

*Disability Support Services*

Information for  
Faculty & Staff

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*Disability Support Services*

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Available in alternative formats upon request  
***MISSION STATEMENT***

Disability Support Services (DSS) is committed to making UAB programs and services accessible to students with disabilities. To prevent discrimination based on disability in all UAB student programs and services, the primary goal of DSS is to ensure an accessible university environment by working with students, faculty, staff and community agencies to provide appropriate accommodations.

This resource guide for faculty and staff has been developed to answer questions about faculty responsibilities to students with disabilities, and to offer recommendations concerning accommodations for students with disabilities. DSS staff members can provide additional information and resources regarding services for students with disabilities.

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## ***LEGAL MANDATES***

The Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on disability. Compliance with these laws requires that universities modify certain academic requirements so “that such requirements do not discriminate or have the effect of discriminating” against qualified students with disabilities.

When qualified students with disabilities request accommodations, UAB has a legal obligation to provide appropriate accommodations. The obligation to accommodate students with disabilities does not require reduction of academic standards or course requirements, nor does it require acceptance of behaviors that pose a direct threat or disrupt the learning environment. If a particular requested academic accommodation is judged to be inappropriate, the University is obligated to consider other reasonable adjustments.

Laws do not require that students with disabilities receive special advantages that place them in a better position to succeed than their classmates. Rather, laws require that students receive equal access to programs and services by removing physical and instructional barriers so students can compete based on their academic abilities. Requirements that are essential to a course or program of study, or to any certification or licensing requirement are not legally discriminatory.

### ***Identifying Students with Disabilities***

Students are responsible for informing UAB of their disability and their need for accommodations and services by presenting Disability Support Services (DSS) with documentation verifying their disability. The documentation must state a specific diagnosis, describe the history and symptoms of the disability, specify which major life activities are substantially limited by the disability, and recommend accommodations to lessen the negative effects of the disability. UAB guidelines for documentation correspond with federal and state guidelines, Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) guidelines for documentation of disabilities. Documentation guidelines are available from the DSS office or on the DSS website.

Students who choose not to self-identify when they enter UAB do not forfeit their right to identify themselves and to request accommodations later. However, UAB is not obligated to provide accommodations and services for students with disabilities until they register with DSS and request academic accommodations.

DSS is responsible for receiving and holding all documentation related to a student's disabilities. By law, faculty and staff do not have access to information related to the diagnosis of a student's disabilities, but may be provided with information related to the services and/or accommodations requested by a student. Generally, no information is released by DSS without the informed, written consent of students. General information on specific disabilities and UAB services for students with disabilities is available from DSS.

Students must be diagnosed with a specific disability to receive services through DSS. Conditions such as test anxiety and pregnancy are not considered disabilities by law. DSS cannot provide services to students with temporary conditions, such as broken arms or hospitalization not related to diagnosed disabilities. Typically, DSS provides services for students with the following disabilities:

- Attention deficit disorders
  - Learning disabilities
  - Mobility disorders
  - Psychiatric disorders
  - Sensory disorders
  - Systemic (health-related) disorders
  - Traumatic brain injury
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## ***ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS***

Providing academic accommodations is essentially a problem-solving process. Academic accommodations should enable students with disabilities to have access to the same programs and services available to other students, and to have their academic performance evaluated without the limiting effects of a disability.

DSS recommends academic accommodations for students, based on documentation from the physician, psychologist, or other licensed professional that diagnosed the student's disability. DSS also investigates accommodations that have been used in other educational settings. DSS staff members meet individually with students to discuss accommodation needs: accommodations are considered on a case-by-case basis, as required by law.

DSS issues accommodation letters after documentation of a student's disability has been reviewed and accepted. So, students who present accommodation letters to instructors are recognized by UAB as students with disabilities, and are entitled to services under UAB policies. If students identify themselves as disabled to instructors, but do not have accommodation letters from DSS, they are NOT eligible for services under UAB policies. Faculty members are not responsible for providing accommodations that are not requested through DSS. Faculty members should not address accommodation needs in the absence of a request from Disability Support Services.

Instructors should include a statement similar to one of the following in their course syllabus and repeat it during the first class meeting:

If you are registered with Disability Support Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability but have not contacted Disability Support Services, please call 934-4205 or visit DSS at 516 Hill University Center.

Students who may need course accommodations are welcome to make an appointment to see me during office hours. Students with disabilities must be registered with Disability Support Services, 516 HUC, and provide an accommodation request letter before receiving academic adjustments.

