



## 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](mailto: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.

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## Introduction – Disability Services Faculty Guide

This guide is intended to provide faculty guidance for teaching students with disabilities. It includes strategies related to working with students with the following disabilities:

- Allergy-related
- Anxiety
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Blind/low vision
- Deaf/hard of hearing
- Depression
- Learning disabilities
- Medical-related
- Mobility issues
- Neurological impairments
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Speech and language impairments
- Temporary disabilities (e.g. broken bones, concussions)

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.

[The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADAA\)](#) was established and brought into law in 1990. The law prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications, and governmental activities. The ADAA also establishes requirements for telecommunications relay services.

[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) is a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. The nondiscrimination requirements of the law apply to employers and organizations that receive financial assistance from any Federal department or agency. These organizations and employers include hospitals, nursing homes, mental health centers, institutions of higher education, and human service programs. Section 504 forbids organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services. It defines the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate in, and have access to, program benefits and services.

## Disability Services Process

Disability Services collaborates with students with impairments or diagnosed disabilities and faculty to provide reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids, and support services that are individualized and based on student self-disclosure, observation, and third-party documentation. Students are advised to use advocacy skills to request authorized accommodations specific to class needs and personal preferences. Disability Services may not be able to meet all personal preference requests but does provide reasonable accommodations/auxiliary aids in order to provide equal opportunity to access Mason's programs and services. In order to receive accommodations, students must register with Disability Services and submit documentation of impairment or diagnosis and functional limitations. Disability Services will review the documentation. The following questions are considered when determining eligibility and reasonable accommodations:

- Does the student meet the criteria of having a disability as defined by the ADA Amendments Act of 2008?
- What is the current impact of the impairment on the student's ability to participate in the university's educational programs and services (i.e., functional limitations)?
- What are possible accommodations, modifications, and/or adjustments that might remove the barriers?
- Without these accommodations, would the individual still have meaningful access to the program, service, or activity?
- Would these accommodations compromise the essential elements of the curriculum?
- Would these accommodations require a fundamental alteration in the nature of the program, service, or activity?

The student initially participates in an interactive process with Disability Services staff to design and develop reasonable accommodations. The student is responsible for requesting most accommodations before any academic deadline has been set. Accommodations recommended by healthcare professionals are not automatic. It is the student's responsibility to follow Disability Services' policies and procedures for accessing accommodations as outlined in this section.

After documentation has been reviewed and an initial meeting with a Disability Services specialist has occurred, students will be provided with Faculty Contact Sheets that outline their individualized accommodations. It is the student's responsibility to deliver Faculty Contact Sheets to their instructor(s). Accommodations begin when instructors receive the Faculty Contact Sheet for the current semester. This letter also serves as a catalyst for discussion of how accommodations will be provided.

Some classes require more creative accommodations due to the nature of the course or the complexity of a student's functional limitations. Disability Services can facilitate dialogue with the student and faculty member to clarify essential elements of the course and to identify creative and reasonable accommodations while considering the student's functional limitations.

## Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information

Students with disabilities are admitted to Mason under the same requirements and process as other students. It is not mandatory for students with disabilities to disclose their disability during the admissions process nor at any point during their time at Mason. However, in order to qualify for accommodations, it is necessary for a student to self-identify as having a disability and to submit appropriate documentation to Disability Services. Any documentation submitted is considered confidential and will be treated in accordance with federal and state regulations. This documentation is also kept separate from the student's general academic file; a student may choose to share this documentation with another campus department at their own discretion. Disclosure of disability is a voluntary process. Information related to a disability may be disclosed by Disability Services only with the permission of the student or as permitted by federal law. Staff and faculty are advised that disability matters are confidential and should not be shared with others. Attention should be taken to handle academic accommodations in a discreet manner.

## Rights and Responsibilities

Students with disabilities at George Mason University have a right to:

- Reasonable and effective accommodations according to a disability based on documentation.
- Equal access to educational and co-curricular programs, services, jobs, activities, and facilities available through the university.
- Be treated with respect and dignity and receive equal and fair treatment.
- Confidentiality in all matters of documentation and educational record.
- Information reasonably available in accessible formats.
- Access a grievance process either through a formal or informal complaint.

