

Faculty Handbook: Working with Students with Disabilities

Rock Valley College

Disability Support Services

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This handbook serves as a guide for faculty responsible for administering accommodations for students with disabilities.

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Disability Law in Higher Education

Overview of the Laws

Accommodations are not optional; they are required by law.

Individuals with disabilities are entitled to equal access to post-secondary programs. Three laws protect persons with disabilities in post-secondary education: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. These laws define an individual with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment; has a history of impairment; or is believed to have a disability that substantially limits a major life activity such as learning, speaking, seeing, hearing, breathing, walking, performing manual tasks, or performing self-care tasks.

The Rehabilitation Act (1973)

Title V of The Rehabilitation Act is generally regarded as the first civil rights legislation on the national level for people with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates that an individual with a disability must have equal access to all programs, services, and activities receiving federal funding. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that all information and communication technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities, including digital material and websites. The Office for Civil Rights, associated with the U.S. Department of Education, has enforcement authority for this law.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provides civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities. The law helps ensure that anyone with a disability can access the same rights and opportunities. All public institutions receiving federal funding are covered under Title II (reasonable accommodations) and Title III (public accommodations) of the ADA. The U.S. Department of Justice has enforcement authority for this law.

The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) was signed into law in 2008 and went into effect on January 1, 2009. The ADAAA broadened the definition of disability by:

- Expanding the definition of “major life activities” to include all significant bodily systems such as digestion, respiratory, endocrine system, etc., and activities such as thinking and working
- Redefining who is “regarded as” having a disability
- Modifying the definition of “substantially limits”
- Specifying that “disability” includes impairments that are episodic or in remission if they substantially limit a major life activity when active
- Prohibiting consideration of ameliorative effects of mitigating measures in most situations

Accommodation Eligibility Process

Students must decide for themselves whether they choose to self-disclose a disability and request an accommodation under 504/ADA/ADAAA. Sometimes, an individual may choose not to self-disclose when they enroll at the College or, even after disclosure, may decide not to request accommodations. This is the individual's decision and should be respected. Students may disclose/request later. Accommodations are not retroactive. The College is not responsible for accommodating undisclosed disabilities

Once a student has decided to seek accommodations, they must formally request accommodations from the Disability Support Services (DSS) office. The student completes an online application to initiate the process. As part of the application process, students must also provide documentation that verifies the presence of a disability (or disabilities) and substantial limitation(s). Students will need to login with their RVC credentials to [complete the application](#). If a student requires assistance completing the application, please have them contact the DSS office at (815) 921-2371 or RVC-DisabilityServices@rockvalleycollege.edu.

Once the application has been received, DSS contacts the student to schedule a welcome meeting with the Accommodations Specialist. At the welcome meeting, the Accommodation Specialist reviews the documentation and balances the student's functional limitation of disability with the fundamental nature of the academic task. The fundamental nature of the academic task is informed in part by SLO's and College policy. As an example of a case in which the fundamental nature of the task precludes the accommodation of a student, it would not be discriminatory to preclude a student with a profound visual impairment from participating in a flight training program.

DSS is responsible for engaging in an "interactive process" with the student in granting or denying reasonable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are an action the College may take to accommodate an individual with a documented disability without imposing undue hardship on the institution.

If a student approaches a faculty member about accommodations and does not have an accommodation letter, the faculty member should refer the student to the DSS office. Obvious disabilities may need to be accommodated before the process is complete (i.e., an accessible desk for a student using a wheelchair, hearing devices, or interpreters for a student who is deaf).

Accommodation Implementation Process

Once accommodations have been granted, DSS sends electronic accommodation notification letters to faculty. Each letter is individual to the particular student who has requested accommodations. Once the accommodation notification letter has been sent to the professor, ADA accommodations officially begin. At this point, the responsibility for ADA accommodations shifts to the faculty to ensure that accommodations are implemented with fidelity. Students are

responsible for articulating if the accommodation is not being met or if there is a problem. Students do this by talking with their professor and involving DSS if necessary.

The moment you receive the accommodation notification letter or a student references their accommodation, we ask that you reach out to the student to communicate with them about their accommodations privately. Usually, misunderstandings are easily resolved by the faculty member and the student simply conversing and listening to each other. DSS can support you at any point as you progress through these student conversations. We strongly discourage you and the student from generating your own idea(s) or new accommodation(s) together without the input of DSS.

The week before the semester starts, accommodation notification letters are typically sent out. However, a student may request an accommodation at any point in the semester. Therefore, it is not uncommon for faculty to receive letters after the semester has begun. Regardless of the timing of an accommodation request, the professor must ensure that the required accommodations are implemented with fidelity. Please contact the DSS office immediately if you have questions or concerns regarding the approved accommodations. DSS welcomes questions about implementing accommodations with fidelity, so please contact us with any questions or concerns. No question is too big or too small.