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## ***Accommodation Letters***

It is the student's responsibility to deliver accommodation letters to each instructor in whose course the student is requesting accommodations, and to discuss methods for providing the requested academic accommodations. However, some students with disabilities may not deliver those letters to their instructors until some time after the beginning of the semester. Instructors are not obligated to provide accommodations until they have received accommodation letters. If a student delivers an accommodation letter to his/her instructor immediately preceding an assignment or exam, the instructor may not be able to arrange an optimal accommodation. However, instructors should "do the best you can" in providing academic adjustments on short notice.

Instructors should sign and return the second page of the accommodation letter, confirming their intent to provide the accommodations recommended by DSS. If instructors have questions or concerns about implementing accommodations, they should contact DSS staff members as soon as possible. If DSS is not contacted, instructors will be considered to have agreed to provide the recommended accommodations. Policies concerning DSS accommodation letters are included in Section 3.

Accommodation letters delineate all services for which a student is *eligible*. Students are responsible for discussing with their instructors which accommodations they intend to actually *use* in each class.

## ***Providing Academic Accommodations***

Providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities is a collaborative effort between the student and his/her instructor. For example, extended time for exams should be arranged to match both the student's and the instructor's schedules. A student might start a test before the rest of the class, finish a test after the rest of the class, or take a test in two halves at two different times. Extended time adjustments should be appropriate and efficient for both the student and the instructor.

The same is true for reduced-distraction settings for exams. The instructor should arrange a location close to the regular classroom (with a minimum of distractions), so the instructor is available if the student has questions. Reduced-distraction settings do not have to be private, isolated locations and testing does not have to coincide with the scheduled exam time. Instructors should, if at all possible, provide academic adjustments in their own departments. DSS has very limited space and personnel to administer exams, and does so primarily under special circumstances (such as a student's need for a Brailled test or a scribe).

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## ***Examples of Academic Accommodations***

DSS may recommend the following academic accommodations, based on appropriate documentation and individual class requirements.

Testing Accommodations - Testing accommodations may include extended time, reduced-distraction testing situations, orally administered tests, readers, and/or scribes. Tests are administered in each department, if possible. Students should discuss testing accommodations with their instructors at the beginning of each term. DSS exam proctoring policies are in Section 3.

Tape Recording, Note Taking Assistance, and Scribes - Students may tape record class lectures and/or request peer note takers. DSS can provide carbonless paper for note takers. DSS also will provide scribes for students requiring such assistance. Policies for tape recording, note takers, and scribes are in Section 3.

Reading Assistance - Students may request alternate format materials and/or readers through DSS. In addition, text-to-voice software is available in Stern Library, Lister Hill Library, ETS, and several campus computer labs.

Sign Language Interpreting and Real-Time Captioning Services – Deaf and hard of hearing students may be provided with licensed interpreters or qualified captionists for class sessions, class-related activities, and UAB-related events.

Academic Classroom Aids – Students may use calculators, dictionaries, word processors, spell checkers, and/or grammar checkers for in-class and out-of-class work.

Alternate Formats for Assignments – Assignments may be submitted in formats other than those stated in course requirements, if appropriate (i.e., on cassette tape rather than in writing).

Personal services are not considered to be academic accommodations. Examples of personal services include tutoring, transportation, and attendant care.

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## ***Grievance Process***

According to federal law and UAB policies, instructors cannot deny accommodations for students who present accommodation letters from DSS without input from the student, DSS, department or college administrators, and/or other appropriate UAB administrators. The purpose of the grievance process is to arrive at a final determination of what accommodations are appropriate for a specific situation if accommodations recommended by DSS are questioned.

Questions and concerns regarding accommodations for students with disabilities should be directed initially to DSS. If DSS staff members cannot resolve issues involving academic accommodations, a meeting with the faculty member, DSS staff members, the Director of Student Services, and the student (if appropriate) is the second step in resolving disagreements. If an agreement concerning an accommodation request is not reached at this point, the final step in the conflict resolution process involves the dissenting party filing a formal appeal. During the appeal process, the student is entitled to receive accommodations recommended by DSS.

An appeal of accommodation requests should clearly state the basis and rationale for the objection and should be transmitted as a confidential document to the Vice President for Student Affairs, 503 Hill University Center. The Vice President for Student Affairs will consider the appeal and render a final decision, which will be communicated to all parties.

## ***Steps in the Grievance Process***

1. Consult with appropriate DSS staff member(s).
2. Meet with DSS staff members, the Director of Student Services, and student (if appropriate).
3. Submit a written appeal to the Vice President for Student Affairs.

