modifying tests or test-taking environments is to use the best method to fairly evaluate the achievement of the student, not the student's disability. The use of alternate formats should not compromise the scholastic requirements of the course or the rigor of the exam process. For some students with disabilities, alternate test formats can be essential in accurately assessing the student's understanding of the course material. Accommodations for exams and evaluations commonly used by instructors include:

- Extended time (*not* unlimited time)
- Alternate format for exams (e.g., oral, short-answer or multiple-choice questions, taped, Braille, larger size of print)
- Use of adaptive equipment (e.g., tests available on diskette, talking computer terminals to assist with reading of test questions, or access to word-processing software or a scribe)
- Alternative location (proctoring services allow for moving the test location to one that is distraction free, or has adaptive equipment available)
- Sign language interpreters
- Test schedule variation (especially relevant for health-related disabilities)

Strategies for Inclusive Pedagogy

Students with and without impairments benefit from the following teaching practices. Materials and resources related to inclusive pedagogy are available from the Center for Teaching. The following suggestions are offered as examples of the kinds of innovations that may be considered.

Research on effective teaching demonstrates that some students learn best with visual representations of important concepts and will appreciate diagrams, videos, overheads, and other visual aids. Other students learn best by interactive teaching methods and so flourish in settings that incorporate opportunities to work in small groups. Still others learn best when material is presented in highly structured, sequential modes such as lectures. The important effort is to incorporate a range of teaching methods and thereby, over the duration of the course, address different learning style needs. Additional strategies that help teachers address different learning style needs include the following:

- Move around the room periodically; face the class directly when you speak, project your voice, and check with students periodically to make certain that everyone can understand the demonstrations or teaching aids being used.
- Vary your teaching methods to maintain interest and encourage active learning.
- Select seating arrangements that allow students to see and hear each other clearly. Provide opportunities for students to make maximum use of student-to-student interactions and small group activities.
- Use “real world” examples. They help many students to integrate new information and abstract concepts more effectively.
- When using the chalkboard or overheads, leave notes up longer than you think necessary to give students ample time to complete their notes.
- Remember to periodically highlight important concepts and key points. Cue students about how to prioritize the content material and to focus learning efforts strategically.
- State at the outset of each class the primary points, models, theories or goals, and at the end of each class, summarize conclusions. When possible, link previous content to the current presentation.
- Consider providing students with outlines or notes on main points, models, theories, or goals for each class. Distribute copies of the overheads or slides (such as PowerPoint presentations) you use.
- Use instructional technology as a means for enhancing student access to course material (e.g., download your notes, PowerPoint presentations, study guides, or handouts onto a web page).

Disability- Specific Accommodations

As mentioned in the earlier section on accessibility, a recent national study showed that the accommodations most frequently offered by post-secondary institutions to students with disabilities include: alternative examination formats or additional time,

tutors, readers or note takers, registration assistance, adaptive equipment (e.g., listening devices or talking computers), textbooks on tape, and sign-language interpreters (Horn & Berkold, 1999).

If you have questions about accessibility needs, talk to the student directly while also being careful to maintain her or his privacy. The student services caseworker working with your student can also help you in assessing whether a program or activity is appropriately accessible in the venue scheduled, and, if necessary, help you in moving to an appropriate location.

If accommodations cannot be agreed on within the processes described above, the University has outlined specific steps and timelines for instructors and students to mediate the accommodation process. See the “Procedures for Responding to Requests for Accommodations Required Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).”

The following information is offered to instructors for consideration during the preparation or teaching of a course. It may be of use for instructors to consider the integration of some of these instructional strategies into the overall design of each of the courses they teach, whereas others are more appropriate if held in reserve until requested. The following lists are not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive. Rather, they are meant to introduce University instructors to typical kinds of matches often suggested between particular disabilities and possible accommodations.

Learning Disabilities

Adapted with permission from University of Rhode Island, 1997

- Develop and distribute lecture notes, outlines, study guides, or other handouts, preferably before the class starts.
- Help students make connections between how current topics relate to past and future material.
- Cue students regularly about what you consider to be the key points, models, or theories you expect them to master.

- Stimulate students' interest by incorporating a multi-modality approach to teaching. For example, explaining visual aids with verbal descriptions can be very effective.
- Use voice inflection, gestures, and eye contact to maintain the attention of students.
- Elucidate the course material through concrete examples and practical, "real world" applications where possible.
- Assign homework explicitly by giving oral and written directions.
- Vary the format of tests by offering essay, multiple-choice, oral examinations, or weekly quizzes.
- Provide a separate, quiet room for extended-time tests.
- When appropriate, allow the use of dictionaries, tape recorders, computers, and calculators.
- Offer review sessions, study guides, and study questions.