Due to the unique nature of how a disability can affect each student, the accommodation process is fundamental. The accommodation process may require faculty to be intuitive, engaged, and thoughtful during the accommodation implementation process. While the responsibility of seeking an accommodation always remains with the student, faculty should contemplate how/if a specific academic task may represent an obstacle to the student otherwise demonstrating their mastery of the material. DSS welcomes these types of conversations and will assist with generating potential solutions and alternatives.

If you receive a notification letter for a student not enrolled in your course or have not received a letter for a student you believe should have accommodations, please contact the DSS office. It is not uncommon at the start of the semester for letters to get misdirected due to fluctuating faculty assignments.

Accessing Student Accommodations in the Faculty Portal

Instructors can access a list of all students enrolled in their course(s) with accommodations through the DSS Portal. It is recommended that faculty review the list of students requiring accommodations as early in the semester as possible. Knowing what accommodations students need in advance will allow professors time to prepare any necessary accommodations and ensure that all students have equal access. To view a listing of students in your course(s):

- Login to: <https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/RockValleyCollege/Instructor>
- Select “View” next to a specific student’s name to see the Accommodation Letter

- Clicking on the “Search Student’s Eligibilities” link on the top right will allow an Instructor to see a list of student’s emails that can be exported
- Selecting the “Click to Expand Advanced Search Panel” will display a list of eligibilities that the Instructor can search by (ex., term, student, accommodation type, etc.)

Once Accommodation Letters have been reviewed, it is suggested that the Instructor privately reach out to these students to have an interactive discussion about what accommodations are required and any questions or concerns the student and/or professor may have. Working these details out in advance will ensure that the accommodation process runs as smoothly as possible.

Collaboration: Student/Faculty/DSS Roles & Responsibilities

The accommodation process is collaborative and requires the student, DSS, and the Professor to work together in tandem. Federal law refers to this as an “interactive process.” Each entity has a specific role in the process and is responsible for upholding its respective responsibilities.

DSS is responsible for reviewing documentation, determining the appropriateness of requests for academic adjustments, informing students and faculty members of their rights and responsibilities regarding the provision of accommodations, and facilitating necessary adjustments.

Students are responsible for submitting requests for accommodations, making timely requests for adjustments, following through with their obligations for their accommodations, discussing their specific needs with their instructors, and self-advocating when there are problems or concerns.

Faculty members are responsible for setting a welcoming tone in their classes, providing students with an opportunity to meet and discuss adjustments, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring that approved accommodations are provided.

All parties are responsible for engaging in a collaborative, solution-focused approach to problem-solving if and when issues or concerns arise.

Interactive Process

As discussed previously, OCR has ruled that: *Faculty should be intuitive, engaged, and thoughtful during the accommodation implementation process.* We realize this can be an enormous responsibility and are here to support you. Once an accommodation has been granted by DSS and submitted to the professor, the accommodation must be implemented with fidelity. Sometimes DSS, the professor, and/or the student do not share a common understanding of the accommodation.

In our experience, faculty do not intentionally withhold student accommodations; instead, it is common that accommodations are not implemented with fidelity because of a communication issue. Most typically, the issue is that DSS, the professor, and/or the student do not share a common understanding of the accommodation. Misunderstandings can occur for the following reasons:

- The accommodation notification letter utilizes language that is unclear to the faculty member
- The accommodation notification form utilizes language that the faculty member misreads or misunderstands
- The student believes that the accommodation means something that it does not mean

When there is a misunderstanding about accommodations, the misunderstanding can usually be solved with the professor and the student having a brief conversation in person or via email regarding their understanding of accommodation implementation. If there is still some confusion, faculty should contact DSS. DSS will work with the student and faculty to address concerns, review the accommodations, and achieve consensus and resolution.

DSS and faculty members must build a consensus regarding the accommodations provided. One way to do this is for DSS to utilize common accommodation language. Using a common language means that all accommodations targeting a particular barrier are written the same way, using a standard code. It is best to examine the [list of accommodation descriptions](#) to ensure you understand your obligation before actively implementing accommodations for a specific student.

Additionally, we encourage all faculty to give us feedback on the accommodation language on an ongoing basis so that we can continue to build a cultural understanding and consensus of accommodations. The issue of faculty members misreading or misunderstanding specific accommodations can be addressed by faculty members and DSS engaging in more frequent formal and informal interactions. DSS holds workshops and formal training throughout the academic year or upon request.

DSS is usually not notified of issues regarding a student's accommodation unless they have contacted the DSS directly to resolve an issue. It is likely that the student first reports the issue to you, as their Instructor. Students frequently struggle with questioning their faculty about accommodations. They may be subtle or indirect about their concerns. As their professor, they may hesitate to question how you do things. You must develop a skill set to “read between the lines” and quickly identify student complaints or questions as serious issues.

Sharing of Information for Students with Disabilities

Disability-related information must always be protected. There may be times when it is necessary to share need-to-know information with others to ensure a student's full access to - or participation in - a program, course, or activity at RVC. In these situations, the student must

have completed a Student Consent Agreement form in the DSS office. The information shared would be limited to only that information that is deemed essential and would not include any academic-related information. Access to academic-related records or information would be covered by the FERPA form on file with the RVC Records department. If you are unsure whether or not a student has a valid Student Consent Agreement on file with DSS, please contact our office for verification: (815) 921-2371.

