

# Faculty Guide for Supporting Students with Disabilities

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ACCESSIBLE LEARNING SERVICES



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The policies that govern the accommodations process for students with learning disorders, physical disabilities, mobility impairments, medical related challenges, and mental illness are set by the Disability Policy Committee of the Acadia University Senate. The approved policies are posted on the Accessible Learning Services website, which can be accessed through the following link: <http://accessiblelearning.acadiu.ca/>.

Questions and concerns about Acadia's accommodations policies and procedures should be directed to:

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## Introduction

Approximately eight percent of the student body at Acadia University is registered with Accessible Learning Services. While the majority of registered students self-identify as students with learning disorders, the number of students who require accommodations for mental health, medical related challenges, physical disabilities, and mobility impairments are steadily increasing.

The mandate of Accessible Learning Services is to work with staff and faculty to remove barriers that may interfere with students' academic success. The logic that underpins Acadia's support for student accommodations is directed by a fundamental need to minimize potential challenges that may interfere with students' academic progress. Acadia embraces the responsibility to support all students by providing academic accommodations that maximize opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

## Accommodation Registration Process

Staff, faculty, and students all play important roles in the accommodations registration process. The integrity of the process depends on each embracing their responsibilities. Students are required to self-identify to Accessible Learning Services staff and notify their professors of all anticipated support needs. Accessible Learning Services staff is prepared to coach students on different strategies for discussing accommodation needs with faculty, and will also work with faculty to implement support recommendations.

New and returning Acadia students who anticipate the need for accommodations are required to arrange a meeting with the Disability Resource Facilitator either before they get to campus or shortly thereafter. Students should bring a recent medical or psychological educational documentation that highlights both the diagnosed condition and recommendation for accommodation to the meeting. Students are not required to present documentation to any other staff or faculty once documents have been accepted by Accessible Learning Services. This is done primarily to ensure that Acadia students receive appropriate accommodations without compromising their right to privacy. Students are advised of support resources that are available at Acadia University for students during the accommodations registration process.

The accommodations provided by Accessible Learning Services are based on recommendations outlined in students' medical and psychological educational documentation. These recommendations are varied and may include counselling, mentoring, tutoring, note-taking, assistive technology, exam accommodations, and access to government bursaries and grants.

Accessible Learning Services requires that all students who anticipate the need for accommodations complete an **Instructor Verification Form**, a process which includes students meeting with instructors, notifying them of support needs, and securing their signatures.

## **Accommodations For:**

### **Learning Disorders**

Characteristics of Specific Learning Disorders is diagnosed through a clinical review of the individual's developmental, medical, educational, and family history, reports of test scores and teacher observations, and response to academic interventions. The diagnosis requires persistent difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic or mathematical reasoning skills during formal years of schooling. Symptoms may include inaccurate or slow and effortful reading, poor written expression that lacks clarity, difficulties remembering number facts, or inaccurate mathematical reasoning.

Current academic skills must be well below the average range of scores in culturally and linguistically appropriate tests of reading, writing, or mathematics. The individual's difficulties must not be better explained by developmental, neurological, and sensory (vision or hearing), or motor disorders and must significantly interfere with academic achievement, occupational performance, or activities of daily living (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)).

### **Accommodations for Learning Disorders**

Students with learning disorders may struggle with reading related decoding and comprehension, conceptual and the mechanical aspects of writing, listening, speaking and understanding instructions, processing math related concepts and general computation, spatial or mechanical abilities, and the ability to organize and plan

- Note taking support and/or permission to record lectures
- Strategically placed short breaks to encourage students to maintain focus in the classroom as well on tests and exams
- Clear course guidelines and expectations
- Academic mentoring
- Tutoring
- Assistive technology
- Editing help
- Exam accommodation (For example, access to a quiet exam room, access to a computer to organize and edit, and extra time)