Students with disabilities at George Mason University have the responsibility to:

- Initiate services with Disability Services.
- Provide appropriate documentation of a disability to Disability Services according to guidelines.
- Request accommodations in a timely manner from Disability Services to ensure that they are in place as soon as possible, while also understanding that accommodations may be requested at any time during tenure at Mason.
- Work collaboratively with Disability Services staff to determine reasonable accommodations.
- Self-advocate and monitor personal progress. Students will alert Disability Services if assistance is needed with accommodation-related issues as soon as possible.
- Request and pick up Faculty Contact Sheets from Disability Services.
- Meet with professor(s), provide Faculty Contact Sheets, and discuss accommodation needs.
- Request Faculty Contact Sheets through the Disability Services Website: <http://ds.gmu.edu>
- Understand that requests for accommodations are not retroactive. Accommodations begin when Faculty Contact Sheet are provided to professor(s).
- Keep documentation and contact and disclosure information up to date with Disability Services.
- Follow all policies and procedures when using the Disability Services Testing Center: <https://ds.gmu.edu/test-center/>



- Select among equally effective accommodations, adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services.
- Refuse an unreasonable accommodation, adjustment, and/or auxiliary aid or service that imposes a fundamental alteration of a program or activity, or places an undue burden on the university.

**George Mason University has the responsibility to:**

- Provide information to students with disabilities in accessible formats upon request.
- Ensure that courses, programs, services, and activities, when viewed in their entirety, are available in the most integrated and appropriate settings.
- Evaluate students on their abilities and not their disabilities.
- Provide or arrange for reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services for students with disabilities in courses, programs services, and activities.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality of records and communication except where sharing information is permitted or required by law or when the student requests that such information be shared.
- Provide students with access to a step-by-step grievance procedure

## Accommodating Disabilities

Students are able to access accommodations following completion of the intake process with Disability Services. Accommodations are designed to:

- Meet classroom access needs in a timely manner.
- Provide appropriate accommodations for testing.
- Support accessible course materials for students.

If a faculty member believes that accommodations approved by Disability Services may interfere with the essential requirements of a course or alter the nature of a course, they should contact Disability Services immediately. Disability Services will work collaboratively, through an interactive process, with faculty members and students regarding feasible options for modifications to afford equitable access.

### Preface

One of the most important shifts in higher education over the last few decades has been the movement away from focusing simply on *teaching* practices and, instead, emphasizing the degree to which our students are *learning*. Although some might argue that this change can seem like a sort of shell game where we are swapping semantics, the consequences for our classroom practices are actually quite dramatic. By concentrating on student learning, we call attention to the various processes students undergo as they construct their own pathways to knowledge from the tools presented to them by their instructors and the course materials. Instructors are encouraged to have clear and measurable objectives on their syllabi. In order for this kind of learning to occur, however, all students must be afforded equal access to the classroom and to course activities. It is often the case that some students with disabilities will need reasonable accommodations in order to make the goal of a truly accessible class a reality. These students will be working with Disability Services in order to determine appropriate accommodations.

This section of the handbook outlines the most frequent accommodations provided for students with disabilities along with teaching strategies for implementing these accommodations and for enhancing accessibility.













## Test Proctoring through Disability Services

Disability Services is committed to maintaining the highest academic integrity standards. In order to meet this goal, the Disability Services Testing Center is monitored by a secure closed-circuit security system. The Testing Center is located in Student Union Building 1 (SUB 1) Room 3313. All students are required to show ID before taking tests, exams, and quizzes in the Testing Center. Any actual or suspected incident/evidence of improper test-taking or Honor Code violation will be documented by Disability Services staff or proctor. These will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and to the instructor.

Examples of testing accommodations:

- Extended time
- Use of a word processor
- Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) – a magnifying device that projects onto a screen
- Text-to-speech and speech-to-text software
- Large print document
- Scribe
- Reader
- Braille
- Raised table
- Scantron Scribe

Students registered with Disability Services have access to the Disability Services Testing Center. If an instructor is able to administer an exam and can arrange the approved accommodations, then the student can choose to take the test with the instructor or use the Disability Services Testing Center. Disability Services does not need to be informed about these exam arrangements if the instructor is proctoring and providing approved accommodations.