*Reminder: During the Grievance Process, the student is entitled to receive the accommodations recommended by DSS.*

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## ***DSS POLICIES***

### ***Accommodation Letters***

Students should deliver accommodation letters to instructors at the beginning of each semester. Students may deliver accommodation letters at any time during the semester; however, instructors are not obligated to provide accommodations until they receive accommodation letters. Accommodations are not retroactive: instructors are not obligated to adjust grades on assignments or exams administered before an accommodation letter was delivered and discussed.

The following steps describe the accommodation process:

1. The student meets with a DSS staff member to discuss accommodation requests.
2. DSS prepares an accommodation letter to the instructor of each course.
3. The student hand-delivers each accommodation letter.
4. The student discusses with the instructor how accommodations will be implemented.
5. The student schedules test accommodations with the instructor approximately one week before each scheduled exam.

### ***Exam Proctoring Policy & Procedures***

Faculty who wish to have their exams proctored at DSS need to complete and return a test proctoring form (these are provided by the student to the professor). DSS is not responsible for picking up exams to be given at DSS. Students must arrange delivery of exams to DSS with their instructors. *All exams must be delivered to DSS at least two working days prior to the administration of the exam.*

Students cannot leave the test area once an exam has begun, unless they are eligible for accommodations that allow for movement or breaks.

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Students cannot take any materials into the test area, unless approved by the instructor.

DSS only administers exams at the dates and times indicated by the instructor: instructors must contact DSS to approve any changes to dates and times.

Exams will be returned by DSS staff members within one working day of completion.

### ***Excused Absence Policy***

Some students with disabilities may have an accommodation to “excuse a reasonable number of disability-related absences.” This accommodation is recommended **ONLY** when a student’s disabilities make it impossible to attend class because of debilitating illness, hospitalization, or other professional intervention. Excused absences, like all accommodations, are designed to provide equal access for students with disabilities: excused absences are **NOT** designed to permit students to receive credit for classes without demonstrating skills required in those classes.

There is no ‘magic formula’ for the number of excused absences a student with disabilities is allowed in addition to absences allowed all students in the class. The most important factors in determining what is reasonable are the essential skills and required performances of the class. For example, if class information is available in class or through peer notes, textbooks, internet resources, etc. absences may not prevent students with disabilities from missing numerous class sessions and completing class assignments outside of class. If certain requirements can be met **ONLY** in class (such as discussions, oral presentations, or practicum hours), fewer absences can be allowed. The best solution is to talk with the student about class requirements and possible modifications as early in the semester as possible.

Students who miss class because of disability-related absences are responsible for informing instructors that their absences was disability-related, getting notes or other materials from the classes they missed, and arranging to make up any tests or assignments missed. Instructors should talk with the student about the type of assignments missed, the amount of work needed to complete class requirements, and the quality that should be reflected in that work.

When absences prevent students from gaining essential information or completing essential components of a class, instructors can consult with the student and with DSS about options such as a medical withdrawal or grades of I, N, or F.

### ***Note Taker Policy***

Peer note takers are paid \$60.00 per semester for providing class notes. There are two ways students can obtain a peer note taker. The student can approach a classmate with the request, or instructors can ask for a volunteer from the class (by simply stating that someone in the class can be paid for providing a copy of their class notes). When a class member volunteers, instructors should introduce the volunteer to the student privately, without mentioning that the student has a disability. A note taker needs to be someone who attends class regularly, takes legible notes, and can give notes to the student in a timely manner.

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## ***Readers/Scribes Policy***

Readers are used for materials that are not available in alternate formats and for materials that are too difficult to access via adaptive computer software. Readers do not provide interpretations or explanations of documents read.

Scribes are used to transcribe oral information. Scribes write, word for word, the message that they are instructed to transcribe. Scribes can only question their sources for clarification of information they may have heard incorrectly.

Readers and scribes are hired, scheduled, and paid through DSS. Students may not arrange for readers or scribes without DSS permission.

## ***Sign Language Interpreters/Captionists Policy***

Sign language interpreters and captionists provide services for classroom instruction (e.g., lecture, discussion, lab, etc.) and academic requirements (e.g., group meetings, internships, teacher-student conferences, etc.). Interpreters facilitate communication between deaf/hard of hearing and hearing individuals. Interpreters use a specific language to communicate the spoken word to deaf clients. Interpreters may use their voice to communicate sign language to hearing persons. However, some deaf individuals prefer to voice for themselves. Captionists provide accurate, real-time transcripts for hard of hearing students. Captionists also may provide unedited transcripts as needed. Captionists use a court reporting stenograph machine that is linked to a laptop computer. Hard of hearing students can read the live transcript of oral communication in the classroom.

