

REPORT OF THE DISABILITY TASK FORCE

May 23, 2003

Task Force Charge:

At the request of Provost Phil DiStefano, Ofelia Miramontes, Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Equity, established a Disability Task Force to provide advice, recommendations and strategies to campus administration and primary units regarding legal academic accommodations for students with disabilities. More specifically, the task force was asked to:

- Complete an analysis and identify areas of academic accommodations that have a history of being problematic.
- Analyze solutions to the problems and needs of students and faculty.
- Make recommendations for solutions.

Task Force Members:

Cindy Donahue, Director, Disability Services, co-chair
Emily Richardson, Assistant Res. Professor, Department of Psychology, co-chair
Charles de Bartolome, Associate Professor, Department of Economics
Wayne Boss, Professor, Leeds School of Business
Kathy Bowman, Specialist, Disability Services
MaryAnn Sergeant, Staff, Diversity and Equity
Brooke Burger, Graduate student
Arrah Closson, Undergraduate student

Background: Reasonable Accommodations

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, the university is legally required to provide reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

A disability is defined as: a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities (in condition, duration, manner); having a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment. Temporary injuries or conditions are not considered disabilities and persons with such are not protected under Section 504 or the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities are determined by Disability Services (DS). The process starts with the student submitting documentation to DS and requesting services and/or accommodations. A team of DS specialists reviews the documentation and determines appropriate accommodations. The student then meets with a specialist to discuss any further concerns. If accommodations are deemed appropriate, the student requests that DS prepare a letter for each of the student's course instructors to advise them of the required accommodation(s). The student presents each letter to his/her instructor. A copy of a typical letter is shown in Appendix A. The letter distinguishes between exam accommodations (e.g., 1.5 extended time) and classroom accommodations (e.g., note-taker in the class).

By late October 2002, Disability Services wrote 860 letters of accommodation for 250 students to be given to 490 course instructors (ranks included professors, instructors, GPTIs, TAs). The breakdown of requested accommodations was:¹

<i>Exam accommodation with provision being the responsibility of instructor</i>	<i>Number of letters</i>
Time extended 150%	810
Time extended 200%	8
Exam to be taken in a quiet setting	253
Exam to be taken in a separate room (provided by DS upon request)	15
<i>Exam accommodation with provision being the responsibility of DS</i>	
Exam to be taken using a word processor	139
Scribe provided	8
Reader provided	10
Exam to be written in large print (provided by DS or instructor)	20
Exam to be written in Braille	4
<i>Classroom accommodation</i>	
Consideration of attendance problems (when attendance is not a critical component of the course)	58
Notetakers provided by DS	60
Interpreters provided by DS	22
Captioning provided by DS	3
Materials enlarged or electronic format by DS or professor	30
Materials brailled by DS	4
Books on tape, provided by DS	22

Background: History

Until 1996, Disability Services provided the majority of proctoring services for exam accommodations for students with documented disabilities. At the end of this period, DS was proctoring approximately 350 exams per semester. During this period, DS was finding it difficult to provide the necessary space for the number of proctored exams, and there was a concern that students having their exam proctored in a remote location were being placed at a disadvantage because they lacked access to the instructor when the exam content was unclear. In 1996, the funding for personnel at DS who coordinated the exam proctoring was discontinued, and the responsibility for providing the exam accommodations of extra time and quiet setting was shifted from DS to faculty.

Task Force Process

The task force has met every two weeks since Spring 2002. Initially, the task force gathered information on how the system is currently working, the numbers of students with disabilities and the categories of disabilities. Exam accommodations, which in general are administered by the faculty, surfaced as possibly being a large problem area, and the task force henceforth

¹ A letter may request several accommodations.

focused its attention on this accommodation. The history of exam accommodation provisions at CU-Boulder was reviewed, other universities were surveyed regarding their exam proctoring systems, and a previous faculty survey from 2000 was reviewed.

During Fall 2002, the task force decided to survey both faculty and students in order to analyze perceived or real problems around exam accommodations. The targeted groups for the survey were (1) the course instructors to whom Disability Services had written a letter requesting an accommodation in Fall 2002 and (2) the students who had requested such letters. Surveys were sent by mail to the instructors near the end of the Fall term – if the instructor had more than one student requesting accommodations in his/her course, the instructor was asked to complete a separate survey for each student. The students who had requested letters for the Fall 2002 semester were surveyed at the beginning of the Spring semester.

