Handbook on educational access for students with disabilities

Information for faculty and staff members and administrators

Virginia Commonwealth University
Dear Colleague:

In 2006, Virginia Commonwealth University began implementing VCU 2020: Vision for Excellence, the university’s most ambitious strategic plan to date. Key to the development of the plan and, indeed, to the vast opportunities available for the diverse audiences served by VCU, is this working mission statement:

The university provides a fertile and stimulating environment for achieving excellence in learning, teaching, scholarship, research, clinical practice, creative expression and in public service. Essential to the life of the university is a faculty actively engaged in scholarship and creative exploration — activities that increase knowledge and understanding of the world and inspire and enrich teaching.

Clearly, this is a mission in which we can all see ourselves — students and faculty and staff members. In fact, it is vital that everyone in our internal and external communities realize the unique role that he plays in making VCU the most accessible it can be.

Therefore, I urge you, the faculty of this great university, to create a welcoming and understanding environment in which all students are treated equally and fairly. Use the resources such as this handbook regularly and be fully aware of the various strategies suggested as part of the universal design for learning.

We feel confident that you share our commitment to providing reasonable access and appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities. This handbook will provide the guidance you need to help our students to succeed.

Best wishes,

Stephen D. Gottfredson
Provost and vice president for academic affairs

David C. Sarrett
Associate vice president for health sciences
Faculty responsibilities

There are several things you can do to make your classroom a more welcoming environment:

- Provide accommodations that are listed on the student’s accommodation letter. This letter will be on letterhead from DSS.
- All students who identify themselves to faculty members as having a disability, without an accommodation letter, should be encouraged to identify themselves to the DSS service provider on their respective campus.
- Respect student privacy by keeping all disability-related information confidential. For example, when facilitating the note-taking process, use discretion and avoid singling out the student with a disability.
- Although it is highly recommended that students present their accommodation letters to faculty members in the beginning of the semester, students can do this at any time. Keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive and begin at the point when a faculty member receives the accommodation letter from the student.
- Faculty members are strongly encouraged to include a disability statement on the course syllabus to provide a way for students to solicit support. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require VCU to provide an “academic adjustment” and/or a “reasonable accommodation” to any individual who advises us of a physical or mental disability. Students who have a physical or mental limitation that requires an academic adjustment or an accommodation should arrange a meeting with the assistant dean of students. Additionally, if course work requires students to work in a lab environment, students should advise the course director, instructor or department chairman of any concerns they may have regarding safety issues related to their limitation(s).

VCU accommodation process

1. The student with a disability contacts the appropriate DSS office.
2. The student provides the DSS service provider with appropriate documentation of the disability.
3. The DSS service provider carefully reviews the documentation to determine eligibility for services.
4. If the student is determined eligible for services, the DSS service provider will provide the student with accommodation letters based on the documentation provided.
5. The student shares the accommodation letters with each of his professors.
6. Faculty members provide accommodations that are on the accommodation letter.
7. If there are questions or concerns regarding the accommodations, faculty members should contact the appropriate DSS office as soon as possible. In the meantime, continue to provide the accommodations until any concerns have been resolved.
• Make the syllabus and textbook list available to students, department staff and the bookstore prior to the start of class (preferably 10 weeks prior to the start of classes). Some students require textbooks converted into an alternate format, which can be a time-consuming process.

• If a student with a disability is taking a test in the DSS office, it is the responsibility of the faculty member to ensure that the exam is sent to the DSS office prior to the testing date. Exams can be mailed, delivered in person, e-mailed or faxed to DSS.

• Faculty members or the departments are responsible for setting attendance policies as well as policies on makeup work and missed quizzes and exams. However, faculty members are free to be flexible in situations where the disability is clearly a mitigating factor. Faculty members should make their policies clear in order for students with disabilities to make informed decisions about what courses to take.

• Consider ordering textbooks that come in alternate formats (i.e., electronic versions).

• The Academic Integrity Policy applies in all exam modifications.

• Online information also must be accessible. Please see the enclosed CD for more information on Web accessibility and how to make other common electronic information accessible.

