

Q&A from the Nov. 11 Curators' Teaching Summit: The Testing Center and Student Disabilities

Note: Answers 1-5 were provided by Cheryl Downey-Eber, manager, the Testing Center (cherylde@mst.edu, 341-4222), answers 6-16 were provided by Connie Arthur, student program administrator, Counseling, Disability Support and Student Wellness (conniea@mst.edu, 341-6655), and answer 17 was provided by Ross Gubrud, psychologist, CDSSW (gubrudr@mst.edu, 341-4211). Please contact them for further information.

1. Are there any plans to increase the size of the Testing Center?

Presently the Testing Center has acquired an additional room in Norwood Hall, G-11. This room is designed to administer a majority of our computer-based testing programs like Fundamentals of Engineering, Test of English as a Foreign Language, Teacher Certification. The Testing Center will try to maximize this resource. Already plans are in the works to use this area as an overflow testing area, especially during finals week. At peak times we will have 26 to 46 seats available.

We are keeping accommodated classroom testing on the 2nd floor in 201, 202, and 203 Norwood Hall, so please keep delivering exams to the 2nd floor.

2. Are there any plans for having everyone in a class taking the exam in the Testing Center (e-testing on computers)?

To be fiscally responsible for this campus, it would not be feasible. Who would be responsible for locating/ providing the space, technology, staff and other costs?

3. Why is it faculty responsibility to schedule the Testing Center? Aren't the students grown-ups, and if not, why is their failure my problem?

Faculty and students jointly make arrangements with the Testing Center. The Testing Center is relying upon communication occurring between faculty and student.

The role of faculty is to notify the Testing Center of students who are eligible for accommodations; the role of students is to confirm their intention to use the Center for a given exam.

A suggestion: Create an accommodation testing policy in the course syllabus clarifying student and faculty responsibility, including what would happen if the student did not self-identify prior to a test and/or confirm intent to use Testing Center.

4. How do I use the services of the Testing Center if the need is not related to a disability?

The Testing Center, as long as space is available, can administer classroom exams. The Testing Center cannot administer classroom exams to an entire class. Visit Testing Center website (<http://testcenter.mst.edu>) and locate Testing Policies for S&T Faculty. Included with accommodation

policies, there is a section on Alternate Time for a Classroom exam. The process is very similar. If a student is suddenly ill and you would like the student to take the test in our office – Contact Cheryl Downey-Eber or Kristin Dawson. We will work with the student and faculty on a case by case basis.

5. Does the GRE exam allow (???)unreadable word) or double time for the exam with a letter from a doctor requesting it? What about similar standardized tests (ACT, SAT, MCAT, LSAT, etc.?) What about the bar exam, medical boards, etc.?

The tests you have mentioned do have policies for accommodations. These policies are posted on each testing program website. The testing program has staff available to make the determination regarding each accommodation request in addition to scheduling the examinee with an available test center that can provide the requested accommodations. The process defined by each test company requires extra planning on the examinee's part.

All professional certification test programs additionally have similar procedures as the test programs listed above. It may be advantageous to search the testing program's website for "examinees with disabilities," or "accommodations:

- GRE- <http://www.ets.org/disabilities>
- NCEES –Fundamentals of Engineering - <http://ncees.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/NCEES-Examinees-with-Disabilities-Guide-November-2013.pdf>
- GMAT - <http://www.mba.com/the-gmat/schedule-a-gmat-appointment/register-as-a-test-taker-with-disabilities.aspx>
- ACT - <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/disab/>
- SAT - <http://student.collegeboard.org/services-for-students-with-disabilities>
- MCAT- <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/accommodations/>
- LSAT- <http://www.lsac.org/docs/default-source/jd-docs/accommodatebrochure.pdf>

Some of these links will be posted to the Testing Center webpage with Testing Programs.

6. Are students with accommodations strongly advised towards attempting to overcome/live with their disability as an adult? What will such students do in the workplace; employers won't give them twice as long to complete a project.

