

# Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

## POLICY ON ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

"The University of Western Ontario is dedicated to the advancement of learning ... and .. seeks to provide an environment of free and creative enquiry.... As part of our commitment to excellence, we seek to recognize and remove the obstacles faced by traditionally under-represented groups in order to facilitate their access to and advancement at Western." (Leadership in Learning, pp.3, 4). The University also accepts that education is defined as a "service" under the Human Rights Code of Ontario (Section 1) which states that: "Every person has the right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods and facilities, without discrimination because of ... handicap." The University, therefore, recognizes its obligation to provide reasonable academic accommodation to students with disabilities where the accommodation can be implemented without compromising the academic integrity of the course or program. The provisions of this Policy do not apply if the University determines that the necessary pedagogical, human, physical or financial resources are not and cannot be made available to accommodate a particular disability.

In its efforts to accommodate disabilities appropriately, the approach adopted by the University is collaborative, involving the student requesting the accommodation, the instructor, department (or school or program where applicable), and/or Faculty which provides the accommodation, and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in the Student Development Centre which coordinates the request for and provision of accommodation.

The University also recognizes that the process of requesting, granting, and making arrangements for academic accommodation imposes certain responsibilities on all those involved.

**The Responsibility of the Student:** Students seeking accommodation must make timely, formal requests and provide relevant medical or psychological documentation sufficient to allow the University to determine whether they qualify for academic accommodation and what kind of accommodation might be required. Such requests must identify the courses for which accommodation is being sought and must be accompanied by (1) any available medical or psychological documentation of the diagnosed disability, (2) documentation of previous academic accommodation from the educational institutions that provided it and (3) any other information that SSD may give notice it requires. Students are also responsible for following SSD's instructions relating to the implementation of an accommodation. Failure to provide the required documentation in a timely fashion or failure to follow SSD's instructions may delay or prevent the implementation of an academic accommodation for a particular course.

In making formal requests to SSD, students are deemed to consent to the release, by SSD to individual faculty members, of information about the nature of their diagnosed disability. This information should be sufficient to enable faculty to engage in informed discussions with the student and SSD on the manner and extent to which the student's needs, arising out of the diagnosed disability, can and should be accommodated. The student must also be prepared to work with SSD and the instructor in developing an appropriate accommodation.

**The Responsibility of the Instructor, Chair<sup>1</sup>, Dean<sup>2</sup>:** The decision whether to accept an accommodation suggested by SSD rests with the instructor in the first instance. The instructor, Chair or

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<sup>1</sup>A reference to "Chair" throughout this document is to be interpreted:

For Faculties with Departmental Structure, as the Chair of the Department.

For the Faculty of Education, as the Program Chair.

For the Faculty of Health Sciences, as the Director of the relevant School.

For interdisciplinary undergraduate programs, i.e., Administrative & Commercial Studies, Environmental Studies, International & Comparative Studies, as the program director.

For graduate programs, as the Graduate Program Chair.

Note: For Faculties without Departmental structure not covered above, the levels are instructor and Dean.

<sup>2</sup>A reference to "Dean" throughout this document is to be interpreted:

For all graduate programs, as the Vice-Provost (Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies).

For the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

Dean may reject a suggested accommodation only if it would compromise the academic integrity of the course or program. All those involved in making the decision must recognize their obligation to accommodate where possible, and their obligation to respect both the privacy and dignity of the student, as well as the academic integrity of the programs.

It is the responsibility of the instructor to identify the essential academic requirements of the particular course or program so that the discussions are informed properly. Where possible, it is recommended that instructors provide SSD with a summary of these essential academic requirements prior to or at the beginning of classes. The instructor is responsible for working with SSD to determine the manner and extent to which the student's needs, arising out of the diagnosed disability, can and should be accommodated. It is equally the responsibility of the instructor to question a suggested accommodation if the instructor believes it would compromise the academic integrity of the course or program. In such circumstances, instructors are encouraged to suggest alternative accommodations, where appropriate.

