FACULTY GUIDE
FOR TEACHING AND ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
REVISED 2015
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Forward ............................................................... 3
5 Quick Faculty Tips ............................................... 4
Overview of Services ............................................. 5
Eligibility and Documentation Requirements .................. 5
Reasonable Accommodations ................................... 6
How Students Register with Disability Support Services .... 6
After Students Register with DSS ............................... 6
Testing Services Center .......................................... 7
Testing Accommodations ......................................... 7
Note-Taking and Smart Pen Accommodations ................. 8
Online Course Accommodations and Considerations ........ 8
Internship Accommodations and Considerations .............. 9
Faculty, Student and DSS Responsibilities in the Accommodations Process ........................................ 9
Types of Disabilities ............................................... 10
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) ............ 10
Autism Spectrum Disorder ....................................... 11
Blindness/Low Vision ............................................ 12
Brain Injuries ..................................................... 13
Deaf/Hard of Hearing ............................................ 14
Learning Disabilities ............................................. 16
Medical Disabilities .............................................. 17
Mental Health Disabilities ........................................ 18
Physical/Mobility Disabilities .................................... 19
Speech and Language Disabilities ............................... 20
Universal Design for Learning ................................... 21
Academic Advising for Students with Disabilities ........... 23
Emergency Evacuation of Individuals with Disabilities .... 24
Frequently Asked Questions ..................................... 25
FORWARD

Towson University is proud of its increasingly diverse community of students, and this community includes students with disabilities. Nationally, more students with disabilities are pursuing a college education than ever before as part of the promise of full and equal educational opportunity. This trend is reflected at Towson University, where the number of students registered with Disability Support Services (DSS) has doubled over the past 10 years to approximately 1,600 students (2014-15).

This guide is intended to serve as a resource for faculty in teaching, accommodating and advising their students with disabilities. We hope that faculty will find it helpful as they carry out their central role in implementing the university’s commitment to providing access to all students. In this updated version of the guide, faculty will find information about various types of disabilities, the characteristics of students with these disabilities, recommended accommodations, and suggestions on how to effectively meet students’ needs in the classroom and other college settings.

Information is also included about DSS and the Testing Services Center, which are additional resources for faculty. Our staff is available to consult with faculty regarding students with disabilities. Each student registered with DSS is assigned to a DSS specialist who can share information with faculty on a need-to-know basis as provided under FERPA and university policy. Effective collaboration is essential to our students’ academic success, and we look forward to working together with you and students with disabilities enrolled in your courses and programs.
5 QUICK FACULTY TIPS

1. Encourage students to disclose their disability as soon as possible by including a statement in your syllabus such as:

“If you need an accommodation due to a disability please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. A memo from Disability Support Services (DSS) authorizing your accommodations will be needed.”

2. Towson University procedures require that students who want to request an accommodation must identify themselves to DSS, submit appropriate documentation verifying their disability, engage in an interactive process with DSS regarding their request, and provide faculty with a DSS memo specifying the approved accommodation. If a student hasn’t given you a DSS memo you should not provide accommodations on the basis of a disability, and the student should be referred to DSS.

3. As a faculty member you play an important role in providing accommodations. However, it should not be time consuming. DSS is a resource for you to expedite the accommodations process. For example, the purpose of the DSS Testing Services Center is to assist faculty with implementing testing accommodations. Faculty should provide help with course work for students with disabilities as you would for any other student. If a student with a disability needs more assistance than you can reasonably provide, you can refer the student to DSS or another appropriate campus resource.

4. Information related to a student’s disability is confidential and protected under the Family Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The student should be afforded the opportunity to meet with you privately to discuss disability-related matters and should not be identified as having a disability in front of others. In order to provide accommodations, it is permissible to disclose disability-related information on a limited, need-to-know basis.

5. Accommodations are designed to mitigate the effects of a disability so the student has an equal opportunity to meet the course standards, not to change or circumvent them. If a student with a disability cannot meet the course standards with accommodations, it may mean the student will not pass. Accommodations give students a chance to compete on a level playing field; they don’t guarantee success.
Overview of Services

Disability Support Services (DSS) at Towson University works with undergraduate and graduate students with various disabilities and some temporary impairments that substantially limit one or more major life activities. The DSS staff is available to answer questions concerning accommodations and services as well as to provide information about other resources on and off campus.

DSS works with students with various disabilities including learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mental health disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, brain injuries, physical/mobility and medical disabilities, as well as vision and hearing impairments.

DSS works with each student individually to determine and implement reasonable accommodations based on documentation and a personal interview. DSS encourages new students to maintain regular contact with our office, especially during their first year. This contact provides the opportunity for DSS staff to guide students and to work with them proactively to resolve problems that may arise.

DSS also serves as a resource for faculty. DSS is available to discuss students’ needs and accommodations, and faculty are encouraged to contact us at any time. Each DSS-registered student is assigned to a specialist who can specifically address questions or concerns about the student. By working collaboratively with faculty, we strengthen the services we provide to students.

Services and accommodations provided by DSS can include:

- Orientation and help with transition from high school or community college
- Help with course load and selection
- Priority registration beginning the second semester
- Testing accommodations and use of the Testing Services Center
- Note-taking assistance
- Interpreting services
- Alternate formats for printed materials
- Short-term assistance with organization and study skills
- Disability consultation and help with disclosure
- Assistive technology
- Para-transit registration
- Internship accommodations
- Information and referral to resources both on and off-campus*

*Please note: DSS maintains a referral list for providers of diagnostic testing, content tutoring and long-term academic coaching.

Eligibility and Documentation Requirements

Students must submit documentation that meets DSS guidelines and verifies eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under the ADA a person with a disability is someone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. A diagnosed condition alone does not necessarily qualify an individual for accommodations. The documentation must also support the need for accommodations and/or services.
Documentation should be current and completed by a professional who is qualified to make the diagnosis. It should identify the disability and describe how the disability currently impacts the individual. Documentation should demonstrate whether and how a major life activity is substantially limited. It is recommended that the documentation describe the individual’s current or past accommodations, services and medications, as well as any recommendations for accommodations in a college setting. (Specific documentation guidelines are available on the DSS website.)

The documentation provided will be reviewed as a part of the collaborative process with the student. During a personal interview, consideration will also be given to the student’s self-report, strengths and needs, previous academic experiences and ideas regarding accommodations. Additionally, DSS staff consults with faculty as needed regarding the appropriateness of accommodations within the curriculum.

**Reasonable Accommodations**

In the context of higher education, reasonable accommodations are modifications or adjustments in the academic environment that enable a qualified student with a disability equal access to the university’s programs, courses, services and activities. Accommodations are intended to make it possible for the student to learn the material presented and for the instructor to fairly evaluate the student’s understanding of the material without interference from the disability.

