

Disability Accommodations at Collin College

Federal law requires institutions of higher learning to make reasonable adjustments necessary to make sure that students with disabilities are not discriminated against. Frequently, that means removing barriers that could potentially make it impossible or significantly difficult for students with disabilities to access learning with the same level of ease as those without disabilities. For example, an instructor might routinely prohibit consumption of food or beverage in his or her class. While snacking in class might be a luxury to most students, it may be a medical necessity to a student with brittle diabetes. Requiring that student to “wait till the end of class like everybody else,” or to step outside of the classroom to take a snack would be essentially forcing the student to choose between education and a life threatening medical crisis. Similarly, requiring a student who is deaf or who has a severe hearing impairment to make an oral presentation on a research project may be seen as unnecessarily discriminatory since the student could demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter in writing instead.

While the law mandates that instructors provide the necessary accommodations to students with disabilities, it does not require them to change the course content or alter academic standards in the process of providing the accommodations. Additionally, instructors and institutions should ensure that accommodations do not give students with disabilities an unfair advantage over the other students. The purpose of providing accommodations is to ‘level the playing field’ for students with disabilities, by helping them compensate for a life function that is not the same as that of other students in the class. For that matter, it is important that instructors provide only those accommodations that are specified in the accommodations letters.

The ACCESS office at Collin College serves students with documented cognitive, sensory, and physical disabilities with the aim of helping them realize their best academic potential despite their limitations. Specifically, ACCESS determines the type of accommodations consistent with the particular disability and functional limitations that the student presents with. A panel of qualified professionals makes the determination based on academic, medical, or psychological documents pertaining to the student’s disability. Students who are approved for accommodations are given Accommodations Letters which clearly spell the types of accommodations that they are entitled to. The letters serve as legal documents which members of faculty are required to honor.

Members of faculty have a right to ask for an accommodations letter when a student with a disability requests any accommodation. It is the student’s responsibility to inform his or her professors that he or she has a qualifying disability that requires accommodation, and to present them with the official accommodation letter from ACCESS. Faculty members are encouraged to request that students with disabilities who need accommodations contact them outside class hours to discuss the accommodation. That information is best presented in the course syllabus. That way, students with disabilities know that they are welcome to speak with the instructor.

It is important to note that not every student with a disability is registered with ACCESS office. Some students with disabilities choose to not disclose their disability or request accommodations and their choice should be respected. Therefore, even if a student has an obvious disability, a

member of faculty is not to initiate a conversation about the disability, or accommodations for that matter, unless the student brings it up. To ensure students' confidentiality, ACCESS does not discuss a student or otherwise disclose his or her information to faculty members without the student's written consent.

Faculty are reminded to not make a decision as to whether a student has a disability, to not ask a student whether he or she has a disability, to not decide what accommodation is best for a particular student, or to provide disability accommodation to a student who has not presented an Accommodations Letter from the ACCESS office. Faculty are also strongly advised to maintain strict confidentiality when dealing with students with disabilities, and to refer all questions to the ACCESS office.

ACCESS has offices at each of the three main campuses with the main office located at the Spring Creek campus. Faculty who encounter students who self-identify as having a disability can refer them to the ACCESS office in the respective campus:

ACCESS Spring Creek Campus
2800 East Spring Creek Parkway, D-140
Phone: 972-881-5898

ACCESS Central Park Campus
2200 West University Drive, B-335
Phone: 972-548-6816

ACCESS Preston Ridge Campus
9700 Wade Boulevard, F-144-C
Phone: 972-548-6816