

Creating Access Together

An Introduction for Faculty/Staff

Part of the SLDS "Quick Reference Guide" series. For more guides, visit go.osu.edu/slds-guides

The Office of Student Life's Disability Services (SLDS) collaborates with the university community to create accessible educational environments for students with disabilities. "Disability" used in this context is a broad term. It includes mental health conditions, ADHD, chronic health issues, learning disabilities, temporary injuries (e.g. broken bone, concussion), and sensory/physical disabilities.

Creating access is not just the responsibility of SLDS. Rather, **creating access is a shared responsibility--and valuable opportunity-- for the entire university community.**

Access Matters

- **Students with disabilities make up an important cross-section of Ohio State**, appx. 11% of the college student population ([source](#)).
- **By working together**, we can eliminate barriers and provide equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities.
- **By providing access**, we allow students to learn and be evaluated fairly, based on their merits (not based on their disabilities or barriers).
- **By eliminating barriers**, we create pathways for students with disabilities to achieve their full potential, leading to higher retention, graduation, and employment rates.

From course curricula to software programs to physical spaces on campus, we can create access in two ways: (1) **universal design**, and (2) **accommodations**.

Universal Design

"Universal design" is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or retrofitting. Practicing universal design principles for our physical spaces, curricula, and student services can often minimize or eliminate the need for accommodations. This is truly the most equitable experience for students with disabilities, as they don't have to do anything more or different than their peers in order to gain the same level of access.

Universal design (by definition) is not just beneficial for students with disabilities, but for all students. For example, captioned videos benefit students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing as well as ESL students and students with more visual-based learning styles.

For more universal design examples/resources:

- [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines \(PDF, source: NCUDL\)](#)
- [Universal Design of Instruction - Checklist \(PDF, source: The DO-IT Center, UW\)](#)
- [SLDS webpage on Universal Design](#)
- [ODEE webpage on UDL in Course Design](#)

Accommodations

“**Accommodations**” are reasonable modifications made to university policies/procedures in order to minimize or eliminate disability-related barriers. Registering with SLDS is the official channel for students to be approved for accommodations. However, there may be instances where it makes the most sense for a faculty or staff member to accommodate a student without needing pre-authorization from SLDS, particularly if the need is readily apparent and the request would be easily achievable.

Common academic accommodations include:

- **Exam accommodations** (e.g. extended time; distraction-reduced testing space)
- **Note-Taking Assistance** (e.g. audio recording; peer note-takers)
- **Attendance/Deadline Modifications** (due to disability-related flare-ups)
- **Assistive Technology** (e.g. screen-readers, text-to-speech software)
- **Accessible Course Materials** (e.g. digital textbooks, captioned videos)
- **Sign Language Interpreting/Transcribing** (for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students)

Registering with SLDS and Requesting Accommodations:

To register with SLDS, students provide verifying documentation and meet with their assigned Access Specialist for a Welcome Meeting. During the meeting, Access Specialists discuss the student’s access needs and train the student on how to use their approved accommodations.

After registering, students follow SLDS procedures by communicating their accommodation requests to their instructors (or relevant staff). Students may pick and choose which accommodations to apply to each of their courses. This communication should ideally take place in a 1-on-1 meeting where the student provides the instructor with SLDS paperwork (including accommodation-specific instructions).

SLDS keeps students’ medical information (e.g. diagnosis) strictly confidential. SLDS will discuss a student’s registration status and approved accommodations with faculty/staff on a need-to-know basis.

Reasonableness and Timing of Requests:

Accommodations are designed to be reasonable (meaning they cannot compromise the essential elements of a course, program, etc.) and implemented at the point of request moving forward. Retroactive accommodations are typically only provided at instructor discretion. However, for a variety of reasons, students may register with Disability Services or request accommodations from faculty/staff at any point in the semester. SLDS encourages faculty and staff to consult with us if ever concerned about the reasonableness or timing of a student’s accommodation request.

For more guidance on implementing accommodations:

- Visit go.osu.edu/slids-guides for additional quick reference guides
- Contact SLDS (614-292-3307 / slids@osu.edu)