Providing accommodations does not compromise the essential elements of a course or program, nor do they weaken academic standards. Accommodations simply provide an alternative way to accomplish the requirements by eliminating or reducing disability-related barriers and providing a level playing field. At the college level, the purpose of an accommodation is to correct or circumvent a functional impairment rather than to ensure a student’s success.

Through an interactive process, DSS staff work closely with faculty and students to implement the provision of accommodations. Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis. In reviewing an accommodation requested by the student or recommended by an evaluation, DSS may need to consult with faculty and/or may find that the accommodation is not appropriate given the requirements of a course or program. DSS may propose an alternative accommodation that would be appropriate for the student, but which neither the student nor evaluator has requested.

**How Students Register with Disability Support Services**

- Students must initiate the registration process by calling or visiting the DSS office or by submitting an application along with documentation of the disability.
- If students have questions about documentation, they can contact the DSS office or review the documentation guidelines found on the DSS website.
- Students will be contacted by a DSS staff member to schedule a meeting for a personal interview to discuss their disability, reasonable accommodations and support services.

**After Students Register with DSS**

- At the beginning of every term, students should pick up their memos from the DSS office. Memos document the student’s registration and specify his or her approved accommodations.
- Students should give their memos to each of their professors as early as possible each term and take the time to privately discuss their accommodations. DSS staff is available to assist both students and professors in implementing accommodations as they relate to specific course or program requirements.
- Students are encouraged to maintain regular contact with DSS staff each term to discuss their academic progress. DSS staff can refer students to other on campus programs and services if/when needed.
The Testing Services Center provides testing accommodations for students registered with Disability Support Services. Testing accommodations provided by the Testing Services Center include extended test time, reduced distraction testing spaces, computers, reading and writing software, and other assistive technology. All tests are proctored to ensure academic honesty.

**Testing Accommodations**

Testing accommodations will be documented in the DSS memo if they have been approved. The student should discuss with the instructor ahead of time how this accommodation will be implemented in the course. DSS informs students that if they do not make their request for test accommodations in a timely manner they may not have the opportunity to be accommodated.

If the student wishes to use the Testing Services Center, he or she should make testing arrangements with the instructor before each test. It is our policy that students take exams at the scheduled time of the course unless the instructor approves an alternate time. The instructor may provide testing accommodations in the classroom if the student is agreeable and can be accommodated appropriately.

**Faculty Responsibilities for Using the Testing Services Center**

- Before accepting a test accommodation request, instructors should have in their possession a current DSS memo authorizing test accommodations for the student.
- At least five (5) business days before the test date, the instructor should receive an e-mail from dsstesting@towson.edu which is the online test accommodation request form submitted by the student. Upon receipt of the e-mail, the instructor should review the request, approve it (if appropriate) and submit the form electronically. A message will be sent automatically to the student and the Testing Services Center to schedule the test. We ask that instructors check their e-mail frequently for any request forms and to respond in a timely fashion.
- Instructors should send tests to the Testing Services Center at least 1 business day in advance of the test date during the semester and 3 business days in advance during finals. Tests can be submitted by e-mail to dsstesting@towson.edu or hand-delivered to the Administration Building, Room 228.*

*Completed tests are returned by Testing Services Center courier to the designated department in a sealed envelope. Delivery is confirmed by the signature of a department representative who ensures the instructor will receive it.

**Student Responsibilities for Using the Testing Services Center**

- Students must provide the instructor with their current DSS memo authorizing testing accommodations. This should be done as early as possible each term.
- Students requesting to use the Testing Services Center should submit an Online Test Accommodation Request Form to the instructor at least 5 business days in advance of the test date.
- On test day, students must arrive on time to the Testing Services Center and be prepared to show a photo ID. Students should bring with them a pen or pencil, Scantron and/or blue book (if required) and any other approved test aids (e.g., calculator, textbook, notes).

The Testing Services Center is a resource for faculty to assist them in administering tests with accommodations to students with disabilities. Please email or call the Testing Services Center at any time for more information or to discuss questions you may have.
**Note-Taking and Smart Pen Accommodations**

If the student needs an accommodation for taking notes this will be documented in the DSS memo. Students are typically accommodated either by providing them with a copy of a classmate’s notes or by having them use a smart pen to audio-record the class.

When providing copies of class notes, the instructor should assist the student by recruiting another student in the class who is willing to provide notes. The DSS memo provides directions for the instructor, including a suggested class announcement that keeps the identity of the student with the disability private. Please note that student confidentiality is of the utmost importance.

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) specifies that notes should be provided to the student within 2 weeks of the initial request. Therefore, it is important that the instructor contact the DSS office if a classmate to share notes cannot be identified within this time frame. DSS will then follow up to ensure the student is accommodated.

Instructors can be of great assistance in quality assurance by occasionally reviewing copies of the notes, especially early in the term, and giving feedback. DSS asks the instructor to contact the office with any concerns regarding note-taking, including the quality of the notes.

An alternative note-taking accommodation is using a smart pen to take notes. A smart pen is a ballpoint pen with an embedded computer and digital audio recorder. When used with digital paper, it records what is written and synchronizes the notes with the audio it has recorded.

A student approved for this accommodation will have “permission to use an audio-recording device” on the memo. Students may borrow a smart pen from the DSS office. Smart pens are loaned out for a semester at a time and must be returned at the end of every semester. Students are required to sign the Agreement for Recording Lectures at Towson University, which stipulates that the student must inform the instructor prior to recording as required by Maryland law. The student agrees not to share the recorded lectures with any other person without the consent of the lecturer. The student also agrees not to post, publish or quote the recording without the lecturer’s written consent. The student must erase all recordings within 30 days after the end of the course. DSS erases all recordings when the smart pen is returned at the end of semester.

A smart pen may not be an appropriate note-taking accommodation for all classes, such as classes that involve student discussion of sensitive material. If this is the case, you should consult with the DSS office to determine alternatives.

**Online Course Accommodations and Considerations**

Online course accommodations may differ from classroom accommodations. Most students will generally need only extended time on tests, but other students may require accommodations that will be challenging and/or time consuming to put in place. DSS staff encourage students to carefully consider the requirements of an online course and discuss possible accommodations with their DSS specialist prior to enrolling in an online course.

Students with disabilities should have course information early in order to anticipate and plan for any special needs, particularly the need for accommodations. Students need to be able to determine in advance if the technology/media used in the course will be accessible to them (e.g., captioned videos for a deaf student) and if the technology used in the course is compatible with any assistive technology they use (e.g., a screen reader for a blind student or student with a learning disability).