Faculty and non-DSS staff should not accept or keep medical, psycho-educational, or psychological documentation or records from students. Students who offer such records to faculty members should be referred to the DSS office. Faculty may collect medical excuses for absences due to illness or injury.

Students without Accommodations

You may encounter a student for whom you have not received an accommodation notification letter or who is not receiving accommodations, even though you may feel they are needed. The student may even request accommodations, even though they do not have a diagnosed disability. Reasons for this may include: the student not having a prior history of disability, the student not feeling as though accommodations were needed until now, no documentation available for the disability, or the student not remembering/knowing how to request accommodations. Whatever the reason, please direct these students to DSS, as we can work with them to determine the appropriate assistance that can be provided.

DSS has a list of external evaluators who can conduct psycho-educational assessments for a suspected learning disability, although these evaluations can be expensive. Thus, the student must talk to someone in our office to ensure that they can be advised appropriately based on their particular circumstances.

Denying Accommodations

A faculty member is legally required to provide reasonable accommodations as long as the reasonable accommodations do not lower or substantially modify the course or program's fundamental standards. There may be times when the student or DSS staff request an accommodation that you believe may compromise academic integrity or fundamentally alter the nature of your course or program. If this happens, contact the DSS office. A faculty member should never deny a reasonable accommodation request before consulting with the DSS office.

To avoid potential situations where there is concern regarding an accommodation that may compromise a course or program, all faculty should do the following:

- Identify (and publish, such as in the course syllabus) the essential academic standards of the course (i.e., course/program requirements that go to the very nature of the subject matter or that are of the utmost importance in achieving the course/program objective);

- Articulate specific requirements that individual instructors believe are fundamental to teaching the course/program (consider academic freedom);
- Identify the unique qualities of the course/program in relation to its overall objectives and any program in which the course is required;
- Engage in “reasoned deliberation” as to whether modification of the course/program would change the fundamental academic standards;
- Determine whether there are any alternative options to the fundamental requirements of the course. (See questions to consider below.)

Upon consultation with DSS, faculty must justify why they feel the accommodation is a fundamental alteration of a course or program. The following questions should be used as guidance in making a determination:

- What fundamental course objective does this accommodation alter?
- What practical function does this fundamental objective serve in the academic program?
- Is this course objective documented somewhere (e.g., syllabus, professional association certification requirement, technical standard, etc.)?
- How does the requested accommodation alter this fundamental course objective?
- Will the requested accommodation lower the academic standards of the course/program? If so, how?
- Are there other methods that can be used that can be implemented to achieve the desired academic/pedagogical result? If not, why not?

The decision to deny an accommodation should never be taken lightly. By answering the above questions and documenting the process, instructors can establish that they have thoroughly evaluated both the awarded accommodation and the course/program objectives. It’s important to realize that failure to provide reasonable accommodations to a student with a disability is a violation of law and could potentially open the door for legal ramifications. However, according to the law, students with disabilities are required to meet the “essential,” “academic,” and “technical” standards of the College with or without accommodations. Therefore it is important to work with the student and the DSS office to ensure reasonable and appropriate accommodations.

Differences Between K-12 VS. College Accommodations

It is important to note that the K-12 public school setting and higher education differ significantly in how students are accommodated. Many parents and students are unaware of these differences. Students in the K-12 setting are protected by the Individual with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). Once a student transitions to Post-Secondary courses (even if they are still in high school), they are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Section 504. The chart below delineates some significant differences.

K-12: Education is a right, and schools should ensure academic SUCCESS

- Post-Secondary:** ACCESS to education is provided, but education as a whole is not a right
- K-12:** Schools are responsible for identifying students with disabilities, developing a plan (IEP) to promote success and demonstrate growth, and providing services delineated in the plan.
- Post-Secondary:** Students must apply to the university, meet the requirements, and then they can attend. Students must disclose their disability to the school through appropriate documentation and request accommodations.
- K-12:** Core material and modification are required so that students can demonstrate growth.
- Post-Secondary:** Accommodations/modifications are provided while maintaining the fundamental nature of the curriculum.
- K-12:** All school members are expected to know the students' disabilities and to interact with and provide services according to the plan.
- Post-Secondary:** The student has the responsibility for disclosing their disability. The DSS Office does not provide other campus members information regarding students' disabilities.

EXAMPLES

- K-12:** Assignments may be modified (shorter or fewer) than for students without disabilities.
- Post-Secondary:** Assignments are the same for all students, although time extensions may be provided.
- K-12:** Assessment may be different from that for students without disabilities.
- Post-Secondary:** Assessment is the same for all students.
- K-12:** Support Services such as tutoring and academic coaching are provided.
- Post-Secondary:** Individual support services are not provided and are frequently fee-based.

