

# **Procedures and Guidelines on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

## **March 13, 2015**

The purpose of these procedures and guidelines is to support the implementation of the policy on *Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities*, as approved by Senate. In the event of a discrepancy between the Policy and these guidelines, the Policy will apply.

The provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student requesting accommodation.

The University has a responsibility to:

- provide reasonable accommodations, up to the point of undue hardship, to an otherwise qualified students with a disability; and
- maintain confidentiality of the information obtained.

### **Legal Framework:**

The guidelines shall conform to the provisions of:

- the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; and
- the Prince Edward Island Human Rights Act.

### **DEFINITIONS**

The following definitions shall apply in these Procedures and Guidelines:

Academic Integrity - The essential academic requirements of a course or program which includes, but is not limited to, the knowledge and skills which are necessary to meet the learning objectives.

Disability - As stated in the *Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities* policy, the term disability shall be defined as a functional limitation caused by a long-term or recurring physical, sensory, mental, psychiatric or learning impairment that restricts the ability of a person to perform the daily activities necessary to participate in learning or daily living at UPEI.

Examinations - Include but are not limited to midterms, tests, quizzes, written lab examinations or final examinations.

Undue Hardship<sup>1</sup> - Although undue hardship must be considered in the context of each individual case, a finding of undue hardship could be supported in the following circumstances:

- (i) financial cost is such that the operation of the University and/or its programs would be fundamentally diminished, or a program or service would cease to exist due to the financial burden of the accommodation;
- (ii) there is a risk to public safety or a substantial risk of personal injury to the student with a disability;
- (iii) the accommodation unreasonably impedes the ability of other students to pursue academic studies; or
- (iv) when accommodation alternatives would result either in lowering academic standards or requiring substantial alteration of essential course or program requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> PEI Human Rights Commission: Duty to Accommodate

Significant costs related to a requested accommodation shall be considered in the context of the University as a whole, not on the basis of a department, division, faculty, school, or program.

The onus is on the University to prove undue hardship.

### **REGISTRATION WITH ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES**

Students with disabilities who have been admitted to the University and who self- identify as requiring academic accommodation must register with Accessibility Services.

### **DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS**

Students requesting academic accommodation must provide appropriate documentation satisfactory to the University. The assessment must be comprehensive and reflect the student's learning needs in a university setting and support the requested accommodation. Specific documentation requirements are as follows:

- a) Documentation for students with learning disabilities must include a psycho-educational assessment report that contains a diagnosis of a learning disability. It must be completed and signed by a registered psychologist or a registered psychological associate to support these requests.
- b) Documentation to support medical or psychological disabilities must be from a qualified professional(s) and include: a statement of the diagnosis and nature of the disability; information on the severity, duration and intensity of the disability; and whether the disability is permanent or temporary.

Documentation will need to be renewed as appropriate to reflect the student's on-going need for academic accommodation.

Documentation must be current:

- A psycho-educational assessment must be within a 5-year time period from date of assessment;
- For returning students whose conditions are stable, the original supporting medical documentation will meet requirements;
- When a new or returning students functional abilities show significant change, new supporting documentation may be required;
- In certain circumstances, a student will be provided accommodation on a limited basis while obtaining documentation.

### **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION**

Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity or the essential educational requirements of an academic course/program as determined by the University.

Academic accommodations available may include, but are not limited to:

- An adaption to a component of a program, or alternative forms of evaluation (e.g. assigning a term paper instead of an oral presentation to a student with a speech impediment or autism);
- Use of assistive technology in the classroom/laboratory/field (e.g. FM systems worn by Course Instructors);
- Use of oral and visual language interpreters, educational attendants, and/or note-takers in the

- classroom;
- Use of audio and/or visual recording of lectures;
- Use of adaptive technology;
- Support for examinations including extra time, a distraction-free environment, and use of a computer, adaptive software or word processor;
- Special seating or wheelchair accessible tables; or
- Adjustments to lighting.

### **PROVISION OF ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION**

Requests for certain forms of academic consideration can be accommodated directly by Accessibility Services. These include requests for:

- student mentoring;
- provision of tutors;
- provision of an educational attendant;
- note-taking services;
- use of a scribe or reader;
- alternatives to written tests (e.g. oral exam, alternate formats such as braille or large text) where appropriate;
- arrangements for appropriate seating in a classroom;
- scanning of textbooks into a Kurzweil or MP3 file (text to speech technology); or
- test or exam accommodation to facilitate the use of extra time, distraction free environment, use of a computer, adaptive software or word processor.

