Educator Resources

University of Oklahoma

Disability Resource Center
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Accommodations

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Accommodation Notification Procedure

Accommodations are used to equalize the educational opportunity for students who encounter barriers due to disabilities. Students must self-identify to the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit documentation with requested accommodations. Documentation should provide enough information to illustrate the connection to a barrier and the requested accommodation.

Instructors of record receive memorandums of accommodations to their OU email accounts. A separate email will be received for each student requesting accommodations in a course.

Common Accommodations include note takers; exams – extended testing time and/or reduced distraction environment; use of word processor in classroom; audio recording lectures; sign language interpreter; real time transcription; captioned videos; reader and/or scribe for exams; other reasonable accommodations to provide an equal opportunity for the student.
Accommodation Descriptions

Note takers—In most situations, a system of peer volunteer note takers is used at the University. With the student's permission, the faculty member is contacted to assist in identifying a volunteer note taker in class. The DRC will provide two-part carbonless (NCR) paper for use by the note taker. It is the student's responsibility to pick up this NCR paper from the DRC and deliver it to the note taker. Students are expected to take their own notes in class and to use the notes from the note taker as a supplementary set of notes to compare and ensure that students are getting the information correct. Note takers are not a substitute for class attendance.

Lecture Recording—Students may also wish to audio record class lectures. Students are expected to take their own notes in class and to use the notes from the note taker as a supplementary set of notes to compare with their own notes. Lecture recording not a substitute for class attendance.

Sign Language Interpreter—The DRC will coordinate interpreter services on campus. We strive to provide the highest quality accommodations by hiring qualified interpreters.

Class Transcription—The DRC will coordinate real time captioning services on campus. We strive to provide the highest quality accommodations by hiring qualified transcriptionists.

Testing Accommodations—Alternative testing is provided to allow a student to accurately demonstrate his/her knowledge as opposed to measuring the impact of the disability. Test-proctoring services are available between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Students are responsible for notifying the instructor and making arrangements for delivery and return of the tests. Tests can be delivered to the DRC office by the instructor, campus mail, fax, e-mail, or the student and returned by instructor pick-up, fax, e-mail, or the student. Tests are normally administered during the same time the rest of the class is taking the test unless there are extenuating circumstances. Any rescheduling must be approved by the instructor and the DRC staff. If a change in a test format is required as a reasonable accommodation, the DRC staff will work with the student and instructor to discuss appropriate formats.

Equipment—Students may require the use of specialized classroom equipment for seating, word processing or other adaptive technology. This may include the student utilizing a personal laptop to take notes or access course content. In addition, the DRC is equipped with computers with speech synthesis and speech recognition, scanners, assistive listening devices, DVD players, and a CCTV. Upon request, specific furnishing can be placed in the classrooms for those students who cannot use the existing seating.
Accommodation Descriptions

**Assistive Technology**—Assistive Technology (AT), reduces barriers to access, thus providing students with disabilities the capability of handling a wider range of activities independently. AT increases the access of users with disabilities to the resources available through computers and other electronic hardware, including information on the internet, assistance with alternative text formats, audible presentation of visual information, etc. For example, a screen reader speaks the information on a computer, which allows a student who is blind or visually impaired to access the information.

**Alternative Text Accommodations**—Alternative text accommodations are approved for students with qualified reading disabilities. Alternative text includes electronic PDF, Word, other electronic files, audio books, large print format, and Braille.

Alternative text accommodations are used for textbooks, course handouts, and any other print materials used in a course.

For textbooks, students have some online resources that may enable them to download an electronic format of a book. If this option is not available for an instructor’s text, students may purchase or rent the book as normal and submit an e-text request to the DRC. The DRC contacts the publisher for an electronic copy. If a copy is not available from the publisher, the DRC solicits permission to scan the book into an electronic format. The student must give up his or her book for a time, the binding must be cut from the book, the book is scanned, and finally the book is re-bound and given back to the student. This request process can take anywhere from a few hours to several weeks.

For in class handouts, the instructor is responsible for ensuring documents are accessible. This can mean creating an electronic copy usable with a screen reader for a student who is blind; it could be that a student needs a copy with a larger font size. There are various different formats which may be needed based on the functional impact of the student’s disability.

It is recommended that instructors create their course content in accessible formats. Resources on creating these formats are available through the DRC Educators Resource page.

**Courtesy Services**—The DRC provides courtesy services when appropriate. Courtesy services are temporary, based on the duration of the impairment. This typically occurs when a student suffers a temporary impairment, such as a broken arm or pregnancy, which would prevent them from accessing education in their usual manner.
Facilitating Accommodation Requests

The DRC notifies instructors of specific accommodations via e-mail to their OU e-mail accounts, but will only do so at the student’s request. In order to submit a request for instructor notification, students visit the DRC website http://drc.ou.edu and select “Semester Accommodation Request” from the menu. Students select accommodations for which they have been approved and then submit. This process must be completed each semester and for each course in order to receive accommodations. Students are encouraged to be self-advocates and are expected to identify themselves to the instructor and discuss the specific accommodations authorized by the DRC.