Physical Disabilities

Adapted with permission from The Ohio State University, 1996,
and University of Florida, 1997

- Survey your students to determine whether any student is concerned about the accessibility of the classroom, its environment, or building location.
- Be aware that some students' disabilities or impairments may make them highly sensitive to environmental factors (e.g., ventilation, rugs, or chemical-based odors such as particular kinds of markers). Strategize with students to find appropriate responses.
- Be patient with students getting to class, and remember that they often encounter architectural barriers or transportation delays.
- Allow the use of tape recorders or the presence of note takers during lecture.
- Reserve or arrange seating to ensure active participation of all students.
- Permit any in-class writing assignments to be completed out of class and with the use of a scribe if necessary.
- If the course involves a laboratory, pair the student with a laboratory partner or an assistant.
- If the course involves workshops, field trips, or internships, help the student arrange appropriate transportation and accessibility to the destination, and remember to check on the accessibility of the destination site.
- If no other options are available, you may have to switch classrooms.

Psychological and Medical Disabilities

Adapted with permission from University of Florida, 1997

- Be flexible, in that disorders may typically "wax and wan."
- Acknowledge that there may be extreme stress for the student associated with dealing with the disability and its unpredictability.

- Take responsibility for your own feelings/thoughts about psychological disabilities, and seek education/consultation when appropriate (i.e. is it affecting your ability to be “reasonable” in your response to the student, such as in making accommodations?).
- Assist those students who request it in discreetly recruiting a volunteer note taker or assistant from the class.
- Grant permission, when requested, to allow beverages in class (to deal with medication side effects) and to leave class for a break and return.

Hearing Impairments

Adapted with permission from University of Rhode Island, 1997

- Arrange front row seating so that there is an unobstructed view between the instructor and the student.
- Face the class when giving lectures, and do not place objects in front of your mouth, such as your hands or notes.
- Use visual aids to enhance learning.
- Request that students raise their hands and repeat their questions. This will assist the hearing-impaired student in recognizing who is speaking.
- If there is an interpreter, speak directly to the student, not the interpreter. Maintain a natural voice while enunciating clearly. Avoid talking loudly or over-enunciating.
- Try to speak at a normal pace in order to allow enough time for an interpreter to translate.
- Request that students with hearing impairments repeat themselves if their speech is difficult to understand, or use written communication when necessary.

Visual Impairments

Adapted with permission from University of Florida, 1997

- Prepare and provide reading lists or syllabi in advance so that arrangements can be made for the taping or Brailleing of texts.
- Reserve seating in the front of the classroom. Some students may be only partially blind and will need to be as close to the instructor as possible.
- Face the class when speaking, and verbally describe the content of all visual aids, such as transparencies or notes on the chalkboard.
- Allow lectures to be taped, or provide copies of class notes.
- Call on students by name when conducting discussions in class.
- Provide large-print (at least 18 point font) copies of exams, handouts, and other classroom material for low-vision students. (Today, this is an especially simple task using any word-processing software.)
- Consider alternate exam formats, such as oral or taped, and permit the use of a scribe if necessary.

Communication Disorders

Adapted with permission from University of Florida, 1997

- Offer students the opportunity to speak in class, but do not force them.
- Allow students the time they need to make their comments. Resist trying to speed them up by answering for them, interrupting, or filling in any gaps in their speech.
- Do not hesitate to ask students to repeat themselves when their speech is difficult to understand. Maintain comfortable eye contact and posture until they finish expressing themselves.
- Address students naturally and in your regular speaking voice.
- Encourage student participation through course modifications and adaptive technology, such as one-to-one presentations and the use of voice-synthesizing computers.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Develop and distribute lecture notes, outlines, study guides, or other handouts before the class starts.
- Cue students about how to effectively break large and/or long-term tasks into increments.
- Periodically review progress on assigned tasks. Encourage submission of early “drafts” of the assignment at intervals leading up to your formal due date for the entire assignment.
- Consider the use of on-going cooperative learning groups.
- Provide regular opportunities for students to engage in small group discussions where they restate in their own words concepts, models, or explanations.
- Reinforce the benefit of taking notes. (This activity can also help a student focus “fidgeting” productively).
- Some students remember best what was “done,” not what was seen or talked about. When possible, build in structured learning opportunities that involve physically moving and doing.
- Offer direct and timely feedback about interpersonal effectiveness (e.g., talking too much during class, interrupting others, or being overly blunt).