There are exceptions to the information above. For example, if a student with a hearing disability is in a course with an essay prompt to discuss their favorite song, the assignment likely requires modification. Additionally, if a student who cannot speak uses assistive technology (text to voice) for a presentation, the student would not be evaluated on "voice rate, expressiveness/pitch, intensity/volume."

For additional information on the substantive differences in K-12 and higher education, the OCR brochure, [Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities](#) (Links to an external site), contains beneficial information.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Ensuring that students with disabilities have equal access to a course is a top priority; however, designing a course with accessibility in mind can allow all students to benefit, not just those who receive accommodations. The premise of UDL is that the design of instructional materials and activities makes the learning goals and objectives achievable by individuals with a wide variance in their ability to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember. In essence, universal design for learning, or UDL, eliminates

the "one size fits all" approach to learning and provides alternatives for students with differing abilities.

There are many, many ways in which UDL can be incorporated into course design, and no one solution will work for every situation. However, the following examples illustrate how UDL strategies can be used to benefit all students.

- Offer a choice of learning contexts by providing opportunities for individual, pair, and group work as well as distance learning, peer learning, and fieldwork
- Use multiple modes of presenting material (ex. auditory, visual, tactile)
- Use a variety of materials to present, illustrate, and reinforce new content
- Provide cognitive supports (ex., give students organizing clues; for example: "I have explained the four main points, and now I am going to summarize them.")
- Teach to a variety of learning styles; give instructions both orally and in writing
- Provide flexible opportunities for assessment (ex., visually and orally vs. only written)
- Create a transcript for and caption all audio content
- Upload lecture notes to Canvas to minimize the need for a note taker
- Allow flexibility with assignment deadlines (ex., allow all students to turn in work up to 7 days before the end of the course)
- Use untimed tests when possible
- Provide periodic summaries during lectures
- Provide breaks for long classes or when providing difficult material that needs more processing time

Disability, Characteristics, Accommodations

As mentioned above, designing a course with accessibility in mind can allow all students to benefit, not just those who receive accommodations. Therefore, many of the accommodations granted to students include aspects of UDL.

Below are some characteristics that students may present based on their disability. In most cases, the above strategies of UDL will be part of their accommodations plan. In other cases, a student might need more specific accommodations.

ADD/ADHD, Difficulty paying attention or concentrating on one task for an extended period, Inattention, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, poor time management skills, difficulty with reading comprehension and math problems that require changes in action, operation & order, lack of organization of work (especially written and essay), problems learning foreign languages.

Possible Accommodations may include all UDL strategies. They may also include the use of a note-taker, sitting in front of the class, extra time for writing assignments/exams, reduced distraction testing environment, access to the syllabus available 4-6 weeks before class (when possible), discuss course objectives one-on-one with the professor, give assignments one at a time to avoid work overload.

Blindness/Visual Impairment/Visual Processing: Difficulty seeing things on the board/overhead from a distance, Light sensitivity, complaints of "glare," difficulty seeing or comprehending what is seen or visually presented.

Possible Accommodations will include all UDL strategies. They may also include seating in front of the classroom, large print, Braille or electronic formatted course materials, adaptive computer software (ZoomText, Jaws) and the use of a CCTV or reading machine for printed materials, note taker to assist with class lecture notes, provide verbal descriptions of visual aids/visual information, T.V. monitor connected to microscope to enlarge images, adaptive lab equipment (talking thermometers and calculators, light probes and tactile timers), lab assistant to help with accessing out-of-reach items, high contrast colors on all course materials.

Deafness/Hearing Impairment/Auditory Processing, Difficulty hearing or processing/comprehending what is heard: difficulty hearing instructor and/or other students' comments

Possible Accommodations may include all UDL strategies. They may also include seating in front of the classroom, repetition of verbal information, face-to-face verbal interactions, visual aids, handouts whenever possible, avoiding standing in front of a light source (ex., window), writing technical or unfamiliar vocabulary on the board, Repeat questions/statements from others in the room, classroom note-taker, speak at a slightly slower pace if interpreters are used, use of email for class and private discussions.

Learning disability: difficulty expressing thoughts in spoken or written form, difficulty understanding or interpreting what is heard or read, frequent need to re-read material, asking for repetition, inability to recall or retain information.

Possible Accommodations may include all UDL strategies. They may also include seating in front of the classroom, explain technical language, specific terminology, or foreign words orally and/or by handouts, emphasize important points orally or by colored pens, provide a suggested timeline for long-range assignments, and provide study questions for exams that demonstrate the format and content of the test that will be used, announce reading assignments in advance (about 6 wks.) so students using books in audio have time to get them, reduced distraction testing environment, access to syllabus 4-6 weeks before class (when possible), assignments one at a time to avoid work overload, review instructions for clarification, use of word processor and dictionary for written work.