Note takers—Identifying a Volunteer Note Taker—In most situations, a system of peer volunteer note takers is used for students with disabilities whose documentation supports note taking as an accommodation. With the student’s permission, the DRC staff contacts the instructor of record with a request to assist in identifying a volunteer note taker in class. The DRC provides two-part carbonless (NCR) paper for the note taker’s use. It is the DRC student’s responsibility to pick up this paper from the Center and deliver it to the assigned note taker. Students may also wish to audio record the class lectures. DRC students are also expected, to the best of their ability, to take their own notes in class and to use the note taker’s notes as a supplementary set of notes for comparison. Note takers are not a substitute for class attendance. Educators can use a number of means to secure volunteer note taker: (1) The educator may already know students in class who can serve as note takers; (2) After observing students in class for a few days, the educator may observe a student who may be able to serve as an effective note taker; (3) the faculty member can make an announcement in class asking for volunteers. A public announcement may be handled in the following manner:

"Who expects to do well in class? Who takes notes as a means of recalling information to use as a study guide? Who is satisfied with the quality of their notes? We need a volunteer note taker for the class. Note takers often say their class attendance and the quality of their notes improves when serving as a note taker. Students who raised their hands, indicating that they are effective note takers, please see me after class to discuss this volunteer opportunity."

Once the note taker has been identified, the faculty member introduces the DRC student and the note taker and assure that confidentiality is maintained by all parties. Students should exchange contact information and make arrangements for the receipt of the notes at the end of each class period. It is the DRC student’s responsibility to notify the DRC staff if there are obstacles with the note taking service.

Lecture Recording—Audio recording lectures as an accommodation—Students with verified disabilities are allowed to audio record classes as an accommodation. According to the US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, the audio recording of classroom sessions as an accommodation for students with disabilities may not be restricted. It is specifically addressed under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The legal reference, found in the Code of Federal Regulations 34CFR104.44 (b) for Section 504 reads as follows:

Section 104.44 Academic Adjustments
(b) Other rules. A recipient (college) to which this subpart applies may not impose upon handicapped students other rules, such as the prohibition of tape recorders in classrooms or of guide dogs in campus buildings, that have the effect of limiting the participation of handicapped students in the recipient’s education program or activity.

While students with disabilities who need it as an accommodation must be allowed to audio record classes, they may be required to sign an agreement which indicates that the recordings will not be sold or used for any other purpose than their own educational needs. Please work with the DRC to facilitate this agreement.
Student Agreement for Audio Recording Classes

I, _____________________________, agree that I will not copy or release any audio recording or transcription or otherwise hinder the ability of my professors to obtain a copyright on class material I have taped. I will use the recorded information solely for my educational needs.

____________________________________                          _____________
Student’s Signature                                                       Date
Facilitating Accommodation Requests

Sign Language Interpreter—Communicating with students who are deaf or hard of hearing who use sign language

- Make sure you have the student's attention before communicating directly to him/her.
- Look and talk directly to the student, not the interpreter when interacting.
- Speak at a normal rate and volume.
- All deaf people do not lip read but they do depend on your facial expressions and body language to convey the message.
- Most people understand less than 50% of information when they lip read alone.
- Be aware of lighting in the classroom. Low lighting, windows behind the speaker and back lighting often make it difficult to see clearly.
- Do not over emphasize your speech. Lip reading is best when the speaker talks naturally.
- Repeat questions from the audience. The interpreter or student who lip reads may not have been able to understand from their vantage point.
- It is appropriate when communicating one on one to ask if the information is understood. If not, then explaining in a different manner or point of view maybe helpful. Making office hour appointments or use of e-mail to explain concepts is suggested.
- Use of the board and other visual aids such as power point are useful.
- Students who are hearing impaired, depending on the severity of the hearing loss and life experience, have differing skills in the area of writing and comprehension of the English language.
- Interpreters accompany the student to facilitate communication. They are not responsible for the student's attendance, work ethic or actions.

Real Time Transcription—Communicating with students who are deaf or hard of hearing who use a Real Time Transcriptionist —A Real Time Transcriptionist is a trained professional with specialized equipment to facilitate and ensure that deaf or hard of hearing students have access to the spoken word.

How does this accommodation work?
Verbal interactions and presentation of information is recorded by the transcriptionist with specialized equipment that interfaces with a software program on a Laptop computer.
Accommodation provided by the Real Time Transcriptionist is marginally delayed as it is processed through the related software technology.

Is there a special way to work with this accommodation?
Allow time for the student to respond to questions as they need time to read what others have heard before replying.
Speak directly to the student rather than the transcriptionist so your communication will reflect that you’re directly addressing the student.
Listen attentively and wait for the student to finish speaking/responding before making further comments to allow the student time to read your response.

Does the transcriptionist have specific needs?
The transcriptionist will need to be seated directly beside the student.
Whenever possible provide the transcriptionist with course terminology in advance to build a dictionary and promote accuracy in providing the accommodation.
Facilitating Accommodation Requests

Testing Accommodations—If test proctoring services are required as an accommodation, it is essential that you complete the Test Proctoring Form so our staff will have all of the information available to maintain the integrity of the exam process. The most up-to-date version of the form can be found online at: http://www.ou.edu/content/drc/home/educators/test_proctoring_form.html.

Alternative testing is provided to allow a student to accurately demonstrate his/her knowledge and achievement as opposed to measuring the impact of the disability. Test-proctoring services are available between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Students are responsible for notifying the instructor and making arrangements for delivery and return of the tests. Tests can be delivered to the DRC office by the instructor, campus mail, fax, e-mail, or the student and returned by instructor pick-up, fax, e-mail, or the student. Tests are normally administered during the same time the rest of the class is taking the test unless there are extenuating circumstances. Any rescheduling must be approved by the instructor and the DRC staff. If a change in a test format is required as a reasonable accommodation, the DRC staff will work with the student and instructor to discuss appropriate formats. Any incidents of alleged academic misconduct discovered by the DRC staff will be reported for action under the Academic Misconduct Code for the Norman campus. The DRC staff uses cameras to monitor students taking exams.

