

Disability Services Faculty Survey

January 2022

ASSA Subcommittee Summary and Interpretation of Results

In response to the Faculty Senate charge to ASSA concerning disability accommodation and in close cooperation with the ASSA subcommittee tasked with this charge, Disability Services (DS) circulated a 33-question survey to 500 faculty members on October 21, 2021 and gathered data on November 11, 2021 from 84 respondents. The two categories of faculty most heavily represented in the survey were tenure track (43%) and adjunct (36%).

Underlying Principles of the Accommodation Process

Qualitative responses indicate a widespread acceptance of the principles of “good faith,” equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination enshrined in disability law and policy. Only a very small number of responses (2 of 84) communicated the sense that disability accommodation was unfair or gave certain students an advantage over others.

Familiarity with Law/Policy and Implementation

The majority of respondents were familiar with the federal law (ADA, Section 504, etc.) and WSU policy (PPM 3-34 and 3-32) regarding the accommodation process with 46% being moderately familiar and 34% being very or extremely familiar [Q43]. Only 4% of respondents were not at all familiar with these statutes/policies. Ninety-three percent of the respondents already included statements about disability accommodation in their syllabi [Q6] and most (86%) have already had direct experience with accommodating a disabled student [Q12]. The most commonly experienced forms of accommodation were those related to testing and extended deadlines for assignments (42% of the total)[Q17]. A large majority of respondents (95%) found these accommodations either extremely reasonable or somewhat reasonable. Only 3% found the accommodations somewhat unreasonable [Q18].

The Role of Disability Services

Most respondents (80%) found that they had been provided with adequate information from DS most of the time or always [Q23] and that the process was efficient and easy to manage most of the time or always [Q24]. A similar majority (81%) found DS helpful in response to faculty queries [Q25]. The qualitative responses indicate a similar approval of DS’s role in helping faculty navigate the accommodation process. Some of the qualitative responses called for greater specificity in the accommodation letter itself regarding the implementation of certain accommodations.

Faculty Responsibilities

The responses suggest that a large majority of faculty understood their responsibility to provide an accommodation approved by DS. Most respondents (76%) agreed that denying an approved accommodation was **not** among the individual faculty member’s classroom prerogatives [Q20]. Most agreed (68%) that an individual faculty member is **not** at liberty to determine if an accommodation was overly onerous [Q21].

Faculty respondents were more evenly split over the assertion that faculty members have an exclusive right to determine whether or not an accommodation "fundamentally alters the nature of their course" or program (and might, thus, meet the legally-defined threshold of "undue hardship"). Thirty-three percent of faculty agreed with this assertion while 48% expressed a correct understanding of the law and policy by disagreeing [Q22]. The variance in responses to this assertion indicates some confusion about the role of faculty in the legally specified "interactive process" by which institutional approval of a given accommodation is reached. Any future faculty training could address this confusion by underlining and illustrating the interactivity of faculty, DS, and the student in the accommodation process.

Faculty Training and Student Advising

Most faculty expressed an interest (36%) or tentative interest (38%) in learning more about course accessibility [Q29]. Qualitative responses to the survey indicated that a limited amount of faculty time figured as a challenge in the accommodation process.

Among the most frequently cited challenges [Q27] were those resulting from faculty being made aware of a student's accommodation only late in a given course or semester. It's unclear from the survey whether this phenomenon is due to delays in students' requests for accommodation, delays in processing those requests, or student confusion about when best to deliver their accommodation letter to their instructors. Depending on the cause, more student advising on protocols and expectations may be in order.

Another frequently cited challenge was that students who personally communicated an accommodation need to faculty, nevertheless failed to submit a formal request for an accommodation to Disability Services. In some of these cases, faculty members provided ad-hoc accommodations to students who had not provided the faculty member with a formal accommodation letter. Such instances suggest that students may need additional advising on the need to pursue accommodation through the formal process. They also suggest a need to clarify for faculty that accommodation is legally required only in instances approved by Disability Services.