Physical/Mobility/Fine Motor: difficulty controlling hand, eye, or other muscles that aid in the perception and expression of information, slow or poor penmanship, weaknesses in manual dexterity, strength, or stamina, difficulty getting around campus quickly or easily

Possible Accommodations may include all UDL strategies. They may also include the use of a note-taker, sitting in front of the class, extra time for writing assignments/exams, accessible classroom and lab materials, classroom note-taker, adaptive computer equipment/software

(ex., voice input, alternative keyboard, etc.), scribes for homework assignments and/or tests, alternative methods for providing test answers (ex., oral, video, etc.), modifications in the strength and stamina requirements of assignments.

** Instructor must assist and/or assign a responsible party to help the student evacuate the building in an emergency

Chronic Health Disorders: exhibit physical weaknesses or muscle, nerve, or other chronic problems, tardiness or inability to concentrate may be the result of medical issues, absences/missed work due to unpredictability of the condition

Possible Accommodations may include all UDL strategies. They may also include using a note-taker, extra time for writing assignments/exams, flexibility with attendance and deadlines when absent due to a medical situation, assignments made available in electronic format, and email to facilitate communication.

Emotional/Psychological Disorders: difficulty with self-control, inappropriate behavior, expectations, etc., difficulty focusing/ concentrating in class, unusual mood, appearance.

Possible Accommodations may include all UDL strategies. They may also include the use of a note-taker, electronic communication and submission of assignments, flexibility with attendance and deadlines, advance notice of assignments and expectations (when possible), assignments opened early to allow the student to work ahead, reduced distraction room for exams

Autism Spectrum Disorders: difficulty with social interactions and peer relationships, difficulty using and interpreting nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction, organizational skills, and preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest (especially in writing), resistance to change and difficulty accepting or adhering to specific, nonfunctional routines or unstructured schedules, agendas, etc.,

Possible Accommodations may include all UDL strategies. They may also include the use of a note-taker, electronic communication and submission of assignments, flexibility with attendance and deadlines, advance notice of assignments and expectations (when possible), allowing the student to use a word processor with grammar, spell checker and highlighting capabilities, provide simplified instructions and repeat/summarize frequently, spell out and discuss course expectations before the start of the course. It will also be important to keep course expectations and academic environment as structured as possible and provide advanced notice whenever possible of any changes to the course delivery or expectations

Accommodations for Face-to-Face, Hybrid, & Online Courses

Students must receive accommodations regardless of the type of course in which they are enrolled. The type of accommodations needed may likely differ for online and/or hybrid courses than what is typically needed in a traditional classroom setting. For this reason, it is always a good practice to consult with the student regarding the accommodations needed to avoid misunderstandings.

Typical Accommodations in **face-to-face classes (F2F)** would include copies of lecture notes, peer note-taker, enlarged handouts/course material, recorded lectures, live captioning for lectures, closed-captioning in videos, extended time for exams proctored in the Testing Center to provide extra time or low distraction, live reader or screen reader for exams in the Testing Center, preferential seating (usually in the front or in a lower distraction area), use of technology to support learning (ex. Phone to take pictures, live scribe pen, use of laptop), classroom or lab assistant.

While many of the accommodations would remain the same in an **online classroom**, some differences would include: notes posted on canvas, screen magnification software, recording of synchronous content (if a video recording is not available), live captioning for course lectures, closed captioning on videos (prerecorded content), adjusted exam time in canvas to provide for extra time, text-to-speech software (ReadSpeaker, NVSA).

Note: Hybrid courses will typically involve a combination of online and F2F accommodations depending on the specific delivery method of the course components.

Best Practices

Include a Syllabus Statement

The decision regarding whether or not to disclose a disability and seek accommodations often can be influenced by the “tone” the professor sends out, often as early as the first class. Being mindful of the messages you send (whether implicit or explicit) can help shape an environment where students feel comfortable coming forward and communicating with you.

One way to create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere is to include a disability disclaimer on your syllabi. Creating a welcoming and supportive syllabi encourages students to come forward and seek assistance should they have a disability or concern about their ability to be successful in your course.

Please use the following sample disclaimer, as it is the most current:

Your success in this class is important to me. If you have a disability (learning, physical, psychological, or other) and require an accommodation or modification in procedures, class activity, instruction, requirements, or other manner to fully participate in this course, please contact me as soon as possible (after class or during my office hours is best), so we can connect

you to the Disability Support Services office (DSS) who can arrange for reasonable accommodations. The DSS office is located on the ground floor of the Student Center and can be reached at (815) 921-2371 or RVC-DisabilityServices@rockvalleycollege.edu.

Please do not instruct students to bring their documentation to our office. Let them know how to contact us and encourage them to do so. We will guide them through their next steps depending on their particular circumstances.

Plan Ahead

Many accommodations require time to coordinate. Some, such as sign language interpreters, creating accessible materials (ex. audiobooks), or captioning media, can take 6-8 weeks to implement. Therefore, faculty must plan proactively whenever possible. Working ahead to make a course accessible from the beginning is always much easier than trying to adapt a course retroactively. In addition, considering accessibility up front enables all students to benefit from the accessibility features, not just those with disabilities.