All technology/media tools required in an online course should be available ahead of time. Significant lead time may be needed by DSS to plan and implement accommodations, such as a modification or adjustment to enable a student to access online synchronous technologies. Generally, more lead time is needed to implement accommodations in an online course than in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting.

Since your syllabus is a prime communication vehicle for informing students about course expectations and where to find help during the course, make it available to students as early as possible, preferably at least two weeks before class begins.

Ensure that you have a statement in the course syllabus that tells online students how to request an accommodation through DSS. A sample syllabus statement for an online course could read:

If you have a disability, please contact me to discuss your specific needs. A memo from Disability Support Services (DSS) authorizing your accommodations will be needed. Please note that accommodations needed for an online class may be different than those needed
for a traditional classroom setting, so it is important that you work with DSS to determine appropriate accommodations for this course as early as possible.

**Internship Accommodations and Considerations**

Students with disabilities who require accommodations in the classroom may also require accommodations in an internship placement. An accommodation for an internship more closely resembles a job accommodation rather than an academic accommodation. Unfortunately, since this type of accommodation is less familiar to students, they may not realize they need an accommodation until they have been unsuccessful in completing an internship.

Internship accommodations require advance planning and often involve a significant amount of interaction between the faculty, site liaison and/or supervisor, the DSS office and the student. Students are encouraged to discuss whether accommodations will be needed in their internship with their DSS specialist as early as possible.

**Some types of internship accommodations include:**

- Site location accessible by public transportation
- Internship placement with a slower pace and/or more direct supervision
- Receipt of site-specific materials ahead of time to prepare
- Early start for internship to allow student time to acclimate (e.g., one week ahead)
- More frequent feedback on performance
- Both verbal and written feedback
- Modified break schedule
- Provide quiet place for break
- Use of writing software (e.g., Dragon Dictate)
- Use of smart pen to record meeting information

---

**Faculty, Student and DSS Responsibilities in the Accommodations Process**

**Faculty Responsibilities:**

- Ensure that each course, when viewed in its entirety, is accessible to students with disabilities.
- Submit book lists to the bookstore as early as possible so students have time to obtain texts/materials in alternate formats.
- Include an announcement in syllabus directing students to DSS if they have a need for an accommodation related to a disability.
- Support and implement accommodations as specified in the DSS memo.
- Consult with DSS if accommodation requests conflict with course objectives/requirements.
- Maintain student’s right to privacy and confidentiality.

**Student Responsibilities:**

- Provide DSS with appropriate disability documentation in support of accommodation requests.
- Make requests for accommodations in a timely manner.
- Provide instructors with the DSS memo as early as possible each term.
- Request a DSS memo each term. Accommodations are not granted retroactively.
- Talk with instructors about how accommodations will be implemented in each course.
- Inform DSS of difficulties regarding accommodations.
- Meet essential qualifications and standards for courses and programs.

**Disability Support Services Responsibilities:**

- Inform students of the DSS office location, services and procedures for requesting accommodations.
- Conduct intake interviews with students and evaluate documentation in support of accommodation requests.
- Approve appropriate and reasonable accommodations.
- Maintain disability-related documentation for registered students.
- Communicate with faculty, as needed, as part of an interactive process for providing accommodations to students.
- Protect student’s privacy and confidentiality.
- Provide equal access to courses, programs and services in collaboration with faculty, staff and students.
Of the approximately 1,600 students who are registered with DSS at Towson University, most have learning disabilities, followed by students with mental health disabilities, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorders, and medical disabilities respectively. A smaller number of students have physical/mobility disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, sensory disabilities (e.g., deaf or hard-of-hearing; blindness or low vision), brain injuries and speech/language disabilities. While some disabilities may be readily visible, most are not obvious. Many students also have multiple disabilities. The following pages provide information on various types of disabilities that students in your classroom may have.

**Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

ADHD is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity that interferes with or reduces an individual’s quality of social, academic or occupational functioning. The diagnosis is based on the current presentation of symptoms, which can be predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive/impulsive or a combination of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity. Although some students take medication, symptoms may persist and interfere with learning and behavior.

**Characteristics:**

- Inability to sustain attention on tasks
- Lack of close attention to details resulting at times in avoidable errors
- Easily distracted, not seeming to listen when spoken to directly
- Poor time management and organizational skills
- Difficulty in being prepared for class, keeping appointments, and getting to class on time
- Reading comprehension difficulties
- Difficulty with math problems requiring changes in action, operation and order
- Inability to listen selectively during lectures, resulting in problems with note-taking
- Lack of organization in written work
- Difficulty following directions, listening and comprehending
- Blurtling out answers or interrupting others
- Poor handwriting

**Considerations and Instructional Strategies:**

- Students with ADHD often also have learning disabilities.
- These students benefit from structured classes and strategies that facilitate organization and time management.
- Students should be allowed to choose their seat to reduce distractions and focus on the instructor.
- Use varied instructional methods (lecture with a visual outline, group activities, web based discussions).
- Keep instructions clear and as brief as possible.

**Some Accommodations May Include:**

- Preferential seating
- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Extended time on tests
- Reduced distraction testing environment
Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder characterized by deficits in social behavior, the social use of language and executive functioning (which includes planning & organizing, prioritizing, goal-setting, controlling impulses, etc.). Students with ASD may have difficulty with understanding somebody else’s thoughts, feelings and motivations. They may struggle with regulating their emotions and responding appropriately to others. Some students with Autism Spectrum Disorder can present as very quiet or even appear to be withdrawn. They may use sophisticated vocabulary but struggle to initiate and to maintain “small-talk” or to engage in goal-directed conversations. Students with ASD may have excellent rote memory but have difficulty with high-level thinking and problem-solving. Some students with ASD may be unusually sensitive to touch, sound and/or light and may experience “sensory overload” at times. It is important to note that Autism Spectrum Disorder can vary greatly in individuals and you may not see all of these characteristics in a given student.

