

A Guide for Faculty and Staff Working with Students with Disabilities



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Working with Students with Disabilities at Midwestern State University

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Services for Students with Disabilities

The office of Disability Support Services (DSS) at Midwestern State University exists to provide an academic experience for all students that is fully inclusive and accessible. DSS works to promote an academic environment that is free from physical and attitudinal barriers.

Services provided by DSS to students with disabilities:

- insuring accessibility to university programs
- accommodations counseling
- evaluation referral
- disability-related information
- adaptive technology services and equipment
- interpreter services for academically related purposes

Although DSS does not offer disability evaluation and/or testing, tutoring, personal expenses, or attendants, we provide referral information.

Eligibility for Services

To be eligible for services a student must:

- ✓ Apply and be accepted for admission to Midwestern State University through the regular admissions process;
- ✓ Complete the DSS application;
- ✓ Provide current and comprehensive documentation of a temporary or permanent disability which requires accommodation;
- ✓ Register with DSS at the beginning of each semester

A disability is defined as:

“Any mental or physical condition that substantially limits an individual’s ability to perform one or more major life activities” (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).



Disabilities include but are not limited to: physical disabilities, learning disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, neurological impairments, chronic or temporary health problems, communication disorders, or psychological disabilities.

DSS Procedures

- ❖ Students must identify themselves as having a disability and present documentation to the DSS office in order to receive services. Parents, instructors, advisors, or friends should refer students with disabilities to DSS.
- ❖ The DSS Director reviews all documentation and determines whether the student is eligible to receive DSS services.
- ❖ The DSS Director meets with the student to determine appropriate accommodations.
- ❖ Appropriate accommodations are determined by the Director and student based on the documented needs, previous accommodations, and functional limitations of the student.
- ❖ During an initial meeting with the Director, DSS policies and procedures are discussed with the student. The student is responsible for meeting with his or her instructors to discuss the accommodations and provide them with letters from the DSS office.

Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodations are provided on an individual basis as needs arise. Examples of accommodations include extended-time testing, interpreters, supplemental note-taking assistance, reader services, audio and alternative format, and early registration.

Providing Reasonable Accommodations

It is important for faculty and staff members to provide reasonable accommodations without compromising academic standards. DSS will determine the appropriateness of test adaptation requests, verify exam procedures, and help facilitate accommodations. Instructors are strongly encouraged to be proactive by including the following statement on the syllabi:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an



accommodation, please contact the Disability Support Services in Room 168 of the Clark Student Center, 940-397-4140.

Providing reasonable accommodations to a student with a disability does not guarantee success on exams. Please remember that they may not master the course material, just like any other student. Students with disabilities have the same right as other students to fail as part of their educational experience.

Testing Accommodations

Measuring student progress in the classroom is an essential component of the educational process for all students. Some students with disabilities require that testing procedures be adapted to ensure the measurement of the student's academic achievement, not the functional limitations caused by the student's disability.

To create a fair testing situation, students may need some or all of the following accommodations:

- extended time on tests
- quiet/non-distractive testing environment
- special equipment (i.e., word processor)
- readers
- scribes
- alternative format: large print, Braille, electronic copies of tests

Extended Time

One of the most common test accommodations is extended time on tests. For many students with disabilities, taking tests within the normal time will not result in a fair evaluation. For instance, students with dexterity problems may not be able to write quickly; some, but not all, blind and visually impaired students will need tests read to them or can read their own tests if they are prepared in Braille. Students with psychological disabilities may experience severe test anxiety. Students with learning disabilities may need extra time so that they can process information accurately and their knowledge can be measured fairly.

Even though some faculty may believe that everyone would do better if they had more time, extended testing time does not provide the student with a disability an advantage. Instead, it minimizes the impact of a disability on the student's performance. The University of California conducted a research study that indicated extended time makes a significant difference in the performance of students with disabilities but does not significantly improve the performance of non-disabled students. In other words, it is not true that "everyone would do better if they had extra time" (Runyan, 1991).



Instructor Role with Testing Accommodations

It is important for the instructor and student to decide on the best way to provide testing accommodations. If the accommodation requires the exam to be administered in a place other than the classroom, effort should be made to provide an appropriate setting. Such a setting should be free from interruptions and distractions. Sensible and sensitive proctoring should be provided. A student should not be expected to cope with taking the exam in a busy office. An instructor may choose to administer the tests themselves, providing all accommodations, or refer to the DSS for testing.