Take Home Exams
If you have a student with a disability in your class who is approved for additional time and/or no points taking off for spelling, it is important to know that these accommodations DO NOT apply to take home exams. Typically take-home exams have enough time built in to allow the student what they need and if they are allowed to use a computer, then they can use spell check and should be held to the same standard as other students for their work.

Quizzes
Quiz accommodations are given in the same way as any standard exam is given to a student.

Pop Quizzes
Please read “The Accommodation Dilemma of Pop Quizzes” by Ruth J. Fink, Ph.D., found on pages 10-12 of this manual.

Equipment—Students may require the use of specialized classroom equipment for seating, or word processing or other technology in the classroom. This may include the student utilizing a personal laptop to take notes or access course content. In addition, the DRC is equipped with computers with speech synthesis and speech recognition, scanners, assistive listening devices, DVD players, and a CCTV. Upon request, specific furnishing can be placed in the classrooms for those students who cannot use the existing seating.

Assistive Technology—Assistive Technology (AT), reduces barriers to access, thus providing students with disabilities the capability of handling a wider range of activities independently. AT increases the access of users with disabilities to the resources available through computers and other electronic hardware, including information on the internet, assistance with alternative text formats, audible presentation of visual information, etc. For example, a screen reader speaks the information on a computer, which allows a student who is blind or visually impaired to access the information.
"The Accommodation Dilemma of Pop Quizzes" By Ruth J. Fink, Ph.D.

Pop quizzes can be a valuable teaching/learning tool in postsecondary education, but they often put many otherwise qualified students with learning disabilities, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, traumatic brain injury -and sometimes psychiatric disorders- at an extreme disadvantage.

These students frequently qualify for the accommodation of extended time on examinations, tests and quizzes, typically one and one-half to double time. Here is the accommodation dilemma: Five-minute pop quizzes during class then necessitate a time extension of 2 1/2 to 5 minutes more for the student with the disability, and leave the professor and the rest of the students waiting. Even more problematical, the student with the disability is clearly identified as same, calling undue attention to the disability and also putting this same student under extraordinary stress. Having the student finish the pop quiz in the professor's office is not always possible because of class schedules.

Pop quizzes are simply not "accessible" and fair to all students. There are other ways to obtain the information needed from the students, such as:

(1) Did students read and comprehend the assignment?
(2) Is the student keeping up with daily reading assignments?
(3) How well are students internalizing the readings?
(4) Do I need to reiterate salient points and provide more examples? and
(5) Can the student apply the principles to practical application situations?

I taught classes that met once a week, in the evening, for three hours. When a class meets only 16 times during the semester, it is necessary to track student progress weekly. Here are some things I did in graduate-level, special education theory and methods classes for teacher training in the School of Education at the University of Colorado to accommodate students:

1. Put pop quiz-type questions on the course or department Web site or on a class e-mail list at a certain time, to be e-mailed back or turned in (hard copy) by the next class time;

2. Present these types of questions as a hand-out at the end of class to be turned in at the beginning of the next class;

3. Put all pop quiz-type questions on the syllabus reading list, following each assigned reading (this allows students' reading to be more directed); vary the response mode requirement each week to be posted on a special Web site, e-mailed to the professor, or handed in at the beginning of the next class.

4. Vary how this pop quiz-information is obtained from students so it does not become boring and mundane:

- Do an all-class pop quiz on the overhead one day. Each class member is asked/ expected to add to the discussion (best for classes with less than 15 students) and then discuss the answers with the entire class. Such a technique has proven to be a good learning experience for everyone, in that students whose cognitive abilities are different are allowed the opportunity to observe how their peers think, problem solve and internalize course elements. This also allows the professor to observe how students absorb course material and display knowledge in different ways.
A short take-home pop quiz, due at the beginning of the next class is another option. The professor can put the question on a standard-sized sheet of paper and specify that the answer should not take up more than half the page. (All students typically ask how "long" the answer should be!)

Occasionally the professor could assign an in-class, small-group question and have students derive the answer with one student from each group reporting the collective answer. Depending on the size of the class and the amount of material to be covered, the professor might assign each small group a different question, asking that the answers be turned in at the end of class so the professor can put them on a Web site, in an e-mail memo or put them on the word processor as a hand-out for the next class meeting. For such an exercise, the professor can allow about 15 minutes (of a three-hour class period) for their discussion and answer. Then another 15 minutes can be allowed for reporting to the class and clarifying any misunderstandings.

The professor might ask students to devise a pop quiz-question that they think is relevant to the assigned readings and ask to have it answered (This surprises them!). And one thing that can be learned from this exercise is that some students with learning disabilities have a great deal of difficulty with this task. A professor needs to know the students fairly well before doing this so it doesn't catch certain students being required to demonstrate their weakness or disability in front of the class. It should be emphasized there are no "stupid questions!" A few times I have been caught not knowing the answer, but this allows a simple response of "I don't know," and stating that the answer will be presented at the beginning of the next class period.

About twice a semester, when students have demonstrated that they are keeping up with the class work and readings, or when a particularly long project is due, I have surprised them by stating that there will be no checking of their readings this particular class period, but any questions they have are invited and answered.

If there are less than 12 students in the class I schedule a 15-20 minute one-on-one discussion with each student during the semester, during the last 15 minutes of the three-hour class period (in addition to office hours and other appointments as requested).

While a couple minutes of this time is spent on personal rapport and support, I always have pop quiz-type questions to discuss with them such as, "Tell me your understanding of the differences between internalizing and externalizing disorders for students in your (grade level) classroom." This allows the others to leave early and allows the professor important personal support opportunities to all students, disabled and nondisabled, and no student is singled out for any reason.