The majority of the students are aware of their disability and the impact the disability has on their lives. Just as with the non-disabled students, maturity has an impact on the decisions the students make regarding their responsibilities and goals in life. The fact that the students are at this university, continuing their education, and realizing the challenges they may experience, demonstrates their ambition and desire to live with their disability as an adult. Most of the students have had the disability all of their lives and it is very likely, depending on the situation; they may need some type of accommodation in the workplace.

Our primary concern at the post- secondary level is to accommodate the students so they have the same opportunities to learn as any other student on this campus. Students with a disability are expected to demonstrate their knowledge by completing the same assignments as the other students, take exams of equal difficulty as other students, and meet the same criteria for graduation. Once the persons with disabilities gain employment, the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the

Rehabilitations act will continue to ensure the individuals are allowed accommodations, if the disabled individual discloses and requests the services.

7. What about English as a second language? Is there a requirement for accommodations?

A student with a language barrier may experience some of the same challenges as a student with a learning disability, slow processing, or challenges with written expression. However, English as a second language (ESL) is not considered as a disability. Therefore, Disability Support Services (DSS) cannot accommodate the ESL students.

A more inclusive “universal design” in the classroom could assist all students in the classroom while breaking down barriers for students with disabilities and students with English as a second language.

8. What if student needs longer time on test but does not register; are we required to accommodate?

An instructor is not required to accommodate a student that has requested extended time for testing but has not registered with DSS. However, with the understanding of a student’s particular situation, there have been some instructors that have provided accommodations without a letter from DSS. For a student with a disability to receive accommodations, the student must disclose his/her disability to Disability Support Services and provide supporting documentation. Once the university is made aware of the diagnosis and the request for accommodations, we are legally obligated to accommodate the student.

To establish the instructor’s expectations for the provision of accommodative services, our instructors may establish in the syllabus and verbally in class that a student will need to provide a letter of accommodation from Disability Support Services prior to being allowed any accommodations.

9. How long do we listen? How quickly do we refer to student disabilities?

This question is a bit unclear, so I will respond as if the question is in reference to making referrals to DSS.

If a student is sharing his/her challenges and an instructor hears comments that would make the instructor believe the student would benefit from speaking with someone in Disability Support Services, please encourage the student to schedule an appointment. If the student doesn’t qualify for services, the DSS staff may be aware of resources that could assist the student.

10. How do accommodation requests break down by gender?

I do not have an accommodation request break down by gender available.

11. Tools for dyslexia? I have a student who has access to tools to help him “read” – a computer voice he can listen to – but what about tools to help him make the dyslexia better? Or at least manageable on a daily basis?

I truly appreciate this question, thank you for your inquiry.

I am inspired by the students that are challenged with reading but strive daily towards their educational goals at S&T. As a result of the disability not being as obvious, or what I refer to as “invisible,” many times these students are reluctant to share about their disability or ask for help. While these students have developed coping skills for life, in general, the challenges that they experience in the educational environment require much more time, effort and diligence that go unnoticed by the majority of their peers and instructors.

Providing accommodations that might assist a student with dyslexia is always a challenge. Talking with the student, having the supporting documentation, and being aware of the potential barriers that may present in the classroom helps determine what might make the conditions better for the student.

Academic accommodations for some students with dyslexia that could make their life more manageable could be: 1. Having all class handouts and exams printed on soft colored paper rather than standard white paper. 2. Printed material in larger font and spacing has been helpful for some students. 3. Print in “Arial font” or a font that the student has been familiar with most of his/her life can also be helpful. 4. Text to speech software can truly assist the student, however, some of the voices used in the software tend to be “flat;” using a voice that has some “fluency” may assist the student. 5. The use of technology, such as Tegrity that records the lecture could be beneficial.

12. What is a reasonable accommodation?

With Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act setting the standards and policies that mandate accommodations, we must keep in mind that a student may receive accommodations if, without the accommodation, discrimination would occur.

An academic accommodation is an adjustment made based on the student’s disability and his/her individual need. An accommodation could include modifications to academic requirements, auxiliary aids and services. For example: priority registration, reduced course load, the provision of note-takers, a sign language interpreter, extended time for testing, and adaptive software and technology.