Characteristics:

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder may demonstrate the following communication patterns and social behaviors:

- Comments/questions may be tangential or repetitive
- Unusual speech intonation, volume, rhythm and/or rate
- Unusual body movements and/or repetitive behavior
- Poor or unusual eye contact
- Lack of awareness of personal space – yours or theirs
- May seem to talk “at you” rather than “with you”
- Literal understanding of language – difficulty with interpreting idioms, metaphors, sarcasm and words with double meanings
- May have problems asking for help
- May have problems taking another’s point of view
- May have trouble with monitoring and regulating class participation – too much OR too little

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder may demonstrate the following cognitive functioning characteristics:

- Deficits in abstract thinking – concrete thinker, perseverates on details
- Difficulty with using details to understand “the big picture”
- Problems with organization which includes initiating, planning, carrying out and finishing tasks
- Difficulties with transitioning between tasks
- Difficulties with adjusting to schedule changes
- Tend to be visual learners

Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- Clearly define course requirements, dates of exams and when assignments are due; provide advance notice of any changes when possible
- Use concrete language and avoid using metaphors or idioms if you don’t plan on explaining them
- Be concise and direct when giving feedback to student
- Make sure all expectations are direct and explicit – don’t expect student to automatically generalize information
- If student’s classroom behavior is problematic, meet with student individually and give specific example of behavior and establish strategies to use or rules to follow
- Provide visual aids when possible to support lectures
- Supplement oral with written instructions when revising syllabus, assignments, due dates, etc.
- Ask student to repeat direction in his own words to check comprehension
- If group work is required, student may need your assistance with connecting with classmates and then may benefit from you monitoring how the group is progressing

Some Accommodations May Include:

- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Use of lap top for note taking
- Extended time on tests
- Reduced distraction testing environment
- Use of computer for written exams
- Reduced course load
Blindness/Low Vision

Visual impairments vary widely and may affect the person's central vision acuity, field of vision, color perception or binocular visual function. The following terms are used in an educational context to describe students with visual disabilities:

- “Totally blind” students learn via Braille or other nonvisual media.
- “Legally blind” indicates that the student has less than 20/200 vision in the more functional eye or a very limited field of vision (20 degrees at the widest point).
- “Low vision” generally refers to a severe vision loss in distance and near vision. These students use a combination of vision and other senses to learn. They may require adaptations in lighting or the print size, and in some cases, Braille.

Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- If needed, introduce yourself at the beginning of a conversation and notify the student when you exit the room.
- Nonverbal cues depend on good visual acuity. Verbally acknowledging key points in the conversation facilitates the communication process.
- A student may use a guide dog or cane for mobility assistance. A guide dog is a working animal and should not be petted.
- When giving directions, be clear: say “left” or “right,” “step up,” or “step down.” Let the student know how many obstacles there are; for example, “the chair is to your left” or “the stairs start in about three steps.”
- When guiding or walking with a student, verbally offer your elbow instead of grabbing his or hers.
- Discuss special needs for labs, field trips or out-of-class activities well in advance.
- Ask the student if he or she will need assistance during an emergency evacuation and assist in making a plan if necessary.

Some Accommodations May Include:*

- Reading materials and syllabus in advance (to permit time to transfer to alternate formats)
- Read aloud what is written on the board or in printed materials
- Verbally describe visual cues or gestures used during class discussions or activities
- Preferential seating
- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Use of adapted computer with features such as voice output, large print and Braille
- Alternate formats for textbooks, classroom assignments and tests (e.g., taped, large print or Braille; use of readers, scribes, tape recorded responses, adapted computer for closed circuit TV)
- Raised-line drawings and tactile models of graphic materials
- Extended time on tests
- Accessible online course materials
- Reduced course load
- Assistance with emergency evacuation

*Accommodations may require close collaboration between the instructor and DSS office.
Brain Injuries

Brain injury can be caused by insufficient oxygen, stroke, poisoning or infection. The majority of traumatic brain injuries are concussions and typically result from accidents. Traumatic brain injuries are among the most prevalent injuries sustained by returning veterans, many of whom will attend college.

Characteristics:
Brain injury is unique to the individual and can affect students very differently. Depending on the area of the brain affected by the injury a student may demonstrate difficulties with:

- Organizing thoughts, cause-effect relationships and problem solving
- Processing information and word retrieval
- Generalizing and integrating skills
- Short-term memory
- Communication and speech
- Social interactions
- Balance or coordination

Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- Brain injury can cause cognitive, physical, behavioral and personality changes that affect the student temporarily or permanently.
- Recovery may be inconsistent. A student might take one step forward, two back, plateau, and then unexpectedly make a series of gains.
- While students with brain injuries share some similar learning styles with students with learning disabilities their needs do differ. Differences include the brain-injured student’s adjustment to the disability, types of memory or other cognitive difficulties, medical complications, presence of physical impairments, and the day-to-day fluctuation of impairments commonly experienced during recovery.
- Effective teaching strategies include providing opportunities for a student to learn using visual, auditory and hands-on approaches.

Some Accommodations May Include:

- Reading materials and syllabus in advance of the term
- Textbooks in electronic form
- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Use of lap top for note taking
- Extended time for in class assignments
- Extended time on tests
- Reduced distraction testing environment
- Breaks allowed during tests; test given by page or by section
- Use of computer for written tests
- Alternate form of tests, such as oral test or essay instead of multiple choice format; more frequent tests
- Calculator, spellchecker, reader and/or scribe for tests
- Reduced course load
**Deaf/Hard of Hearing**

A student with a hearing loss may be considered deaf or hard of hearing. A student who is deaf has a profound hearing loss (90 decibels or greater), while a student with a hearing loss is able to use some residual hearing to communicate. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing communicate in different ways, depending on the degree of hearing loss, age of onset, and type of language or communication system they use. Some use speech only or a combination of sign language, finger spelling, speech, writing, body language and facial expression. The key is to find out which combination of techniques works best with each student. The important thing is not how you exchange ideas or feelings, but that you communicate.

In the classroom, some deaf or hard-of-hearing students will use a sign language interpreter; others will use a transcriber who will provide a written transcript of the lecture; others will use an assistive listening device that may require the instructor to wear a microphone.

**Deaf or hard of hearing students may:**

- Be skilled at lip reading (also known as speech reading), but many are not; only 30 to 40 percent of spoken English is distinguishable on the mouth and lips under the best of conditions.
- Also have difficulties with speech, reading and writing skills, given the close relationship between language development and hearing.
- Use speech, lip reading, hearing aids and/or amplification systems to enhance oral communication.
- Be members of a distinct linguistic and cultural group; as a cultural group, they may have their own values, social norms and traditions.
- Use American Sign Language (ASL) as their first language, with English as their second language. ASL is not equivalent to English; it is a visual-spatial language having its own syntax and grammatical structure.

**Some Accommodations May Include:**

- Preferential seating
- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Interpreter, transcriber, and/or assistive listening device (arranged by DSS)
- Visual aids whenever possible, including captioned videos and films
- Extended time on tests
- Use of computer for written exams
- Use of interpreter for exam directions
- Accessible online course materials
- Reduced course load
- Assistance with emergency evacuation

**Communicating with Students who are Deaf:**

To communicate with a person who is deaf in a one-to-one situation:

- Make sure you have the student’s attention before speaking. A light touch on the shoulder, wave or other visual signal will help.
- Speak in natural tones; do not yell, exaggerate, or over enunciate.
- If necessary, communicate by paper and pencil or by typing to each other on the computer.
• Look directly at the student during a conversation and maintain eye contact, even when an interpreter is present.
• Avoid standing in front of a light source, such as a window or bright light. The bright background and shadows created on the face make it almost impossible to speech read.
• Use open-ended questions which must be answered by more than “yes” or “no”. Do not assume that the message was understood if the student nods his or her head. Open-ended questions ensure that your information has been communicated.