I emphasize at the beginning of the semester that much of the content of each class is not only for their learning and required by the state department of education for teacher certification, but also for the purpose of internalizing information as they write their comprehensive exams prior to the awarding of their graduate degree. I also emphasize, to this end, that the questions that are posed to them (or they pose to the professor) are to assist them in reaching this goal in a situation that causes them the least amount of stress possible, and accommodates diverse backgrounds, abilities and experiences - but in the form of no timed pop quizzes!
I am NOT advocating that students with disabilities do not need extended time on quizzes. Rather, this is a way to eliminate the need for extended time by obtaining a quick perusal of students' progress in a venue other than a timed pop quiz-situation, and certainly meets some of the tenets of Universal Design.

Student feedback has been very positive in that both students with and without disabilities have expressed appreciation for taking the "terror" out of pop quizzes. Having the opportunity to learn at their own rate and within their own learning style, while being gently pushed to keep up with the readings, were also helpful comments. One very bright student with ADHD sent an e-mail at the conclusion of the course expressing that this class was the first one he had ever completed on time! One or two students (most are active teachers) each semester realize that "modeling" inclusive teaching and testing techniques are a covert part of the class, and have indicated that they are now much more sensitive to learning differences among their own K-12 students; they have put extra thought into finding creative ways to minimize these differences for students in their own classrooms.

Finally, the various procedures assist in alleviating the "extra time" dilemma of pop quizzes.

This was published in The Section 504 Compliance Guide by Thompson Publishing Company, in 2006; it is revised from an e-mail to Disabled Student Services in Higher Education (DSSHE) Listserv in February, 2001; also posted on the Brown University Website at one time, and also on a UCONN website as well.
Alternative Formats

Consider accessibility when purchasing videos and making textbook selections. For example, make sure videos are captioned, and make sure that book resources can be accessed by all students.

Resources on Achieving UDI http://www.facultyware.uconn.edu/home.cfm

Making Documents and Files Accessible

Word Documents
- http://webaim.org/techniques/word/

PowerPoint Presentations
- http://webaim.org/techniques/powerpoint/

PDF Files
- http://www.adobe.com/accessibility/best_practices.html#
- http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/

Video Files
Captioning provides equal access to videos for students who are deaf or hearing impaired. Captioning also benefits all students when audio quality in a room is poor, or when other students in the class are noisy.
- http://webaim.org/techniques/captions/
- http://www.doit.wisc.edu/accessibility/online-course/standards/multimedia.htm
- http://www.w3.org/2008/06/video-notes
**General Information**

**Determining Essential Functions of a Curriculum**

**Confidentiality**

**Instruction Policy**

**Over Accommodation**

**Ten Tips for Online Teachers**

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**Determining What is Fundamental to the Nature of a Program**

Students must be able to perform the essential functions of a program with or without accommodations. Postsecondary institutions are not required to waive or substitute elements that are fundamental to the nature of the program. The provision of reasonable accommodations and services due to disability cannot fundamentally alter the nature of the course, program, or event. There are some situations where adjustments in teaching method or testing may not be required because they could be considered fundamental alterations.

It isn't up to an individual faculty member to decide what is fundamental to the nature of a program. Office for Civil Rights (OCR) guidance and case law provides for a decision-making process that should include at least the following elements:

- The decision is made by a group of people who are trained, knowledgeable and experienced in the area; and,
- The decision-makers consider a series of alternatives as essential requirements:
  - carefully consider whether appropriate alternatives are available, including a consideration of feasibility and cost;
  - determine if the essential requirement in question cannot be modified for a specific student with a disability; and,
  - ensure that the determination is not based only on the past tradition of the institution, such as an assertion that we have "always" done this or required this, without a valid basis for the determination; and,
- The decision should be a careful, thoughtful and rational review of the academic program and its requirements; and,
- The process should include consideration of the nature and purpose of the program, whether the standard is required in similar programs in other institutions, whether the standard is essential to a given vocation or occupation for which the program is preparing students, and whether the standard is required for licensure or certification in a related occupation or profession.

The DRC staff is available to assist with this process and to help answer any questions about the disability issues.
Confidentiality

All documentation of disability submitted to the DRC will be held in confidence. Disability documentation provided by a physician, psychiatrist, psychologist or other recognized professional is not subject to free access under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). The information regarding a student’s disability will be shared by the DRC on a limited basis, and then only when there is a compelling reason for such disclosure. This means that a faculty member generally does not have a need to know what the disability of a student is, only that it has been appropriately verified by the DRC staff.

Instruction Policy

Instruction Policy

1. You are strongly encouraged to make a statement in the opening session of your class and in the class syllabus such as this one:

"Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities."

2. Any student who responds to your announcement should be referred to the Disability Resource Center, (Goddard Health Center, Room 166, (405) 325-3852) to make a formal request for accommodation.

3. Refer also to sections 5.2 Individuals with Disabilities and 5.3 Disability Resource Center of the Faculty Handbook. Please be assured that the Disability Resource Center will assist you in making appropriate accommodations.
Over Accommodation
When Faculty Are TOO Accommodating!
by Jane E. Jarrow, Ph.D.

Most faculty members in higher education today understand the legal and educational imperatives that mandate equal access to students with disabilities through academic accommodation. Sometimes, though, problems arise from faculty who are readily prepared to provide appropriate accommodation - it is their accommodating nature that can get them, the institution, and (sometimes) the student into trouble!