Over the course of the semester, instructors may become concerned about the well being of a student for any number of reasons. It may be helpful, therefore, to refer students to support services offered through the University Health Services, the University Health Center, and Mental Health Services (127 Hills North). For emotional / psychological emergencies, students can also seek immediate support at the Urgent Care Clinic (127 Hills North).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Instructors often raise questions about academic accommodations for students with disabilities or impairments, especially when a student's disability may be an invisible one or seem to be anchored to challenges faced by most students. In anticipation of some of the questions often posed by instructors, we include the following information.

If I integrate accommodations for a single person, am I undercutting a “level playing field” for peers?

To qualify for accommodations, students with disabilities enrolled at the University of Massachusetts Amherst must provide the appropriate University personnel with suitable and complete documentation of their disability. Once documentation and registration requirements have been satisfied, caseworkers from the appropriate University office work closely with the student to develop and implement an appropriate plan of “reasonable accommodation.”

Accommodations for students with disabilities are not designed to give them an advantage over peers. For example, extended time for tests gives a student with serious impediments to processing and integrating information quickly (as with a learning disability) the time necessary to compose and express their mastery of the material.

Will accommodations “coddle” students with disabilities and deny these students a quality of academic preparation necessary for later success?

No. Students with disabilities require particular kinds of accommodations (matched to their individual needs) so that what is actually assessed is in fact their academic progress, not the impact of their disability on the learning process. If accommodations are well matched to the individual student with a disability, the accommodations do not change the rigor or content of the course. What they do is offer instructors and students with disabilities equitable tools for assessing fairly the academic progress that the student has made to date.

For some instructors, academic accommodation processes will continue to go “against the grain,” especially whenever there is any call for a departure from traditional modes of demonstrating academic progress. This suggests that such a question as this one is difficult to resolve strictly relying on intellectual presentations. Values and beliefs can be difficult to explore and critique, much less to change, because they are rooted within a network of deeply held feelings, as well as reasoned cognitive positions. To examine more closely attitudes and beliefs about, for example, “fairness,” it may be useful to pursue such questions in disabilities workshop settings or faculty development seminars.

Will accommodations require that an inordinate amount of my time and attention be devoted to the needs of just one or two students?

There are a range of proactive adjustments in the presentation of course material that will not only assist students with disabilities, but will also help all students have a richer academic experience. “For example, most of the requests by students with learning disabilities at [the University of Massachusetts Amherst] . . . are for extended-time tests, notes, prepared materials before class, and study guides. Such accommodations are typically helpful to all students, and in fact may be representative of effective instructional practices ” (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn 1998, pp. 47-48). In addition, many students can benefit from the use of such varied teaching methods as visual aids, overhead transparencies, multiple test formats, discussion groups, and presentations (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn, 1998, p. 48). The positive effect of using these strategies is that students overall are given the opportunity to learn in their own way while being evaluated in a fair and consistent manner.

Why does it seem like I’m the last to know anything about my student’s disability?

Most often, the appropriate caseworker is the person most qualified to assess the individual’s disability and to then match the appropriate accommodations. Therefore, students work closely with their caseworker to agree on the accommodations to be requested. At that point, the instructor is notified either in person, by accommodation sheet, or letter. Underlining these procedures are federal and state law and University

policies regarding family and student privacy rights. Instructors do not have the right to ask what the specific disability is of a student. An instructor can, however, verify with the appropriate University office that the student has documented evidence of a disability and is registered and eligible to receive University services and accommodations.

Am I being asked to undercut the academic rigor of my course by providing accommodations?

The University works to provide the accommodations necessary for ensuring complete access to and full participation in the educational process for qualified students with disabilities or impairments. It does not require a change in standards of academic achievement and evaluation. In practice, equitable accommodations act to give you, the instructor, the means to fairly assess academic performance and to support students with disabilities in learning and integrating information through their unique learning styles (University of Florida, 1997). Briefly stated, students with disabilities cannot be denied access to college programs solely on the basis of their disability, *and* they are expected to meet all degree requirements of the University.

What if I do not agree with the requested accommodations?