**The Responsibility of Services for Students with Disabilities:** It is the role of SSD to provide information and advice to the University community concerning the provision of services to students with disabilities, including academic accommodation. SSD will receive documentation from students concerning their disabilities to be held in confidence. These documents may provide the basis for advice offered to instructors, departments or Faculties concerning the accommodation to be offered. It is the responsibility of SSD to satisfy itself that the student has an assessed disability and that the disability requires some form of accommodation. An accommodation suggested by SSD will be based on its determination of the student's needs and on any course and program information provided to it. SSD shall provide sufficient information to the instructor, department, or Faculty about the nature of the student's diagnosed disability and consequent needs to permit an informed discussion of the manner and extent to which those needs can and should be accommodated in light of the essential academic requirements of the course or program.

**Faculty Advisors:** A panel of faculty advisors who are specialists in disabilities will be appointed by the Provost. These individuals shall serve as specialized consultants to the university community with respect to disability issues. Their role will be to provide advice on request to SSD or the instructor, concerning ways to accommodate a particular disability. The procedures for appointing the faculty advisors are as follows:

1. In consultation with the relevant departments, the Provost will appoint a group of faculty advisors, chosen on the basis of their expertise in different disabilities. The areas of expertise shall include, but not be limited to: motor impairment; visual impairment; speech and hearing impairment; learning disabilities; psychological and psychiatric disorders.
2. In the event that a specialist in a particular area is not available among the faculty of the University, the Provost may appoint an individual external to the University on an ad hoc basis.
3. Faculty advisors will be appointed for a two-year term, renewable.

### **PROVISION OF INFORMATION**

All material released by SSD shall be equally available to the student, instructor, Chair and Dean.

### **PROCEDURES**

In applying the policy, the following procedures normally will be followed:

1. Students who wish to be considered for formal academic accommodation on the grounds of disability should make their requests in writing to the Coordinator for Services for Students with Disabilities. The request must identify the courses for which accommodation is being sought and outline the nature of the disability. It must be accompanied by the documentation prescribed above (see Responsibility of the Student). In the absence of appropriate medical or psychological documentation, the student must arrange for assessment of the disability. SSD may assist with these arrangements but cannot guarantee the timely accommodation of students who make requests but have not been assessed professionally. Students should also, where possible, provide copies of the course outlines for the courses for which accommodation is being requested.

2. To ensure that SSD has sufficient time to review the requests and to make arrangements for academic accommodations, students should submit all required documentation to SSD by the following dates:
  - a) incoming first year or transfer students should submit all required documentation to SSD by August 1 or as soon as possible after they receive their offers of admission from the University;
  - b) returning upper-year students should submit all required documentation by August 1 or as soon as possible after registration;
  - c) students requesting accommodation for courses offered in Intersession, Distance Studies, Summer Day and Summer Evening Sessions, should submit all required documentation to SSD at least one month before the start of classes or as soon as possible after they receive their offers of admission;
  - d) graduate students should submit all required documentation to SSD as soon as possible after they receive their offers of admission from the University and accommodation requests for a particular term should be submitted to SSD, with all required documentation, at least one month before the start of a term.

Although exceptions based on individual circumstances will be considered, accommodation cannot be guaranteed in a given term for a student who has not made a timely request.