Actions Already Taken By Task Force: Syllabus Statement & FAQs

The task force immediately recognized that one source of problems with exam accommodations was a lack of awareness by instructors and/or students regarding the procedures necessary for obtaining or granting accommodations. In response, the task force created a standard disability statement, which it recommends that instructors include on their course syllabus. The statement reads:

“If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me [the instructor] a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your [the student’s] needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices)”

The content of the statement was designed to inform both instructors and students that the process by which the student seeks the accommodation is by the student giving a letter prepared by Disability Services to the instructor teaching the class. In addition, the task force endorsed “Disability Services’ Responses to Frequently Asked Questions.” Handouts of the FAQs were disseminated to new faculty, department chairs, and Graduate Part-Time Instructors (GPTIs), and the information was posted on the DS web site at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices. The questions and responses are shown in Appendix B.

Survey responses

As already noted, the instructors to whom Disability Services had written a letter requesting an accommodation in Fall 2002 and the students who had requested such letters were surveyed in order to determine perceived and real concerns. For instructors: 490 course instructors were sent surveys and 243 (50%) responded. Because an instructor who had several students with disabilities in his/her class was asked to complete a survey for each student, the number of surveys returned exceeded the number of instructors returning surveys. Out of a possible 860 of these faculty surveys, 316 (37%) were returned. For students: 250 students were asked to complete surveys and 87 (35%) responded. A student was asked to complete a survey for each of his/her Fall 2002 instructors; out of 860 possible student surveys, 180 (21%) were returned.

In view of the percentage of returned surveys, the task force believes the results to be sufficiently representative of both faculty administering accommodations and students requesting

accommodations of these faculty.²

Survey findings

The surveys sent to faculty and students are attached in Appendices C and D. In parentheses beside each item response is the percentage of replies marking the item. In discussing the responses and making recommendations, we follow the order of questions on the faculty survey and use the responses of the student survey as appropriate. Please note that the terms “faculty” and “instructor” are used interchangeably and refer to course instructors, who include the ranks of professor, adjunct professor, instructor, GPTI, and TA.

Cover page: 25% of instructors reported that they did not include a statement concerning disabilities on their syllabus and 29% of the student responses indicated that there either was no statement concerning disabilities on the syllabus or they didn’t remember seeing one. The task force believes that these numbers are unacceptably high. As noted earlier, the task force believes that the syllabus statement is the simplest but most powerful way to improve faculty and students’ awareness of the procedures for exam accommodations.

The absence of the syllabus statement was particularly marked in the School of Business, the College of Engineering and the department of Chemistry in A&S.³

Recommended Actions:

- Faculty should continue to be encouraged by all means possible to include the preferred disability statement on syllabi. In particular, we recommend that Michael Grant, Associate Vice Chancellor of Undergraduate Education, send this syllabus information in an e-memo to chairs and deans at the beginning of each semester, requesting they flag and forward the memo to all instructors.
- Disability Services should work individually with Business, Engineering, and Chemistry to encourage their instructors to use the syllabus statement.
- DS should continue to provide information about procedures for determining and providing accommodations to new faculty at their orientation.
- At the orientation given to all GPTIs, there is currently an optional session on disabilities. It is recommended that this session should be included in the mandatory portion of the orientation.

Survey Q.1. 23% of the faculty surveys indicated that the student requesting accommodations did not provide a letter from Disability Services. This high number reinforces the importance of using a statement on the syllabus to outline that accommodations for documented disabilities should only be provided if a letter from DS is received.

² Surveys were sent to instructors in each college, although no surveys were returned from instructors in the Schools of Education and Journalism. The breakdown by college of the number of surveys returned/number of surveys sent (and returned surveys as percent of sent surveys) is: Architecture and Planning 1/16 (6%); Arts and Science 236/741 (32%); College of Music 7/15 (47%); Education 0/7 (0%); Engineering and Applied Science 20/73 (27%); Journalism 0/8 (0%); Leeds School of Business 22/65 (34%); School of Law 2/4 (50%); Other 1/3 (33%).

³ In particular, these are the departments for which over 40% of the responses said they did not include a syllabus statement and for which at least 4 surveys were returned.

Survey Q.2. 93% of faculty surveys noted that the student's request for accommodations was given with adequate time for the instructor to implement the accommodation.

Survey Q.3. 12% of the faculty surveys gave reasons for providing "accommodations" without a letter from Disability Services (1 letter from Wardenburg, 6 letters from Counseling, 6 letters from physicians, 16 out of the kindness of heart and 9 "other").

Among these 38 surveys providing non-DS authorized accommodations, faculty indicated they experienced problems implementing the requested accommodation, including "finding time in instructor or student schedule" and "finding personnel to proctor." Although faculty may choose to provide accommodations for temporary injuries or other conditions, the task force finds it interesting to note that faculty are reporting problems providing "accommodations" that are not required by DS. The provision of such "voluntary" accommodations may be clouding sentiment on campus about providing mandated accommodations for documented disabilities.

Recommended Action:

- When discussing accommodations on campus, accommodations that must be provided for students with disabilities documented by Disability Services should be carefully distinguished from accommodations provided at the discretion of the instructor for other considerations.

