



## What every GTA should know.... About students with disabilities

If you are going to teach courses, you will have students with disabilities enrolled in them. Some you will be able to identify based on apparent signs, some you will not. Some will need accommodations, some will not. For those who do need accommodations, it is the student's responsibility to let that need be known. The method on this campus is for the student to give you, the instructor, a memo from Resources for Disabled Students (RDS) that verifies the student is eligible and that lists the type of accommodations that have been recommended. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- moving classes/activities to accessible locations
- providing alternatives to print material
- allowing the tape recording of lectures
- providing sign language or oral interpreters
- providing note taking support (volunteer, paid, or computer assisted)
- changing the length of time for completion of assignments and other academic activities
- providing adaptive computer equipment
- flexibility in assignments or attendance
- adapting or modifying testing situations

The most common accommodation is for students to take their exams with extra time and/or a quieter location. This accommodation is facilitated through RDS via a scheduling form. The student is responsible for scheduling the exam with RDS but will need your approval signature and instructions related to any conditions under which the exam may be taken. In addition, you will need to indicate the place to pick up/return the exam by RDS (usually the main office unless otherwise requested). You will be left with a copy of this form that is your reminder to have the exam ready (or to email it to RDS) prior to the day/time of the exam. The student is to return the original copy of the scheduling form to RDS one week prior to the scheduled exam date. For finals, this deadline is two weeks before the exam.

Note: RDS will be transitioning to an on-line system in the near future.

### WHY ACCOMMODATIONS?

The University is required through federal mandates to be non-discriminatory based on disability in all its programs and services. These obligations apply to all individuals employed by the university. The process of non-discrimination has as its goal to minimize the effects of a disability that results from an environment created without consideration for the vast diversity of human characteristics in physical and/or mental

ability. Accommodations are provided to ensure that qualified students are able to participate in and benefit from any university program or service. These federal mandates are outlined in *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* and its amendments.

Students who meet the basic requirements (otherwise qualified) of a program or activity cannot be denied access to any program or activity offered or sponsored by the university solely on the basis of disability. The regulations of both acts also outline the types of auxiliary aids and/or reasonable accommodations the university is to make for qualified students with disabilities.

A reasonable accommodation is designed to minimize the effects of a disability so a qualified student can benefit or participate in an activity to the fullest extent possible. Accommodations are determined individually for each student and are to be appropriate to the specific limitation caused by a disability.

A reasonable accommodations is not required if such accommodation would significantly alter the essential or fundamental objective of an academic program or class. If you should receive a request for an accommodation that would alter your course, contact RDS immediately so other options can be offered.

If a student requests an accommodation but has not provided you with a verifying memo, please refer the student to RDS. While you may feel the request is reasonable, you do not have to provide it until the student has been verified to need it by RDS.

Not all recommendations for accommodations on a memo from RDS may be appropriate or necessary for a given situation. RDS is available to assist both the student and faculty member in negotiating what may be most effective as an accommodation. If you have any concerns about any accommodation request, please call RDS at 491-6385.

## ARE ACCOMMODATIONS FAIR?

A disability inherently can put a student at a disadvantage in comparison to the other students in your class. An accommodation for the particular limitations of a disability is meant to minimize this disadvantage and to "even out the playing field" - or to provide an equitable environment for the student with the disability. Therefore, it can be considered **UNFAIR** to the disabled student to **NOT** provide an accommodation.

An accommodation is related to the presence of a hearing, visual, mobility, learning, or other disability. Since the majority of your students will not have such conditions, it is unnecessary to accommodate them in the same way because their needs as individual students will be different than those of a student with a disability. No two students are alike. Therefore, the need to treat them as if they were all the same, or equal, is an inequitable and unjust expectation. In addition, research indicates that accommodations such as extra time on exams does not benefit the student without a disability while it

significantly improves test scores of students with disabilities (time constraints may actually test students' limitations rather than their knowledge).

It is important, however, to remember that all students should have the same expectation to learn the material of a particular class. Some students will do well and some others will not; sometimes due to individual student effort and motivation and sometimes due to the method you choose in teaching and/or measuring their learning outcome. The latter can present artificial barriers to students with disabilities regardless of their effort and motivation. Accommodations are means by which disabled students have the opportunity to transcend these barriers as they participate in the educational process.

Accommodations are by no means fool-proof and even with a reasonable accommodation a student may still fail to learn the material. Nevertheless, what is important is that the student is given the opportunity to learn, and a fair chance to show how much he/she has learned, through methods that facilitate both those processes.

