

Frequently Asked Questions

Westmont Disability Services

What is a reasonable accommodation?

The term reasonable accommodation is used by the ADA and the ADAAG to modifications made in the educational environment to help create an equal educational opportunity for an otherwise qualified student to fulfill course requirements. These academic adjustments, or accommodations, limit as much as possible the effects of the disability on their performance. For more information, go to the Office of Disability Services (ODS) website.

How do I know a student in my course requires an accommodation?

Students registered with ODS are required to submit requests for accommodations through our office. Each student must complete an application and provide the required documentation. You will receive a Letter of Accommodation when a student submits an accommodation request for your course. Students are advised to submit these requests to you at the beginning of the quarter, although you may receive these letters throughout the semester. They are also advised to meet with you individually to discuss their needs and make arrangements for their exams, although they are not required to meet with you.

Students that approach you outside of this format may not be registered with ODS. You may inform students that you need to have verification from ODS in order to provide an accommodation. Students may contact our office for more information.

What do I do after I receive a Letter of Accommodation?

You may not have to take any action at this time, although there may be modifications that need to occur in a timely manner. This letter is to inform you of the accommodation(s) this student requires, and the student may request an accommodation for exams in your class. You will receive another notification email when the student submits a proctor request for an exam. These letters are confidential.

What do I do after I receive an electronic “Request for a Test?” Do I need to arrange for a proctor?

Once a student submits an electronic Proctor Request in our online system, it requires additional information to be submitted by you or your departmental proxy, as well as a description of how

and when the exam will be delivered. ODS will proctor exams so long as requests are submitted within a reasonable time frame. The student must submit the proctor request online at least 3 business days prior to the exam in order to be guaranteed their accommodation(s).

A ODS student submitted a test request VERY late. Do I have to accommodate this student?

Please contact ODS if this happens. According to ADA guidelines, every attempt must be made to accommodate a student with disabilities. ODS will work with you to attempt to accommodate the student. However, this does not guarantee that the student will be accommodated.

Am I obligated to provide for an accommodation after the exam has been given?

Retroactive exam accommodations are not provided by ODS. If a student has arranged for an accommodation and then does not take the exam, the student needs to contact you to discuss the consequences.

What is a “Modified Exam Format”?

A Modified Exam Format is a type of accommodation that may require you to alter the format of your exam. For example, a student may need their exams (and class handouts) in Braille, or on a specific color paper and font size. ODS will assist you with these type of accommodations.

Modified Exam Formats may require explanation from ODS staff. For example, there may be a student that needs to be able to eat a snack during the exam, have a place to stretch, or have access to a restroom during the exam due to a physical condition. The student may also need to type all responses, use a scribe, or use specialized software. Please contact ODS for additional information.

Should I check in with the ODS student(s) and proctor during the exam?

It is recommended that you or someone from your department be available to consult with the proctor and student(s) during the exam. Often times ODS students find it necessary to be able to ask questions during the exam.

If I have a question about arranging an exam accommodation, who can I call?

You can call or email Beth Whitcomb, Administrative Assistant to Disability Services Monday-Friday 1:00-5:00, 565-6135 (bwhitcomb@westmont.edu) or Sheri Noble, Director of Disability Services (exception of Tuesday) 565-6186 snoble@westmont.edu

Do I have to provide an accommodation for a student that is not registered with ODS?

No. Students will often request accommodations from their professor, and may not want to officially register with OSD, and still request assistance from you. You are not obligated to provide an accommodation to a student that is not registered with our program. Kindly refer them to the ODS website or share our contact information.

How do I know that the accommodation requested by the student is appropriate and legitimate?

If you receive a Letter of Accommodation, prepared by the Director of Disability Service, you can be assured that the student has provided the College with proof of a disability under the legal definition of the word. The student will only be allowed to request accommodations which have been deemed appropriate given the nature of the specific disability and its impact on the student. A student who makes a claim to you regarding a disability but has not submitted an instructor letter can be referred to Disability Services to begin the application process to our program.

What should I do if a student tries to give me his/her documentation?

Refuse to read or accept the documentation and refer the student to Office of Disability Services (ODS). The student will present his or her documentation to the Director for review. Director will consider if the student's condition rises to the level of disability.

What if one of my students has requested accommodations that I believe will alter the essential components of my course?

Accommodations based on a disability are intended to "level the playing field" (by removing barriers to learning and demonstration of knowledge) between students with disabilities and students without diagnosed disabilities. If a faculty member believes a specific accommodation will fundamentally alter the essential components of the course, the faculty member should

contact Office of Disability Services to discuss the specific nature of the accommodation's impact on the course.

Who determines the accommodations for a student with a disability?

Westmont College has granted the Director of Disability Services authority to interpret disability documentation and determine appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. Reviews of documentation and services are thoroughly examined using established procedures and policies.

Am I being asked to compromise academic standards or give the student with a disability an advantage?