What’s a reasonable accommodation?
Any modification or adjustment that will allow a student with a disability to perform in a program or have the same rights and privileges as students without disabilities and to benefit from all educational programs and activities.

Roles and responsibilities

Virginia Commonwealth University is committed to providing students with disabilities equal opportunities to benefit from all programs, services and activities offered. The service providers in Disability Support Services on each campus are responsible for identifying and certifying students with disabilities and for determining appropriate academic accommodations including program and exam modifications, auxiliary aids and classroom accommodations. Students with disabilities are responsible for self-identification prior to requesting services. Students are urged to request accommodations at least four weeks prior to the first day of instruction. Accommodations may not be available on the first day of instruction for students who do not request them at least four weeks prior. However, students have the right to request services from the appropriate DSS office at any time during their enrollment.

Monroe Park Campus
University Student Commons
907 Floyd Avenue, Room 102
P.O. Box 842529
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2529
Phone/TTY: (804) 828-2253
Fax: (804) 828-1944
www.students.vcu.edu/dss

MCV Campus
Virginia Mechanics Institute Building
1000 East Marshall Street, Room 202
P.O. Box 980124
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0124
Phone: (804) 828-9782
TTY: (804) 828-4608
Fax: (804) 828-4609
www.vcuhealth.org/vp/sassdss

DSS responsibilities
DSS offers the following services:
• Recommendations for program accommodations in accordance with recent documentation.
• Referral to appropriate student support offices on campus.
• Information and assistance in the area of academic planning.
  – Authorizing appropriate academic accommodations.
  – Assisting faculty members with disability-specific issues.
  – Answering faculty members’ questions.
  – Helping faculty members resolve disability disputes.
  – Liaising between faculty members and students with disabilities.
• Referrals to off-campus resources.
• Alternative testing.
• Consultation with public school special education administrators, rehabilitation or high school counselors, parents, and prospective students concerning VCU’s services for students with disabilities.

DSS will not:
• Perform psycho-educational diagnostic assessments.
• Offer self-contained classes or training programs for students with disabilities.
• Ask faculty members to compromise the quality of instruction or evaluation or sacrifice academic standards.
Student responsibilities

Students should:
- Register with DSS.
- Provide current documentation of the disability to the DSS service provider.
- Give their accommodation letter to professors.
- Monitor their accommodations.
- Discuss any accommodation needs with the DSS service provider.

Students can find the VCU Handbook for Students With Disabilities online on the DSS Web sites.

Students in dual roles

Classified employees and faculty members who also are taking classes should use two different processes for requesting accommodations for disability services. When performing the duties of their employment (something in your work life), individuals should request accommodations through the Office of Equal Opportunity Employment and Affirmative Action Services, which houses the university’s Americans with Disabilities Act service provider. When making a request for accommodations in their roles as students (the academic piece), employees and faculty members should use DSS procedures.

Faculty responsibilities

Faculty members should:
- Provide accommodations, which are listed on the student’s accommodation letter.
  - If a student with an invisible disability requests an accommodation without the DSS accommodation letter, have the student contact DSS to obtain appropriate accommodations.
  - If a student with a visible disability requests an accommodation that appears appropriate (such as allowing a student to sit in the front of the classroom or providing large-print materials), the faculty/staff member should have the student contact DSS in the meantime, faculty and staff members also should contact DSS to see if the accommodation request is appropriate.
- Respect student privacy.
  - Student educational records are considered confidential and may not be released without the written consent of the student.
  - As a faculty or staff member, you have a responsibility to protect educational records in your possession.

“Directory information” is information that is considered public and can be released without the student’s written permission, unless the student has opted to withhold directory information.

If you are ever in doubt, do not release any information until you call Records and Registration at (804) 828-1349.

If you have questions about accommodations, please contact DSS for clarification. In the meantime, continue to provide the accommodation listed on the student’s accommodation letter until the issue has been resolved.

Faculty or staff members who have questions or concerns regarding reasonable accommodations in relation to the VCU work environment may contact EEO/AA Services. EEO/AA Services develops and enforces policies that ensure equal opportunity and access to education and employment to all members of the university community.