One way to ensure you are providing an equitable learning experience to all students is to follow the principles of Universal Design in Instruction. This paradigm for teaching, learning, and assessment, draws on brain research and media technologies to respond to individual learner differences. Universal design for instruction and learning embraces three general principles:

- 1) To support **RECOGNITION** learning by providing multiple, flexible methods of presentation
- 2) To support **STRATEGIC** learning by providing multiple, flexible methods of expression and apprenticeship
- 3) To support **AFFECTIVE** learning by providing multiple, flexible options for engagement

These share one common recommendation: to provide students with a variety of options for **accessing**, **using**, and **engaging** with learning materials. Like universal design in architecture, these alternatives reduce barriers for individuals with disabilities but also enhance opportunities for every student.

On campus, the **Access Project** provides additional resources for faculty who wish to implement Universal Design into their courses. For more information, contact the **Access Project** webpage: <http://accessproject.colostate.edu/>

## WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

The following are offered as suggestions when you have a student with a disability in your class. Remember, a student with a disability is first a **STUDENT** and will have the same motivations and desires as any other student to learn and to be successful.

### For All Students

- You may want to include on your syllabus a statement that invites students to talk to you if they have a need for an accommodation due to a disability or other situation. Students are sometimes intimidated with the act of speaking to instructors because of negative experiences they have encountered in the past concerning their needs. Your demonstrated willingness to work with a

student can often make it easier for a student to approach you early in the semester rather than in the middle of a crisis. Again, if a student has not yet had contact with RDS, this may be a good time to inform them of university procedures for obtaining accommodations.

#### Sample Statement:

If you are a student who will need accommodations in this class, please make an appointment to see me to discuss your individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation. A verifying memo from Resources for Disabled Students may be required before any accommodation is provided.

- Each student with a disability is a unique individual. A student may approach you appropriately or he/she may not be very adept at self-advocacy. Your understanding of this and your willingness to give appropriate feedback as to the student's interaction with you may help her/him with future encounters with faculty and other representatives of the university.

#### For Students with Learning Disabilities

- Some students with learning disabilities may not realize they are experiencing trouble in a class until they take an exam. More frequent testing throughout the semester or other measures of performance in addition to exams only is often helpful for these students.
- Study guides can also be helpful for students who have difficulty differentiating the minutia from what is important.
- Students may also have difficulty with specific types of exams. Often an alternative format will prove to be a better indicator of the student's mastery of the material.
- Your assistance in identifying potential tutoring support may also benefit students who are struggling with the compatibility of their learning disability and your teaching style.

#### For Students with Mental Health Conditions and Neurological Conditions

- Since mental health and neurological conditions vary widely in how they affect a student, your understanding and willingness to work with a student is likely the best approach. Some may need flexibility with attendance or assignment deadlines; others may need to have exams adjusted to help minimize the stress or maximize their abilities. Often things that assist students with other disabilities (e.g., students with learning disabilities) may be helpful as well.
- Some conditions may affect how a student behaves in class. One condition that characteristically manifests in unexpected behavior may result from conditions considered on the Autism Spectrum, including Asperger Syndrome. These conditions are neurological and often results in difficulty for the student in terms of interpreting social cues.

#### For Students with Mobility Limitations

- Students with mobility limitations may be those who use mobility aids such as walkers, canes, and wheelchairs. They may also have 'mobility limitations' that impact the use of any of their four limbs, including hands and arms. Students who have other skeletal limitations from injuries are also included in this category, including those students who experience temporary limitations from surgery or accidents.
- Reasonable accommodations involve providing physical access to a particular class location and adjusting the interior of a room to accommodate the presence of a wheelchair or other mobility device. Because the campus is not 100% physically accessible, moving classrooms is often the only way to ensure access.

- Other considerations may involve the activities required in a particular class. A common accommodation in a lab might be to provide an assistant for a student who is not able to manipulate equipment or to have the student complete an assignment in another way.
- For those students who acquire temporary mobility limitations, an extension for completion of assignments or other adjustment might be appropriate, including referring the student to RDS for test taking accommodations.
- Some students with mobility limitations (as well as students with mental health conditions and with hearing and visual limitations) may use a service dog. These are animals that have dispensation in terms of access to public buildings because they provide a specific service to the student as an accommodation. You can expect that the student will have the dog under control so that the animal does not cause a disruption to the class.