To communicate with a person who is deaf in a group situation:
• Seat the student to his or her best advantage. This usually means a seat opposite the speaker so that he or she may see the person’s lips and body language. The interpreter should be next to the speaker and both should be illuminated clearly.
• Provide new vocabulary in advance. It is difficult if not impossible to speech read or to read finger spelling of unfamiliar vocabulary.
• If a lecture or film is presented, a brief outline or script given to the student and interpreter in advance helps them follow the presentation.
• Avoid unnecessary pacing and speaking when writing on a blackboard. It is difficult to speech read when a person is in motion and impossible to speech read when his back is turned. Write or draw on the blackboard first, then face the group and explain the work. If you use PowerPoints or an overhead projector, don’t look down or away while speaking.
• Make sure the student does not miss vital information. Provide in writing any changes in meeting times, special assignments or additional instructions. Allow extra time when referring to the textbook since the student who is deaf must look at what is written and then return attention to the speaker or interpreter.
• Slow down the pace of communication slightly to facilitate understanding. Repeat questions or statements made from the back of the room. Remember that students who are deaf are cut off from whatever happens outside of their visual area.
• Use hands-on experience whenever possible in training situations. Students who are deaf often learn quickly by doing. A concept which may be difficult to explain verbally may be explained more easily by demonstration.

Using an Interpreter:
• Speak clearly and in a normal tone, facing the person using the interpreter (do not face the interpreter). Speak directly to the deaf or hard of hearing person rather than to the interpreter, and avoid using phrases such as “tell him” or “ask her.”
• Do not rush through a lecture or presentation. The interpreter or the deaf student may ask the speaker to slow down or repeat a sentence for clarification. Allow time to study handouts, charts or overheads. A deaf student cannot watch the interpreter and study written information at the same time.
• Permit only one person at a time to speak during group discussions. It is difficult for an interpreter to follow several people speaking at once. Since the interpreter needs to be a few words behind the conversation, give the interpreter time to finish before the next person begins speaking so the deaf student can contribute to the discussion.
• If a class session is more than an hour and a half, two interpreters will usually be scheduled and work on a rotating basis.
• Provide good lighting for the interpreter. If the situation requires darkening the room to view a screen, appropriate lighting is required so that the deaf student can see the interpreter.
• Any videos that are used should be closed captioned; or request a DVD player with a closed captioning decoder.
• You may ask the student to arrange for an interpreter for meetings during office hours.
• Advance notice should be given for field trips and outside activities so that the student may request an interpreter in a timely fashion.
• If a course requires frequent use of a textbook during class time, DSS or the instructor may provide a desk copy to the interpreter.
•Bound by a professional code of ethics, interpreters are hired by the University to interpret what occurs in the classroom. Interpreters are not permitted to join in conversations, voice personal opinions, or serve as general classroom aids. Do not make comments to an interpreter that are not intended to be interpreted to the deaf student.

Adapted from: Communicating with a Student who is Deaf, Seattle Community College; Regional Education Center for Deaf Students.
Learning Disabilities

According to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other disabling conditions (e.g., sensory impairment, intellectual disability or psychological/mental health disability) or with extrinsic influences (e.g., cultural differences or inadequate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences. The impact of learning disabilities can be mitigated by remediation, instructional interventions and the use of compensatory strategies.

The following terms have sometimes been used to describe specific learning disabilities:

- **Dyslexia** is a language-based learning disability that is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, decoding, spelling, writing and listening. These difficulties typically result from deficits in understanding, remembering and working with letter sounds (phonological awareness). Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede vocabulary and background knowledge.
- **Dysgraphia** is a learning disability that affects the written formation of letters or words. Students with dysgraphia have difficulty with handwriting, copying and note-taking.
- **Dyscalculia** is a learning disability that affects the student’s ability to solve arithmetic problems and grasp math concepts. Students with dyscalculia can have difficulty with both simple and complex math functions and problem solving.

Characteristics:

- Difficulties may be seen in one or more of the following areas:
  - Oral and/or written expression
  - Reading comprehension and basic reading skills
  - Problem solving
  - Ability to listen selectively during lectures, resulting in problems with note-taking
  - Mathematical calculation and reasoning
  - Interpreting social cues
  - Time management
  - Memory, sequencing and organization
  - Following directions and concentrating
  - Visual-motor planning

Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- Use advance organizers when possible. Explain what you will be discussing, how it relates to the previous lesson and why it is important at the beginning of each lecture to set the stage for learning.
- Consider posting class notes or an outline of key concepts on the web before class.
- Present material in a variety of ways, not just by lecture. Using visual aids, hands-on materials, videotapes and computer-facilitated instruction, as well as lectures, will enhance learning opportunities for students by using a multi-sensory approach.
- Allow students to demonstrate what they have learned in a variety of ways, not only by paper-and-pencil tests (e.g., presentations, papers, projects, etc.)

Some Accommodations May Include:

- Reading materials and syllabus in advance of the term
- Textbooks in electronic format
- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Use of lap top for note taking
- Extended time for in class assignments
- Extended time for tests
- Reduced distraction testing environment
- Breaks allowed during tests; test given by page or by section
- Use of computer for written tests
- Alternate form of tests, such as oral test or essay instead of multiple choice format; more frequent tests
- Calculator, spellchecker, reader and/or scribe for tests
- Reduced course load
Medical Disabilities

Students may have chronic medical conditions that are not visible but pose serious difficulties in an educational setting. Medical disabilities may include chronic illnesses such as multiple chemical sensitivity, asthma, arthritis, diabetes, Crohn’s disease, migraines, renal disease, cardiac conditions, cancer, fibromyalgia, Multiple Sclerosis, lupus and epilepsy/seizure disorders.

General Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- Since the condition of a student with a medical disability may fluctuate or deteriorate over time, the need for and type of accommodations may vary.
- Fatigue may be a significant factor in the student’s ability to complete required tasks within regular time limits and may affect his or her attention in class.
- Medical conditions and the side effects of medication can cause fatigue, reduced stamina, inattentiveness and lack of ability to concentrate, as well as dizziness and disorientation.
- Some of these conditions may cause the student to exceed attendance policies and/or timelines for completing assignments. Please refer to section on “Class Attendance Accommodations” for guidance or contact DSS for further assistance.
- A student may need to leave the classroom unexpectedly but is still responsible for any missed instruction.

