

ASSA Charge: Review Student Disability Accommodation Letters. This work would include working with WSU Disability Services and Legal Counsel to create 1) a survey to be sent out to faculty to gauge their experience, knowledge, etc. with student disability accommodations; 2) **clear guidelines outlining specifically for what faculty are responsible, i.e., define “reasonable accommodations” and what resources are available to faculty; and 3) clear guidelines outlining specifically for what WSU Disability Services are responsible.**

1. What are reasonable accommodations?

Academic Adjustments (sometimes called reasonable accommodations) are defined in PPM 3-34 as, “Modifications to academic requirements as are necessary to ensure that such requirements do not discriminate or have the effect of discriminating, on the basis of disability, against a qualified applicant or student with a disability. For example, modifications may include, but are not limited to, changes in the length of time permitted for the completion of degree requirements, substitution of specific courses required for the completion of degree requirements, and adaptation of the manner in which specific courses are conducted. Academic requirements that are essential to the instruction being pursued will not be regarded as discriminatory.”

A reasonable accommodation is an adjustment designed to mitigate the impact of a student’s disability without compromising the integrity of an academic course or program. Providing reasonable accommodations allows students with disabilities to have equal access to education and services at the University. Students with disabilities are required to meet the same academic and technical standards as any other student, while using reasonable accommodations.

There is no exhaustive list of reasonable accommodations nor any pre-established limits to accommodation requests from students. All accommodation requests must be reviewed by Disability Services on a case-by-case basis with the full capacity of University and state resources. Individual faculty should not make unilateral decisions regarding reasonable accommodations, but rather should collaborate with Disability Services as the campus department designated to provide a wide array of support services, accommodations, and programs to remove barriers to full participation in the life of the University.

Accommodations requests must be considered for all programs, not just traditional lecture style activities. This includes taking a class on a field trip, in lab classes, dance programs, etc. Best practice is to anticipate potential needs before the activity to make it as accessible as possible without requiring a student to make a request. Another good practice is to give students as advanced notice as possible (such as in the syllabus or

other descriptions of the activity) about any requirements of a program so that any needs can be addressed as early as possible.

2. What are faculty responsible for in terms of accessibility and accommodation?

Commitment to Inclusivity and Obligations Under the Law.

WSU is committed to providing equal and inclusive educational opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities, and to meeting its obligations under the law. Disability Services, a department within Student Affairs, provides academic and other accommodations for students with disabilities according to PPM 3-34. To assist students with disabilities to fully participate in the various programs, services, and activities at the institution, Disability Services requires the support, cooperation, and full partnership of faculty, staff, and administrators within the University community. Additionally, PPM 3-32 prohibits discrimination and harassment against individuals with disabilities and requires cooperation in providing accommodations.

As stated in PPM 3-34, “WSU faculty and staff shall work cooperatively with qualified students, employees and others who request accommodations in order to provide access to the programs, services, and activities of the University, as required by law.” Disability Services provides training and facilitation of the accommodation process as outlined by policy. If there are disputes regarding access or accommodations, all parties should work cooperatively to resolve such disputes.

Responsibility for Accessibility By Design

As the identified campus leaders in disability initiatives, Disability Service promotes a proactive approach to program design and inclusivity. The University should make resources accessible to all students. Faculty and staff should integrate elements of universal design and accessibility as they build programs and services. This is why all faculty need to be working to develop curriculum and teaching resources (Canvas links, videos, textbooks, reading materials, etc.) that can be accessible to students without requiring that they make requests for accommodations through Disability Services. These efforts are not only the right thing to do to include diverse learners, but significantly affect the university’s ability to meet its legal obligations. Disability Services relies on faculty to determine the best curriculum and learning materials for students in their programs, which includes intentionally choosing accessible materials.

