

# IV.I. GUIDELINES FOR ADDRESSING ACADEMIC ISSUES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

(Source: *Provost's Memorandum, Almanac, September 10, 1991; revised, Office of the Provost, Almanac, October 4, 1994; revised, Almanac, December 7, 1999* (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v46/n14/ORdisability.html>); *revised, Almanac, July 14, 2015*)

The University of Pennsylvania is committed to providing access and equal educational opportunities to all students, including students with disabilities. Penn does not discriminate against students with disabilities. The University provides reasonable accommodation to a student's known disability in order to afford that student an equal opportunity to participate in all University-sponsored academic and extra-curricular programs, activities, and services.

## Reason for Policy Guidance

This policy guidance, known as the *Provost's Memorandum*, serves two purposes:

- to provide guidance to faculty and staff so that they may reasonably accommodate and support students with disabilities without compromising academic standards and requirements
- to assure students with disabilities that the University will provide access to all University-sponsored programs, benefits and activities through reasonable accommodation and program accessibility as required under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended ("ADA")

## Protection from Discrimination

The Rehabilitation Act and the ADA prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities by institutions like Penn that receive or benefit from federal financial assistance. These and other laws require that reasonable accommodations be provided to otherwise qualified individuals with a disability.

## Some Key Definitions

*Disability*—A person with a disability is defined as an individual who

1. has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,
2. has a record of such an impairment, or
3. is regarded as having such an impairment.

Examples of recognized disabilities include, but are not limited to, blindness, deafness, paralysis, diabetes, epilepsy, lupus, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, HIV/AIDS, specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

*Reasonable Accommodation*—A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment that enables an otherwise qualified individual with a disability full access to participation in University-sponsored programs. These modifications should not fundamentally alter the purpose or requirements of the course or program. Reasonable

accommodations are determined on an individual basis and take into account the functional limitations of the impairment. Accommodations may vary from class to class depending upon course content and format. They are intended to be effective and reasonable; they may not be exactly what the student wishes or requests.

*Appropriate Documentation*—Appropriate documentation is a written evaluation or report provided by a clinician in a specific profession or area of expertise who is considered qualified to make the diagnosis. The documentation must be current, comprehensive, and may include clinical and social histories from parents, counselors, and specialists. A diagnosis must be included. Documentation must identify the student's specific functional limitations within the academic setting and must show substantial limitation compared to most people. The documentation should conform to well-established practices in the specific area(s)/field(s). For more information, see Documentation Guidelines ([https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/ps\\_documentation\\_guidelines.php](https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/ps_documentation_guidelines.php)) on the Student Disabilities Services website.

## Responsible University Office

Students with disabilities and temporary conditions are served by the Office of Student Disabilities Services (SDS). The office is located in the Weingarten Learning Resources Center (WLRC), a department under the Office of the Vice Provost of University Life. SDS is responsible for assessing all student requests for accommodations and determining reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities.

The Office of Student Disabilities Services is available to assist faculty and professional staff with the provision of academic accommodations and for consultation regarding students with disabilities.

Phone: 215-573-9235  
 FAX: 215-746-6326  
 TTY: 215-746-6320  
[vpul-sds@mail@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:vpul-sds@mail@pobox.upenn.edu)

## Accommodation Procedures

### Responsibilities of Students

Students with disabilities who seek accommodation at Penn are responsible for self-identifying with SDS. Identification may take place upon admission or at any time during the student's course of study.

Students requesting accommodations are responsible for providing documentation, at their own expense, according to the guidelines published on the SDS website: [https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/ps\\_documentation\\_guidelines.php](https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/ps_documentation_guidelines.php). SDS may request additional information if the documentation provided does not support the existence of a disability or the need for the accommodations requested.

The SDS Documentation Review Committee thoroughly reviews the documentation and accommodations are determined through an interactive process with input from the student. Consultation with faculty may be important in determining how to best accommodate a student in a specific course. A determination from the Committee may take four to six weeks, or longer if additional information is needed. For examples of reasonable accommodations, please see the SDS website at [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/academic\\_accommodations](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/academic_accommodations) ([http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/academic\\_accommodations/](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/academic_accommodations/)).

Students who are approved for accommodations must authorize SDS to inform professors about their approved accommodations. They must

also make online requests to SDS for individual exam accommodations each semester. Students are encouraged to introduce themselves to professors to initiate a dialogue about their particular needs.

#### *Responsibilities of Faculty and Staff*

Faculty and staff are responsible for ensuring equity and access in their programs and classrooms. The SDS approved accommodations should not fundamentally alter the academic requirements essential to a course, program of study, or to licensing prerequisites. It is also important to recognize that students with disabilities must reach the same performance standards to fulfill degree requirements as their non-disabled peers. Accommodations provide students with disabilities equal access, not an unfair advantage.

**Instructors are required to accommodate students only after receiving an email from SDS indicating the accommodations that have been approved.**

A statement about services for students with disabilities should be included in the syllabus for each course. Below is a sample syllabus statement:

## Sample Syllabus Statement

*The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and received approval from the Office of Student Disabilities Services (SDS). If SDS has approved your request for accommodations, please make an appointment to meet with me as soon as possible in order to discuss the arrangements for your accommodations.*

*If you have not yet contacted Student Disabilities Services, and would like to request accommodations or have questions, you can make an appointment by calling 215-573-9235. The office is located in the Weingarten Learning Resources Center at Stouffer Commons, 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300.*

*Please visit the SDS website at <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/index.php> (<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>). SDS services are free and confidential.*

## Accommodated Exams

In order to effectively manage the logistics of exam accommodations, instructors are expected to respond promptly to SDS emails requesting information about exam accommodations. Although the exam may not be written until shortly before the exam date, other details are needed by the SDS accommodations staff as early as possible in order to arrange for exam administration and inform students of the arrangements. Professors are encouraged to provide SDS with exams as early as possible prior to the exam to allow SDS time to prepare exam materials. Exams are locked in a secure location until the exams are being administered.

In the event that questions arise during the administration of the exam at SDS, it is important that SDS has contact information for the instructor or TA (phone, text and/or email).

The *Standards for Accommodating Exams for Students with Disabilities* is available on the SDS website at: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/StandardsforAccommodatingExams.php>. This document provides guidelines for accommodated exams that are administered by faculty or their designees.

## Note-taking Announcements

Faculty may be asked to assist SDS by identifying note-takers through an announcement or email to the class and referring interested note-takers

to SDS. A template for the email will be included when SDS contacts faculty regarding note-taker accommodations.

## Accessibility of Information and Course Materials

Faculty should collaborate with their department offices and SDS to ensure that their course materials, presentations, audio-visual materials and exams are available in an accessible format for students with sensory and print disabilities.

## Confidentiality

All disability documentation provided by the student is confidential and remains in the Office of Student Disabilities Services for the purpose of determining reasonable accommodations. **Students may not request accommodations from faculty that have not been approved by SDS. If documentation is provided to the instructor, it should be returned to the student and the student should be referred to SDS.**

Faculty should refrain from discussing a student's disabilities and accommodations in front of the class, in the presence of other students, or to faculty or staff not directly involved in the accommodation process.

## Reconsideration Process

Students may request reconsideration of the SDS accommodation determination through the *SDS Reconsideration Process* found on the website at: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/reconsiderationprocess.php>.

## Concerns and Complaints

The Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Programs is responsible for overseeing the University's implementation of its equal opportunity and nondiscrimination obligations arising under Federal, Commonwealth, and local laws. Any concerns or complaints should be addressed to:

The Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Programs  
Franklin Building  
3451 Walnut Street, Room 421  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6205  
(215) 898-6993 (voice)  
(215) 746-7088 (fax)  
<http://www.upenn.edu/affirm-action/>

## Additional Information

Related policies and procedures are available on the SDS website (<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>) in the section for Faculty and Staff.