When determining if an accommodation is “reasonable”, we keep in mind that in providing the accommodation, we are not required to lower or effect substantial modifications to essential requirements of a course. Example: The University may be required to provide extended timing for an exam but it is not required to change the substantive content of the exam.

13. Is there a time we should not make an accommodation based on our common sense?

We should always be mindful of discrimination. That being said, we are also aware that some recommended accommodations by both the student and the professional providing the documentation may not be appropriate for the post-secondary environment.

Example: There are many requests for extended time for class assignments. It is very rare that a student be provided this accommodation. Our instructors provide a course timeline of assignment expectations in the syllabus. I deny the accommodation request and explain that it is up to the student to be aware of assignment deadlines and plan accordingly. Many students, disabled and non-disabled, may need to develop better planning and organizational skills.

14. What is the process of giving students accommodation letters? Are they tested by doctors/counselors?

Each student who qualifies for accommodations is required to provide documentation or an assessment/evaluation from a licensed professional that states the diagnosis responsible for the disability. The documentation should also provide information regarding how the disability will impact the student in the post-secondary environment.

To view the guideline for documentation, please visit the DSS website: <http://dss.mst.edu/>. The documentation link will provide more information regarding the information we expect to receive.

15. Who decides what the specific accommodation will be? Is this from a doctor, or Connie, or what? (double-time, calculator, etc.)

The documentation from the professional that has been treating the student should make specific recommendations regarding the accommodations that would best meet the student's needs. Also, speaking with the student about the barriers he/she experiences in the educational environment will assist in determining accommodations. If there are questions about the appropriateness of a requested accommodation, Connie Arthur will call the professional to inquire about the student's request or she may consult with the professional staff in CDSW and Student Health Services.

16. "Whether I can treat disability student equally in case of a missed class, missed exam, etc."

The question presented at the Summit was based off of the following department policy:

"The general policy is that a missed exam will be 'made up' by replacing the zero with the percentage on the final exam for any student with 6 or fewer unexcused absences. Any deviations from this policy must be approved by a department coordinator or chair."

The scenario presented:

If a student with a disability, particularly a chronic episodic health condition, such as Crohn's Disease, misses an exam, can the student with a disability be treated the same as any non-disabled student.

Response:

Again, I am going to refer to our responsibility to meet our mandated obligation set by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Students receive accommodations if, without the accommodation, discrimination would occur.

If the student has a chronic episodic condition that cannot be controlled by the student, and has the potential to physically impact the student's ability to make it to class, then that student would qualify for the accommodation to "make-up work missed due to illness." Meaning that the student be given an equal opportunity to access the material missed and demonstrate his/her knowledge by submitting homework or taking an exam, as provided to the other students.

Is this accommodation a "free pass to miss class"? Absolutely not. The student and instructor are encouraged by Disability Support Services, in a statement on the accommodation letter, to set pre-determined limits and expectations regarding the deadlines.

Therefore, potential deviations determined by the instructor, coordinator and/or department chair, could be: 1) that the student's absences are considered excused, as long as the instructor and DSS are

notified of the situation. 2) Perhaps, instead of six absences, the student is allowed eight absences. 3) It could also mean that the student have additional time to submit missed assignments. 4) If more than one exam is missed, it could mean the student be allowed to take a different exam of equal challenge, to replace the exam missed.

Consideration should be based on the essential requirements of the course. If the student is allowed to take the exam at a different time or another exam of equal challenge, would that jeopardize the integrity or lower the essential requirements of the course?

Bottom line: The Office of Civil Rights, through the enforcement of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, would expect the university to demonstrate that we have made considerations for the episodic health condition of the student.

17. If a student exhibits unusual behavior, what should we do?

Options:

- Contact counseling (341-4211) for a consultation
- Express concern about the observed behavior and encourage student to seek counseling (204 Norwood)
- Complete a UCARE report: <http://communitystandards.mst.edu/behaviorform/index.html>