

## Guiding Principles for Making Decisions Regarding Access and Accommodations

*(This document is currently in development. Contact Melanie Thornton at [mthornt@uark.edu](mailto:mthornt@uark.edu) for the most recent version.)*

### 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 for this person?
- 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 what is essential to the course or activity, are there alternative accommodations that will provide access without a fundamental alteration?

### Guiding Principles

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

- Focusing solely on accommodation provision and not working proactively to improve access maintains the status quo.
- As a result, disabled students are required to go through additional steps to obtain access.
- An important goal for our offices is for disabled students to have an experience that as similar to that of nondisabled students as possible.

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

- Access should be provided in a timely manner.
- Access should be provided in the most integrated way possible.
- Accommodations should effectively remove the barriers that disabled students experience.
  - Students should be told that they can and how to let the DRP know if an accommodation is not effective.

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

- Disabled students should have the same opportunities as nondisabled students—not more opportunity.

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

- Information about campus accessibility and the process of requesting accommodations should be easy to find.
- The process for requesting and implementing accommodations should require as few steps and be as straightforward as possible.
- Examples of unnecessary burdens:
  - Requiring students to have a certain number of meetings with the disability resource office just because it is policy
  - Requiring students to meet with professors when that is not necessary for the implementation of an accommodation
  - Requiring third-party documentation even when the disability and barrier are apparent

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

- This includes, among other things, social events, internships, and athletic activities.

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

- A student should not have to ask an instructor for permission to use an accommodation.
- If the accommodation has been approved and the student opts to use it, it should be implemented.
- Even those students not skilled in self-advocacy deserve equal access.
- If the professor has concerns that an accommodation is not necessary due to the design of the course or that it would result in a fundamental alteration, they should discuss this with the DRP.

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

- Provision of accommodations and access is not a formulaic process, but requires individual consideration.
- Students should not automatically receive certain accommodations and be denied others based solely on their condition.
- The DRP should not determine proactively that a specific accommodation is never provided.
- Each request must be individually analyzed in context if considering denial to determine whether it would:
  - Fundamentally alter the class, requirement(s), or program
  - Give the student an unfair advantage over other students (exceeding equal access)
  - Result in undue financial or administrative burden

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

- Accommodations should not be denied because it is assumed a student will not be able to meet future requirements.
- Accommodations should not be denied because it is assumed that that accommodation will not be available in the workplace.

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

**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.**

- Students should have access to information about the internal process as well as external resources for grieving a decision.

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Partners for inclusive Communities is administratively located in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas. Partners is the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service.

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