### **Attention Deficit and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD and AD/HD)**

Attention Deficit Disorder is a neurological condition that makes it difficult for a person to initially focus and remain focused on specific tasks for longer periods of time. Students with ADD are usually distracted by factors that originate intrinsically. The condition is identified as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder AD/HD whenever individuals also exhibit hyperactivity in response to external stimuli. AD/HD may affect students' learning by making

it difficult for them to pay attention in class, take adequate notes, start and complete assignments on time. Students may enter into activities somewhat impulsively. There is no cure for AD/HD. Students with AD/HD may struggle with tasks and projects that require planning, time management, sustained attention, and sustained effort. In certain instances, medication that stimulates specific areas of the brain that control the ability to focus on assigned tasks has proven to be effective for controlling AD/HD related symptoms; however, even with medication, the academic success of students with AD/HD is still tied to their ability to work hard, to organize their personal and academic schedules, and to seek out support that both reduces distractions and support task completion.

### **Accommodations for ADD and AD/HD**

- Note taking support and/or permission to record lectures
- Exam accommodation (For example, access to a quiet exam room, access to a computer to organize and edit, and extra time)
- Strategically placed short breaks to encourage students to maintain focus in the classroom as well on tests and exams
- Clear course guidelines and expectations
- Academic mentoring
- Tutoring
- Assistive technology
- Editing help

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurobiological disorder that affects how the brain processes information. It is characterized by qualitative differences in the development of language (verbal/non-verbal communication), cognition, and social understanding. People with ASD tend to have communication deficits such as responding inappropriately in conversations, misreading nonverbal interactions, or having difficulty building friendships appropriate to their age. In addition, people with ASD may be overly dependent on routines, highly sensitive to changes in their environment, or intensely focused on inappropriate terms. Again, the symptoms of people with ASD will fall on a continuum, with some individuals showing mild symptoms and others having much more severe symptoms. The spectrum will allow clinicians to account for the variations in symptoms and behaviors from person to person (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)).

### **Accommodations for Autism Spectrum Disorder**

- Exam accommodations
- Assistive technology
- Organizational tools
- Note takers
- Clearly stated instructions and expectations

- Multi-modal instruction/examples
- Minimal background noise and distractions
- Predictability and structure in classroom activities, instruction and scheduling
- Counselling

## **Mental Illnesses**

The term mental illness refers to a broad range of conditions that may affect students' ability to perform academically. Most often, these conditions are either neurobiological or the result of a traumatic event, but are always diagnosed by trained professionals. Mental illnesses vary in intensity, depending on external and internal factors. Overall, owing to differences in type and intensity, mental illnesses pose different challenges to students. Besides directly impacting students' academic performance, students struggling with chronic mental illnesses may also find it difficult to manage their social lives. In all cases, a medically trained professional determines the appropriate treatment plan, which may include either a medication program or a therapy arrangement, or in some cases, a combination of both.

### **Some Commons types of Mental Illnesses**

#### **Depression**

Students struggling with depression usually deal with challenges that impact their mood. Mood related challenges that result from depression are different from normal stress related challenges in that they fundamentally impact the way a person feels about themselves and how they relate and interact with others. Some of the most common depression symptoms include lack of sleep, loss of appetite, general feelings of sadness, feelings of hopelessness, feelings of worthlessness, anxious feelings, and continued feelings of guilt. Additionally, students struggling with depression may also withdraw completely from all academic and social activities.

#### **Anxiety Disorders**

Anxiety Disorders are characterized by chronic episodes of intense fear followed closely by such physical symptoms as chest pain, difficulty breathing, dizziness, nausea and other indications of abdominal distress.

#### **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is characterized by repeated unwanted thoughts that in some cases lead to compulsive rituals (For instance, hand washing, counting, checking, etc.) to reduce the stress caused by the obsessions. Failure to perform the compulsions may lead to extreme anxiety.