Students who are registered with Disability Services and have academic or testing accommodations will be provided with a Faculty Contact Sheet for each course that they are taking. Students will be provided with Faculty Contact Sheets when they initially register with Disability Services. In subsequent semesters, students can request Faculty Contact Sheets through the Disability Services website (<http://ds.gmu.edu>). Students should present their Faculty Contact Sheet to their instructors prior to requesting testing accommodations for an upcoming test, quiz, or exam. A Test Proctoring Form must be completed by the student and instructor for each specific test if the student will take that test with Disability Services. This form is considered a contract between a student, an instructor, and Disability Services. Students are encouraged to turn in completed test proctoring forms several days prior to the scheduled test, quiz, or exam date.

## Testing Policies and Procedures

### **Students review and sign this as an agreement prior to using the Disability Services Testing Center**

- It is the student's responsibility to meet with each instructor each semester to discuss disability-related and testing accommodations needs in the course as outlined in individual Faculty Contact Sheets. Disability Services does not automatically inform faculty members and instructors that a student with accommodations will be in their class.
- Students registered with Disability Services have access to the Disability Services Testing Center. If an instructor is able to administer an exam and can arrange the approved accommodations, then the student can choose to take the test with the instructor or use the Disability Services Testing Center. Disability Services does not need to be informed about these exam arrangements if the instructor is proctoring and providing approved accommodations.
- A Test Proctoring Form must be completed by the student and instructor for each specific test if the student will take that test with Disability Services. Students are responsible for ensuring that the Disability Services Testing Center receives a completed Test Proctoring Form 48 business hours prior to the day of the test or exam. Failure to deliver a completed Test Proctoring Form on time may result in a delay or the need to reschedule a test. For tests at the Sci-Tech campus, Test Proctoring Forms must be turned in at least one (1) week in advance.
- Disability Services Test Proctoring Forms must be submitted 48 business hours prior to an exam, quiz, or test. The Testing Center will not be able to accommodate same day requests for tests/quizzes. If there is a last-minute change or day-of request, the student may need to reschedule their exam, quiz, or test depending on the nature of the accommodation. The Disability Services Testing Center does not have scribes, readers, interpreters, or assistive technology services on “standby” and does require time to coordinate these services.
- If a student requests to take an exam at a different time/day than what is noted on the completed Test Proctoring Form, then Disability Services will need direct communication (e.g., email, phone) from the instructor of the new approved date/time of the test.
- Test materials can be delivered to Disability Services in one of three ways and this information should also be noted on the completed Test Proctoring Form:
  - a. Test will be hand-delivered by instructor to Disability Services Testing Center (SUB 1, Room 3313) at least 24 hours in advance of scheduled test.
  - b. Test will be emailed to Disability Services Testing Center (dstests@gmu.edu) at least 24 hours in advance of scheduled test.
  - c. Student obtains test from instructor on the day of the exam and physically brings the test with them to the Disability Services Testing Center. Disability Services recommends that instructors provide students with a copy of the test in a sealed envelope.
  - d. If test is in Blackboard and we need a password or any documents it should be emailed to dstests@gmu.edu 24 hours in advance of scheduled test.

Students are encouraged to remind instructors about test delivery option as the testing date approaches. Disability Services also assumes responsibility for security of the test once it is delivered.

