

Advisors Corner

Advising Students with a Disability: What to Ask and How to Help

Sometimes students are reluctant to disclose that they have a disability; they fear that the advisor will be a future faculty member and will view them negatively. Inviting the student to share opens the door and can help put the student at ease. When meeting with an advisee we recommend asking the student general questions to help you learn more about the person. Here are a few possible questions that will help you become more informed about a student and may help you become aware if the student has a disability.

Is there anything special that would be helpful for me to know about you, for example special issues or circumstances related to family, outside work, assistance you received in high school or another college? What do you consider your strengths and challenges academically? What has helped you deal with the challenges you face in school?

Disability Support Services will be presenting at the Academic Advising Workshop on Monday, September 23rd at Buchanan Alumni House, our session will address this and additional questions you might have about advising students with disabilities. The tentative time for our presentation is 10:00 a.m. You can register for the Workshop on the CLAS Advising Center's website umaine.edu/clasadvisingcenter/facultystaff-advising-workshop-fall-2013/.

Should I Refer Students, Continued From Page 1

Jeremy: "I really don't have the time to make an appointment and go over there, can't you make an exception in this one case and give me the accommodation?"

Professor: "Jeremy, my policy is that I don't provide copies of the Power Points to all students. I have a number of reasons for this policy, and to alter it would be a disability accommodation. I prefer that all accommodation requests go through the Disability Support Services office."

Thoughts from DSS:

Many faculty make arrangements for their students during the year. Clarifying for the student the difference between a Universal Design component of your class, an exception that you are willing to make, and an approved disability accommodation is helpful to all parties involved. As representatives of the University of Maine we encourage you to be mindful of these differences and be cautious about your language when discussing "arrangements" versus "accommodations" when students approach you with requests.

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Disability Support Services serves UMaine **students** with a disability. For **faculty and staff** disability services and accommodations, please contact Bonita Grindle at the Office of Equal Opportunity, 207.581.1227 or bgrindle@maine.edu.



Fall 2013

The UMaine Disabilities Insider

Disability Support Services

Welcome to the fall edition of our biannual Disabilities Insider Newsletter. Things frequently change in regard to disability law and accommodation services and we are endeavoring to keep you updated on access issues that affect your students and your classes.



Should I Refer Students to DSS or Can I Provide Accommodations on My Own? Some Scenarios to Guide You

Conversation 1: Testing Tribulations

Sally: "Professor I have a disability and it always takes me longer to finish essay tests; can I have extra time to finish the tests in your class?"

Professor: "In order to get disability accommodations you need to meet with Disability Support Services on campus and they will prepare letters that inform all your faculty about the accommodations you need. In my class though, I allow anyone who can't finish the tests during the regular class additional time. If this meets your needs I am certainly willing to make this arrangement with you for tests in my class. Please remember this is an arrangement for my class though, and won't necessarily apply to any of your other classes. Other faculty might require an accommodation letter from Disability Support Services before they would give a student additional time to finish tests."

Conversation 2: Providing Power Points and Taping Class

Jeremy: "Professor, would it be okay if I tape record your class so that I can listen to it when I review my notes later and make sure I didn't miss anything?"

Professor: "Sure, I have no problem with you recording my class. With all the cell phones, digital recorders and smart pens available, there are probably a number of students already recording the class that I'm unaware of. Thanks for asking."

Jeremy: "By the way, I also need copies of all your Power Point Slides because I have a disability. Could you email them to me before each class?"

Professor: "Since this request is specifically related to a disability, you need to meet with the staff at Disability Support Services so that they can approve the accommodation. They will prepare letters for all your professors and can help you get access to materials you need in all your classes."

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umaine.edu/disability

TESTING TALK SCENARIOS

You are handed a Testing Accommodation letter by a student with a disability. Now what? This may represent difficult communication on the part of the student and some need for planning by the faculty. Let's look at some real scenarios and solutions.

Connie has a severe anxiety disorder and rushes up to her professor in the hallway and thrusts her accommodation letter in his hands. He understands right away that she is nervous and reassures her, "No problem Connie, I have handled lots of accommodation requests. Unfortunately, I have to dash to a meeting right now but we can talk later." Connie is thrilled to have the letter delivery behind her and moves quickly away.