No. If the existence of the disability has been verified, the accommodation should provide an equal opportunity to the student, in effect starting the student on equal footing with others. To compromise standards or "water down" the requirements would not assist the student in acquiring a competitive degree. The student with a disability should fulfill all of the essential course-related requirements; however, altering the font, substituting an equivalent requirement, or changing the method of meeting requirements may provide the student a more equitable chance at success.

By making certain accommodations to students with disabilities, am I not discriminating against the other students who would probably prefer such things as extended time for tests, etc.?

Technically, it may appear that preferential treatment is being given to students with disabilities; however, the objective of the legal requirement is to help the student compensate for a life function which is not the same as that of other students in the class. Through the accommodation, we attempt to provide the student with the same opportunity that other class members have without special measures. The law allows, and in fact requires, that special needs be met.

Why am I not informed of the nature of a student's disability and the reasons for requesting accommodation?

Office of Disability Services cannot divulge specific information regarding a student's disability because of a human rights obligation to maintain confidentiality. Students are not obligated to disclose specific information about their disability. From our experience, we find that most

students will freely disclose to their instructors; however, there are some who are uncomfortable doing so.

If a student requests an accommodation that is not specified on his or her instructor letter for my course, what should I do?

If it is a request that you feel does not compromise the academic standards of your course and that you can easily accommodate, it is your right as an instructor to grant it. Students with disabilities should receive at least the same teaching supports you would provide to any other students. If however, support is being offered to a student based on your knowledge of a disability when it would not normally be provided to any student; it is recommended that you check with the Director of Disability Services to verify that the student has appropriate documentation to support such a request.

Do I need to modify my typical grading process for someone with a disability?

No, however you may be asked to consider allowing students to provide evidence of what they have learned in different but equally challenging formats (i.e. oral, instead of in written form, or vice versa). The opportunity to write tests and examinations outside of the regular format is a fairly typical accommodation granted to students with disabilities. However, the completed work should be treated no differently from that of other students in your class, and the essential elements of the course should not be compromised.

How do I provide the accommodation of "extended time (double time)" for pop quizzes?

The accommodation of "extended time (double time)" applies to all tests, exams, quizzes, and pop-quizzes. Faculty members may find the "extended time" accommodation straightforward for tests and exams but may be stumped when considering this accommodation with in-class quizzes and pop-quizzes. Faculty members can contact Office of Disability Services to discuss specific quiz and pop-quiz concerns.

Are the rules for student conduct different when the student with a disability is misbehaving, threatening or rude?

No. The student with a disability should be held to the same conduct standards as any other student within your class. If you feel the disruption is a direct result of the specific disability or have questions, please contact us to address your concerns.

Are all students with disabilities registered with Office of Disability Services?

No. It is possible that a student with a disability has chosen not to register with Disability Services, or he/she may not have met the eligibility criteria for services. In either instance, faculty members do not need to provide accommodations for those students.

How can I tell when a student is "faking" a disability?

That students feign disabilities in order to receive special consideration is a common myth. No student who truly understands the nature of a disability would want to "fake" having one. If you have any reason to question whether or not a student has a disability, contact the Director of Disability Services. The student must have documentation on file to verify that he/she has a disability.

Do I have to provide extended time for take home essay/exams?

Generally, No. Students are generally only allowed to receive extra time on in-class exams. If the situation were different for a particular student, you would receive an e-mail from ODS about the need for further accommodations.

What are the consequences if I do not provide the requested accommodations?

The student can take legal action against you and the institution. Toya Cooper, Westmont Legal Counsel, is listed as the contact person for students to file grievance complaints.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 stipulates that no otherwise qualified person due to disability may be denied the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (29 U.S.C. § 794(a)). Note that this statute applies only to public and private "recipients" of federal aid. However, nearly all public and most private colleges are recipients. Moreover, if aid is received anywhere within a college, the entire institution is required to comply with the act's provisions. To demonstrate compliance, a college must file an assurance of compliance (i.e., a document attesting to the fact that the institution does not discriminate based on disability), provide notice to participants that the recipient's program does not discriminate based on disability, identify a specific employee to coordinate compliance, conduct a self-

evaluation, engage in voluntary action to correct those circumstances that may have limited the participation of students with disabilities, adopt grievance procedures, and remediate violations of the act (McCarthy, Cambron-McCabe, & Thomas, 1998, p.168). The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is responsible for much of the enforcement of Section 504 in educational institutions.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

In addition to Section 504, Title II of the ADA prohibits public entities (e.g., state government, public schools, public colleges) from denying qualified persons with disabilities the right to participate in or benefit from the services, programs, or activities that they provide, and from subjecting such individuals to discrimination if the exclusion or discrimination is due to the person having a disability (42 U.S.C. § 12132). The OCR also is responsible for the enforcement of Title 11 of ADA.

The aforementioned section provided brief discussions of Section 504 and the ADA. Due to these laws, all public and private colleges are required to demonstrate compliance with applicable federal mandates. Where violations of either Section 504 or the ADA are claimed, the plaintiff first must show that he or she is disabled, as that term is defined under federal statute, and is qualified. <http://www.ldonline.org/article/6082/>