- The Disability Services Testing Center is available Monday through Friday, 9:00am-4:45pm. The Testing Center is open until 8:45pm on Tuesdays during the Spring and Fall semesters. During the summer and winter semesters, the Testing Center is open Monday through Friday 9am to 4:45pm. Extended hours are also available during the final exam period and these hours will be posted in advance on the Disability Services website (<http://ds.gmu.edu>), communicated via the Disability Services Newsletter, and posted on signs in and around the Testing Center. Students are encouraged to check the final exam schedule available on the Registrar's website for additional information.
- Exams that need to be converted (e.g., large print, braille, scanned into computer) must be received by Disability Services with enough time to ensure appropriate conversion. Students should communicate with instructors early and often in order to ensure that testing materials are submitted with enough time for conversion.
- Students must show photo ID (e.g., Mason ID Card, Driver's License) when checking in to the Disability Services Testing Center. Disability Services staff will determine an appropriate location for each student within the Testing Center once check-in is completed.
- Approved accommodations specified on the Faculty Contact Sheet for the current semester will be granted during the test.
- Tests will be given at the scheduled date and time as indicated on the completed Test Proctoring Form. Instructors will be notified of any late arrivals. If a student is more than fifteen (15) minutes late, the exam is considered a 'no show' and the instructor will be notified. If a student shows up late, (less than 15 minutes) they will forfeit the time and be allowed to begin with the end time remaining the same. It is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor about options to reschedule and to ensure that the Disability Services Testing Center is provided with updated information if the test is successfully rescheduled.
- Students are responsible for their own personal test materials. Disability Services does not supply test materials. If a student forgets any personal test materials (e.g., calculator, bluebook, Scantron), they will be allowed to leave and retrieve any materials prior to starting the test. The start time as indicated on the Test Proctoring Form will not change. Upon return, students will have the remainder of the allotted time.
- Students are encouraged to arrive at the Disability Services Testing Center 10-15 minutes prior to the start of the test to complete the check-in process. Students will need to leave the following with Disability Services staff: academic materials (e.g., textbooks, articles), laptops, tablets, any electronic device that sends/receives data (e.g., smartphone, smart watch, Fitbit). These devices will be kept in a secure location. Disability Services is not responsible for any damage or loss. If a student is using noise canceling headphones, the headphones must be without Bluetooth capabilities. If the headphones have Bluetooth capabilities they are not permitted and the student can use the Disability Services noise canceling headphones. These devices will be kept in a secure location. Disability Services is not responsible for any damage or loss.
- Students should contact their instructor and the Disability Services Testing Center immediately if they are unable to take a test due to illness or an emergency. Students are responsible for coordinating makeup and rescheduled tests at the instructor's discretion.
- Students should notify the Disability Services Testing Center if they will no longer need to take a test in the testing center after submitting a completed Test Proctoring Form.



- Students who have accommodations for breaks during testing should take note of the Disability Services Testing Center Hours in order to access their breaks appropriately. Student's must stay on the same floor as the testing center, unless they get permission to do otherwise.
- Disability Services will not clarify or answer any content-related questions during a test. Students should notify Disability Services Staff or an available proctor if they have a question during a test. Disability Services staff will contact the instructor by phone or email. Disability Services staff can also be available to accompany students to the instructor's campus location so that the student can speak to the professor directly to ask a question. Disability Services cannot guarantee that an instructor will be available while taking a test in the testing center. If an instructor is unavailable, students are encouraged to continue the test and to write their question down. Any written questions will be included with testing materials sent back to the instructor following the test.
- Disability Services staff and proctors may come into any and all testing locations at any time. Scribes and readers that are necessary related to approved accommodations may accompany a student into testing locations. Personal care attendants may also accompany a student into a testing location to assist only with activities of daily living (e.g., assistance to the restroom, removing a jacket) and may not be present while the student is actively completing the test.
- Use of materials or resources not listed on the Test Proctoring Form (e.g., Internet, text messaging, note card) is strictly prohibited. Any actual or suspected incident/evidence of improper test-taking or Honor Code violation will be documented by Disability Services staff or proctor. These will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and to the instructor.
- If an instructor issues pop quizzes in class, contact the Disability Services Testing Center at [dstests@gmu.edu](mailto:dstests@gmu.edu), at least 24 hours in advance of the quiz. Disability Services staff will work with the student and instructor to accommodate pop quizzes on a case-by-case basis.
- I understand that accommodations are not retroactive and start the time my professor receives the Faculty Contact Sheet. Additionally if I want to take a test in the Disability Services Testing Center, I need to notify my professor prior to the date of the exam.
- A reader is defined as someone who reads the content of the material aloud to the student. A scribe is defined as someone who writes down or indicates the student's answers exactly as dictated.
- The Disability Services Testing Center is video-monitored through a closed-circuit security system. Disability Services' laptops are also monitored in real-time via SchoolVue Software. Any exams proctored virtually through the Disability Services Testing Center will be recorded.

