

Committee-Based Assessment Process and Guidelines for Students with Disability Accommodations

This document outlines procedures to be followed by graduate students, academic departments, and faculty committee members when disability accommodations are requested for non-course-based assessments. Typically, this includes any committee-based pass/no pass or graded assessment in the graduate space outside of a numbered course. It is usually not associated with an instructor-led course. This includes:

- Qualifying Proposals
- Qualifying Exams and Defenses
- Thesis Proposals
- Thesis Defenses
- Any committee-based exam outside the normal course/instructor framework

Background

Disability accommodations for committee-based assessments such as the above are often more complex than typical exam accommodations such as additional exam time, distraction-reduced testing, use of a laptop for exams, etc. Each committee-based assessment may have different formats, oral and written portions, presentation and Q&A components, or other elements. Additionally, the student's performance is evaluated by a committee rather than by an individual professor or teaching assistant. In addition, committee-based assessments are typically scheduled separately from regularly scheduled exams and often require coordinating the limited availability of multiple committee members. Committee-based assessments are often used as a critical milestone that must be completed in order to progress toward a graduate degree.

For this reason, disability accommodations in this space must be individualized, not only based on the student's disability need, but also on the design and key learning objectives of the assessment. Approved accommodations shall not fundamentally alter the core objectives or design of the assessment. The determination of reasonableness and feasibility of accommodations is separate from and unrelated to the student's overall level of performance in the graduate program.

This document reviews the process by which the Office of Disability Resources collaborates with students and academic departments to:

1. Determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations for the student's committee-based assessment; and
2. Ensure that approved accommodations are implemented correctly.

Process Overview

A detailed, step-by-step guide to the process is listed below. The process consists of five main stages:

Stage 1: Student Request

The graduate student with a disability makes a request to the Office of Disability Resources for accommodations related to a committee-based assessment. It is highly recommended that the student submit this request at least six (6) weeks prior to the scheduled assessment date to allow adequate time for review and implementation.

Action Items:

Accessibility specialist meets with student to understand the accommodation request and to determine necessity.

- A. Disability Resources ensures that requests are written in a concise, concrete manner in bullet point format - avoiding vague/abstract language or ongoing and evolving accommodation requests
- B. Disability resources reaches out to the program director to determine key decision makers and schedule a meeting with those decision-makers.
- C. If necessary, Disability Resources requests supporting medical documentation from the student (note - medical documentation may already be on file)

Stage 2: Consultation with Department

Disability Resources meets with the student's principal investigator, program director, and all other identified decision-makers in the department to discuss the reasonableness and feasibility of the requested accommodations. The student's diagnosis will not be shared with decision-makers unless the nature of the disability is implied based on the accommodations discussed (e.g. student requires materials in Braille). In those very rare cases where Disability Resources anticipates that information about a student's diagnosis will need to be shared, the accessibility specialist will advise the student ahead of time.

Action Items:

- A. Facilitate meeting with identified department level decision makers in order to share proposed accommodations and better understand the following:
 - I. The assessment format, what are the standard expectations, timeline with regard to both overall progress toward degree as well as specific assessment time allotments, and whether retakes are a standard option.
 - II. Personnel involved / committee members.
 - III. The learning objectives / purpose / goals of the assessment.
 - IV. Whether any alternative accommodations would be more appropriate.

- V. Identification of the faculty/staff member that will be monitoring / moderating / ensuring the accommodations are upheld.
- VI. The obligation to uphold accommodations and why it's important to provide accommodations as approved.
- VII. Whether any of the requested accommodations would fundamentally alter the nature of the committee-based assessment.

Stage 3: Determination by Disability Resources

Disability Resources evaluates the information obtained in Stages 1 and 2 and determines whether the requested accommodations are reasonable and, based on that determination, approves or denies the requested accommodations.

Action Items:

- A. If additional information is required to make this determination, Disability Resources may continue to engage in an interactive dialogue with the student and/or decision-makers in the academic department.
- B. Accessibility Specialist writes the Summary of Accommodations Memorandum listing agreed-upon accommodations and distributes it to all departmental decision-makers and the student. The student will be provided with a written rationale for any requested accommodation that is denied.
- C. If approved accommodations are different from accommodations the student requested, the Accessibility Specialist meets with the student to discuss next steps.

Stage 4: Committee Member Briefing

Disability Resources meets with all committee members who will be attending the assessment and the faculty or staff member designated by the department to ensure that approved accommodations are implemented correctly during the assessment ("Accommodations Monitor"), to review the approved accommodations and procedures to ensure they are implemented.

Action Items:

- A. The purpose of this meeting is to confirm the logistics of the accommodations and inform committee members and Accommodations Monitor of their obligations and best practices. Since accommodations have already been approved by key decision-makers, no changes to accommodations will be made at this stage.
- B. Review the obligation to uphold accommodations and why it's important to provide accommodations as approved.

- C. Confirm and document in writing who is responsible for serving as the Accommodations Monitor and review procedures with them. If appropriate, the Accommodations Monitor should be a committee member who is familiar with the accommodations process. This meeting should occur at least one (1) week prior to the scheduled assessment date.

Stage 5: Implementation of Accommodations

The student sits for the committee-based assessment, with the designated Accommodation Monitor present to ensure that the approved accommodations are implemented correctly and consistently.

Action items:

- A. If necessary, Accessibility Specialist provides all committee members with a companion document to the Summary of Accommodations Memorandum, reviewing logistics and clarifying procedures for implementing accommodations.
- B. Prior to beginning the assessment, the Accommodations Monitor must verbally confirm with all committee members that they understand the approved accommodations.
- C. The assessment is held.
- D. If, during the assessment, it is unexpectedly determined that the accommodations cannot be implemented, the assessment should be stopped and the Office of Disability Resources consulted about next steps. The assessment may not proceed until the Office of Disability Resources has been contacted and has provided guidance.
- E. The Accessibility Specialist follows up with the student within two business days of the assessment to confirm that the accommodations were implemented correctly.