Some Accommodations May Include:

- Reading materials and syllabus in advance of the term
- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Use of lap top for note taking
- Extended time for in class assignments
- Possible adjustments to attendance requirements and timelines for completion of assignments
- Extended time for tests
- Reduced distraction testing environment
- Breaks allowed during tests; test given by page or by section
- Use of computer or scribe for written tests
- Reduced course load
- Use of para-transit van

Considerations When a Student Has a Seizure in Class:

DSS encourages students with epilepsy/seizure disorders to inform their instructors about what should be done if a seizure occurs during class time. Some students may request that the campus police who are trained to provide emergency assistance be called. Others may provide you with an individualized plan of action to follow.

Generally, if a seizure occurs:

- Keep calm. Ease the student to the floor and open the collar of the shirt. You cannot stop a seizure. Let it run its course and do not try to revive the student.
- Remove hard, sharp or hot objects that may injure the student, but do not interfere with his or her movements.
- Do not force anything between the student’s teeth.
- Turn the student’s head to one side for release of saliva. Place something soft under the head.
- Make sure that breathing is unobstructed, but do not be concerned if breathing is irregular.
- When the student regains consciousness, let him or her rest as long as desired.
- To help orient the student to time and space, suggest where he or she is and what happened.
- Speak reassuringly to the student, especially as the seizure ends. The student may be agitated or confused for several minutes afterwards.
- Don’t leave the student alone until he or she is clearheaded. Ask whether you can call a friend or relative to help get him or her home.
- If the seizure lasts beyond a few minutes, or if the student seems to pass from one seizure to another without regaining consciousness, contact the campus police. This rarely happens, but when it does, it should be treated immediately.
Mental Health Disabilities

Students with psychological/mental health disabilities are a growing population on college campuses. These disabilities are often referred to as invisible because students may experience symptoms without those around them being aware. These students comprise a diverse group with a wide range of conditions, including but not limited to depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and schizophrenia. With appropriate treatment, often consisting of a combination of medications, psychotherapy and support, the majority of symptoms of psychological conditions are controlled.

Although every case is different, there are some commonalities in the academic experiences of students with psychological disabilities. Many students report difficulties with focusing, concentrating and completing work on time. Reading, writing and math may require extra time and effort. Their ability to function may vary from day to day. In response to stress, students may experience an increase in symptoms. Medications to help alleviate symptoms may have side effects that can contribute to a student’s academic problems. Although many individuals with psychological disabilities are stabilized using medications and/or psychotherapy, their behavior and mood may still cycle.

Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- Students with psychological disabilities may not be comfortable disclosing the specifics of their disability.
- If a student does disclose, be willing to discuss how the disability affects him or her academically and what accommodations are needed.
- If a student’s performance is being affected by psychological symptoms, refer the student to DSS and/or the Counseling Center.
- Many students take prescription medications to manage their symptoms which can result in drowsiness, fatigue, memory loss and decreased processing/response time.
- Some of these conditions may cause the student to exceed attendance policies and/or timelines for completing assignments. Please refer to section on “Class Attendance Accommodations” for guidance or contact DSS for further assistance.
- A student may need to leave the classroom unexpectedly but is still responsible for any missed instruction.

Some Accommodations May Include:

- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Use of lap top for note taking
- Possible adjustments to attendance requirements and timelines for completion of assignments
- Exit from classroom with permission to return after short break
- Extended time for in class assignments
- Extended time for tests
- Reduced distraction testing environment
- Breaks allowed during tests
- Reduced course load
Physical/Mobility Disabilities

A variety of physical/mobility disabilities result from congenital conditions, accidents or progressive neuromuscular diseases. These disabilities may include cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, muscular dystrophy and amputation. Functional limitations and abilities vary widely; the same diagnosis can affect students very differently.

To assist with mobility, students may use canes, crutches, braces, prostheses, scooters or wheelchairs. Students with mobility disabilities may face difficulties getting to class on time due to symptoms associated with their disability, as well as transportation problems, inclement weather, elevator or equipment breakdown.

Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- Flexibility may be necessary when applying attendance and promptness rules.
- Make sure the classroom layout is accessible and free from obstructions.
- Special seating arrangements may be necessary to meet student needs, such as special chairs, lowered tables, or spaces for wheelchairs or scooters.
- In lab courses students may need a physically accessible workstation. Consult with the student for specific requirements, then with DSS if additional assistance or equipment is needed.
- If a student also has a communication disability, take time to understand the person. Repeat what you understand, and when you don’t understand, say so.
- Ask before giving assistance, and wait for a response. Listen to any instructions the student may offer; the student generally knows the safest and most efficient way to accomplish the task at hand.
- Saying “a person who uses a wheelchair” is more appropriate than “a person confined to a wheelchair” since a wheelchair provides mobility.
- When talking with a person who uses a wheelchair or scooter, try to converse at eye level; sit down if a chair is available.
- A wheelchair is part of a student’s personal space; do not touch or push the chair, unless asked.
- When field trips are a part of course requirements, make sure accessible transportation is available.
- Ask the student if he or she will need assistance during an emergency evacuation, and assist in making a plan if necessary.

Some Accommodations May Include:

- Classrooms, labs, field trips, and places to meet with faculty in accessible locations
- Adaptive seating and tables in classrooms/labs
- Lab assistant
- Textbooks in electronic format
- Copies of classmate’s or instructor’s notes and/or PowerPoints
- Audio-recording lectures
- Use of lap top for note taking
- Possible adjustments to attendance requirements and timelines for completion of assignments
- Assistive computer equipment/software
- Extended time for in class assignments
- Extended time for tests
- Use of computer or scribe for written tests
- Reduced course load
- Use of para-transit van
Speech and Language Disabilities

Speech and language disabilities may result from hearing loss, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities and/or physical conditions. There may be a range of difficulties from problems with articulation or voice strength to complete absence of voice. Included are difficulties in projection, fluency (such as stuttering and stammering) and articulating particular words.

Considerations and Instructional Strategies:

- Give students opportunity – but do not compel them to speak in class. Ask students for a cue if they wish to speak.
- Permit students time to speak without unsolicited aid in filling in the gaps in their speech.
- Do not be reluctant to ask students to repeat a statement.
- Address students naturally. Do not assume that they cannot hear or comprehend.
- Patience is an important strategy in teaching students with speech disabilities.

Some Accommodations May Include:

- Modifications of oral presentation assignments (such as a one-to-one presentation or use of a computer with voice software)
- Alternative assignment for oral class presentations.
Universal Design for Instruction, also known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), is a framework instructors may find useful in designing courses to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. The goal of UDL is to make learning more accessible for all learners, and it minimizes the need to alter it for anyone. The UDL framework can be applied to the overall design of course curriculum, as well as to specific materials, strategies and environment, including lectures, classroom discussions, group work, web-based instruction, demonstrations, labs and fieldwork.