3. If SSD, after determining that a student has a disability requiring accommodation, proposes to recommend a form of accommodation to the instructor, it will make best efforts to contact the instructor (at minimum, by electronic mail) to discuss essential course or program requirements and possible accommodations, and to give the instructor the opportunity to discuss the appropriateness of the proposed accommodation. Where possible, SSD shall attempt to contact the instructor by the third week of classes in the fall and winter terms and by the end of the first week of classes in Intersession, distance studies, summer day and summer evening sessions. Following discussion with the instructor, or within two weeks of first attempting to contact the instructor where no discussion has yet occurred, SSD, if it remains of the view that accommodation is required, will send a letter to the instructor. The letter should contain (1) a statement as to the documentation on file with SSD; (2) a brief description of the nature of the student's diagnosed disability and consequent needs; (3) a suggested accommodation. A copy of this letter will be sent to the Dean of the student's home Faculty for information and SSD will make a copy available to the student.
4. The student is strongly encouraged to make contact with the instructor to discuss the proposed accommodation at this time. Both instructors and students should approach the question of accommodation as broadly as possible and look at all aspects of the course in considering the most appropriate accommodation.
5. An instructor who agrees with the suggested accommodation shall sign the request and return it to SSD within two days of its receipt.
6. An instructor who cannot agree to the suggested accommodation on the basis that it would compromise the academic integrity of the course or program, shall discuss the matter with the Chair<sup>3</sup>. If the Chair does not agree with the instructor, the accommodation shall be granted and the Chair shall so advise SSD and the student. Otherwise, the instructor and Chair shall consult directly with SSD within one week of the instructor's receipt of the accommodation letter from SSD. This consultation may take the form of a meeting with the Coordinator for SSD and the student.
7. If the Chair agrees with the instructor that the suggested accommodation is not appropriate, and the Chair and SSD are unable to agree on an appropriate alternate accommodation at the consultation, the Chair shall forward copies of all correspondence between SSD and the

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<sup>3</sup>Where there is no Chair or Director, as defined in Footnote #1 above, the instructor shall consult directly with SSD and if the parties are unable to agree, the instructor shall forward all relevant materials to the Dean within the time limits set out above.

instructor and Chair, and any other relevant material, to the Dean of the Faculty within one week of the consultation.

8. The Dean shall review the material and if the Dean does not agree that the suggested accommodation will compromise the academic integrity of the course or program in light of their essential requirements, the Dean shall notify SSD in writing within one week that the accommodation is to be granted, with a copy to the student, the instructor, the Chair, and the Dean of the student's home Faculty. If the Dean agrees that the suggested accommodation will compromise the academic integrity of the course or program in light of their essential requirements, the Dean shall notify SSD in writing within one week that the accommodation is not to be granted, with a copy to the student, the instructor, and the Chair. The student may apply within two weeks of that decision to have an appeal against the decision heard by the Senate Review Board Academic. If additional information has been provided to the Dean by the student or SSD, the Dean shall provide a copy of such information to the instructor and to the Chair, and shall consult with the instructor and Chair before making his or her decision.
9. The Senate Review Board Academic shall follow the procedures set out under Senate policies "Student Academic Appeals" and "Appeals to SRBA", provided that in the case of a conflict between the regulations and procedures set out under those policies and this Policy, the regulations and procedures under this Policy shall prevail. To uphold a decanal refusal, the Senate Review Board Academic must be persuaded that the suggested accommodation or accommodations would compromise the academic integrity of the course or program in light of the essential requirements of that course or program.

If the Dean accepts the accommodation proposed by SSD, the instructor may appeal the decanal decision to the Provost, (or to the Principal in the case of an Affiliated University College). The Provost's (or Principal's) decision is final and not appealable to SRBA.

A copy of the final decision of the University shall be forwarded to the Dean of the student's home Faculty.

10. Because the decisions regarding accommodation may affect a student's progress in an ongoing course, they must be made expeditiously. In the meantime, the accommodation proposed by SSD (see # 3 above) shall be implemented from the date of the letter setting out the accommodation until a final decision has been made by the University (after the disposition of all appeals).
11. Where a student has been accommodated pending the final disposition of all appeals, and such disposition is that accommodation should not be granted, the grade received on any examination, test or assignment completed under the conditions of interim accommodation is to be nullified. Any such examination, test or assignment must then be re-administered without the interim accommodation. If readministration of such examination, test or assignment is not possible, an alternative means of fairly determining the student's course mark must be devised by the instructor and communicated to the student.
12. Where appropriate, SSD will facilitate any special arrangements that need to be made regarding accommodations. In all accommodations involving exams, security procedures must be as stringent as for any other examination.

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**Related policies and Notes:**

The Faculty Handbook on Implementation of this policy is at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_disabilities\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_disabilities_handbook.pdf)

The Services for Students with Disabilities website is at <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>