Students need to be able to access their course materials at the same time as others in the class. If materials need to be converted to an appropriate format (i.e. captioning, tagged texts for screen readers), students with disabilities may not have the same

opportunities as their peers. Some material conversion is a time-consuming, labor-intensive process. Any action on the part of faculty to select accessible materials and/or publish required materials prior to the start of the semester greatly reduces the delay in access of the student and minimizes legal risk.

Disability Services can provide training and resources for faculty who seek to explore more accessible options for student learning. These resources can be found on the Disability Services website. [Information specific to COVID can be applied to any situation.](#) This includes the offer of Disability Services to provide training. "Help us help you. Disability Services offers ADA Training to any other departments. This training can be modified to fit the specific needs of the audience." Here is a short list of some of the topics they can cover:

- Basic ADA Law
- Who is Disabled?
- Office Procedures and Policies
- Working with Disabled Students
- Documentation Requirements
- Accessible Technology
- Transition Issues for Disabled Students
- Q&A/Problem Solving

This training can be co-facilitated with WSU's ADA Coordinator and is available for almost any size audience. Please contact Disability Services at 801-626-6413 (Ogden), 801-395-3442 (Davis) or dsc@weber.edu (Ogden), dscdavis@weber.edu (Davis) to make arrangements.

Additionally, an effective collaborative partnership exists between Disability Services, Stewart Library, and WSU Online to provide many resources for inclusive course design and accessible materials. Faculty are encouraged to reach out to their assigned college librarian to find free, accessible course materials. [WSU Online](#) provides extensive support to improve Canvas accessibility and remediate course documents. These resources and partnerships strengthen daily and updates can be found on the specific websites.

Responsibility in the Accommodation Process

The student accommodation process is outlined in PPM 3-34. Any student needing an accommodation due to a physical or mental limitation may request assistance. This may be as simple as a request for something to be done to help them in the course. For example, a student may ask to sit closer to the front of the classroom or to have an assignment extension. If the adjustment is an easy one and would normally be allowed

for any student in need, it can and should be provided. If the request is more complex or if faculty seeks support or consultation, all parties should reach out to Disability Services. In other words, the student does not necessarily have to use specific language, like “accommodation” or “adjustment.” They could simply say something like, “Can I have more time on a test? I’m struggling to complete the test in the time allowed.” If faculty are not sure if the student is requesting an accommodation under the law, or disclosing their need for disability-related services, faculty may contact Disability Services for consultation. In these cases, it is best for faculty to notify the student that they are considering their request. Then seek out information from Disability Services in a timely manner to meet the student’s needs.

Faculty should never ask students about their disability status, health condition, or similar, or otherwise require them to provide written or verbal documentation or information about their condition. Any verification required for temporary or disability-related health conditions should be referred to Disability Services.

A key point here is that faculty members should not seek to determine and/or otherwise make arrangements on their own to accommodate students with disabilities. If a student tells you they have a disability-related accommodation, determine whether or not the student has an Accommodation Verification Letter outlining the accommodations approved by Disability Services. If the student does not have such a letter, do not seek to determine or arrange accommodations by yourself. Refer the student immediately to Disability Services. If you feel that a student may benefit from a disability-related accommodation, please contact Disability Services prior to initiating any conversations about this with the student.

3. Overview of the Student Accommodation Process (refer to PPM 3-34)

Initiation and Referral

The student initiates the accommodation process by registering with Disability Services and providing documentation of their disability to establish eligibility for services. Faculty and staff often are the first contact for disability-related accommodation requests and are encouraged not only to refer the student to Disability Services, but also to contact a Disability Services advisor to verify the request and referral (disabilityadvisor@weber.edu or 801-626-6413).

To facilitate disability awareness, inclusion, and timely accommodations, all WSU faculty should include a Disability Accommodation statement in their course syllabi. In addition, faculty and program administrators should consider disability accommodation instructions in their program handbooks, syllabi, or other departmental materials.