Most institutions have established a clearly articulated policy as to who holds the documentation of disability, what steps a student must take to declare their need for disability-related accommodations, and how that information is communicated to faculty. But what of the student who says, “I don’t want to go through the disability services office. I want to advocate for myself and work directly with faculty and negotiate my own accommodations.” Regardless of why students choose to go this independent route (and there are both good and bad reasons for taking such a stance), the faculty member who agrees to disregard institutional policy and honor accommodation requests directly from the student may not be doing anyone a favor!

Personal Jeopardy Faculty members who work directly with students, discuss the disability, (possibly) look over the documentation, and agree to accommodation may be establishing themselves as the “gatekeepers” without meaning to do so. If the faculty member agrees to provide accommodation “x” and not accommodation “y” and later the student maintains that he/she was not appropriately accommodated, it is the faculty member’s decision that is subject to question and the faculty member who could conceivably be held responsible for violating this student’s civil rights. The faculty member who agrees to provide accommodations without institutional authorization for a student with one disability (for example, LD) but is less familiar and comfortable with another disability (for example, ADD) and sends that student back through channels for official documentation could be opening himself/herself up for charges of discrimination, intimidation, or harassment. Faculty members who conscientiously try to make life easier for the student by allowing the student to bring the documentation directly to them may gain access to confidential information to which they should not be privy. For all these reasons, it would be best for faculty not to be drawn into the collection of disability documentation or the decision-making regarding accommodation.

Institutional Jeopardy The student who provides documentation to a single faculty member (who accepts and acts on that documentation) may be able to make a legitimate case for saying the he/she informed the institution of the disability and the need for accommodation. The faculty member should not be discussing the information that has been shared (because of issues of privacy and confidentiality), and yet the student may be expecting to receive similar consideration and accommodation from other faculty on the basis of having provided the documentation to someone in authority at the institution. If it is not made clear that the institution has not been “notified” until the documentation is provided and requests are made from such-and-such an office, the institution may not be in a position to defend itself from charges of discrimination by neglect for a student who does not receive accommodation by others within the institution. Or consider this scenario – Professor A accepts the documentation and provides accommodation without going through channels, as do Professors B and C, and then Professor D says, “I will provide accommodations when I receive proper notification from the disability services office that this is appropriate.” Professor D looks like the villain for following the rules!

(Continued on next page)
More distressing, however, is the possibility that the institution may be facing some very real difficulties if the disability services office determines that some of the accommodations that Professors A, B, and C provided were not warranted by the documentation and does not prescribe those same accommodations for Professor D to provide.

*Student Jeopardy* Students with disabilities will still have those disabilities after they leave the postsecondary environment. Whether they choose to go on to graduate or professional school or seek a place in the world of work, chances are that if they needed accommodations to successfully function in higher education, they may need accommodation in their future endeavors as well. More and more often, those settings beyond the postsecondary experience are ready and willing to provide accommodations on the basis of verification from the higher education institution that those same accommodations have been provided during the student’s postsecondary career. If the student has no record of having been served by the institution - if the student was never on file in the disability services office and received all of his/her accommodations through individual discussion with faculty - that student will have no official history of being regarded or served as a person with a disability and may have a much more difficult time establishing the claim to accommodations in the future.
TEN TIPS FOR ONLINE TEACHERS

Norman Coombs, CEO EASI

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For decades if not centuries, teaching involved the instructor lecturing and sometimes becoming involved in discussion in a face-to-face setting. If the class was large enough, the instructor might need a microphone and amplifier. One of the next technologies to find its way into the class was the overhead projector. In fact, the projector had been used for years in bowling alleys as the way to keep a running tally of everyone’s scores. Sometimes, the instructor prepared a transparency for the overhead in advance. Often, the instructor just used a special pencil to write on the transparency as the lecture or discussion progressed. The technologies were rather simple and unobtrusive.

Today’s “smart classroom” has one or more computers, projectors, wireless connections to the Internet and sometimes a local network linking the teacher’s computer with those of the students. While the interfaces are becoming more user-friendly, they are also continuing to expand their features and becoming increasingly complex. The same is true for online learning courses. Besides being a discipline expert, the teacher has to learn how to “drive” these technologies. Not only is it more to learn, but it is more to keep track of during a presentation. While many students are far more savvy about these technologies than are the teachers, some students have to struggle to master the technology while trying to grasp the presentation’s content.

Teaching is communication. These technologies are intended to enhance the communication. Clear communication requires the presenter to exercise judgment in organizing the content and in its delivery. Everything should be selected with an eye to whether or not it helps move the presentation content forward and rejected if it becomes an external distraction. Humor and stories are good devices, but be sure to make clear how they relate to the point being made. The rich array of features provided by these technologies are also helpful additions if and when they tie into the presentation. An occasional aside may add relief from the content, but keep it short and help transition the audience back into the content. There is a real temptation with technology to use it to add sparkle to the presentation which is good as long as it doesn’t become a distraction.

A couple years ago, I heard about an army commander whose officers routinely submitted field reports as PowerPoint presentations. In frustration, he issued an order not to include any audio of bombs dropping, planes buzzing overhead and other battlefield backgrounds and just focus on the report content. Used in moderation, they may have served a purpose, but he became overwhelmed by his officers’ using these features to impress him rather than focusing on the actual report.

The tips listed below are items that I found helped me to focus on using technology to facilitate communication while making it as transparent as possible. Your experience may be different than mine, and you need to pick and choose tips if and when they fit your situation.

(Continued on next page)
1. Do NOT Replicate The Classroom
Find out how best the technology works and use it for your advantage. Don't force it to do what it is not good at. I began trying to do via the computer just the same thing I did in class and did surprisingly well at it. I was lucky because my first attempt at distance learning was to transpose an interactive class to distance learning. Coincidentally, it was well suited and took little modification. I soon learned that there were some things that worked better over the Internet than in class, and other things worked better in class. Already, we behave differently in different classrooms. I have one style for a giant lecture hall; another for a room full of 35-40 students; and still another with 6-8 students in a cozy seminar space. Take that experience and create a style and format that suits both your content and the technology you can use. Video is good for large classes with little interaction. Computer conferencing is better for small, interactive situations. Be thoughtful about designing your content and selecting the technology that supports your content and with which you are comfortable.

2. Be A Virtual Host
Your students won't see you or at least not "in the flesh". You need to work to show you are present and work to convey some sense of personhood. When I first began teaching over the computer, I thought long and hard about how to convey myself to the students. On our system, my username was nrngsh and that is certainly impersonal and even meaningless. I discovered, besides that computerized label, that I could attach a personal name to my email and online postings. I thought briefly about “cyber prof” and almost threw up! I thought about Dr. Coombs and Professor Coombs both of which sounded both impersonal and stuffy. Then, I asked myself, “Who am I?” Right or wrong, I concluded I am a bit stuffy and a bit informal. Hence, I am “Prof Norm Coombs”.

Intentionally or not, our physical rooms convey an atmosphere to our guests and this is part of projecting a welcoming image. One colleague of mine has his office desk facing the wall. When you enter the room, there is a comfortable chair for you, and my friend swivels around facing you. You sit almost knee to knee with nothing between you. Another colleague has his desk facing the door. He is on the other side with the desk between you. Besides putting space between you and him, his sitting behind the desk signals authority and creates a status gulf besides the physical gap created by the desk.

Look for ways to be a virtual online host and create an online atmosphere. Find ways to be warm and welcoming. In a face-to-face class, I do not stand at the door to welcome students as they arrive. On the computer, I try to recognize students personally once they have become virtually connected.

3. Model The Behavior You Want From Your Students
Obviously, you will use the syllabus or other introductory materials to describe the course structure and explain how it will function. Especially for students new to online learning, they may not be sure how to interact in this setting. There is nothing like modeling the behavior you want from your students to provide them with clues to how they should behave. For example, if you want a relaxed, spontaneous and sharing kind of class, make your personal introduction to the class in a relaxed and informal style. Talk about your family, your hobbies and show your non-professional side along with providing your academic qualifications. If you want a class that is highly structured; one where all the work turned in to you has been proof read and spell checked, use an introduction that is formal and academic. In one case when you make online responses, you will carefully use proper grammar, no slang and even spell check spontaneous interaction. If you want spontaneity from your students, make your interactions relaxed and informal.
Different courses have different demands. Remember, the class will not see your body language. You can put the same kind of message into the format of written communication, a kind of verbal body language. Most students will reflect back to you the kind of behavior that you model for them.

4. Be Interactive
The uniqueness of the Internet is its potential for interaction. Make the most of it. Many studies of the impact of the Internet and the personal computer is that both tend to flatten power relations. This has also been shown true for distance learning. While some teachers find the lessening of power to be threatening, others find it liberating. It is now an old and hackneyed saying to say that the difference between classroom learning and distance learning is “The sage on the stage” versus “the guide on the side.” Instead of being an authority figure, beyond challenge, the instructor becomes a resource. the teacher’s role changes from that of being an instructor to becoming a mentor, and students do more than learn a disciplines content; they learn how to learn.

5. Modularize Your Material
Sitting in class through an hour-long lecture stretches most students’ attention span. Listening to an hour-long audio or watching an hour-long video requires more concentration when there may be interruptions from family or even the phone. Instructional designers, whether talking of a face-to-face class or a virtual class strongly recommend that the content be broken into smaller, logical segments of 2-3 pages in length or 4-5 minutes long. If you build in opportunities for interaction at those breaks, it will help students engage both with the content and with each other.

In live presentations, teachers frequently go over material 2-3 times from different angles to help students understand and remember it. If the online content is asynchronous, and modularized, the repetition can be omitted because students can readily proceed at their individual pace and repeat a module 2 or 3 times. If the student has been interrupted because he or she does not have a controlled environment, the student doesn’t lose the material as it can be repeated.

6. Use of Multimedia and Images
Different learners learn differently. Some are visual learners; some understand auditory information well; some benefit from text. By providing a variety of experiences, all learners benefit. Even if you can find ways to present the same or similar content in different modes, you will benefit a wider audience. Similarly, some content is better adapted to text; some to pictures; some to audio or video. The point is to select the communication mode for its usefulness in communication content rather than selecting it to impress the students with your technical skills.

While people do have different preferred learning and interacting modes, some have disabilities which necessitates their learning by one mode or another. Besides accommodating different learning styles, you may be making the course content available to someone who, otherwise, would have been prevented from receiving an education. Some merely prefer a communication mode; others require it!

7. Design, Simple, Clear Display For Your Content
Online teachers, besides having to organize the course content, have to organize the content’s display or layout. This is true whether that content is being delivered as a document or in a multimedia format.
Help the student to focus on your message by avoiding needless visual or auditory clutter and distractions. If the content being displayed contains text, be sure that the text is large enough that the reader won’t have to strain to read it. Remember the average age of online learners is older than that of face-to-face students and those students may already be using glasses. Use a moderate font size and easy-to-read font types. The sans serif fonts are crisper and clearer for most readers. Be sure the contrast between background and foreground is adequate and avoid using highly patterned background. If you do not pack the text and/or images too densely, the student will be able to understand the content better. If the content is in an image or a video, try to remove needless items in the student’s view that will distract. If it is an audio, do your best to avoid having annoying ambient noises.