Although lead times will vary depending on the nature of the service or accommodation required, the following outlines some general timeframes:

- **Interpreting, Real-time Captioning, Real-time Transcribing, Video Captioning, Classroom Relocation, Braille materials:** Immediately upon registration with DSS
- **Tables, Chairs, Footstools, Podiums, Lab Assistants/Library Assistants:** At least six (6) weeks before the beginning of the new term
- **Alternative Format Course Materials (ex., E-text, Braille, Large Print, Tactile Graphics, etc.):** At least six (6) to eight (8) weeks before the beginning of the new term
- **Note-Taking Services:** Upon registration or one (1) week before the new term
- **Alternative Testing:** Minimum advance notice required for scheduling exams with Testing Center: Quizzes and Exams - 3 business days. *One (1) business day before a quiz or exam, students should call the Testing Center to confirm the appointment and delivery of the exam
- **Reasonable Flexibility with Attendance or Assignments:** Reasonable flexibility with attendance or assignments details should be discussed with your Instructor by the end of the 1st week of the term
- **Assistive Technologies or Software:** At least 2-4 weeks

Aside from ensuring sufficient time to implement accommodations, it is good practice for faculty to plan and anticipate any potential situations that may present a problem. One never knows when a student may present with a need for an accommodation, and it is important to ensure that a course or program does not present a barrier for the student to participate. Think ahead and be prepared to remove barriers for students who may need accommodations, especially for co-curricular events and activities such as field trips or outdoor labs.

Transportation is often a consideration for off-campus events and should be investigated for

accessibility before scheduling the event. It is never acceptable to tell a student with a disability that s/he cannot participate in an activity because it is not accessible.

Do's and Don'ts

DO

- Confer with the student with a disability as to their appropriate accommodations
- Treat students with disabilities with the same courtesies you would afford to other students.
- Assist students in following the College's processes, such as the requirement that all accommodation requests be lodged with the Disability Services office and not individual faculty members alone.
- Following College processes protect students, faculty, and the institution by ensuring consistency. It takes the burden off individual faculty members, who are often ill-equipped to determine whether an accommodation is appropriate or how to provide it.
- Violations have been found in cases where faculty members have not followed institutional policies.
- Create a welcoming environment for all students.
- Be approachable and available. Welcome questions, seek out a student's point of view and respond patiently. Offer multiple options for communication and collaboration.
- Contact DSS if you are concerned that a student may be unable to perform an academic task due to a mental or physical condition or limitation. Assumptions should never be made that a student has or does not have a disability.
- Direct a student (preferably in writing) to the DSS office if they request accommodations, but you have no accommodation notification letter.

DO NOT

- Make assumptions about a student's ability to work in a particular field. Most often, concerns that students may not be able to succeed are based on fears and assumptions, not facts. Remember that employers are also required to comply with the ADA.
- Engage in philosophical debates about "fairness" to other nondisabled students or whether providing accommodations violates your academic freedom. These arguments are unavailing for multiple reasons.
- Philosophical debates about whether and how equal educational opportunities are provided to students with disabilities are legally meaningless. Congress has determined how we as a society should address equal access to education by passing federal civil rights statutes protecting the rights of persons with disabilities without adversely impacting those without disabilities.
- Academic freedom is not preemptive of federal civil rights statutes.

- Refuse to permit students to record lectures as an accommodation. General college procedures may permit instructors to refuse to allow lectures to be recorded. However, ADA allows recording course content and lectures as a reasonable accommodation.
- Refuse to provide copies of handouts, refuse to describe written information orally, or refuse to face the class when referring to written information if these accommodations have been determined to be appropriate for a student. If these accommodations are not possible, determine other equally effective alternatives.
- Refuse to provide extended time for tests because you feel doing so would require that all students be given additional time.
- Refuse to provide accommodations until you have personally evaluated a student's documentation of disability. Eligibility for services under the ADA is the job of the disability services personnel, not the faculty.
- Segregate or stigmatize any student. Do not draw undue attention to a difference (e.g., disability) or share private information (e.g., a specific student's accommodation).
- Avoid contacting DSS when unsure how to address an accommodation or disability-related situation.
- Accommodate students without the appropriate notification letter and language for the specific accommodation(s) being requested.

Accessible Course Content

All posted content needs to be in accessible formats. Content that is in an accessible format can be easily accessed by visually impaired, deaf, or hard of hearing students or those with a reading disability. Hence, it is inappropriate to post or use documents (hand-outs) in which students cannot use assistive technology (text to speech) to have it read aloud.

Accommodating Students through Canvas

Faculty are strongly encouraged to post all content in Canvas. "All content" is all materials for which students may have to demonstrate competency. For example, if a student needs specific content to write a paper, give a presentation, or take a quiz/test, it should be posted. There are several tools to help with ensuring the accessibility of course content that is loaded in the Canvas learning management system.

Ally for Canvas – Once turned on in a course, this tool allows faculty to check the accessibility of their course content, fix accessibility issues, and run a report to guide accessibility improvements. [Ally for LMS Help for Instructors](#) provides additional information about Ally. For assistance with turning Ally on or technical assistance, contact John Fillicaro at (815) 921-4646 or J.Fillicaro@rockvalleycollege.edu.