Interpreters and captionists are not tutors, instructors, note takers or counselors, and should not engage in these roles. Ultimately, interpreters and captionists are responsible for ensuring that the environment is appropriate and conducive for interpreting.

### ***Guidelines for Instructors using Interpreters***

Interpreters usually sit in the front of the classroom, where the deaf student can watch both the interpreter and the instructor.

Interpreters have to adjust to your presentation style and rate. It may be necessary for interpreters to ask you to repeat something or pause a moment to communicate your message clearly.

Speak directly to the deaf student in your normal voice and rate.

Don't say, "Tell him..." or "Ask her...". Just talk directly to the student and the interpreter or captionist will interpret.

Don't have discussions with interpreters or captionists unless you need to discuss how something will be communicated.

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Allow for a 5 minute break every 40-45- minutes, if possible.

In group discussions, it is imperative that only one person talks at a time. Group discussions done in a circle or semicircle are ideal: this allows the deaf student to identify who is talking.

Please inform interpreters in advance if there are audio-visuals to be used, especially if you are using a videotape. All videotapes should be closed captioned.

Don't ask interpreters for their opinions regarding the deaf student. Interpreters are not allowed to provide information about students or disabilities.

*Above all, interact with deaf/hard of hearing students as you would with any student.*

### ***Tape Recording Policy***

Students who are eligible to tape record class lectures should furnish their own recorder and cassettes. All tapes are for private use only: the information is to be treated as confidential and may not be shared with any other student, organization, media, or other entity. Failure to abide by the tape recording policy may result in a charge of academic misconduct.

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## ***INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES***

### ***Creating an accessible environment***

Include a statement about disability accommodations in your syllabi. If possible, have syllabi and reading lists available before class begins. Early access to syllabi assists students who need different formats for class materials (e.g., Braille, audiotape, sign language interpreters, etc.).

In your first class meeting, invite students with disabilities to discuss accommodation needs with you. Remember students with disabilities that request accommodations must register with DSS. If a student requests accommodation but does not have accommodation letters from DSS, refer the student to DSS (516 Hill University Center, 934-4205).

Use web pages and e-mail to make course information available. Text-based web pages are easier to navigate with assistive computer technology.

If possible, arrange your room in a circular or semi-circular manner. If you cannot rearrange furniture, leave a few front row seats open for distractable students, deaf students who use interpreters/captionists, and students who use service animals.

If your classroom or building is not accessible to students with mobility disorders, call DSS as soon as possible (934-4205). If field trips are required, verify that transportation and off-campus sites are physically accessible.

Respect the privacy of students with disabilities; avoid mentioning accommodations in front of others (i.e., "John, will you need an accommodation for this exam?" or "Students who need extended time for exams please leave the room now."). If you need to address a disability-related issue immediately, try conferring with the student in the least distracting manner possible.

Avoid fostering dependence in students with disabilities.

When in doubt about if and how to assist students with disabilities, ask them! If your offer of assistance is declined, do not insist on 'helping'.

Above all, interact with students with disabilities in the same manner as other students.

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## *Teaching accessibly*

Face the class when speaking. Many students with hearing or attention disorders depend on seeing your face for information.

Repeat or re-word lengthy or complex oral directions.

Always try to preview and summarize content during each class session.

If you use a board to describe information, complete some examples in advance. Or examples can be presented by using overhead projectors, power point, or web sites.

Make copies of handouts available in large print. DSS can enlarge documents and convert documents to other formats (such as audiotape or Braille) with advanced notice. Remember, it is important that students with disabilities receive information in a timely manner, comparable to non-disabled classmates. This is not always possible, but UAB has an obligation to make every effort to do

Read aloud information presented on the board or overhead. Also, try to have printed copies of board or overhead information available.

Repeat questions and comments from class members. Repetition affords students with sensory and cognitive disabilities an opportunity to clarify and/or gain information that may have been missed.

Provide study guides for quizzes and exams, or provide guidelines for studying effectively (i.e., "Concentrate on lecture notes, and chapters 1, 2, and 5, in your text.").

If possible, provide alternative ways to complete assignments. For example, give students an option of taking 5 quizzes or completing 5 brief essays.

Provide timely feedback on assignments and tests. Students retain information better when the information is current.

Always try to present key terms and concepts visually as well as orally.

Stress the importance of time management, study skills, and organization.

Students with disabilities do not need sympathy; they need academic modifications to meet the expectations of an academic environment.

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