Testing in the DSS Office

The student is responsible for scheduling each quiz or exam they are interested in taking in the DSS office. The DSS staff will email the instructor an exam request and testing accommodation information for proctoring the exam. A DSS student worker is available to pick up the exam and return it directly to the professor. Exams in the DSS office are kept in a locked file room in order to protect the security of the exam. All exams are monitored either by video and recorded or by an individual proctor present in the room at all times. Instructors who have questions or concerns about the testing are encouraged to speak to DSS.

Advocacy

DSS is available to students with disabilities to assist or advise with any disability-related issue. DSS works to increase awareness through education and outreach. Staff members are available to university students, faculty, staff, and administration for consultation on disability issues.

Technology Resources

Adaptive Technology Services (ATS) offers students with disabilities the opportunity to use technology to complete tasks that were previously not possible. Providing adaptive support for students with disabilities can equalize learning opportunities throughout the university.

ATS services include:

- Accessible workstations
- Adaptive technology assessment
- Adaptive software
- Audio and alternative format
- Scanning services
- Text-to-speech
- Speech-to-text



Incorporating Accessibility and Usability when Providing On-line Learning

Images

Images can add visual interest and illustrate complex ideas but, with overuse, can cause major accessibility issues for users with disabilities. Things to consider: Is the image necessary? Does it distract from other content? Does it fit well with other graphic elements?

ALT Text

ALT text, or alternative text, should be added to every image and should convey the function of the image in terms of the whole page. Alt text makes your content understandable to the assistive technology used by blind users.

Hyperlinks

Links within the text should always be intuitive.

Bad Practice: "For course syllabus, click here." Good Practice: "Course Syllabus."

Headings

Headings structure the page visually and also create a hierarchy for the content on your page making it far more accessible to a variety of users.

Using Size and Color

Don't enlarge text to look like a heading. Apply color to text sparingly and never as the sole means of conveying information. Make sure there is sufficient contrast between the text and back-ground.

Uploading Video and Audio

Videos can engage students but they can also put up barriers to accessibility. Begin with a script. A script can be read by screen readers and can also be used to create captions for the video with audio.

Do's...

- Use sans serif fonts. They are easiest to read on a computer screen
- Include text files or scripts along with audio and video files
- Use ALT text for images
- Use lists, either numbered or bulleted
- Left-align text. Right and center aligned text slows the reader down
- Use quotations, bold text, or italics to denote a title instead of underlining
- Highlight text sparingly



...And Don'ts

- Don't rely on color alone to convey information. Make sure you use another visual indicator for students who cannot see color
- Don't use the indent button unless it is for block quote
- Don't overuse italics. Large blocks of italicized text is harder to read

DISABILITY LAW

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Title V of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is regarded as the first “civil rights” legislation for individuals with disabilities on the national level. Included within the various sections of Title V is a call for nondiscrimination in federal agencies (Section 501) and the establishment of the Architectural and transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Section 502). Section 504 is important to the post-secondary community.

Section 504 This is a program access statute. It provides that “no otherwise qualified individual with disabilities in the United States...shall, solely by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance...” Subpart E of Section 504 deals specifically with this mandate for institutions of higher education.

- Institutions must make modifications to academic requirements as necessary to ensure that such requirements do not discriminate against students with disabilities or have the effect of excluding students solely on the basis of disability.
- An institution may not impose rules or restrictions that have the effect of limiting participation of students with disabilities in educational programs or activities.
- Evaluation of student performance, including course examinations and other measures of student achievement, must be provided with appropriate accommodations. These accommodations ensure that the evaluation represents the student's achievement in the course, rather than reflecting the impact of the student's disability.
- The institution is responsible for seeing that students with disabilities are not denied access, benefits, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity because of the absence of auxiliary aids or services.



Section 508 In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Inaccessible technology interferes with an ability to obtain and use information quickly and easily. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, open new opportunities for people with disabilities, and encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that became effective for public entities such as Texas A&M University on January 26, 1992. The ADA provides comprehensive civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local governmental services, and telecommunications. (Each major component of the act is contained in a separate section referred to as a title.) The Act contains five titles. Titles II, III, and V are pertinent to postsecondary education.