Survey Q. 4. 36 (11%) surveys indicated that faculty provided the accommodation of **double** extended time on exams. 29 of these 36 surveys claim it was on the Disability Services letter, 7 of the 36 gave double time for non-disability reasons. However, DS rarely determines double time for exams to be appropriate and, in fact, only 8 or less than 1% of the letters prepared by DS required **double** extended time for an exam accommodation.

Recommended Action:

- Faculty should be made aware that they do not need to provide accommodations beyond the requirements in the Disability Services letter. This information will be included on the FAQs page of the DS website.

Only 15 (1.7%) of the Disability Services accommodations letters included **separate room** as an appropriate accommodation. However a much larger number – 60 (19%) of the faculty survey and 16 (9%) of the student survey responses – indicated that a separate room was to be provided as an accommodation. In comparison, 29% of the DS accommodations letters prepared at the beginning of the semester included **quiet setting** as an accommodation but a smaller percentage – 25% of the faculty surveys and 18% of student surveys – indicated that a quiet setting was the required accommodation. The task force concluded that faculty were equating **quiet setting** with the need for a **separate room**, when in fact the regular classrooms where exams are administered to the rest of the class can qualify as "quiet setting" if noise and distractions are minimal. The task force also felt that faculty were unaware that DS will offer assistance when a separate room is determined as an appropriate accommodation.

Recommended Actions:

- Disability Services will change the language in the letters sent to instructors to distinguish between the accommodation of **separate room** and the accommodation of **quiet setting**. The quiet setting accommodation will now

be defined as “distraction reduced environment,” and the DS letters to instructors will explain these two terms when one or the other is used.

- Disability Services will continue to note in its letters to instructors that DS will assist when a **separate room** is a required accommodation.

Survey Q. 5. When asked about the “manner of approach” in discussing/requesting the specific accommodation via the letter from Disability Services, 98% of the faculty surveys reported students as pleasant (1 & 2 on 5-point scale) and 87% of the student surveys reported faculty as pleasant (1 & 2 on 5-point scale). It appears from these data that, with rare exceptions, people are being quite civil with each other when requesting or providing accommodations. Further analysis of these data indicates that the few faculty who were rated by students as not pleasant were adjunct instructors or teaching assistants.

Recommended Action:

- Faculty should inform their TAs about rights and responsibilities around disabilities and accommodations. In addition, the mandatory orientation for GPTIs addressing disabilities accommodations, recommended above, should also help to address this issue.

Survey Q's. 6, 7, 8 and 9. When queried about the difficulty of providing exam accommodations, only 18 (7%) faculty surveys noted that it was hard or relatively hard. (However, a larger number – 76 or 24% – of faculty surveys went on to report the problems they had in providing mid-term exam accommodations). For both mid-term exams and for the final, the ranking of problems was approximately consistent: the most commonly cited problem was finding space to allow for extended time, the next most cited problem was finding personnel to proctor and the next two most cited problems were finding time in the instructor's or the student's schedule and finding space for quiet setting. Written comments in this area were minimal and problems listed were equally distributed by college. The task force felt that the few detailed complaints stemmed from faculty having misinformation. (In addition, only one instructor indicated a “philosophical objection” to providing exam accommodations, and this individual (an adjunct instructor) provided the most extreme negative ratings on questions 5 through 9). From the student survey results, 17 (10%) student survey responses indicated that receiving their exam accommodation was relatively hard, but only 7 surveys included reasons.

The task force believes that the numbers of faculty having problems with exam accommodations are small and that the numbers are not of sufficient magnitude to recommend the campus provide a testing center on an ongoing basis. However, it is likely that some faculty do have real difficulty in providing the required accommodations.

Recommended Actions:

- Primary responsibility for providing space and personnel to proctor should continue to be placed with the course instructors.
- Individual departments are encouraged to designate a room or space for exams in advance to alleviate space concerns, particularly during finals.

- Disability Services will continue to provide backup assistance when instructors anticipate difficulty in finding space or in other exceptional circumstances. Arrangements should be made with DS a week in advance of the exam. This back-up assistance will be noted in the letter DS sends the faculty to advise of the necessary accommodation.

We note that in the past there was concern that students taking an exam in a location separate from the main class were placed at a disadvantage when the instructor corrected errors or clarified exam content to the main class but not to the student taking the exam in the separate location. This concern is likely to vary between departments. If this is a particular concern, an instructor may feel that the student should take the exam with the main class and then, if the student requires extra time, complete the exam in a separate location. In this way the student will have heard any clarifications made to the main class.

Finally, the letters sent by Disability Services to faculty were analyzed to see if students with disabilities tended to congregate in specific departments. Students with documented disabilities were a statistically larger share of the students in American Indian Studies, Women Studies and Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences.