



DISABILITY SERVICES FACULTY GUIDE

Disability Services created this guide to assist faculty members in understanding the needs of students with disabilities in higher education and to provide information about accommodations that ensure equal access to curricular and co-curricular activities. Visit the Disability Services website for additional information (<http://ds.gmu.edu>) or contact Disability Services via phone (703-993-2474) or email (ods@gmu.edu) with any questions, comments, or concerns. We encourage you to take time and read through the document in its entirety and we hope that the information will be helpful for future reference.

George Mason University
Disability Services | An office of University Life
Student Union Building I, Suite 2500
Phone: 703-993-2474
Email: ods@gmu.edu
Website: ds.gmu.edu

exceptions to enable all students to demonstrate their specific talents and abilities (e.g., oral presentations, poster presentations, written assignments).

- Provide a course outline, the list of reading requirements, copies of lecture notes/slides, and any other course material in an accessible digital format to all students whenever possible.

Temporary Disabilities

Temporary disabilities are characterized by brief, unanticipated impairment in a major life activity or function (e.g., mobility, attention, concentration, fine motor skills). Disability Services provides support to students with temporary disabilities typically for the time that their access to Mason classes, coursework, and programs is significantly limited as a direct result of a temporary disability or injury. The registration process for temporary disabilities is the same as the process for students with long-term or permanent disabilities. More common temporary disabilities reported by students at Mason include:

- Extended Illnesses (e.g., Mononucleosis)
- Complications due to pregnancy
- Recovery from surgery
- Short-term injuries due to accidents (e.g., broken bones, sprains, concussions)

Grievance Procedure

Disability Services (DS) collaborates with students with documented disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations that are individualized and based upon disability documentation, functional limitations, and a collaborative assessment of needs. Students with disabilities who have met with a DS specialist and are not satisfied with their approved accommodations are encouraged to appeal the decision made and meet with the Director or Associate Dean. This meeting is an opportunity for the student to engage in additional conversation and to provide supplemental documentation to support a request. Should the appeal not be granted within DS, the next step is for the student to appeal the decision to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator in the Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics (CDE) office: <https://diversity.gmu.edu/>

Should the appeal not be granted by the ADA Coordinator, the final step is to file a complaint using the CDE Grievance procedure.

CDE has established a process to assist in carrying out its responsibilities in administering and enforcing applicable federal and state laws and university policies related to nondiscrimination and investigating complaints. Consistent with federal and state laws and university policies related to nondiscrimination, CDE investigates complaints of unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including sexual harassment), national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, marital status, pregnancy status or genetic information.

Grievance Filing

All complaints must be filed with CDE. Assistance will be provided if needed. Complainants will be asked to complete an intake form describing the alleged discrimination and/or harassment. Two types of complaints can be filed:

Informal: Discuss allegations and concerns with respondent (the accused) and attempt to resolve the situation. The respondent is reminded that George Mason University expects all to adhere to our equal opportunity policy. Respondent is put on notice that behavior has been questioned, and informal resolution sought, if possible. If attempts to resolve the situation are not successful, the complainant may pursue a formal complaint. The Office reserves the right to investigate any allegation brought forward if it finds sufficient information to indicate a serious or continuing violation of the equal opportunity policy.

Formal: The Complainant provides a summary of the nature of the allegation in writing and then a full investigation is conducted by the Office complete with written findings and, if a violation is found, corrective actions are taken. For the complete grievance procedure, including time frames and appeal process please view the EO/AA Grievance Procedure Document.

For more information or instructions to fill out EO/AA Grievance Procedure documentation please visit <http://integrity.gmu.edu/compliance/grievanceprocedures.cfm>

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What if I suspect that a student has a disability but hasn't provided me with any documentation from Disability Services? Can I ask them if they have a disability?

We recommend not asking directly about a possible disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act states that a public entity may not make unnecessary inquiries into the existence of a disability. These inquiries usually relate to hiring or pre-admission screening, but when talking with students such inquiries should also be avoided. A direct inquiry such as this could also be considered intrusive or insensitive. You may simply tell the student that you notice they are having academic difficulty and encourage them to consider looking into support services available on campus (Disability Services would be considered a support service). We also recommend making statements or sharing concerns based on observable behavior (e.g., "I noticed that you are struggling with X topic," "It's important to participate more in class and I notice that you're not participating as much as other students in the course").

What if a student comes to me at the end of the semester and tells me that they have a disability, but has not provided me with documentation from Disability Services?

If a student discloses that they have a disability, it is appropriate to refer and encourage them to visit Disability Services (SUB I Suite 2500 | <http://ds.gmu.edu>) for support. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive. If a student has not supplied you with a Faculty Contact Sheet from Disability Services, then you are not required to provide any accommodations or academic adjustments even if the student has disclosed to you that they do have a disability.

What if I disagree with an accommodation that is provided by Disability Services?

As part of George Mason University's continued commitment to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities, the university established and maintains Disability Services. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. The laws that provide guidance to Disability Services regarding accommodations for students include The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADAA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Fair Housing Act, and Virginia State Laws. Please call or email Disability Services for assistance, clarification, or questions about accommodations (703.993.2474 | ods@gmu.edu). We are here to support, guide, and consult with anything related to student accommodations. For further explanation regarding legal obligations of higher education institutions to provide accommodations for students with documented disabilities, please refer to page 1 of this guide which discusses the ADAA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

When is a student required to submit their accommodation letter to me?

Students can begin the process and register with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. A student may provide you with a Faculty Contact Sheet at any time during your course. There are many different kinds of disabilities that vary significantly for each individual. Some conditions may not be static and the need for special instructional strategies or accommodations may change as the condition changes. However, please keep in mind that implementing accommodations begins at the time you receive the Faculty Contact Sheet; accommodations are not retroactive.

What if I have provided the accommodations as outlined by Disability Services, but the student is still struggling in my class?

If you are concerned that a student is not succeeding in your class despite the accommodations provided, we encourage you to first talk with the student to discuss these concerns. A specialist from Disability Services can also be available for any questions or concerns that you have. It may be helpful during your conversation with the student to ask if they would like to involve a Disability Services specialist when addressing the issue. Ultimately, all students are expected to meet the same academic requirements and should be assigned grades using the standards set forth in your program/syllabus. While we strive to guarantee equal access for students with disabilities, we cannot guarantee success.

A student who is registered with Disability Services is being extremely disruptive in my class and I'm not sure how to handle the situation. What should I do?

We recommend starting to address this situation as you would with any student—whether they are registered with Disability Services or not. It is appropriate to make statements or share concerns based on observable behavior. If that does not resolve your concerns or if the behavior does not change, it is appropriate to make a referral to the Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC | <http://ssac.gmu.edu>). SSAC offers students one-on-one support, interactive programming, and on- and off-campus resources.

What do I do if I am seriously concerned about a student's well-being? I know the student has a disability. Who should I contact?

If there is a life-threatening emergency, call 911 immediately. If there is an emergent situation and crisis intervention is needed, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS | <https://caps.gmu.edu> | 703.993.2380). Crisis-related resources are also available on CAPS homepage. It is also appropriate to make a referral to the Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC | <http://ssac.gmu.edu>). SSAC offers students one-on-one support, interactive programming, and on- and off-campus resources.

Is my intellectual property at risk if I provide copies of my lecture notes in any form to a student?

Disability Services can provide a Recording/Lecture Notes Agreement, by request, to be reviewed by the student and instructor. The student should then sign the agreement form and a copy should be sent to Disability Services to be kept on file.

Resources and Links

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – <http://www.ada.gov/>

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed July 26, 1990, is a comprehensive federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. This piece of legislation ensures equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, State and local government services, and telecommunications.

Disability Etiquette – [Disability Etiquette \(PDF\)](#)

A guide that provides tips on interacting with people with disabilities published by the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association.

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) – www.ahead.org

A professional membership organization for individuals involved in the development of policy and in the provision of quality services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities involved in all areas of higher education.

Cerebral Palsy Group – <https://cerebralpalsygroup.com>

Includes information about transitioning into adulthood for teenagers and college students.

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology (DO-IT) – <http://www.washington.edu/doi/>

DO-IT Center promotes the success of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education and careers, using technology as an empowering tool. There is also information to help faculty, administrators, and staff create accessible environments, programs, and resources for students with disabilities and help students with disabilities prepare for and succeed in college.

HEATH Resource Center – <http://www.heath.gwu.edu/>

Online clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities.

Office for Civil Rights – www.ed.gov/ocr

Serve student populations facing discrimination and the advocates and institutions promoting systemic solutions to civil rights problems.

Mobility International USA – <http://www.miusa.org>

Founded in 1981, Mobility International USA (MIUSA) is a disability-led non-profit organization headquartered in Eugene, Oregon, USA advancing disability rights and leadership

globally.® MIUSA is a cross-disability organization serving people with a broad range of disabilities.

Disability Specific

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

www.add.org

www.chadd.org

Autism Spectrum Disorder

<http://www.autism-society.org/>

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/>

Blind and Visual Impairments

<http://www.vdbvi.org/>

www.afb.org

Learning Disabilities

www.nclld.org

Mental Health/Psychiatric Disorders

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about_mental_illness

Instructional Strategies

CAST Universal Design for Learning – www.cast.org

CAST is a nonprofit research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals, especially those with disabilities, through Universal Design for Learning.

