

# **Grounded Practice: Guiding Principles for Making Decisions Regarding Access and Accommodations**

Melanie Thornton, Coordinator of Access and Equity Outreach



UNIVERSITY OF  
**ARKANSAS.**

College of Education  
& Health Professions

# Initial Process

**When determining accommodations, there are some key factors that should be considered:**

- Is the person requesting the accommodation disabled? Do they have a diagnosis or condition that may rise to the level of disability?
- Does a barrier exist?
- Can the barrier be removed proactively by changing the design of the course, assignment, exam, etc.?
- Does the requested accommodation effectively remove the barrier without altering the fundamental nature of the course or assignment?
- If the requested accommodation would result in reducing rigor or altering essential components, are there alternative accommodations that will provide access?

# **Seamless Access**

- 1. To the extent possible, access should be seamless.**

# **Effective, Timely, Integrated**

**2. Access should be effective, timely and integrated.**

# Access, Not Success

**3. Accommodations provide opportunity for access, not a guarantee of success.**

# No Unnecessary Burden on Students

**4. Disabled students should not be overburdened by the accommodation process.**

# Access to All Benefits

**5. Access for disabled students extends to all of the benefits that students in general enjoy—both academic and co-curricular.**

# **No Requirement for Student to Negotiate**

**6. Access should not hinge on a student's ability to negotiate with a professor or other personnel.**

# **No Blanket Bans, Open Communication Process**

**7. Accommodation requests should never be dismissed without a process that involves thoughtful consideration and an opportunity for the student to provide more information.**

# No Denials Based on “Real World” Arguments

**8. Accommodation determinations should be made based on the present situation, not an imagined future scenario.**

# **No Charging Students for Accommodations**

**9. The cost of accommodations should never be passed along to a student.**

# Clear Grievance Process

**10. A clear process that informs what to do if the student disagrees with a decision should be outlined and easy for students to find.**

# Scenario #1

Sarah comes to see you because she is taking a music class during the 5-week summer session. There are weekly online quizzes. The access coordinator told her that she would need to ask each professor about her extended time accommodation in their class and make sure it was okay.

Dr. Moon has told her that extended time accommodations will not be granted and that summer school moves quickly. He's explained that if she needs more time she should take the course during the academic semester. She shows you the syllabus and it says the same thing: no extended time will be granted to students with disabilities during the summer.

# Scenario #1 (Continued)

You call Dr. Moon to follow-up. He's extremely supportive of accommodations during the academic year but explains that the quizzes are open book and intended to see if the students are keeping up with the material.

Quizzes follow the book outline and with too much time students will be able to look up the answers. It will be unfair and not measure whether the student is keeping up with the material.

# Scenario #2

Alexis is a Deaf student who uses American Sign Language (ASL). Alexis is actively involved in the university's debate club and has requested an ASL interpreter to facilitate participation in weekly meetings, practices, and competitions.

The university provides ASL interpreters for academic classes and related activities but does not currently have a policy addressing extracurricular activities. The debate club is not directly tied to any academic course but is an official student organization recognized by the university.

# Scenario 2 (continued)

The debate club advisor has expressed concerns about the logistics and cost of providing an interpreter for all club activities, particularly for off-campus competitions that may last several hours. They also worry about setting a precedent for other clubs with members who might request similar accommodations.

They ask if there is an ASL interpreting student who could assist and use it as part of their practicum hours. They ask Alexis if they know of a friend who could assist or if they might apply for some type of grant to help cover the costs.

# Next Steps

# Contact Me

**Melanie Thornton**

Coordinator of Access and Equity Outreach  
Partners for Inclusive Communities  
University of Arkansas

Email: [mthornt@uark.edu](mailto:mthornt@uark.edu)