#### **Bipolar Disorder**

Is characterized by episodes of depression and mania. Symptoms may include racing

thoughts, feeling hyperactive, inflated or unrealistic self- confidence, and depression.

## **Eating Disorders**

Students struggling with eating disorders may display unhealthy preoccupation with calories and exercise, although the disorder is not just about food. Eating disorders affect the person's self-worth and identity and can be a way of distancing self from painful emotions and feelings.

## **Accommodations for Mental Illnesses**

- Extra time for tests and exams
- Academic mentoring
- Alternate locations for tests
- Academic mentoring
- Counselling

## **Medical Conditions**

Some students also require accommodations for medical related conditions which may either be chronic or temporary. Some common chronic conditions include Crohn's-Disease, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and Lupus.

Students experiencing temporary medical issues such as broken limbs and concussion can also access accommodations through Accessible Learning Services.

## **Accommodations for Medical Conditions**

- Strategically identified break periods to allow students to allow students to rest, make use of lavatory facilities, and take medication as prescribed.
- Extended time for exams and tests
- Scribe
- Note taking
- Use of computer

## **Hearing Impairments**

The impact of hearing loss on deaf or hard of hearing students' receptive and expressive communication abilities depends on factors such as degree of hearing impairment and age of onset of hearing loss. Students with hearing impairment may use Sign Language (including working with interpreters), lip reading, and a variety of assistive listening devices. It is helpful to realize that hearing aids amplify all sounds, some of which---like overhead projector motors---may be very distracting to students. As well, persons who lip read must do a certain amount of guessing. For these reasons, persons with hearing impairment rely more heavily on visual cues and visual presentation of information.

## **Accommodations for Hearing Impairments**

- Assistive listening devices
- Preferential seating
- Assistive technology
- Sign language interpreters
- Exam accommodations
- Note taking
- Attention to fire/emergency evacuation procedures

## **Vision Impairments**

Some students with low vision or who are blind are easily recognizable by their guide dogs or white canes. Others may move about and function without evident challenges; they may see adequately to allow for basic navigation, but be unable to focus on finer details. Students with complete vision loss will need all visual information transferred to some other modality. Those with partial vision loss may require magnification or other enhancement of print material.

## **Accommodations for Vision Impairments**

- Note taking
- Exam accommodations, including extra time, use of a computer, readers, scribes etc.
- Assistive technology, which include text-to-voice software and screen magnification.
- Verbal articulation of visuals
- Advance notice of reference readings and texts to allow time for students to digitally record items, scan them, and locate brailled copies
- Permission to record lectures
- Share fire/emergency evacuation procedures

## **Mobility Impairments**

Students with mobility impairments expend an unusual amount of energy on the regular routines of daily living. The Acadia campus presents unique challenges to those with physical disabilities because of its hilly terrain. As well, there are varying degrees of pain and fatigue that accompany physical disabilities like spina bifida and cerebral palsy. Additionally, some required medications can have adverse side effects on students, causing fatigue and poor concentration.

## **Accommodations for Mobility Impairments**

- Change of classroom venue if the classroom is inaccessible or in a remote location
- Note taking support and/or recorded lectures
- Strategically identified break periods to allow students to rest, make use of lavatory facilities, and take medication as prescribed
- Adaptive equipment, e.g. computers with speech synthesizers, adapted keyboards and keyboard guards, tape recorders, specialized software
- Advance book/reading lists
- Exam and assignment accommodation
- Flexibility with punctuality where mobility is a factor
- Presence of an attendant caregiver to manage placement of books, note taking, retrieval of research material, feeding and personal care needs during class time
- Attention to fire/emergency evacuation procedures

## **Brain Injury**

Brain injury is most commonly caused by traumatic injury to the brain as a result of either a blow to the head or a violent whipping action of the neck. Brain injuries are characterized by moderate changes in an individual's level of functioning. There is no such thing as a "typical" head injury. Some brain injuries result in problems with executive functions while others create difficulties with cognitive and social functions. Still, others are accompanied by such physiological problems as pain and fatigue. Because healing from brain injuries occurs within the first two years of the injury, faculty members might expect to see ongoing changes in students' recovering from brain injury.