While these comments may sound as if you are being urged to minimize your descriptions and explanations, please do not come to that conclusion. Each point you are making needs an adequate context to give it clear meaning. Use good transitions as you move from point to point. Build in transitions between the modules. When including images or tables or multimedia, do not conclude that the item speaks for itself. You know what you mean by including it, but the student may not know what you mean. Keep what you are saying simple but don’t skimp on the necessary context to give those items their meaning in the bigger picture.

8. Create your Content Using Universal Design Principles
Design your materials to meet a wide variety of learning styles, socio-economic backgrounds and different user interfaces. Strive to achieve clear communication rather than trying to impress your students with glitz. The teacher and/or the instructional technology staff will frequently have a relatively new computer with a high-speed Internet connection. While this will let you use the latest technologies and upload even large files quickly to the server, remember your students are probably not so richly blessed with such state-of-the-art applications. While it can be fun using cutting edge tools, your content may not be useable by all of your students. It is better to work with technologies that are a couple years old and are being widely used. Even when students are on the cutting edge, they may be using mobile applications which, while being state-of-the-art, won’t readily handle large graphics or multimedia. Because the content looks slick on your computer, that may not be true for all of your students. Besides designing for different student learning styles, you need to accommodate a growing number of different applications that may be downloading and displaying your content. Envision someone accessing your course on a cell phone, on a netbook, on a powerful desktop computer and also using special screen magnification or screen reader software.

Most of us never were given formal training in using the authoring tools we use to create our courses. Because we taught ourselves or got some help from someone else with little training, we fail to make use of some of the features in our applications that provide real help in designing content that takes advantage of their universal design principles. You can actually embed important information about your document into that document making it a powerful ally in conveying your meaning to the document user. This is called document markup. In creating print books, the process includes putting markup into the information being sent to the printer influencing its page layout. Markup is everywhere. Your word processor has always been including markup into its output. In old applications or simple ones like notepad, it could be as simple as a markup for starting a new line. In typewriter days, we called it a carriage return. Markup controls line length, centering or left justified and dozens of other things. What is important for our purposes is that some markup conveys information about the function of an item in a page. For example, there is markup for title, header levels, tables, columns lists and more.
Perhaps you are wondering why it is important to make a header with header markup instead of merely using font type, and size. Your eyes have been trained to recognize headers from its appearance. However when the functional markup is in the document, the application displaying the document can understand that. The Opera browser can jump from header to header helping you navigate a long document. Screen reader software can do the same thing for users who are blind using any browser. Here is an analogy to help you grasp the significance of header navigation. Remember cassette tapes and how frustrating it was using fast forward and back to try to locate an item? A blind user has to scan line by line down screen after screen to locate something in an electronic document. With markup, the user can jump to a specific page, to the next header 1 or header 2.

I want to come back to the concept of universal design and not just accessibility. Ebook readers are using similar navigation tools. The Markup in a document can be used by future applications meaning the document will not become functionally outdated. If you are writing for a journal or publisher, they usually demand specific markup be used. Last, if you use document markup, you will be more consistent, and the universal design feature will be exported to other file types when you save a document in PDF, HTML etc. The fact is that by the software designers putting markup features into their software, this has always been their preferred way for you to use their application.

9. Tips to Make Content More Accessible for Students With Disabilities
Besides using style markup properly in authoring your content, there are a couple other important tips that go beyond that. The most important is adding a text description to any image. I do not mean adding the description above or below the image although that can be done. You can put the text description into the markup so to speak. In Microsoft products, right click on the image and depending on the version you will locate a text box where you can input a short description which the screen reader will speak to someone using a screen reader. That also exports into different document types when you export to those. Plain text, ‘txt’ documents however lose almost all markup information.

Probably none of you would dream of making 2 columns on a page in your word processor by using the tab and space keys. You would use the column feature. Similarly, you would not make a table of date using tab and space either. If you did, a screen reader would see the information left to right all as one line and read it that way. When you use column and table markup features, the screen reader reads the information properly. Two columns are turned into one long column for the user who is blind. Tables are separate cells and the reader can tab or arrow from cell to cell, and the application will identify the row and column before speaking the cell. You can even use markup to tell the document which row and column contains headers. Then when the user moves from cell to cell, the screen reader will speak the appropriate header. Like saying Tom had lunch on Monday and paid $7.99. Perhaps not speaking it exactly like that but would inform that information to the user. Tables only make sense when the contents of a cell is associated with its headers. Forms and combo boxes and radio buttons are other items where markup is crucial. This goes far beyond what these tips can cover.

The bottom line is that for most simple course content, proper markup for navigation, text for images and markup for columns, tables and lists are all important to use for anyone. Most of the more complicated accessibility issues deal with advanced Web features that teachers will rarely need or use.

To come back to basics, I want to stress that the most important thing you can do to facilitate the learning of special needs students is to be the best teacher you can and to communicate as simply and clearly as possible. Clear communication is the most important first step towards making an online course accessible for students with disabilities.
10. It’s About People And Not Technology
You are using technology to teach, to communicate. Keep your focus on the student and the content not on the technology. I remember a bakery truck in my hometown with a sign on the back with this poem:

As you travel through this life,
Whatever be your goal;
Keep your eye upon the doughnut,
And not upon the hole!