We encourage students to deliver their accommodation letters during a quiet time when they can converse with their faculty privately about the testing plan. Office hours are ideal or making an appointment. If a student tries to deliver their letter to you at a very busy time, it is certainly appropriate to ask them to see you during office hours to discuss the logistics of the accommodation. In the above scenario, Connie has delivered her letter but has no clear idea of where and when she is meant to take her tests for the class. She is also unclear as to who needs to take responsibility for arranging the later "talk" about this. Given her disability she is likely to remain quiet and invisible, assuming that she delivered the letter and await communication from the professor.

William has ADHD and struggles with executive functioning skills such as organization, planning, and prioritizing tasks. He waits till after class has ended and all the students have departed to approach his professor with the accommodation letter. Unexpectedly, he gets the ball passed back to him. The professor says "Sure, I am happy to give you the extra time you need, just remind me a week before each test that you need an accommodation." William agrees while thinking that keeping himself organized is not his strong suit and now he needs to remind his professor of things too.

This is a somewhat controversial topic in the area of disability accommodations. One view is that college students are adults and so asking them to be responsible to remind professors of need for each test is not unreasonable. The other perspective is that the student has already gone through numerous steps to get the accommodations including, identifying his disability to DSS, providing documentation for review, meeting with DSS staff for accommodation approval and then delivering the letter to the professor. Does it then become an unfair burden to the student to require them to "ask" over and over again when all the other students just need to "show up" for the test?

In scenarios like William's, the better outcome is usually achieved with a bit of advanced planning. Given the rising numbers of students with disabilities it is likely that professors will be faced with some kind of testing accommodation request. To plan ahead and clarify the availability of alternative testing space and proctors would then allow a clear one time exchange of information with the student about where and when you expect them to report for the test. The student then has the responsibility to arrive at the designated location on time with neither party needing to remind the other.

Emily has Aspergers Syndrome, which affects her fine motor movements and processing time. She delivers her letter to her professor for testing accommodations and he explains that he has no space or proctor available and would like her to test at DSS in East Annex. Neither of them remembers to complete the *Test Proctoring Form* necessary for reserving a space on the date of the first test. Emily goes to DSS on test day, but they do not have her test or a space and so they send her back to the professor for other arrangements to take the test and receive her accommodations.

DSS is one of many locations for faculty to use when providing testing accommodations. Some other options are testing in a faculty office, a room adjacent to the department office where a secretary or A.A. could proctor, or in their lab. They might even schedule the student's test for an alternative time when proctors and space are more available. If DSS is used, we have a specific procedure when assisting faculty in making their testing accommodations. In the case of Emily, both parties forgot to follow that procedure. Emily still has her disability and is still in need of her testing accommodations.

Faculty are people first and as such have different styles and preferences in regard to implementing disability accommodations. One size does not fit all. We provide these scenario pieces in hopes of encouraging you to be clear and direct with students when you arrange the accommodations. Generally, it is the vague communications that result in adjustments and corrections that are even more time consuming and frustrating to all.

Faculty Questions

and Answers From DSS



Question: A student in my class brought a dog with him to class. The dog doesn't have a vest on and doesn't look like a service dog. Can I ask the student if he has a disability or ask the student to remove the animal from class if they haven't told me they have a disability?

Answer: In general the best course of action is to call Disability Support Services and talk to us about the situation. Under the law an individual with a disability who requires a service animal (a dog) is allowed to bring that animal with them to class and any public area. The ADA regulations state that only 2 questions can be asked of a person with a disability using a service animal. Those 2 questions are: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform. Faculty and staff cannot ask for details about the person's disability, training documentation for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.



The Semester Has Begun. Are Your Documents Accessible?

An obstacle for many students with a print based disability is that the documents provided through First Class or Blackboard are inaccessible to their computer's screen reader. For a document to be accessible, a computer program (such as Natural Reader or Jaws) must be able to recognize that there are words present, and if a document is created with an image base—say, a photocopy or scan—than the computer's screen reader will not be able to speak it out loud for the student. Please be sure to check your class's documents to see if they are accessible before they are shared with the class. If you have concerns that your documents might not be accessible, our website umaine.edu/disability and the UMaine IT Accessibility site umaine.edu/itaccessibility have information about creating accessible documents. Michael Dunn, on the DSS staff is also available to answer questions you may have about accessible files at 581.2317.