The ASD Project – <http://webdev.usu.edu/drc/facultytraining/intro0.htm>

This computer-based course is intended to develop an awareness about accommodating students with disabilities. In your role as faculty, there is a little background information that may be helpful. Studies have shown that students with disabilities can participate in higher education and compete favorably with other students.

Fundamental Alteration Process

George Mason University's process when an accommodation is challenged based on fundamental alteration of an academic program

1. Accommodation decision made by Disability Services (DS)
2. Department/faculty member objects. Must contact DS immediately.
 - a. Department/faculty explain reasons.
 - b. DS explains accommodation to faculty member. If faculty member still objects to the specific accommodation, DS will offer potential alternatives to faculty member, and to the student, to address the approved accommodations. If the faculty member continues to believe that the approved accommodation interferes with the essential academic or technical requirements of the course, DS will forward to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator.
 - c. ADA Coordinator will oversee fundamental alteration evaluation. **(Academic decision, based on the academic program, ADA Coordinator oversight)**
 - i. Is the academic requirement an essential component of the academic program?
 - ii. After determining whether the academic or technical requirement is essential to the academic program, have the ADA Coordinator consider alternatives for essential requirements.
 - d. If the requirement and/or the evaluation process are deemed essential, the accommodation is not provided. Determine what alternative assistance is available to the student. **(DS and academic program determination)**
3. Appeals. **ADA Coordinator and Provost.** Both parties may appeal a determination of whether or not an academic requirement is essential and whether or not provision of the specific accommodation would fundamentally alter the academic program. The ADA Coordinator reviews the process followed, ensuring it includes the above steps, and may suggest alternative means to assist the student, if appropriate. The Provost or his/her designee is the final authority on whether an academic component is essential and whether the proposed accommodation would fundamentally alter the academic program.

George Mason University Student Support Services

Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI) – Provides assistive technology assessments, support, and training. Conversion to accessible text.

Aquia Building, Rm 238

T: 703.993.4329

W: ati.gmu.edu

E: ati@gmu.edu

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, and Questioning Resources (LGBTQ) – Provides services to LGBTQ students including advising, advocacy, counseling and referrals, education and training, group and workshop facilitation, and leadership development.

SUB I, Rm 2200

T: 703-993-2702

W: lgbtq.gmu.edu

Military Services – Assists veterans, active duty service members, guardsmen, reservists, and dependents to make successful transitions to Mason community.

SUB I, Suite 1510

T: 703-993-1316

W: military.gmu.edu

Office of International Programs and Services – Educates, celebrates, and serves the Mason community, including international and domestic students, faculty and exchange visitor by helping them reach their highest academic and personal goals.

SUB 1, Room 4300

T: 703-993-2970

W: oips.gmu.edu

Student Health Services – Provides high quality health care, counseling, health education and prevention services to George Mason University students.

SUB 1, Suite 2300

T: 703-993-2831

W: shs.gmu.edu

Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) – Provides one-on-one support, interactive programming, and on- and off-campus resources. Manages student-of-concern referrals.

SUB 1, Suite 3200

T: 703.993.3686

W: ssac.gmu.edu

Career Services – Provides assistance in academic/career decision- making and goal-making.

SUB 1, Rm 3400

T: 703.993.2370

W: careers.gmu.edu

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) – Provides individual and group counseling, workshops, and outreach programs.

SUB 1, Rm 3129
T: 703.993.2380
W: caps.gmu.edu

Disability Services (DS) – Assists students with disabilities to obtain reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids, and support services.

SUB 1, Suite 2500
T: 703.993.2474
W: ds.gmu.edu

Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education (ODIME) – Provides resources to members of the Mason community who seek to strengthen their capacities to meaningfully engage and interact with people with different identities than their own and to co-create an inclusive and welcoming campus environment.

SUB I, Suite 2400
T: 703-993-2700
W: odime.gmu.edu

Learning Services – Provides academic skills workshops and academic counseling.

SUB 1, Rm 3129
T: 703.993.2380
W: caps.gmu.edu/learningservices

References

Sheryl E. Burgstahler, “Universal Design in Education,” in *Universal Design in Higher Education: From Principles to Practice*, ed. Sheryl E. Burgstahler and Rebecca C. Cory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2008), 14.

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Tips for Working with Students with Psychological Disabilities. (2016). Retrieved August 10, 2016, from The University of Texas at Austin, <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/tips-for-working-with-students-with-psychological-disabilities/>

Teaching Students with Mental Health Disabilities. (2013, June). Retrieved August 10, 2016, from Accessible Campus, <http://www.accessiblecampus.ca/educators/teaching-tips/mental-health-disabilities/>