When you begin using technology in teaching, there is the natural temptation to focus on it; how it works; what it does; and how it seems to come between you and the student. Think of it like a blackboard, just a tool. Try to forget about it as much as possible and focus on the student. Technology is the means to an end and not the end itself!

Recommended Resources:

Making Online Teaching Accessible

Universal design in higher education: from principles to practice
Edited by Sheryl E. Burgstahler and Rebecca C. Cory published by Harvard Education Press in 2008

THE ONLINE TEACHING SURVIVAL GUIDE: SIMPLE AND PRACTICAL PEDAGOGICAL TIPS

Engaging the Online Learner

EASI (Equal Access to Software and Information) provides regular Webinars and several month-long online courses covering these and related topics:

www.easi.cc

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Frequently Asked Questions

What does “reasonable accommodation” mean?
The University of Oklahoma will reasonably accommodate otherwise qualified individuals with a disability unless such accommodation would pose an undue hardship, would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of the service, program, or activity or in undue financial or administrative burdens. The term "reasonable accommodation" is used in its general sense in this policy to apply to employees, students, and visitors.

Reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to:
• Making existing facilities readily accessible and usable by individuals with disabilities
• Job restructuring
• Part-time or modified work schedules
• Reassignment to a vacant position if qualified
• Acquisition or modification of equipment or devices
• Adjustment or modification of examinations, training materials or policies
• Providing qualified readers or interpreters
• Modifying policies, practices and procedures

The Disability Resource Center, unless otherwise provided, is the central point-of-contact to receive all requests for reasonable accommodation and to receive all documentation required to determine disability status under law. This center will then make a recommendation on accommodation to the appropriate administrative unit. Reasonable accommodation with respect to employment matters should be coordinated with the Office of Human Resources. Reasonable accommodation with respect to academic matters, including but not limited to faculty employment, should be coordinated with the Office of the Provost while all other issues of reasonable accommodation should be coordinated with the Office of the Vice President for Administrative Affairs.

How does the DRC determine student eligibility for accommodation?
Student eligibility for accommodation is determined on a case-by-case basis after considering student self report, history of accommodation, documentation, and the DRC staff professional expertise.

What accommodations do students use?
Common Accommodations include note takers; exams – extended testing time and/or reduced distraction environment; use of word processor in classroom; audio recording lectures; sign language interpreter; real time transcription; captioned videos; reader and/or scribe for exams; other reasonable accommodations to provide an equal opportunity for the student

How will I know if students in my class may use reasonable accommodations?
The University has an on-line process for informing faculty that students are registered with the DRC and may use accommodations. Students request accommodations online at the beginning of each semester, and faculty are notified of accommodations by email after the requests are approved by DRC staff.

In most instances, if a deaf/hard of hearing student pre-enrolls in a class, the DRC will provide early notification to the educator. This is to provide adequate time to arrange for captioning of all videos used for the course.
Why don’t students use the accommodations that the DRC says are available to them?
Some students with disabilities prefer to have the same academic experience as their peers. They sometimes feel that it is embarrassing to ask for different treatment. The desire for a similar experience means students may experiment at the beginning of the semester, taking a test without accommodations or taking their own notes to see if they will be successful. They will then only request accommodations when they encounter barriers. The educator has an obligation to provide accommodations at the time of the student’s request upon approval by the DRC.

Why doesn’t DRC tell me the student’s disability?
Information about the specifics of a disabling condition is personal and treated as confidential by the University. However, to participate in ensuring that accommodations are effective, you need to know what accommodations have been determined to be reasonable. If you have specific questions about a student, please contact DRC.

Who is responsible to ensure accommodations are in place once a student has requested them?
The University community, including students, faculty, and staff, is responsible to engage in dialogue to identify possible accommodations. The reasonableness and effectiveness of each potential accommodation will be assessed. In this environment the DRC ensures that this process takes place on an individual basis.

Can I proctor exams myself, or have a TA proctor?
Generally, it is best to allow the DRC to proctor exams. If there is a reason you must proctor the exam, please consult with the DRC to ensure effective and appropriate accommodation will be provided. Proctoring services provided directly by the DRC eliminate any conflict of interest or questions about academic integrity.

These questions are adapted from the University of Arizona’s Disability Resource Center content. Their original questions can be found at http://drc.arizona.edu/faculty-staff/faqs.
Resources

Educator Development

Please visit the DRC Faculty Development page at http://www.ou.edu/content/drc/home/educators/resources.html. The page includes links to a set of instructional tools developed by Project Pace at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. These tools are available on a set of CDs but have been modified to make them available to you on this website. Please log in with your OUNetID and password to access these tools.

Faculty Development CD

- Tips for Teaching Students Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision
- Tips for Teaching Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Tips for Teaching Students Who Have Learning Disabilities

Universal Design

Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) is an approach to teaching that consists of the proactive design and use of inclusive instructional strategies that benefit a broad range of learners including students with disabilities. The nine Principles of UDI provide a framework for college faculty to use when designing or revising instruction to be responsive to diverse student learners and to minimize the need for "special" accommodations and retrofitted changes to the learning environment. UDI operates on the premise that the planning and delivery of instruction as well as the evaluation of learning can incorporate inclusive attributes that embrace diversity in learners without compromising academic standards.

Definition from: http://www.facultyware.uconn.edu/udi_factsheet.cfm

Links

- Resources on Achieving UDI http://www.facultyware.uconn.edu/home.cfm

Internet Resources for Faculty

- DO-IT Faculty Room: http://www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty/
- FAME: http://ada.osu.edu/resources/fastfacts/index.htm
- Project PACE: http://www.ualr.edu/pace/about_pace/index.htm