Title II. Title II of the ADA is divided into two subparts. Subpart A requires that state and local government entities and programs be made accessible to individuals with disabilities. Subpart B covers transportation and requires that public transportation systems be made fully accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

Title III. Title III covers the accessibility and availability of programs, goods, and services provided to the public by private entities. Although the Act uses the term “public accommodations”, it is used in the context of use by the public rather than operation by a public entity. By definition, a public accommodation is privately owned, operated, and/or offered.

Title V. Title V of the ADA contains miscellaneous provisions that apply to all of the other titles as well—in other words, employers, state and local government entities, and public accommodations covered by Titles I, II, and III are also covered by the ADA.

General Requirements of the ADA

- No exclusion on the basis of disability
- No discrimination through contract
- Participation in the most integrated setting
- Modification in policies, practices, and procedures
- Modifications to allow the presence/ use of service animals
- No discrimination through association
- Surcharges to cover the costs of accessibility may not be imposed solely on persons with disabilities
- Examinations and courses must be accessible
- No discrimination because of insurance constraints
- No harassment or retaliation



Disability Etiquette

It is important to be aware of and to apply the appropriate terminology when describing people with disabilities. Always put people first, not their disability. For example, say “woman with arthritis,” “children who are deaf,” “people with disabilities.” This puts the focus on the individual and not the particular functional limitation. Terms such as crippled, deformed, suffers from, victim of, and the retarded are never acceptable. Disability groups strongly object to using euphemisms to describe disabilities. Terms such as handicapable, mentally different, physically inconvenienced, and physically challenged are considered condescending. They reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be dealt with upfront.

The following definitions may help clarify which terminology to use:

Disability. General term used for a functional limitation that interferes with a person’s ability, for example, to walk, lift, hear, or learn. It may refer to a physical, sensory, or mental condition. Use as descriptive noun or adjective, such as persons who are mentally and physically disabled or man with a disability.

Handicap. Not a synonym for disability. Describes a condition or barrier imposed by society, the environment, or by one’s own self. Handicap can be used when citing laws and situations but should not be used to describe a disability. For example, the stairs are a handicap to her.

Nondisabled. Appropriate term for people without disabilities. Normal, able-bodied, healthy, or whole are inappropriate.

Appropriate Terminology

The following is a partial list of appropriate terminology:

People who are ...

blind, visually impaired
deaf, hard of hearing
mentally retarded
nondisabled
physically disabled
wheelchair users

Persons with or who have ...

Cerebral Palsy
Down Syndrome
a head injury
a mental illness
Paraplegia, Quadriplegia
a seizure disorder
a specific learning disability
a speech impairment

What if I suspect a disability?

Instructors are a very common referral source for DSS. If you think that a student might have a disability or discloses a disability, it is your responsibility to refer them to DSS. It is not appropriate for instructors to ask for or accept documentation.



What if I still have questions?

Please feel free to call the Disability Support Services office and ask to speak to Director or Accommodations Coordinator if you have a question about a situation, or disability law, or services in general. DSS also provides training to academic departments upon request.

References

Clifton, Nancy L. (ed.). *The Disabled Student in the Classroom. Building a Partnership in Equal Access to Learning: A Resource for Faculty and Staff at Ball State University.* Muncie, Indiana: Disabled Student Development.

A Guide to Support Services for Students with Disabilities. Texas A&M University, College Station, TX: Support Services for Students with Disabilities, 1993.

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Redd, Cathy and Barbara Blacklock. *Students with Disabilities at the University of Minnesota: A Guide for Faculty and Staff.* Office for Student Affairs. Student Affairs Student Counseling Bureau. University of Minnesota.

Runyon, M. Kay. "Journal of Learning Disabilities." Vol. 24, No. 2, February 1991, pp.104-108. *Students with Disabilities: A Guide for Faculty and Staff.* Services for Students with Disabilities, Office of the Dean of Students, University of Texas at Austin.

Midwestern State University does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's disability and complies with Section 504 and the ADA in its admissions, accessibility, treatment, and employment of students in its programs and activities. The designated ADA Coordinator for Midwestern State University is the Director of Disability Support Services Office, who is responsible for ADA compliance. (940) 397-4140