I have read and agree to comply with all Disability Services Testing Center Policies and Procedures.

## Specific Disabilities

This overview is based on characteristics of each disability as stated in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5)

### Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with function or development on a daily level.

Strategies for teaching and support:

- Provide a syllabus with clear explanations of course objectives with specific due dates for assignments.
- For large projects or long papers, break down the task into smaller parts.
- Give verbal reminders in class of upcoming deadlines regarding homework assignments and upcoming exams.
- Provide an outline of each lecture at the start of class.
- When possible, start each lecture with a summary of material to be covered and conclude each lecture with a summary of major points addressed.
- Students with ADHD may start to “drift” during class. A varied format may help to sustain attention.

Students with ADHD are encouraged to use the following strategies:

- Use of a day planner
- Write down all assignments
- Take notes in class and rewrite notes after class
- Break tasks down into manageable components
- Set reasonable goals and use a checklist to keep track of progress
- Use an audio recorder for lectures and studying
- Work on projects with someone who has strong organizational skills
- Get feedback on social behavior from a trusted friend

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is diagnosed based on the presence of the persistent deficits in social communication & social interaction across multiple contexts; restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities; and presence of symptoms since early in the developmental period.

Strategies for teaching and support:

- Establish trust to decrease conflict
- Provide a syllabus with clear explanations of course objectives with specific due dates for assignments
- Be clear about times and reasons for office visits
- Be willing to re-explain information as concretely as possible
- If the student is disruptive to others, arrange to meet privately; let the student know what behavior is disrupting others and help them understand why
- Give reasons for your requests to help the student understand your point of view
- Avoid arguing if the student gets “stuck” on a topic. Instead, stick to your reasoning and let them know that the conversation is done
- Avoid absolute words such as “always” or “never” unless that is exactly what you mean
- Supplement oral instructions with written instructions when possible (e.g., revising assignments, updating due dates)
- May need to set limits on participation (e.g., allow student to answer three questions per class period)
- Limit use of metaphors—they are often misunderstood
- Discuss any safety concerns ahead of time (e.g., evacuation procedures)
- Be aware that students with Autism may be distracted by others making noise and that they may be disruptive to others unintentionally
- If a student’s head is down on the desk, consider the possibility that they may be experiencing sensory overload rather than sleeping
- Use clear and detailed directives when referring to revisions that need to be made
- Listing or numbering changes on the paper will provide guidelines for students when working
- If modeling writing rules, write them on a separate sheet for future reference
- Keep directions simple and declarative
- Ask students to repeat directions in their own words to check comprehension
- Clearly define course requirements, dates of exams, and other important due dates. Provide advance notice of any changes
- Teach to generalize and to consolidate information
- Provide supplementary pictures and graphs when appropriate
- Redirect tangential responses to bring student back to main topic
- Use scripts and teach strategies selectively
- Keep expectations direct and explicit. Don’t require students to “read between the lines” to glean your intentions. Students with Autism may struggle to automatically generalize instructions
- Provide direct feedback to the student when you observe areas of academic difficulty
- Encourage use of resources designed to help students with study and organizational skills
- Avoid idioms, double meaning, and sarcasm, unless you plan to explicitly explain your usage

- If the student has poor handwriting, allow use of a computer if easier for the student
- Use the student's preoccupying interest to help focus/motivate the student. Suggest ways to integrate this interest into the course (e.g., related paper topics)
- Consider individual sensitivity to sensory overload (e.g., sound, light, touch)

## Blind and Low Vision

There are two main categories of visual impairments: Low Vision and Blind. Low vision students usually are print users, but may require special equipment and materials. The definition of legal blindness covers a broad spectrum of visual impairments. The extent of visual disability depends upon the physical sensory impairment of the student's eyes, the age of the student at the onset of vision impairment, and the way in which that impairment occurred. Vision also may fluctuate or may be influenced by factors such as inappropriate lighting, light glare, or fatigue. Hence, there is no "typical" student with a vision impairment. The major challenge in an educational environment is the overwhelming mass of visual material to which students are continually exposed to in textbooks, class outlines, class schedules, and during lectures. Also, the increasing use of film, videos, computers, and YouTube adds to the volume of visual material necessary to appropriately access the educational environment.