EEO/AA Services
90 West Franklin Street, Suite 114
P.O. Box 843022
Richmond, Virginia 23284-3022
Phone: (804) 828-1347
TTY: (804) 828-1420
www.vcu.edu/eeoaa

Certification

All students who identify themselves to faculty members as having or suspecting a disability should be encouraged to identify themselves to the DSS service provider on their campus. Faculty members should not provide any accommodation without first receiving accommodation letters from DSS.

Students with visible physical impairments may be required to present documentation upon request of the DSS service provider. Reports from physicians or other health care professionals must be presented, and are used for official identification and the determination of appropriate academic accommodations.

Students with hidden disabilities such as learning or psychological disabilities are required to present extensive and current documentation of their disability to the DSS service provider for official identification. Examples of documentation include psychiatric or psychological reports and/or educational assessments.
The accommodation process

The accommodation process at Virginia Commonwealth University begins with identification of a disability requiring reasonable accommodation. If a student notifies a faculty member that he has a disability, the faculty member should ask that student whether he has contacted the Disability Support Services office for that campus. If the student has not yet contacted DSS, the faculty member should refer the student to that office and provide specific contact information (detailed earlier in this handbook). If a student mentions that he “might” have a disability, or suspects that he has an impairment requiring accommodation, the faculty member should refer that student to DSS.

After the student contacts DSS, the DSS service provider for that campus will request appropriate documentation of the student’s disability. Examples of appropriate documentation are provided in the VCU Handbook for Students With Disabilities, available online and in the DSS office on both campuses.

If the student doesn’t yet have appropriate documentation, the DSS service provider will provide information on obtaining such documentation (and additional assessment services, if necessary). After documentation is provided, the DSS service provider will review it to determine whether the student is eligible for support services. If the student is eligible, the DSS service provider will supply a letter detailing the types of accommodations that are appropriate for this student. The student is advised to share the accommodation letter with each of his instructors at the beginning of each semester. It should be noted that the accommodation letter does not provide the specific disability category, and the student is under no obligation to share that information with the instructor. Faculty members who have any questions or concerns about providing the accommodations detailed in these letters should contact DSS as soon as possible.

The law

Federal laws, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, mandate university responsibilities to individuals with disabilities. Both address the civil rights of persons with disabilities. Virginia Commonwealth University may not discriminate in the recruitment, admission, educational process or treatment of students with disabilities. Students who have voluntarily disclosed that they have a disability, provided documentation of that disability and requested reasonable accommodations are eligible to receive approved modifications of programs, appropriate academic accommodations or auxiliary aids that enable them to participate in and benefit from all the educational programs and activities at VCU.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states: “No otherwise qualified person with a disability in the United States ... shall, by reason of ... disability, be denied the benefits of, be excluded from participation in, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

As an institution, VCU receives federal financial assistance and is obligated to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified people with disabilities.

A “qualified person with a disability” is defined as one “who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the education program or activity.” A person with a disability includes “any person who [1] has a physical or mental impairment which substan-

ially limits one or more major life activities, [2] has a record of such an impairment, or [3] is regarded as having such an impairment.”

Qualified impairments or chronic illness may include, but are not limited to:

- AIDS.
- Attention deficit disorder.
- Bipolar disorder.
- Cancer.
- Cerebral palsy.
- Chronic fatigue syndrome.
- Depression.
- Diabetes.
- Epilepsy.
- Hearing loss/deafness.
- Learning disabilities.
- Multiple sclerosis.
- Muscular dystrophy.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Traumatic brain injury.
- Ulcerative colitis.
- Visual impairments/blindness.

Title II of the ADA states: “A public entity shall make reasonable modifications in policies or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the public entity can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.”

The Disability Support Services office on each VCU campus is responsible for working with academic programs to determine what kinds of accommodations are “reasonable,” versus those that would “fundamentally alter the nature” of those programs.
Reasonable accommodation

Any modification or adjustment that will allow a student with a disability to perform in a program or have the same rights and privileges as students without disabilities and to benefit from all educational programs and activities.

A reasonable accommodation makes it possible for a student with a disability to participate fully in the educational program and for an instructor to fairly evaluate the student’s understanding of the material without interference from the disability.

A reasonable accommodation is not intended to compromise academic standards.

Online materials

Both on-campus and electronic resources for students must be accessible to students who have disabilities. Guidelines for accessibility of Web sites and electronic media are provided in regulations for Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

For example, text versions of graphic materials must be provided for people with vision impairments who use screen readers. Specific VCU policies regarding Web site accessibility can be found online at www.vcu.edu/accessibility/webstandards.

Confidentiality

Medical information from a student must be collected and maintained on separate forms and kept in a separate medical file along with other information required to be kept confidential under the ADA. The student must keep medical information confidential even if he is no longer registered at the university.

The ADA allows disclosure of this information only in the following circumstances:
- Supervisors and managers may be told about necessary restrictions on the work or duties of the employee and about necessary accommodations.
- First-aid and safety personnel may be told, when appropriate, if the disability might require emergency treatment.
- Government officials investigating compliance with the ADA must be given relevant information on request.
- Employers may give information to state workers’ compensation offices, state second injury funds and workers’ compensation insurance carriers in accordance with state workers’ compensation laws.
- Employers may use the information for insurance purposes.
- Faculty members receiving this information may not disclose it to anyone else without written authorization by the student specifically requesting release of that information. For example, if a student is eligible for note-taking services as a reasonable accommodation for disability, faculty members could announce to potential note takers in their classes that “a student” needs these services; the student should not be named or pointed out in class. Accommodation letters should be destroyed after the faculty member reads them; they should not be placed in students’ files where other individuals could read this confidential information. For additional information, refer to the ADA at 29 C.F.R. § 1630.14 (b).

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (sometimes called the Buckley Amendment) was passed by Congress in 1974. The act grants four specific rights to students:
- The right to see the information that the institution is keeping on the student.
- The right to seek amendment to those records and in certain cases append a statement to the record.
- The right to consent to disclosure of her records.
- The right to file a complaint with the Family Policy Compliance Office in Washington, D.C.

Basic rules

Student educational records are considered confidential and may not be released without the written consent of the student except as enumerated in the law. As a faculty or staff member, you have a responsibility to protect educational records in your possession. "Directory information" is information that is considered public and can be released without the student’s written permission, unless the student has opted to withhold directory information.

If you are ever in doubt, do not release any information until you call Records and Registration at (804) 828-1349. Rights of students under the FERPA are available online at www.vcu.edu/enroll/rar/rights.
Faculty awareness

Our beliefs and attitudes about disability are a product of our personal experiences, education and media exposure. Each individual must examine his perceptions and be aware of how these may influence his actions. More students with disabilities are attending universities because of increased medical advances, growth in assistive technology, a changing job market and greater student and family awareness regarding legislative protection. More than half of students with disabilities in colleges and universities have hidden disabilities. Increasingly, many hidden disabilities are first diagnosed in college.

Avoid these labels:

| Person who is handicapped/an invalid. | Person with a disability. |
| Individual who is a victim/afflicted with cerebral palsy. | Individual who has cerebral palsy. |
| She is restricted/confined to a wheelchair or is wheelchair-bound. | She uses a wheelchair. |
| He is a deaf mute/deaf and dumb. | He is deaf/does not voice for himself/nonvocal. |
| She has a birth defect. | She has been disabled since birth. |
| He is crazy/insane/a mental patient. | He has a psychiatric disability/emotional disorder/mental illness. |
| My aunt has fits. | My aunt has epilepsy/seizures. |
| The student is slow/retarded/lazy/stupid/an underachiever. | He is a student with a learning disability/attention deficit disorder. |
| A normal or healthy person. | A person without a disability |
| Steve is crippled and lame. | Steve has a mobility impairment. |
| Tonya is a quadriplegic. | Tonya has quadriplegia. |
| Handicapped parking. | Accessible parking. |

Guidelines for talking about disabilities

When talking about disabilities:
- Refer to a person’s disability only if it is relevant.
- Do not portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave or special.
- Use people-first language (placing the person before the disability promotes equality for all).

