



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

Programs and Services for Students With a Disability

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DISCLOSURE OF A DISABILITY

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INFORMATION FOR INSTRUCTORS

The duty to accommodate students with disabilities arises from the Ontario Human Rights Code. The University of Toronto has a legal obligation to comply with the Code, and while the duty rests with the University as a whole, the central office charged with compliance on behalf of the University in respect of students on St. George Campus is Accessibility Services. The purpose of the following information is to help instructors understand their role, as well as the limits of their role, in arranging accommodations for their students with disabilities.

DISCLOSURE OF A DISABILITY TO AN INSTRUCTOR

The Accessibility Service Office acts as a resource for all Faculties and Departments on campus for their students with disabilities. It is in the best interest of the student experience when our office works in partnership with the student and their instructors in order to provide a collaborative and integrated approach when providing accommodations. Our office encourages students to be self advocates and to disclose that they have a disability to their instructors and discuss plans for accommodations.

If a student chooses to disclose a disability to an educational instructor, the instructor should take care to avoid asking a student about his/her disability. Further, the instructor must take care to avoid speaking about a student's disability in front of their class or other students, avoid disclosing a student's personal disability information without the student's permission to other faculty, avoid leaving written information regarding a student's disability in a public place or in plain view, and avoid using a student's name when discussing general disability issues.

ACCOMMODATION REQUEST MADE DIRECTLY TO AN INSTRUCTOR

Requests for accommodations made directly to an instructor from a student may be appropriate in some cases and not in others. This will depend on many factors, including whether a disability is visible, such as a student in a wheelchair or a student who is blind, or whether a disability is invisible, such as a student with a learning disability, a mental health difficulty, or a chronic illness such as epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, or cancer.

If a student approaches an instructor and asks for an accommodation (e.g. an extension for a paper, an oral exam or take-home exam) based on a disability, the instructor should proceed with caution due to the fact that s/he does not have access to medical documentation which is used to determine whether the requested accommodation is appropriate. If it is determined that the student is registered with Accessibility Services, the instructor can ask for the student's permission to contact the student's Advisor.

If it is determined that the student is not registered with Accessibility Services, the instructor could put accommodations in place, only in the most obvious case of a disability (e.g. the student is in a wheelchair), and in such a case, the instructor would only do so for a period of time that would allow the student to register with Accessibility Services in order to make official accommodation arrangements.

Further, if an instructor suspects that a student has a disability and could benefit from accommodations, s/he could suggest that the student make use of the many services provided on campus, such as Accessibility Services.

WHY STUDENTS CHOOSE NOT TO DISCLOSE:

In an ideal world, all students, including students with disabilities, would be comfortable discussing all aspects of their personal identities in an open manner without fear of discrimination and /or harassment. In reality, however, some students may be reluctant to disclose their disabilities, particularly at the post-secondary level, for fear of being stigmatized, denied opportunities, or arousing unwanted curiosity and unnecessary concern from others. Some will have had bad experiences in the past that may have included being on the receiving end of intolerant attitudes and other forms of discriminatory treatment.

There are many students on campus who choose not to disclose their disability. Further, they choose not to register with the Accessibility Service Office, or, if newly diagnosed, they register when they are well into their academic programme. Many students, particularly in their first year, decide that they want to try to cope on their own, only to find that they require accommodations when multiple term tests and papers become due.

Students with disabilities who request academic accommodations at The University of Toronto are required to register with the Accessibility Service Office on their respective campus. Accommodations are the changes made to remove the barriers so that students with disabilities are provided with equal opportunities to access and benefit from their environment. With accommodations in place, they must fulfill the same duties and essential programme requirements as every other student. Accommodations are not put into place to give a student with a disability an unfair advantage over their peers. Rather, they are granted in order to mitigate the negative effects of a disability and allow the student to function optimally.

Students should register with their campus' Accessibility Services Office to meet with a Disability Advisor as soon as possible, preferably before classes begin, as it takes time to put an accommodation plan in place. Disability Advisors are the experts in their field. They work with the student to determine the impact of the disability and, in particular, the functional limitations the disability has on the student's academic programmes to determine appropriate accommodations. Advisors encourage students to advocate for themselves and to speak with their lecturers about their disability-related accommodations, thereby promoting a three way partnership with students, Accessibility Service staff and faculty.

There are well over 2,000 students with disabilities registered with the three campus offices for students with disabilities at the University of Toronto. While the majority of students are enrolled in undergraduate programmes, hundreds attend the School of Graduate Studies in both the masters and doctoral streams. Further, students are registered in many of the Professional Faculty undergraduate and graduate programmes.

CONFIDENTIAL MEDICAL DOCUMENTATION

Any student requesting accommodations from Accessibility Services must provide medical documentation from an appropriate health care professional to attest to the nature of the disability and the limitations and restrictions that arise from the disability. This documentation is the basis of determining whether or not measures of accommodation are required, and if so, what measure(s) would be appropriate to accommodate the student's particular limitations and restrictions.

All confidential disability related medical documentation and information is safeguarded by Accessibility Services, separate from the student's academic record in order to protect the students' right to privacy. Disclosure of a disability does not occur outside of the office without student consent.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The principles of respect for dignity, individualization, and inclusion and full participation apply both to the substance of an accommodation and to the accommodation process at the University. Accommodations, such as arrangements for an accessible classroom, sign language interpreters, support services such as an assessment or assistance from a learning strategist, modification to evaluation methodologies such as extended time when taking tests and completing assignments, academic materials in alternative formats such as Braille or voice activated software, in-class supports such as tutors, readers or note takers, or a computer with adaptive software, are put into place in appropriate cases to give the student with a disability an opportunity to be successful in their studies. Academic accommodations do not alter the essential program requirements or expectations, nor do they give the student an added advantage.

DISABILITIES

Many people relate more easily to persons with visible disabilities, such as a student with a mobility challenge or a student with a white cane or guide dog, than persons with invisible disabilities. Many of the students who register for accommodations have invisible disabilities, such as mental health difficulties, chronic health conditions (e.g. arthritis, bowel diseases, cystic fibrosis, MS, diabetes, and cancer), learning disabilities, or attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder. Students, particularly with chronic health or mental health disabilities, may be subject to debilitating conditions that are episodic in nature and require the student to withdraw from their programme for a period of time. Other students may find themselves devoid of energy or ineffective for certain parts of each day due to fatigue, pain, or powerful medication side effects. It is also important to note that some students have as many as two, three, and sometimes more diagnoses of a disability.

The offices for students with disabilities are pleased to provide further information and educational workshops.

To find links for websites, below, browse: www.accessibility.utoronto.ca

Accessibility Services, St. George Campus

AccessAbility Services, UTSC

Accessibility Resource Centre, UTM

UofT Ontarions with Disability Act (ODA) Plan

UofT Policy on Commitment to Persons with Disabilities