How to Work with Students with DRS Accommodations

Nearly 20% of undergraduate students have a disability, and only a third of students with disabilities who enroll in a four-year college or university graduate within eight years. The University accommodates students with documented disabilities in accordance with and as defined by the ADA. Accommodations are intended to afford these students equal opportunities for success. Their success should be important to us all, and it also profits the university in terms of retention. All faculty are required to comply with the University of Colorado’s Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS) accommodations. These are the minimal accommodations that students with disabilities must be afforded in accordance with the ADA. Faculty with additional disabilities training or with expertise in their own areas who are aware of further aids that may help a student are welcome to offer such support. While accommodations are intended to facilitate students’ success in mastering course material, students are still accountable for learning course material and meeting the expectations and standards of the course. Sometimes managing both seems difficult. This handout explores options available for implementing various accommodations.

Recommended Best Practices: A DRS letter is often a starting point for a conference with a student.

1. When presented with a DRS form describing accommodations for a student, take the time to discuss the accommodations with the student, while respecting the fact that students have privacy rights and are under no obligation to disclose their disability to faculty.
2. As the instructor of record, you determine how the accommodations are observed. **We encourage documenting these expectations in writing and giving a copy to the student.** These can also be shared with DRS.

The goals are to ensure that the student’s needs are met and that the faculty member feels confident that the student is accessing the same course information, acquiring the same mastery, and is accountable as are all students. Clarifying how the accommodations will be observed to achieve those goals, preferably in writing, is beneficial to all parties in facilitating the success of the student while maintaining faculty standards. If you are unsure of how to make an accommodation given the nature of your class, contact the DRS office.

Notetakers and Lecture Access: Note that this accommodation is not the same as flexible attendance and the student is required to be present.

1. Helping students find notetakers in the class or among those who have already taken the class is always preferable since they are more likely to receive accurate information; however, notetaking is still an unreliable act where important points and erroneous information may be taken down.
2. **IT is often more accurate and accessible.** Faculty members may want to explore other options with their students, such as recording the class and capturing images of boards taken during class.

Alternative and extended time in testing: Students may be allowed additional testing time at the DRS Testing Center. If a student requires voice/text or scanning technology the Center may be the best option for the student. Faculty may prefer their students have access to them during an exam. If a student only requires additional testing time, **the faculty member can accommodate the student by extending the time themselves** through an extended exam period, having the student complete the exam in their office or a classroom where they can continue to proctor the exam.
**Extension/Flexibility of Assignment Due Date:** The amount of extra time is not always specified in the letter. Sometimes a student who has flexibility with assignment dates can find themselves overwhelmed and fall behind in the course of the semester by using this accommodation; creating a plan or schedule with the student can help them to succeed and reduce faculty frustration. A faculty member can require notification from the student when they intend to use this accommodation, for instance the student can be instructed that “they must let the faculty member know they will need additional time before the assignment is due, within 24 hours of the assignment due date and time, etc.” **The faculty member can set a time or date by which the assignment must be turned in.** Talking with the student, creating a written agreement arrived at so everyone is on the same page, can add clarity for both student and faculty as to how the accommodation will be honored to ensure the student can successfully progress through the class.

**Flexibility in Attendance:** Flexibility in attendance does not mean that students are excused or exempted from expectations for class participation in the learning, practice and dissemination of material that takes place during in-class contact. In seminars and classes where faculty believe the in-class engagement is an essential component of their course, this is especially problematic. There are a number of ways to deal with this accommodation. Students can be expected to arrange for notetakers (2 or more students from the class is best as notes are unreliable) or to record the class and image capturing of important material, proofs, etc. In some cases faculty may allow the student to Zoom in. Faculty member can require that a method is set up ahead of time so that the student does not miss the class material and fall behind during the course of the semester. This also allows the instructor to set up a method for checking that the student has accessed, received, and reviewed the material.

**Presentations and Workshops:** Presentations can create additional challenges to both attendance and assignment flexibility. Faculty can consider having the student post their presentations to canvas or presenting by Zoom. For paper workshops, faculty can require students workshop their papers through the Writing Center which also offers online options or require they use break-out groups or collaborations on canvas or Zoom.

**Other Resources and Suggestions:**

**IT Advances:** It may be useful to identify what technology a student has access to in order to facilitate their learning. If they don’t have recording tools etc. that may be useful, you may direct them to DRS and OIT for help acquiring tools that will facilitate their access.

**Universal Design:** Faculty can also aid in the process by employing universal design and making sure their materials are accessible. When designing instruction to support a variety of learners and that align with accommodations for students with disabilities consider the principles of universal design for learning (UDL). The following website provides some basic guidelines: [http://udlguidelines.cast.org/](http://udlguidelines.cast.org/). The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning may also offer additional resources: [http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/](http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/).

**Engage DRS:** Consider inviting DRS staff to a faculty meeting to gather information, clarify your role as a faculty member, and to remove any misconceptions about disabilities accommodations.

Prepared by UCD Faculty Assembly Disabilities Committee