Alternative Formats for Students – Ally for Canvas includes the option for students to choose from several different types of alternative formats, such as accessible PDF, ePub, electronic Braille, and audio files. The [Ally Quick Start Guide for Students](#) provides more details on these features.

Accessibility Checker in Canvas - The Rich Content Editor Accessibility Checker is located in the Rich Content Editor menu bar and assists instructors and course designers in maintaining accessibility requirements in Canvas content. The Accessibility Checker notifies the content creator of common accessibility errors and provides suggestions for fixing the errors.

Adjusting Assignment Deadlines in Canvas – Instructors can extend deadlines for course assignments for individual students who need this as an accommodation. Once the time has been adjusted, it will only be visible to the student for whom it was extended, not the entire class. For assistance with assignment adjustments, contact Heather Moore at (815) 921-4623 or H.Moore@rockvalleycollege.edu.

Adjusting Exam Time in Canvas – You must master how to grant extended time for Canvas quizzes and tests. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) recently found that a college failed to comply with implementing the ADA accommodation of extended time because a professor “didn't know how to give a student extended time individually.” In this case, the professor had allotted 30 minutes for a quiz; because she did not know how to give the disabled student 60 minutes, she gave all students 60 minutes. OCR ruled that it didn't meet the accommodation of granting 100% extended time for the ADA standard. For assistance adjusting the exam time(s) in Canvas, contact John Fillicaro at (815) 921-4646 or J.Fillicaro@rockvalleycollege.edu.

Captioning for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students

It is inappropriate to post or use media that contains an audio component without closed captioning. You are responsible for only accommodating students in your course who have submitted the Accommodation Notification Letter; however, it is best practice to design all of your courses with accessibility in mind.

Real-Time Captioners are trained professionals who provide a speech-to-text translation that can be read visually on a laptop, computer monitor, or another display screen in real-time. This type of captioning is typically required for "live" events, such as lectures and class discussions. Real-time captioning services are contracted out through a third party and thus can require a significant lead time to coordinate. Planning should be done as early as possible when real-time captioning is needed, and [requests](#) are made via the DSS website.

Automatic Transcription via Zoom or Teams can be turned on in the settings bar. Although this captioning can be a solution for a student in a pinch, it is **not** recommended as an accommodation as automatic captions (such as those on YouTube) are often inaccurate and do not meet quality standards.

Media captioning is captioning of prerecorded multimedia that contains an audio component (i.e., presentations through videos, DVDs, the Internet, and other sources). All content in a course containing an audio component must be captioned. It is recommended that faculty create a transcript for all audio content, which is helpful when content needs to be captioned in-house. [Requests for media captioning](#) can be made via the DSS website. For questions or

assistance related to captioning media, contact Nathan Talan at (815) 921-4602 or N.Talan@rockvalleycollege.edu.

Unique Accommodations

Flexibility with Attendance and/or Deadlines

Modified attendance and adjusted assignment deadlines (referred to as FLEX) are relatively new accommodations implemented in higher education. Rock Valley College and other institutions are still determining the best practice and approaches for implementing these accommodations.

RVC regards class attendance and participation as essential to the educational process. In extraordinary circumstances, students may qualify for modified attendance. Students should use these absences infrequently and only when absolutely necessary.

Faculty have the right to establish attendance and late work policies. However, if a student has a disability with random or cyclical acute episodes that may occasionally impact their ability to meet a deadline, take an exam at the scheduled time, and/or attend class, flexibility with attendance and/or deadlines may be considered an appropriate accommodation. These accommodations must always be directly linked to the student's disability.

The process for requesting the FLEX accommodation is through Disability Support Services (DSS). All requests are considered individually and on a course-by-course and semester-by-semester basis.

DSS will consult with instructors in situations where there is a concern. The goal will be to understand the role attendance plays in the design of the course, as well as the impact or timing of assignments and exams in the interactive or participatory nature of the course.

If the Flexibility with Attendance & Deadlines accommodation is reasonable based on the student's disability and the DSS staff's understanding of the course, an Agreement Form will be emailed to the professor for completion. The form will specify how and to what extent flexibility may be applied to the class in question.

The faculty member must return the completed agreement via email to DSS within three (3) business days of receiving the form. The form should not be given directly to the student.

Examples of FLEX Concerns & Solutions

Addressing graded in-class activities. Because our mandate is to provide access to students with disabilities, we cannot penalize students who avail themselves of this accommodation. This accommodation represents another reason why it is so critically important to post all content on Canvas.

Please note that it is inappropriate to exclude students with disabilities from activities. For example, if a student emails to let you know they will be using their FLEX attendance accommodation on a day in which an in-class activity is scheduled (ex. speaker, lab, etc.) and the activity requires an assigned reflective writing exercise on the topic, the student should not be excused from that assignment. Excusing the student from that assignment may be construed as exclusionary or discriminatory. Instead, a similar assignment should be developed for that student. For example, have the student watch a Ted Talk on a similar topic and assign a reflective writing exercise.

