

Carnegie Mellon

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Why We Accommodate Students Fact Sheet

Larry Powell, Carnegie Mellon University

What are my responsibilities as a faculty member?

Campus compliance with the ADA is a shared responsibility. Faculty members play an important role in an institution's efforts. The ADA is a civil rights statute, ensuring that students with disabilities will have the opportunity to participate in postsecondary education without discrimination. For faculty members, providing reasonable accommodations or auxiliary aids and services is one way to prevent discrimination.

What is the purpose of the academic accommodations?

Students with disabilities are capable individuals who may require adaptation of materials, methods, or environments to facilitate learning. Accommodations may also ensure that when students are evaluated, they are able to demonstrate what they learned rather than the effects of their disability.

How do I decide which accommodations are appropriate for a particular student?

Because appropriate documentation is usually provided by the student to staff within the Disability Resources office, faculty members are not responsible for making decisions about accommodations. Students have the responsibility for requesting accommodations and services, and must provide documentation of conditions that may warrant academic accommodations. Before providing particular accommodations for a specific course, the Disability Resources office carefully considers the nature of the student's disability and how this disability may affect the student's ability to learn, and to demonstrate achievement, in the course.

How will I know that a student in my class is supposed to have an accommodation?

It is common practice for the Disability Resources office to provide students with information (a memorandum) that they give to faculty regarding the type of accommodations that will be provided each semester. Some of these accommodations, such as sign language interpreters, may be provided by the Disability Resources office itself, while other accommodations, such as extended time for exams, may be provided by the faculty member. Not every student needs every accommodation, and the Disability Resources office is the best campus resource for working with each student to determine the accommodations that are recommended.

Occasionally a student may ask you to provide accommodations, but you never received notification from the Disability Resources office. To protect yourself, the student, and your institution, you should recommend that the student channel any requests through the Disability Resources office. Students have a right to privacy in disability matters, and their confidentiality should be maintained. Please file notices of accommodation in a secure place and refrain from discussing their disabilities and necessary accommodations in the presence of fellow students or others who have no educational need to know.

Will accommodations compromise the integrity of my class or academic program?

No. When providing accommodation for disabilities, institutions of higher education are not required to lower academic standards or compromise the integrity of the school or program. Essentially, accommodations and auxiliary aids and services are provided to "level the playing field" for the student with a disability enabling the student to compete with their peers. Once you have provided accommodations, you should grade the work of a student receiving accommodations as you would grade the work of any other student. There is no need to give them a break by being unduly lenient. To grade students more harshly because they have had the opportunity for additional time for exams or other instructional modifications would nullify the effect of the accommodations, in addition to possibly constituting discrimination.

What else can I do?

Don't be afraid to ask a student to describe how he or she learns best. You can also make your course more disability-friendly by including information on your course syllabus that encourages students with disabilities to contact the Disability Resources office for assistance in receiving accommodations. If you need additional information or specific resources, please contact the EOS - Disability Resources office.

Attitude

As you meet people with various disabilities, you will likely find that you are apprehensive about how you should behave towards that individual. Every person is different and some will find it easy to work with such individuals, whereas others will find it difficult adjusting. Always remember that a person with a disability is a person. He or she is like anyone else.

Remember

Common Courtesy - Treat people as you would like to be treated yourself. People with disabilities are NOT alike and have a wide variety of skills and personalities. Most disabled people are not sick, incompetent, dependent, unintelligent or contagious. We are all individuals.

**Some information taken from Community Resources for Independence*

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