

Faculty Guidelines on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities **Student Accessibility Services**

NOTE: Academic accommodations are meant to remove barriers faced by students with disabilities in order to “level the playing field” while at the same time maintaining the academic integrity of the program and course curriculum.

1. Letters of Accommodation from Student Accessibility Services

- a) Only students who have been fully assessed by Student Accessibility Services as having a disability will receive a letter requesting academic accommodation. The letter will include the student’s name and student number, the name of an Accessibility Counsellor assigned to the student and reference the human rights code. The letter will outline the *recommended* classroom, assignment, practicum/ field placement, lab, test and exam accommodations *intended to remove barriers and promote the opportunity for the student to fulfill the academic standards of the course.*
- b) Academic accommodations within the context of a specific course should reasonably reflect (but not extend beyond) what is specified in the official Letter of Accommodation. It is not appropriate for a student to negotiate disability-related accommodations beyond those outlined in the letter from Student Accessibility Services. A student’s request for further disability-related accommodation must first be assessed by Student Accessibility Services and communicated in writing to the Course Director. Requests that students may make for special consideration on compassionate grounds due to other extenuating life circumstances are exclusively at the discretion of the Course Director.
- c) Course Directors may also receive a “support letter” from a counsellor in Student Counselling & Development with whom a student has been meeting to deal with any range of issues. **This type of support letter may be given to students with or without disabilities.** This is different from a Letter of Accommodation and has no legal basis. It is intended only to inform course directors (with the student’s consent), that there are extenuating circumstances that might affect the student’s performance in a course. The Course Director is not obliged to follow any suggestions offered in a support letter; it is for the Course Director to *consider*. Again, this letter is not an “official” Letter of Accommodation. See <https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/> for details of services and contact information for Student Counselling & Development.

2. Student Responsibilities

- a) Students registered with Student Accessibility Services are instructed to deliver the letter of accommodation to each of their course directors via email or in person within the first two weeks of class or as early in the term as reasonably possible thereafter.

3. Course Director Responsibilities

- a) Instructors are responsible to implement all needed accommodations and are welcome to connect with Student Accessibility Services with any questions about specific accommodations. Course Directors can email the Accessibility Counsellor listed on a student's letter of accommodation or can email sasinfo@yorku.ca
- b) If a student has submitted a letter of accommodation that outlines the need for additional time or supports or a test or exam, course instructors will ensure that any on-line testing platform, such as Moodle, is changed to ensure that the student received their additional time. Here are the [instructions](#) to do so. Course Directors can also reach out to Alternate Exams by email (altprof@yorku.ca) for assistance with calculating extra time
- c) It is expected that course instructors will *maintain confidentiality and respect the students' right to privacy*. This includes respecting the validity of an accommodation letter from Student Accessibility Services. Any further questions regarding the recommended accommodations should be directed to Student Accessibility Services. It precludes course instructors, teaching assistants, or staff requesting further personal information from the student (e.g. medical/psychological documentation or further 'proof'). Student Accessibility Services gathers relevant medical and psychological documentation to help in their determination of appropriate academic accommodations. Therefore, students do not have to disclose personal information to faculty members.
- d) Where a dispute arises over the appropriateness of a recommended accommodation, it is the Course Directors' responsibility to *demonstrate that such accommodation would undermine the academic standards and integrity of the course*. For example, Course Directors may refuse to waive or substitute a requirement of an oral presentation because they believe it is integral to the standards and integrity of the course that students demonstrate the oral presentation skills. Or, a course director may argue that all students must participate in group-work as such capacity is essential to the meeting academic standards; and if they can't, they may forfeit the grade for participation. Based on Ontario human rights legislation, the Course Director must be prepared to support the argument that the requirement in dispute is an *essential, vital, and core requirement of the course and program of study*. Otherwise, the student must be accommodated.
- e) Queries about how to accommodate students fairly should be discussed with the Accessibility Counsellor named on the official Letter of Accommodation. At times, determining appropriate academic accommodation may require a discussion that includes the student, the Accessibility Counsellor, and the course director. *It is strongly advised that course directors not engage directly or exclusively with students on contentious accommodation issues.*
- f) Course Directors should familiarize themselves with the companion document to this one entitled "Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: Recommended Protocols for Faculty".

4. The Role of Student Accessibility Services

- a) Student Accessibility Services works exclusively with students with diagnosed disabilities and Course Directors to establish appropriate academic accommodations to meet the students' individual needs.
- b) Students with or without disabilities can be referred to Student Counselling & Development (Room N110 of the Bennett Centre for Student Services) for confidential personal counseling regarding emotional/psychological issues that may be interfering with their academic performance.

Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
Recommended Protocol for Course Directors
Student Accessibility Services

1. Ensure the link to the [York Senate Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#) is included in all course outlines, or otherwise made available to students in all courses.
2. Review York Senate Policy, this recommended protocol, and “*Student Accessibility Services Faculty Guidelines on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities*” with Teaching Assistants prior to the first day of class.
3. Discuss Senate Policy and Departmental protocol with students in the first week of class.
4. Make an announcement in the first week of class asking students with disabilities to submit Letters of Accommodation issued by *Student Accessibility Services* within the first two weeks of class or as soon as reasonably possible thereafter so that appropriate academic accommodations can be discussed and arranged.
5. Upon receiving a Letter of Accommodation, *in cases where there are multiple or more complex accommodation requirements, or where the Course Director suspects there may be a potential problem or dispute forthcoming*, it is recommended (but not required) that the Course Director draft a written statement indicating:
 - a. The ways in which the recommendations outlined in the letter will be met within the context of a particular course.
 - b. A clear justification/rationale for the denial of any accommodation request(s).In cases of straightforward accommodation requests such as extended time on a test this is not necessary.
6. The Course Director should explain the specific terms of accommodation in the course to the student and the written statement (if one is created) should be sent via e-mail to the student, copied to the student’s Accessibility Counselor in *Student Accessibility Services*.
7. Disputes regarding the terms of accommodation, or *potential* areas of dispute, should be brought forward and resolved in consultation with *Student Accessibility Services* as **early as possible once the course has begun**. To resolve a dispute, it may be necessary to meet with the student and the Accessibility Counselor. When disputes arise it is suggested that the Course Director notify the Undergraduate Program Director just as information.
8. If a dispute or issues involving academic accommodation cannot be resolved in consultation with Accessibility Services, notify the Chair of the Department and/or Undergraduate Program Director (UPD) right away. If the Chair or UPD is unable to resolve the dispute satisfactorily, the Associate Dean or Dean should be consulted who will attempt to resolve the disagreement. At any point in the process, the [York University Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion](#) on campus can be consulted to help mediate the dispute.
9. Keep records of all correspondence regarding academic accommodation.