Human Rights Guidelines for Accommodating Post-Secondary Students (April 2014) state that:

Accommodation does not mean that education providers are required to lower their academic standards. On the contrary, students with disabilities are expected to develop the same essential skills as their classmates. However, the manner in which those skills are developed may differ. If a certain course requirement poses a particular difficulty for students with disabilities, the education provider should examine that requirement and determine whether it is truly necessary to meet the educational objectives of the program, and whether it would be possible to waive or modify the requirement without affecting those objectives.

Ultimately, an education provider should develop curricula with an eye toward inclusion. This process may include putting course materials online, ensuring that they are available in alternate formats from the outset or implementing universal design principles. By designing his/her programs in ways that permit students with disabilities to fully participate, an education provider can not only promote an inclusive educational environment, but may also make the accommodation process a smoother one for both the provider and the students. The education provider should also provide guidance to its instructors and support staff on working with students with disabilities and providing an environment that is welcoming, inclusive and free of discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

Recommendations from the student's psychological or medical documentation may necessitate the need for academic accommodation on a case-by-case basis. In collaboration between the Course Instructor, the student and Accessibility Services, individualized academic considerations may be granted while

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/g/Guideline-Accommodating-Post-Secondary-Students-Disability-New-Brunswick.pdf>

maintaining academic integrity. These include requests for:

- Advanced provision of reading lists, class notes and other course materials;
- Alternate scheduling for the completion of course, project, thesis work, or examinations, including competency examinations;
- Due to extenuating medical considerations, waiving the participation requirements by re-weighting other evaluation methodology, or by the provision of an alternative assignment;
- Extensions to program completion time limits.

### **THE REGISTRATION PROCESS FOR ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES**

- The Registrar's office will provide Accessibility Services (AS) information on students with disabilities who self-declare upon admission, so accommodation needs can be arranged prior to starting University.
- Students will make appointments directly or will be referred throughout the year so intake is a continuous process.
- Documentation will be reviewed and an individualized accommodation plan will be developed.
- When necessary, referrals will be made for further psychological-educational assessments\*, academic or health-related supports within the Department of Student Affairs (e.g. Health Centre, Counseling, Writing Centre, tutoring, mentors, or educational attendants) or external services. (\*It is a student's responsibility to pay for an assessment.)
- At the start of each semester (or within a week of the student who is newly registered with AS), an e-mail will be sent out to each course instructor outlining the student's name, student number and his/her accommodation needs.
- It is important to note that the student is not required to disclose his/her disability, nor should the Course Instructor request this of the student. The medical documentation has been reviewed and verified by the AS Coordinator. Students are encouraged to identify themselves to the Course Instructor and discuss their individual learning needs early in the term.

### **EXAM ACCOMMODATION**

Many students with physical, learning or other types of disabilities who have supporting medical documentation require some form of exam accommodation (e.g. distraction-free environment, extended time, use of computer, adaptive software or word processor). Often this results in the exam being written with Accessibility Services.

#### **Student and Proctor Responsibilities**

- Students are required to provide AS with their test and exam schedules at the beginning of the semester;
- Students are required to schedule their final exams with AS, as soon as the final exam schedule is released, or at least two weeks prior to the exam date;
- Approximately one week prior to the exam, AS will contact the department and arrange for the exam to be delivered either in person or electronically to AS;
- Students must arrive 10 minutes before the start of the exam;
- When a student arrives for an exam, a proctor will escort the student to a room and give him/her the exam;
- Exams taken at AS are carefully invigilated. All materials taken into the exam rooms, such as pencil cases, are checked. Students are also regularly checked during the exam. All personal belongings of the student including cell phones are kept with the exam proctor;

- After the exam is completed, it is secured under lock and key; and
- To preserve exam integrity, Departments are responsible for and required to pick up and sign for the completed exams/tests and quizzes.

## **DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

### **Accommodation Appeals:**

If consensus cannot be reached between the student, Instructor and designate of Accessibility Services on a request for accommodation, the following process for dispute resolution will be followed:

- A formal appeal must be made in writing within 2 weeks of the Instructor's decision. This appeal must be submitted to the Chair (or equivalent), who will consult within the department before arriving at a decision.
- The Department Chair's decision may be further appealed, in writing, within two weeks of the decision being rendered to the Dean of the Faculty.
- Decisions may be further appealed through an "*Accommodation Appeals Committee*". The constitution of this committee is determined by the Vice-President, Academic.

### **Academic Appeals:**

The policy on *Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities* states that students have the right to appeal under Academic Regulation 12: Academic Appeals.

The Department of Student Affairs and Accessibility Services staff are available for consultations regarding various ways and options available to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to contact us with any questions related to the accommodation practices, student services, and supports offered at the University of Prince Edward Island.