### For Students who are Blind/Sight Impaired

- If you plan to use videos, slides, or other visual media, it might be helpful to have someone in class describe the material orally to students who are blind. Written material may need to be converted to alternative formats and your cooperation in this process may be to provide an extra copy of a book or copies of printed handouts prior to distribution to the class so that they may be converted into an appropriate format (i.e., electronic, audio or Braille).
- If you post anything via the Internet (e.g., notes, bulletin boards, assignments, etc.), be sure it is accessible for students who use adaptive devices. Students with visual impairments in particular often use screen readers. These devices DO NOT read pictures; they only read text. An alternative format or adaptive aid may be necessary for a student to have access to your material and information.
- For more information on how to make your materials more accessible, contact RDS, Coordinator of Alternative Text. To create accessible web content (including webpages), contact the Assistive Technology Resource Center ([ATRC](#)), 491-6258.

### For Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

- If a student is hard of hearing, facing the class while lecturing will be helpful for those students who lip-read. Students who lip-read (speech read) use the formation of the words on your mouth. However, since many different sounds look alike on the lips, a student will be trying to piece together the content and another accommodation may be needed to supplement that process. If meeting one on one with a student, please be sure you do not obscure your mouth and offer to repeat information and/or write it down.
- Some students who have hearing loss between mild and moderate may need only a note taker. If a volunteer in-class note taker is identified, RDS will supply NCR paper so that each page of notes is duplicated and then given to the student or the note taker can have notes copied in the RDS office. A paid note taker may also be provided as an accommodation for a student depending upon the specific need and nature of the course. Instructors may be asked to help identify potential in-class (volunteer and paid) note takers as well as any former students who may be willing to be act as a paid note taker. A computer assisted note taker (transcriber) may also be assigned. These are individuals employed by RDS to assist in capturing material from courses in a more thorough manner.
- If a student is deaf, he/she will be accompanied by a sign language/oral interpreter. An oral interpreter is one who 'mouths' what is being said. Students who rely on speech (lip) reading often need this type of accommodation. Students who have more profound hearing losses or who are more proficient in sign language will require an interpreter who not only 'mouths' what is being said but can also translate into pictorial gestures ([American Sign Language](#)).

- A classroom interpreter will position him/herself in view of the student as well as within hearing distance of you. The interpreter is also available to reverse interpret - or voice what the student wants to say. It is important to remember to speak to the student and not the interpreter when conversing with the student since the interpreter is there to simply translate words into and from signed gestures. If your pace of lecturing is too fast for the interpreter to follow you may be asked to repeat or to slow down so that the student does not lose important information. Remember, too, whatever the interpreter voices will be the words of the student and not the interpreter.
- DVD's and videos often have sub-titles (or open captioning). Showing these during viewing can be helpful for students who may have difficulty hearing. If a particular DVD or video is closed-captioned, please check with Instruction Services to see if your equipment can access the closed captioning option. If a DVD or video is not captioned (open or closed), you might need to provide a copy of the text. If a student uses an interpreter, proper lighting may need to be provided for the interpreter if the lighting in class is altered for visual displays. A student who cannot access an in-class DVD or video may need to view it outside of class with appropriate accommodations either in advance or afterwards.

### For Students with Chronic Health Conditions

- Several chronic health conditions could impact a student's ability to participate fully in class activities in the same way other students are able to participate. These conditions include, but are not limited to, sickle cell, diabetes, epilepsy, narcolepsy, chronic pain, and specific food intolerances (e.g. gluten, peanuts, etc.). Each student could be impacted in different ways, regardless of having the same condition. As a result, it may be important to discuss with each student to determine if the chronic condition will interfere with the practices of the course. The types of interference could be as minimal as determining what food should be considered for class gatherings (for food intolerances) to what to do if a student has an exacerbation that requires a brief hospitalization. Accommodations that might be needed will be dependent upon how a particular condition limits the student in participation.

## WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO PROVIDE ACCOMMODATIONS?

Both *ADA* and the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* are civil rights laws. A student who feels discriminated against based on his/her disability has the right to file an informal or formal complaint internally with the university's [Office of Equal Opportunity](#) and/or an external formal complaint with the [U.S. Office of Civil Rights](#) for further investigation. In addition, the *ADA* allows an individual direct access to the courts as a means to address the claim of discrimination and you can be held personally responsible for your actions. For more information concerning your individual responsibility, please contact the [Office of Equal Opportunity](#), 491-5836.

For more information about students with disabilities and the resources available, go to the RDS website:

<http://rds.colostate.edu/>