Strategies for teaching and support:

- Speak to the class upon entering and leaving the room or site.
- Provide a syllabus with clear explanations of course objectives and specific due dates for assignments.
- Call the student by name if you want his/her attention.
- Use descriptive words (e.g., straight, forward, left) in relation to the student's body orientation. Be specific in directions and avoid the use of vague terms with unusable information, such as "over there", "here", or "this."
- Describe pertinent visual occurrences of the learning activities in detail.
- Describe and tactually familiarize the student to the classroom/laboratory and any related equipment, supplies, materials, or field sites.
- Give verbal notice of room changes, special meetings, or assignments.
- Offer to read written information for a person with a visual impairment, when appropriate.
- Identify yourself by name; don't assume that the student who is visually impaired will recognize you by your voice even though you have met before.
- If you are asked to guide a student with a visual impairment, identify yourself, offer your services and, if accepted, offer your arm to the student's hand. Tell them if they have to step up or step down, let them know if the door is to their left or right, and warn them of possible hazards.
- Verbally let the student know if you need to move or need to end a conversation.
- If a visually impaired student is in class, routinely check the instructional environment to be sure it is adequate and ready for use.
- When communicating with a student who has a vision impairment, always identify yourself and others who are present.

- Do not pet or touch a service animal (i.e., service dog). Service animals are working animals. It can be hazardous for a visually-impaired person if the dog is distracted.
- Be understanding of the slight noise made by a portable braille.
- Use an auditory or tactile signal where a visual signal is normally used.
- It is not necessary to speak loudly to people with visual impairments.
- Explain sudden noises.
- When seating a person who is blind or vision-impaired, guide their hand to the back of the chair and allow them to seat themselves.
- Describe where things are placed and let the student pick up and feel objects, where appropriate.
- Don't move objects without telling the student.
- Don't leave doors ajar. Close or open them fully.
- It is appropriate to use words like "look" and "see"
- It is appropriate to refer to object color when talking to the student.
- Let the student have hands-on experiences whenever possible. Don't force the student to touch new things if they are unsure about them.
- Ask if the student needs help rather than assuming.
- Do not leave the student unless they know where they are.
- Do not push or steer the student, let them take your hand or elbow.
- Accept the student's Faculty Contact Sheet and ask student if you have questions regarding the accommodations or contact Disability Services for further assistance.
- Verbally spell out new or technical words
- Contact the Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI) in advance if showing any media in the classroom
- Describe, in detail, all pertinent visual occurrences or chalkboard writing.
- Modify instructions for auditory/tactile presentation.
- Allow student to use a tape recorder for recording class presentations.
- Make all handouts and assignments available in an appropriate format (e.g., regular print, large print, Braille, audio recording) depending on the student's optimal mode of communication.

## Chronic Medical Conditions

Chronic medical conditions include diseases or other human health conditions that are persistent or long-lasting in nature. The term 'chronic' is usually applied when the course of the disease lasts for more than three months. Chronic medical conditions may substantially limit a person's ability to perform major life activities such as seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, learning, caring for oneself, and working. Many medical conditions require chronic care management for effective long-term treatment. Effective chronic disease control requires attention to social, behavioral, environmental and clinical aspects. Below is a list of more common conditions experienced by students at Mason.

AIDS	Allergies	Back Conditions	Brain Injuries
Cancer	Cerebral Palsy	Chemical Sensitivity	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
Chronic Pain	Diabetes	Epilepsy	Gastrointestinal Disorders
Heart Conditions	Lyme Disease	Migraine Headaches	Multiple Sclerosis
Paraplegia/quadruplegia	Respiratory Disorders	Sickle Cell Anemia	Sleep Disorders
Spinal Cord Injury	Stroke		

These medical conditions vary significantly in their effects and symptoms. These conditions may not be static; therefore, as the condition changes, so may the need for special instructional strategies or accommodations. The use of such strategies will depend on how the disability is manifested at that particular time and may change throughout the semester. Consult with Disability Services regarding questions and concerns – 703.993.2474 | [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu)

## Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Strategies for teaching and support:

- Have visual materials (e.g., PowerPoint, lecture notes) available to the student before class. It is difficult to attend to an interpreter, speaker, and visual prompts simultaneously.
- Have captioned videos available. Videos that are not captioned must be captioned before class. It is not appropriate for an interpreter or transliterator to interpret for the video. Doing so would deprive the student of the ability to attend to both the visual information and the message being conveyed. If faculty members wish to show visual media that is not captioned, procedures for requesting accessible media and the online form can be found at <https://ati.gmu.edu>
- Failure to allow for adequate lead time may result in a video not being captioned and opens the university up to complaints regarding accessibility. This policy includes YouTube videos and any required media being shown in the classroom or required to be viewed outside of class.
- Treat all students equally. Please keep in mind that although deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind students have special needs, they should be treated equally to other students in your course.
- Interpreters are not always an accurate reflection of students when voicing for them. Try to be patient when an interpreter voices for students. D/deaf, hard-of hearing, and D/deaf-blind students have diverse communication skills. If it is difficult to understand a student's question or statement, it is acceptable to ask for it to be repeated.
- Be aware of processing time and that there may be up to 5-10 seconds between what is said and the time that an interpreter signs the material to a student.
- Slow down. While slowing down can be tough for faculty members, the rapid pace of instruction is a frequent concern for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students.
- Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind students frequently need to sit at or near the front of the room in order to have a clear view of the speaker, the interpreter, the captioning, and of any classroom materials. Allow D/deaf students to have access to the first few rows in class on the first day.

- Avoid pre-determined groups of deaf/hearing students to work together. Before establishing groups, ask students privately for their preferences.
- When using a laser pointer please allow the pointer to remain on the object. By allowing the pointer to remain positioned for an extended period of time, deaf and hard-of-hearing students will be able to locate its position, read the content there, and return their attention to the speaker (and an interpreter or reporter if present).
- Using proper names is best. Avoid using pronouns as referents in the class. When speakers are more specific, it helps all students—hearing or deaf—to understand.
- Provide a syllabus with clear explanations of course objectives with specific due dates for assignments.

### Suggestions for Working with Sign Language Interpreters and Cued Speech Transliterators

**Interpreters** are specially trained professionals whose role is to facilitate communication between people who do not share a common language. While an interpreter is not an expert in a faculty member's field, the interpreter is an expert in communication between D/deaf and hearing individuals.

**Cued Speech Transliterators** resemble the function of a sign language interpreter except that the transliterators use a hand code, or cue, to represent each speech sound.

- Interpreters will interpret everything that happens in the classroom—both spoken and signed. Interpreters convey content and the spirit of the speaker. Speakers should use their normal rate and direct all questions and comments to the D/deaf student, not the interpreter.
- Faculty members may be asked to provide the interpreter with materials relevant to the course (e.g., copies of the syllabus, handouts, an extra copy of the textbook, lecture notes). A permanent, armless chair will also be needed.
- Specialized terms and proper names will need to be provided to the interpreter before the class. This aids the interpreter in conveying information to the deaf student accurately.
- Instructors should use visual aids whenever possible and write new words, phrases, concepts, and ideas on the board.
- Depending on the length and nature of the class, a team of two interpreters may be assigned to a class. The interpreters will alternate according to time limits they have agreed on. They will make the change as unobtrusively as possible and it is not necessary for faculty members to stop the lecture during this change.
- Interpreters operate under a professional Code of Ethics. All information pertaining to the class will be kept confidential within the educational team working directly with the student. The Code of Ethics requires the interpreter to sign or voice everything seen or heard in the classroom. Speakers who ask the interpreter “not to sign this” place the interpreter in violation of the Code of Ethics. Likewise, the interpreter will voice for the faculty member and/or class everything the D/deaf student signs with the exception of brief questions specifically to the interpreter for communication clarification.
- If individuals will read material aloud in class, faculty members are asked to remind other students to slow down. Reading tends to be done at a much quicker pace than extemporaneous speech. If possible, provide interpreters with a copy of any literature to be read in class.

