The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) prohibit discrimination against college students with disabilities. The spirit of these laws is one of inclusion. They provide equal opportunity to students with disabilities so that they may access their education.

The Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) provides and facilitates reasonable accommodations for students with qualifying disabilities or disabling health conditions. To be eligible for accommodations, a student must have a disability that substantially limits at least one major life activity. Accommodations may intersect with the academic, dining, and residential dimensions of the College.

This summer, OAS became a part of the Division of Inclusive Diversity, Equity, Access, and Accountability (IDEAA), reporting to Michael Dunn. Diana Boros and Liza Gijanto are the faculty advisors for academic accessibility.

OAS is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to ensure that students have access to their education -- and to working with instructors to make sure this process is as transparent, responsive, and supportive as possible.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is an accommodation?

An accommodation is support that lowers or removes a barrier caused by a disability or disabling health condition. An accommodation is a means to provide equal access to an individual who is experiencing a substantial limitation in one or more major life activities. For example, a student who experiences processing delays in reading and writing may need more time on time-constrained assignments, like an in-class exam.

Accommodations are a means to provide access, but do not guarantee success. It’s up to the student to use their skills and strategies to be successful.
The most common accommodations granted on our campus are:

- Permission to audio-record lectures
- Extended time to complete tests, quizzes, etc.
- Use of a computer for text-to-speech software
- Provision of copies of outlines
- Testing in an alternate, quiet space

2. How does OAS determine which accommodations may be appropriate?

OAS engages in an interactive process with students to determine appropriate accommodations. This process usually includes a review of documentation, interviews with the student, and consultation with faculty colleagues and/or knowledgeable providers. This process helps us recognize the student's needs and potential points of access. For more information about our process, check out the procedures to request accommodations and information about accommodations in college vs. high school.

3. How will I know if any of my students receive accommodations?

As a general practice, we do not automatically notify instructors of students in their courses with accommodations. We encourage students to self-disclose their accommodations to faculty by sharing their "accommodation letter" from OAS with you, but we will share the letter at a student's request. We encourage students to have a conversation with you about how accommodations are to be managed in your course, but they are not required to do so.

A student's accommodations in a course are active from the date you receive their official letter. Accommodations are not retroactive to the start of the semester.

4. When can students request accommodations? Can accommodations be added or changed after the initial letter is produced?

A student may start the accommodation process at any point in the semester. The process can take up to four weeks. If a student experiences a new or exacerbated barrier that requires a new accommodation, then they may return to OAS to continue the interactive process. If new accommodations are approved, OAS will create a new letter.
5. What if I have concerns about a student’s accommodation to audio-record my class?

If a student has this accommodation, they must work with you to complete an Audio Recording Agreement via Google Forms before they are allowed to record class. Speak with your student about the parts of class that are appropriate to record -- perhaps a lecture, but not a class discussion. Material discussed during the unrecorded part of class may not be tested for grading. If something is said during an unrecorded part of class that may appear on a test or assignment later, the instructor could reiterate or summarize that point after the discussion ends, when recording resumes. This requires communication and/or signaling between student and professor about when recording should occur.

6. When are accommodations not appropriate?

The law provides several exemption areas when accommodations are not appropriate, if the accommodation:

- Poses a direct threat to others’ health or safety
- Creates an undue burden on the College
- Creates a fundamental alteration of College policies, practices, procedures, or academic requirements (see the next question for more information)
- Requires the provision of personal services and devices (such as personal aides, specialized tutors, or specialized personal equipment; a student may use these as needed, but the College does not provide them)

7. How do we determine if an accommodation presents a fundamental alteration of a course?

A fundamental alteration generally involves one of the following:

- A removal of an essential skill
- A lowering of an objective or standard
- A change in the essential goal or outcome of the course or assignment
- The modification of a requirement needed for a specific licensure or certification

These skills, objectives, standards, goals, outcomes, and requirements would generally be included in a course syllabus in order to be considered fundamental. A fundamental alteration would not be reflected in a tradition, absence of consideration, a failure to consider technology, or a pretext of discrimination.
8. Is there a process I need to follow if I believe an accommodation is a fundamental alteration in my course, or if I have concerns about an accommodation?

Yes. Please contact OAS to discuss the situation. We are developing a new grievance process for students and instructors, so that we can consistently and fairly address concerns about the assignment and implementation of accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not automatically omitted if you believe that it fundamentally alters your course; we must go through the grievance process first.

9. What if I am not familiar with an accommodation or I am unsure of how to implement it?

Please contact OAS to discuss the situation. We are here to help with any logistical questions or concerns you may have.

Contact Us

Please reach out to our team with your questions, concerns, or ideas! We are here to support you and all members of our community.

- Megan Pietryka, Assistant Coordinator of Accessibility Services, mtpietryka@smcm.edu
- Diana Boros, Associate Professor of Political Theory, Faculty Advisor for Academic Accessibility, dboros@smcm.edu
- Liza Gijanto, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Faculty Advisor for Academic Accessibility, lgijanto@smcm.edu
- Michael Dunn, Assistant Vice President of Equity and Inclusion, ADA/Section 504 Coordinator, mkdunn@smcm.edu

Office of Accessibility Services Website and Faculty Resources page