## **Accommodations for Brain Injuries**

- Exam accommodations
- Note takers and tutors
- Assistive technology
- Extra time for tests and exams
- Academic mentoring
- Counselling

# Academic Accommodations

## Mid-Term and Exams

Accessible Learning Services provide various support services to registered students who anticipate the need for mid-term and exam accommodations. Some of the most common mid-term and exam accommodations provided by Accessible Learning Services include exam time extensions, alternative test formats, alternate testing location, prompt sheets, and use of a computer or calculator. Students whose accommodation requests have been approved by Accessible Learning Services write all their mid-terms in the Accessible Learning Services exam room, which is located in the basement of the old Student Union Building. All final exams are written in the Fountain Commons. Mid-terms and exams are proctored by current Acadia graduate students who have been hired by the Disability Resource Facilitator.

Students seeking exam accommodations from Accessible Learning Services must provide an exam schedule to the Disability Resource Facilitator at least five days prior to the mid-term for which they are seeking accommodation, as it provides adequate time to assign a proctor for exam accommodations, to identify and reserve alternate test locations for students, to confirm accommodation arrangements with instructors as well as enough time for faculty to deliver test copies to the Disability Resource Facilitator.

Accessible Learning Services is unable to provide appropriate accommodations to students without faculty cooperation. Consequently, Accessible Learning Services suggests that faculty deliver exam and test copies at least five days prior to tests and exams. Faculty who are unable to meet the aforementioned requirement should make special arrangement with the Disability Resource Facilitator.

## Frequently Requested Exam Accommodations at Acadia

- **Alternate Testing Locations:** Accessible Learning Services encourages students to write midterms and exams with their classes whenever possible. Professors may be willing to extend exam or test times if the accommodations requested by students pertain to extra time; however, some students require specialized transcription services, special equipment and support needs that may be best met in alternate test locations. All mid-terms and exams written with Accessible Learning Services are proctored by graduate students who have been hired by the Disability Resource Facilitator.
- **Extended Time:** Requirements for extended time for writing examinations vary depending on the nature of the students' accommodation needs. Many students request extra time for scheduled midterms and exams but write short tests and quizzes with their classmates. Accessible Learning Services supports requests for extended time based on the recommendations suggested in students' psychological

educational assessments and medical reports.

- **Oral Examinations:** Students with disabilities that affect reading (vision impairments and some types of learning disabilities) may require that their exams be read aloud either by a proctor or with the use of assistive technology. For this reason, Accessible Learning Services may request that an exam be sent electronically rather than as a paper copy. In such instances, neither a reader nor assistive technology provides information that would present an unfair advantage to students.
- **Scribing:** This accommodation is used by students who have either limited manual dexterity or certain types of learning disorders. Scribing is the process by which a student dictates responses to a designated scribe who does the actual writing. Scribes write only what is dictated to them and are usually quite knowledgeable on Acadia University's exam policies. Accessible Learning Services staff strictly adhere to all the university's academic regulations.
- **Assistive Technology:** Evaluation alternatives can also include the use of technology and equipment, which may include such large print software like Zoom Text, scanning/reading software like Kurzweil, voice-dictation software like Dragon Naturally Speaking and MacSpeech, screen-reading software like JAWS, talking calculators, live scribe hand-held spelling and grammar checkers and print magnifiers. These technologies may be used by students with print disabilities, including those with certain learning disabilities, visual impairments, and motor disabilities that limit movement of hands and arms.