The caseworker and student will work together to ascertain the most appropriate accommodations within the context of a specific course and then suggest these to the instructor. In most cases, this arrangement works well. However, there are times when either the instructor or the student may feel that the accommodation process has become problematic and may choose to dispute it. If you have concerns as an instructor, and conversations with the student and her or his caseworker are unsatisfactory, there is a formal process for disputing requests for academic accommodations. Refer to “Procedures for Responding to Requests for Accommodations Required Under the Americans with Disabilities Act” for guidelines.

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UNIVERSITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

The following University offices and programs offer essential support services to students with disabilities. Additionally, the professional staff members of these offices often have a great deal of experience helping instructors design useful, discipline-specific accommodations for students with disabilities.

Office of Disability Services (DS)

231 Whitmore Building, 545-0892 (V/TTY)*

The Office of Disability Services (Disability Services) provides services to any student with a documented visual, hearing, mobility, or medical disability. Accommodations are based on the individual's specific needs, and Disability Services works with instructors to ensure an effective plan. Disability Services also facilitates the availability of accessible classrooms, tutors, class-work modifications (e.g., note takers, books on tape, readers, proctored examinations, interpreters), adaptive equipment, and personal assistance referrals. Committed to increasing the awareness of and sensitivity to diversity, the goals of Disability Services are to educate and advocate for students, instructors, and staff and to ensure equal and accessible opportunities at the University.

Learning Disabled Student Services (LDSS)

321 Berkshire House, 545-4602 or 545-6218

LDSS coordinates support services for individuals with documented learning disabilities. Meeting with students regularly, LDSS staff members help individuals develop their educational program; acquire tutors for specific courses; and determine the need for instructional modifications, including the use of taped lectures, note takers, and extended-time exams. In addition, the staff oversees and supports the achievement of students with learning disabilities by collaborating with instructors, advisors, and other university professionals. For example, LDSS offers specialized tutoring and proctoring services.

LDSS maintains a network of university instructors and staff who have had successful experiences in working with students with learning disabilities in their "Faculty Friends" Program. Many faculty members have also been honored with the Phinney Memorial Award in recognition of their help to students with learning disabilities. Contact LDSS or your department chair for the names of peers within your discipline or college who will be able to assist you with the questions and concerns you may have.

*V/TTY is the acronym for Visual/Teletype Communication Device for the Deaf.

Program for Students with Psychological/Medical Disabilities (P/MD)
123 Berkshire House, 547-2457 or 545-0333

The Program for Students with Psychological/Medical Disabilities offers academic and psychological support to students with documented psychological and certain medical disabilities (i.e., those that affect central nervous system functioning and have significant psychological concomitants). Using a clinical case management model, the P/MD Program assigns an individual to meet regularly with students to review their academic progress and needs, offer strategic suggestions, facilitate student requests for academic and nonacademic accommodations, monitor mental status, establish a liaison with mental health providers, and assist students in decision-making strategies regarding appropriate disclosure of their disability. The Program enhances academic progress and creates a productive learning environment for students, staff, instructors, and administrators.

In addition to their role as advocates for students with disabilities, the professional staff members of these offices can often serve as excellent resources for instructors. When considering implementing teaching innovations designed to create more inclusive classrooms, some instructors have found it useful to consult with students with disabilities and their caseworkers for support in identifying specific helpful strategies.

ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES

Many instructors have found it useful to consult with service providers at the University. The selected offices listed below are staffed by professional personnel with the expertise and access to resources that can be of great assistance to instructors, staff, and students in understanding better how particular disabilities affect the learning process and what accommodations will likely be most appropriate.

Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office

Paul Appleby, ADA Compliance Officer
305 Whitmore Building
545 - 3464

Counseling and Assessment Services

Dr. Sally Freeman, Executive Director
123 Berkshire House
545 - 0333

Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS)

Dr. Patricia Silver, Director
321 Berkshire House
545 - 4602

Learning Support Services

W.E.B. Du Bois Library
Room #1020
545 - 5334

Office of Disability Services (DS)

Madeline Peters, Director
231 Whitmore Building
545 - 0892 (V/TTY),
www.umass.edu/disability

Program for Students with Psychological/Medical Disabilities

Dr. Patricia Barrows and Dr. Deborah Berkman, Directors
119 Berkshire House
577 - 2457 or 545 - 0333

Tutoring Office for Students with Disabilities

Kathy Weilerstein, Coordinator
323 Middlesex House
545 - 6218