Breaking up the flow of the class. For interactive course activities, such as presentations, it may be challenging to accommodate the FLEX student for their presentation when you have already concluded the presentations and the student submits work after the course has concluded. The DSS Office recommends scheduling a presentation make-up day(s) near the end of the semester so that you can more efficiently accommodate students without interrupting the flow of your course.

A recent OCR case involved the following scenario: A student was told that the due date for a writing assignment was one month before the assignment was due. The due date fell on the last day of class, and the professor and institution argued that the student had a reasonable amount of time to complete the assignment. OCR disagreed, arguing that if a student needs extended deadlines during the class, that need for an accommodation does not end on the last day of class. To comply with this guidance, DSS strongly suggests that you make all course deadlines seven days before the last day of the course.

Temporary Disabilities

Students with temporary injuries or disabilities are eligible for accommodations via the same process as students with permanent disabilities. All requests should go through DSS. Once approved for accommodations, an Accommodation Notification Letter will be emailed to the professor outlining the specific accommodations required. Temporary situations are addressed on a case-by-case basis, and the effective expiration of the accommodations is based on the documentation supplied by the student.

Retroactive Accommodations

It is always ideal for requests to happen as early in the semester as possible, although a student is entitled to request accommodations at any time. Accommodations must be provided from the point at which the request is made. Sometimes a student may indicate that they did not perform well academically due to not having accommodations. If this is the first time the student has requested accommodations, accommodations would not be retroactive but would be active from the date of request forward.

However, when a student has an unexpected injury or situation that qualifies them for accommodations, and it takes several days for them to obtain and submit documentation, DSS

has discretion with the start date of the accommodations. In situations like this, DSS will communicate with the professor regarding the type and timeline for the required accommodations.

Service Animals

People with disabilities who have service animals are protected under the ADA/Section 504. Service animals are restricted to either dogs or miniature horses. The dog/horse must be individually trained to do work or perform tasks to benefit an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. The tasks performed by the dog/horse are directly related to the individual's disability. Examples of these tasks are calming a person with PTSD or anxiety, alerting regarding low blood sugar (diabetes) or potential seizure, guiding a visually impaired person, or pulling a wheelchair.

Emotional Support Animals (also sometimes referred to as "Comfort," "Therapy," or "Assistance" animals) are distinct from Service Animals and are generally not permitted on campus.

College personnel must permit service animal access to property, events and/or activities with its handler when it is readily apparent that the animal is trained to do work or perform tasks for its handler. Examples include (1) a dog guiding an individual who is blind or has low vision, (2) pulling an individual's wheelchair, or (3) providing assistance with stability or balance to an individual with an observable mobility disability.

If the need for the service animal is not apparent, College personnel may **only** ask the following of service animal handlers:

1. Is the service animal required because of a disability; and
2. What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

If the owner states that the animal is required because of a disability and identifies a type of work or task the animal has been trained to perform, the service animal must be admitted. If there is doubt that an animal is a service animal, college personnel should admit the animal and then consult with DSS regarding future access.

Specific questions or concerns related to the use of service animals on the RVC campus by visitors can be directed to the DSS Director: L.Shattuck@rockvalleycollege.edu or (815) 921-2371.

Pregnant & Parenting Students

It is illegal to exclude a pregnant student from participating in any part of an educational program. This prohibition applies to classes, extracurricular programs, interscholastic sports, and student leadership opportunities.

Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 prohibits discrimination against a student based on pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, miscarriage, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions. The Title IX regulation also prohibits a school from applying any rule related to a student's parental, family, or marital status that treats students differently based on their sex.

At Rock Valley College, a pregnant student may utilize the process established for any student with a temporary medical condition. Pregnant students seeking accommodations should contact the DSS office for guidance. The DSS office can be contacted via phone at (815) 921-2371 or by email: RVC-DisabilityServices@rockvalleycollege.edu.

A pregnant student must be given excused absences due to pregnancy or pregnancy-related issues for as long as deemed medically necessary by a doctor. The student seeking an excused absence should contact their faculty member or supervisor to inform them if an excused absence is needed. A student should seek additional information from the Title IX Coordinator (Dean of Students), second floor Student Center, for additional information if needed. A pregnant student will be expected to provide medical documentation from their doctor.

Disability Support Services Contacts

Location: Student Center, Ground Floor

Main Line: (815) 921-2371

Email Address: RVC-DisabilityServices@rockvalleycollege.edu

Website: www.rockvalleycollege.edu/DisabilityServices

Staff:

[Lynn Shattuck](#), Director

[Stephen Ramberg](#), Administrative Assistant

[Cara Vande Voorde](#), Accommodations Specialist

[Fred Williams](#), Assistive Technology Specialist

[Susan Stopoulous](#), Sign Language Interpreter

[Natalie Mahaney](#), Sign Language Interpreter

[Luke Markley](#), RAISE Program Coordinator