## Other Academic Accommodations

- **Note Taking:** Many students who are registered with Accessible Learning Services regard note taking as integral to their academic success at Acadia. The Disability Resource Facilitator contacts professors to ask for assistance recruiting note takers once the request for note taking has been processed. Note takers offer their services to the Disability Resource Facilitator, who is responsible for checking the quality of notes, selecting an appropriate note taker, monitoring the ongoing provision of notes, and providing a small honorarium to note takers.
- **Alternate Format:** Students with vision loss, mobility impairments and some learning disorders require alternate formats for print materials. The Disability Resource Facilitator arranges for transfer of print materials to alternate formats, which may include audio files, large print, publishers' e-files, and scanning to PDF and Braille.
- **Prompt/Fact Sheets:** Prompt/Fact Sheets are accommodation tools for students whose documented disabilities interfere with their ability to retrieve learned information. Students who anticipate a need for Prompt/Fact Sheets must provide

documentation to Accessible Learning Services that clearly identifies Prompt/Fact Sheets as necessary components for students' exam/test success. Additionally, students' use of Prompt/Fact Sheets during exams, and tests must be approved by instructors. Accessible Learning Services usually recommend that students create exam or test Prompt/Fact Sheets with their instructors under the guidance of recommendations outlined on students' assessments. Once Prompt/Fact Sheets have been created, Accessible Learning Services require instructors to deliver the approved sheets to Accessible Learning Services at least five days before scheduled exams or tests. Prompt/Fact Sheets do not compromise Acadia's academic integrity but instead removes barriers that otherwise undermine students' ability to demonstrate their academic knowledge and skills.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How can I encourage students with disabilities to talk with me about their accommodations?

A: Announce at the beginning of a course that you are available to discuss instructional methods and appropriate accommodations and supports with students who have disabilities that affect learning. Course outlines should include following message:

Q: Is it appropriate to ask a student who is having obvious difficulties whether he/she has a disability, or to refer the student to Accessible Learning Services?

A. No. It is not a good idea to ask directly about a possible disability. A direct inquiry such as this could be considered intrusive. You may simply tell the student that you notice he or she is having academic difficulty and encourage the student to come and talk with you about gaining assistance.

Q: How do I maintain confidentiality?

A: Rather than approaching students in class, invite them to talk with you in your office.

Q: What do I do if a student approaches me directly with a request for accommodations and is not registered with Accessible Learning Services?

A: If the student has a documented disability, the best approach is to encourage the student to contact Accessible Learning Services so that we can determine whether or not the student is eligible to receive accommodations.

Q: Does providing extra time give some students an unfair advantage?

A: We are not giving an advantage; rather, we are trying to eliminate a disadvantage and overcome an education-related barrier. Even though a student may have average, above average or very high intelligence, he or she may need extra time to read, write, comprehend or process information. With extended time, the student is given the same conditions to produce answers to the exam questions as any non-disabled student may under “regulation-time” conditions. Therefore, the students with LD are provided with a “level playing field”.

Q: Why should I give a particular student extra time? He/she doesn't need it. He/she got a B in his/her last test.

A: In the same way that we would not reduce the time for exams for students without disabilities who receive A's, we do not penalize students with disabilities for getting good grades. Accommodations are based on identified academic needs. The fundamental question is whether it is knowledge of the course material or the speed of completion of the exam that is being assessed.

## **Resources**

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

<http://www.ldac-acta.ca/>

The National Centre for Learning Disabilities

<http://ncld.org/>

Highlights of DSM – V changes:

[www.dsm5.org/Documents/changes%20from%20dsm-iv-tr%20to%20dsm](http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/changes%20from%20dsm-iv-tr%20to%20dsm)

NS Services for Persons with Disabilities:

<http://novascotia.ca/coms/disabilities>

Canadian Mental Health Association:

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Universal Instructional Design

<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~ability/Publication%20-%20Universal%20Instructional%20Design%20University%20of%20Toronto%20Scarborough.pdf>

[http://www.udlcenter.org/resource\\_library/videos/udlcenter](http://www.udlcenter.org/resource_library/videos/udlcenter)