UDL provides students with a wide range of abilities, disabilities, ethnic backgrounds, language skills and learning styles multiple ways to learn and demonstrate mastery of course material. It is not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs. Although UDL may minimize the need for specific accommodations for students with disabilities, it will not eliminate them altogether.

The 9 Principles of Universal Design for Learning

**Principle 1: Equitable Use**
Definition:
Instruction is designed to be useful to and accessible by people with diverse abilities. Provide the same means of use for all students; identical whenever possible, equivalent when not.

Example:
Provision of class notes on-line. Comprehensive notes can be accessed in the same manner by all students, regardless of hearing ability, English proficiency, learning or attention disorders, or note-taking skill level. In an electronic format, students can utilize whatever individual assistive technology is needed to read, hear, or study the class notes.

**Principle 2: Flexibility in Use**
Definition:
Instruction is designed to accommodate a wide range of individual abilities. Provide choice in methods of use.

Example:
Use of varied instructional methods (lecture with a visual outline, group activities, use of stories, or web board based discussions) to provide different ways of learning and experiencing knowledge.

**Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive**
Definition:
Instruction is designed in a straightforward and predictable manner, regardless of the student’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. Eliminate unnecessary complexity.

Example:
Provision of a grading rubric that clearly lays out expectations for exam performance, papers, or projects; a syllabus with comprehensive and accurate information; a handbook guiding students through difficult homework assignments.

**Principle 4: Perceptible Information**
Definition:
Instruction is designed so that necessary information is communicated effectively to the student, regardless of ambient conditions or the student’s sensory abilities.

Example:
Selection of text books, reading material, and other instructional supports in digital format or on-line so students with diverse needs (e.g., vision, learning, attention, English Language Learners) can access materials through traditional hard copy or with the use of various technological supports (e.g., screen reader, text enlarger, on-line dictionary).

**Principle 5: Tolerance for Error**
Definition:
Instruction anticipates variation in individual student learning pace and prerequisite skills.

Example:
Structuring a long-term course project so that students have the option of turning in individual project components separately for constructive feedback and for integration into the final product; provision of on-line “practice” exercises that supplement classroom instruction.

**Principle 6: Low Physical Effort**
Definition:
Instruction is designed to minimize nonessential physical effort in order to allow maximum attention to learning.

Note: This principle does not apply when physical effort is integral to essential requirements of a course.

Example:
Allowing students to use a word processor for writing and editing papers or essay exams. This facilitates editing of the document without the additional physical exertion of rewriting portions of text (helpful for students with fine motor or handwriting difficulties).
difficulties or extreme organization weaknesses while providing options for those who are more adept and comfortable composing on the computer).

Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use
Definition:
Instruction is designed with consideration for appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulations, and use regardless of a student’s body size, posture, mobility, and communication needs.

Example:
In small class settings, use of a circular seating arrangement to allow students to see and face speakers during discussion—important for students with attention deficit disorder or who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Principle 8: A Community of Learners
Definition:
The instructional environment promotes interaction and communication among students and between students and faculty.

Example:
Fostering communication among students in and out of class by structuring study groups, discussion groups, e-mail lists, or chat rooms; making a personal connection with students and incorporating motivational strategies to encourage student performance through learning students’ names or individually acknowledging excellent performance.

Principle 9: Instructional Climate
Definition:
Instruction is designed to be welcoming and inclusive. High expectations are espoused for all students.

Example:
A statement in the class syllabus affirming the need for class members to respect diversity in order to establish the expectation of tolerance as well as to encourage students to discuss any special learning needs with the instructor; highlight diverse thinkers who have made significant contributions to the field or share innovative approaches developed by students in the class.

Faculty advising students with disabilities should follow the same general guidelines they would use when advising any student at Towson University. Work with the student as an individual by becoming familiar with his or her goals, skills, strengths, weaknesses, and so forth. Good advisement is essential to the success of students with disabilities, and the following information is provided to assist in the advising process.

- Most DSS students receive priority registration, so advising should take place early in the registration process.
- Be familiar with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These civil rights laws provide protection from discrimination for individuals on the basis of disability. Legally, you may not advise students to enter or dismiss a particular major or career because of their disability. As an expert in the field, you may point out the necessary skills and abilities needed to be successful. However, you may not be an expert on how the student’s disability will affect job performance or whether an accommodation will be able to compensate for the disability. For example, while you cannot advise a student who is visually impaired not to go into the field of computer information services, you could inform the student that if he or she does choose this field, an accommodation may be needed that will allow him or her to read computer screens.
- Due to the nature of their disability, some students may need some extra assistance initially in understanding academic requirements. If a student needs more help than you can reasonably provide, he or she may be referred to DSS for assistance.
- Help students consider the number of courses to be taken so they don’t become overloaded. It is sometimes advisable for students with disabilities to take 12 versus 15 units per term.
- Encourage students with learning disabilities to take a balanced course load. Depending on the particular disability, they should not take too many courses that require heavy reading or math, a lot of memorization, or extensive writing. Ask the student if you are not sure how the disability may impact him or her academically. An example of an appropriate question could be, “I am not trained in learning disabilities, so could you give me specifics on how your disability may affect you academically?”
- When the disability or side effects of medication result in a short attention span suggest that students avoid longer classes that meet only once a week and spread their classes out over a full day instead of taking classes back to back. Students should also avoid scheduling classes back to back if they receive extended time for tests as an accommodation.
- Be sensitive to student concerns about selecting specific courses or instructors because they may be following recommendations based on their disability. Students with disabilities often do best in smaller, structured classes, with instructors who use a variety of teaching and assessment methods, provide a detailed syllabus, and present information in an organized manner.
- Encourage students with disabilities to register with DSS if they have not done so. Even if the student doesn’t use the services immediately, it is a good idea to register so that services can be provided in a timely way if the student needs them later. It is appropriate to refer students to DSS who suspect they have a disability but do not have documentation. DSS will advise the student about how to register for services.
- Advisors can receive information about various disabilities and consult about specific advisees by contacting DSS.
In an emergency, faculty and staff members should assist individuals with disabilities in the following ways:

- Ensure that the individual is aware of the emergency. Inform hearing impaired persons of the emergency individually; do not assume the person will know what is happening by watching others.
- Before attempting to offer assistance, always ask individuals with a disability how you can best assist them and whether there are any special considerations that should be made or items that need to come to them.
- You may assist in evacuating individuals with disabilities if it does not place you in personal danger. Note: non-emergency personnel should never attempt to carry anyone down the stairs.
- Assist visually impaired individuals by guiding them to safety.
- Assist individuals who are unable to use the stairs by guiding them to an enclosed stairwell (one that is separated from the main building area by doors). Close the doors to the stairwell tightly and notify 911 of the individual’s location. You may stay with the person requiring assistance if it does not place you in additional danger and there is another person able to meet emergency personnel to report the location of the individuals in the stairwell.
1. What is a disability?