Faculty and program administrators are encouraged to seek the advice of Disability Services when creating accommodation statements. A general disability syllabus statement may be found on the Disability Services website, under Faculty & Staff Resources.

Accommodation Determination & Verification Letter

Disability Services advisors work in confidence with students to determine what academic accommodations and services are needed based on the documented disability, and in the context of each individual student's program of study and current class schedule. Disability Services' recommendations are included in an Accommodation Verification Letter, which the student may provide (in confidence) to their faculty. Faculty should read the letter and review the accommodations requested and instructions from Disability Services. Faculty then works with the student and Disability Services to implement and/or negotiate the recommended accommodations.

Faculty should always keep disability-related information confidential. Inappropriate disclosure of disability information must be avoided. Communication with the student about accommodations should not take place in front of other students. If faculty need to discuss an accommodation request with their colleagues or supervisors, it should be discussed without disclosing the name or identifying characteristics of the student. Prior to disclosing information in person or via digital communication, faculty should consult with Disability Services.

Timeliness of Accommodation Request and Implementation

Students may choose to provide accommodation letters to faculty at any point in a program or class. Disability Services encourages, but cannot require registered students to provide faculty with their letters at the beginning of each semester. A student can register with Disability Services or request an accommodation at any time. Accommodations are not necessarily retroactive, but this should be determined by Disability Services. If faculty cannot implement or negotiate the requested accommodation in a timely manner, they should contact Disability Services to determine an appropriate course of action. Rather than deny an accommodation request due to insufficient timeliness of notification, the faculty should consult with Disability Services who may advise that the accommodation be provided on an interim basis, or that the course/program requirement be postponed until the request can be implemented.

Interactive Process or Negotiated Alternative Accommodations

Academic accommodations are determined on an individualized, case-by-case basis. Accommodation Verification Letters often contain broad recommendations with requests for faculty to contact a Disability Services advisor for more specific information. To find out more about the student's needs and what might be an appropriate academic accommodation, Disability Services will need the cooperation and expertise of the faculty member. This is especially important for clinical placements, internships, practicum experiences, or similar.

Faculty should note, as described in the letter, that not all requested accommodations may be appropriate based on essential elements of a course. Faculty should consult with Disability Services before making a determination that the requested accommodation or service would compromise the essential elements of a course and cannot be implemented. Disability Services will facilitate an interactive process, or negotiated alternatives, amenable to all parties, or refer the case to the campus ADA Coordinator. Faculty should in no way make unilateral decisions regarding requested accommodations.

Once an accommodation has been approved by Disability Services and verified in a letter from the student, faculty and staff are required to provide it. In the event the faculty member disagrees with the approval or request, they should meet with the Director of Disability Services. If that still does not result in an acceptable result, the Executive Director of AA/EO may need to review the situation for final determination.

A faculty member can always call Disability Services if there are questions about the adjustment. A description of the processes can be found here:

<https://weber.edu/disabilityservices/registering.html>

https://www.weber.edu/disabilityservices/ssdPP01_letters.html

Cost for Accommodations or Adjustments

In the event the determination is made for an accommodation or adjustment that would involve effort or money, those pieces need to be negotiated between Disability Services and the faculty member or their department. For example, if the student needs a note taker, Disability Services may be able to provide the note taker, but the faculty member must facilitate the note taker being with the student in the class. When it comes to accessibility of electronic information, faculty must be engaged in finding those resources for their own classes. If an issue arises about how services are to be provided, or cost provisions, that needs to be raised to Disability Services, who can work with the department or college to resolve the matter.

Disability matters are the responsibility of everyone working together in a timely manner. If a student is not appropriately accommodated, nobody wins, especially the student. In addition, there are potential legal and disciplinary consequences for not providing appropriate timely access and accommodations.

Disability Services will be using results from the recent faculty survey to develop website and training materials for faculty. They will be collaborating with ASSA members or other faculty members in an ongoing effort to improve disability awareness and inclusivity on campus.