## Learning Disabilities and Cognitive Impairments

Learning Disabilities include difficulties learning and using academic skills, as indicated by the presence of a variety of difficulties regarding reading, math, spelling, and/or writing, that have persisted for at least 6 months, and despite the provision of interventions that target those difficulties.

Learning disabilities are neurologically-based disorders that affect the manner in which individuals with average or above average intelligence receive, process, retain, and/or express information. A learning disability is not synonymous with generalized low ability. Learning disabilities are ‘invisible’ and may affect a student's performance in reading, writing, spoken language, mathematics, orientation in space and time, and/or organization. Areas of difficulty vary for each individual diagnosed with a learning disability or cognitive impairment.

Strategies for teaching and support:

- Provide a syllabus with clear explanations of course objectives with specific due dates for assignments.
- Advanced planning for any reading requirements in a course from semester-to-semester is especially helpful to students who need recorded audio presentations as an alternative format. Lead-time is essential to provide the alternative medium in a timely fashion.
- Create a syllabus that outlines due dates, reading assignments, additional audiovisual or supplemental materials in library collections, descriptions of projects and papers, grading expectations, attendance policies, and rubrics. Provide the syllabus online as well as in print.
- Clearly define course requirements and important deadlines.
- Be sure to provide advanced notice of any schedule changes.
- Sharing lecture notes with a student in advance can be extremely helpful to support visual and auditory preparation for each class.
- Encourage students to make appointments during office hours to discuss progress and accommodations. Office hours are useful for individual discussion of assignments and questions about lectures.
- When presenting new or technical terms, it can be crucial for students with a learning disability to have them written on the board or supplied in handouts.
- Guided notes, PowerPoint presentations, or notes provided online following the end of class can improve the performance of all students.
- Break information into smaller steps or chunks while covering new tasks, concepts, or theories.
- Paraphrase key points from the reading and lectures.
- Provide examples when appropriate.
- During a lecture, pause occasionally to allow students the opportunity to assimilate information and to catch up with note-taking.
- For large projects, provide step-by-step directions, bulleted direction lists, and advanced notice of due dates (e.g., 2 weeks).
- Allow time for questions and clarification during class.



- Be flexible and willing to experiment. Recognize that each student, regardless of ability, exhibits unique individual learning styles.
- Announce information in both oral and written form whenever possible. This is especially true for changes in assignments or exams.
- Talk distinctly and at an even speed. Emphasizing important points with pauses, gestures, and other body language helps students follow classroom presentations.
- Try not to lecture while facing the chalkboard/whiteboard/front of the classroom.

## Psychological and Emotional Disabilities

Psychological and emotional disabilities are characterized by clinically significant disturbances in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior and reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. These disabilities are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important life activities. There are many kinds of mental and psychiatric disorders that vary significantly related to effects and symptoms. These conditions may not be static; therefore, the need for special instructional strategies or accommodations may change as the condition changes. More common psychological and emotional disabilities reported by students at Mason include:

- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia

Strategies for teaching and support:

- Address and incorporate a variety of learning styles (e.g. auditory, visual, kinesthetic, experiential).
- Provide a syllabus with clear explanations of course objectives that includes specific due dates for assignments.
- Incorporate experiential learning activities when appropriate.
- Be prepared to set behavioral expectations for all students in your class.
- Embrace diversity to include people with psychological and emotional disabilities.
- Provide an organized, well-written, and complete syllabus that includes required readings, assignment descriptions, due dates, and clearly-defined expectations.
- Encourage students to tell you about any accessibility concerns. You can do this both verbally early in the semester and by including an accessibility statement on your syllabus. Indicate that these conversations are confidential and are strictly for the purpose of facilitating any learning needs or accommodations needed to access course content.
- Identify and clearly express essential course content and recognize that students can communicate understanding of essential course content in multiple ways. Diversify assignments or allow for

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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://www.add.org)

[www.chadd.org](http://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](http://www.afb.org)

### **Learning Disabilities**

[www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org)

### **Mental Health/Psychiatric Disorders**

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

[http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about\\_mental\\_illness](http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about_mental_illness)

## **Instructional Strategies**

### **CAST Universal Design for Learning – [www.cast.org](http://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](http://ati.gmu.edu)

E: [ati@gmu.edu](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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

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