Federal law defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. A condition in and of itself does not necessarily constitute a disability. The degree of impairment must substantially limit a major life activity (e.g., walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, working, taking care of oneself).

2. What are the federal laws that protect university students with disabilities?

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides that “no otherwise qualified individual with disabilities in the United States … shall, solely by reason of his or 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.”

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as amended upholds and extends the compliance mandates set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to include the whole of the institution’s activities, including facilities, programs and employment.

The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA) broadens the definition of disability and states that the question of whether an individual’s impairment constitutes a disability under the ADA should not demand extensive analysis.

3. What is a reasonable accommodation?

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course or program that eliminates or minimizes disability-related barriers and enables a qualified student with a disability to participate. At the college level, the purpose of an accommodation is to correct or circumvent a functional impairment rather than to ensure a student’s success. Examples of reasonable accommodations include a blind student receiving materials in an accessible format and a student with a learning disability receiving extended time on exams.

4. Who is responsible for determining appropriate accommodations?

Disability Support Services is the office on campus that determines appropriate accommodations. The office bases decisions on the documentation provided by the student with a disability, the student’s functional limitations, and the student’s clarification about specific needs and limitations. The office also consults as needed with faculty regarding essential course and program requirements since a reasonable accommodation should not compromise or fundamentally alter a course or program.

5. Am I required to provide accommodations to students who request them?

Yes, if the accommodations are approved by DSS. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), protect students with disabilities from discrimination and require that they be afforded equal access to an education, including classroom and testing accommodations.

6. How do I know that a student truly has a disability and needs accommodations?

You should ask the student to provide you with a DSS memo verifying that the student has a disability and specifying the approved accommodations. A DSS-registered student is provided with a DSS memo every term if the student requests it. DSS has a file with documentation of the disability for every student who is registered with the office. If the student does not have a DSS memo, he or she should be referred to the DSS office to request services.

7. Does DSS test for learning disabilities and ADHD?

No; however, DSS does make referrals. The office maintains a list of evaluators who provide psychological and educational testing at a reduced rate or use a sliding fee scale.

8. How much additional time on exams is reasonable?

Extended time on exams is the most common accommodation for students who work more slowly for reasons of disability. For most students, time and one-half (1.5x) is adequate. Students with more severe disabilities or multiple disabilities may require additional time. Untimed exams are not viewed as reasonable.
9. Am I required to lower the standards of an assignment because a student has a disability?

No; essential course standards and requirements should be the same for all students. However, it may be reasonable to exercise flexibility when a component of an assignment is not essential. For example, it may be appropriate for a student to complete an assignment orally rather than in writing, if the purpose of the assignment is not to assess written expression.

10. Do I have to provide accommodations to a student who discloses late in the term?

Generally, yes. There could be numerous reasons why a student makes a late request. Perhaps he or she could not get documentation of the disability any earlier and therefore could not request accommodations earlier. Some students try to take a class without accommodations but find they aren't doing well and need accommodations. Whatever the reason, students may make requests for accommodations any time during the term.

There may be some situations where a student requests an accommodation so late that appropriate arrangements cannot be made. You must provide accommodations only at the point when a student makes a request, and you and DSS are able to make appropriate arrangements. Accommodations are not granted retroactively.

11. What if I suspect a student who is struggling in my class has a disability but has not disclosed it?

Talk privately with the student to discuss your observations regarding his or her performance. If the student then discloses a disability, refer him or her to DSS. If the student does not reveal a disability, one recommendation is to suggest various on-campus resources including DSS (e.g., Academic Achievement Center, Counseling Center, etc.). Another recommendation is to ask if the student has ever received support services or academic accommodations in the past. If the student says yes or indicates that he or she may benefit from them, refer the student to DSS. Each situation can be different, so we encourage you to contact DSS to speak with one of our specialists who will consult with you.

12. What if a student with a disability is failing?

Treat the student as you would any student who is not performing well in your class. Invite the student to come in during your office hours to discuss reasons for the failing performance and what resources the student may use to improve. Encourage the student to consult with his or her DSS Specialist regarding disability-related needs and strategies. The DSS Specialist is also available to consult with you.

13. What if a student with a disability is often absent?

Talk with the student to discuss your concerns that absences are affecting class performance. Students with disabilities are expected to comply with class attendance policies. However, there are times when students are approved to have instructors relax class attendance policies for disability-related absences. If so, this will be documented in the student’s DSS memo with specific information for instructors. If the student is missing too much class, the instructor should consult with the student’s DSS Specialist.

14. What if I can’t find a classmate to share notes with a student who needs them?

If you are unable to find a classmate who will willing to share a copy of his or her notes please contact DSS so that we can provide assistance. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights has specified that notes should be provided to the student within two weeks of the initial request.

15. Can a student who needs a reduced distraction testing environment take an exam in the classroom?

It depends. Talk with the student regarding his or her needs. For some students a quiet classroom may be appropriate. Others may need an environment quieter than the typical classroom. The Testing Services Center has reduced-distraction testing spaces, or if the instructor and student agree, they can work together to find a suitable location.

16. What if a student with a disability is disruptive or otherwise behaving inappropriately?

Towson University’s Code of Student Conduct regarding disruptive behavior applies to all students. Students with disabilities are expected to comply with University policies. Clearly state behavioral expectations for all students; discuss them openly in your classroom, on your syllabus, and with individual students as needed. If a student continues to exhibit inappropriate or disruptive behavior, it may be appropriate to provide the student with written feedback regarding professional and behavioral expectations. The DSS office as well as the Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education are available for consultation if you need assistance or guidance.
17. What can I do if I disagree with an accommodation that has been approved by DSS?

Contact the DSS office. Start with the DSS Specialist who is assigned to work with the student to discuss your concerns. You can also talk to the Director of DSS. The accommodations process is meant to be interactive and collaborative among the parties involved. If the disagreement continues, a meeting can be held with the TU Fair Practices Officer and/or the Department Chair. The student may also be included, as appropriate.

18. A student is requesting accommodations for an internship, who should he contact regarding accommodations?

Accommodations for an internship are usually different than academic accommodations and more closely resemble employment accommodations. The student should be referred to DSS to discuss their needs and requests, preferably well in advance of the start of the internship. If the student is eligible to receive accommodations, DSS will work closely with the student and appropriate faculty from the student’s academic program to determine reasonable accommodations for the internship.