Interaction tips:
- Do not be afraid to make a mistake when meeting and communicating with someone with a disability.
- Keep in mind that a person who has a disability is a person and is entitled to the dignity, consideration, respect and rights you expect for yourself.
- When introduced to someone with a disability, it is OK to offer to shake hands.
- Use a normal tone of voice unless requested to speak louder.
- Look and speak directly to the person with a disability even if an interpreter or companion is present.
- When addressing a person in a wheelchair, try to situate yourself at eye level.
- Offer assistance in a dignified manner with sensitivity and respect. If the person declines your assistance, do not insist. If you don’t know what to do, ask how you can help and follow the student’s directions.
- Treat adults in a manner befitting adults.

Common misconceptions:
- People with disabilities cannot be successful.
- Students with learning disabilities are unmotivated.
- Anyone who uses a wheelchair is chronically ill or sickly.
- People with disabilities are more comfortable with their “own kind.”
- Individuals with speech impairments also have cognitive deficits.
- People with disabilities are always in need of “special” help.
Identification and certification

**Identification**

Students are responsible for self-identification. They may elect to contact the service provider in Disability Support Services for formal identification at any time during their enrollment at Virginia Commonwealth University. The timing of self-identification or making requests for academic accommodations to the service provider remains at the student’s discretion. However, accommodations may not be available on the first day of instruction for students who do not request them at least four weeks prior to the beginning of classes.

Accommodations begin at the point that the professor receives the accommodation letter. Accommodations are not retroactive and hence will not apply to the part of the semester in which the letter was not received.

**Certification**

Students with visible physical impairments may be required to present documentation upon request of the DSS service provider. Reports from physicians or other medical professionals must be presented to the DSS service provider and are used for official identification and the determination of appropriate academic accommodations.

Students with hidden disabilities, such as learning or psychological disabilities or mental impairments, are required to present extensive and current documentation of their disability to the service provider for official identification. Examples of documentation could include psychiatric reports, psychological reports and/or educational assessments.

Academic accommodations

**General guidelines**

Promoting inclusiveness. Virginia Commonwealth University students with disabilities shall have the opportunity to participate in all educational programs and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate.

Making accommodations. Faculty members are encouraged to announce their willingness to meet with students with disabilities to implement suitable accommodations as early in the semester as possible. Instructors are strongly encouraged to include in their course syllabus a statement that provides a means for students to solicit support.

Statement examples:

- If you are a student with a disability and you need assistance with your course work, please speak privately with me after class or during my office hours.
- If you have a disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.
- Students who are requesting any accommodations on the basis of disability should schedule an appointment with me as soon as possible, ideally within the first three weeks of the semester. Please schedule this office appointment by indicating your preferred method for communication. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach me just prior to or following class to discuss your accommodation needs.

The need for academic accommodations likely will vary from student to student. Most students need only minor changes. Accommodations may range from presenting lecture materials in an alternate format to allowing additional time to complete an exam. The DSS service provider supplies an academic accommodations letter for students who require modifications.

Providing resources. Professors sometimes suspect that a student has a disability. It is usually inappropriate to ask the student if he has a disability, and it is unlawful to ask the student to identify his disability if the student has not volunteered the information. It is quite appropriate, however, for faculty to indicate that they have observed a consistent difficulty or problem, perhaps in the student’s class work, papers, etc. In that context, a professor might provide a list of VCU services for the student to access such as:

- Campus Learning Center (undergraduates).
- Disability Support Services.
- Special Services for Students (MCV Campus).
- University Career Center.
- University Counseling Services.
- Writing Center.

A more detailed description of services is located in the VCU Resource Guide available on the Web at www.students.vcu.edu/rg.

Accommodations in the laboratory

Laboratory experiences are essential for students in many science courses. Students with disabilities will need to have access to the physical facility, equipment, materials, safety devices...
and other services. Access issues for students with disabilities vary considerably depending on the subject, the physical facility and the needs of each student. For example, a student who is blind will be unable to use standard measurement equipment used in a chemistry or physics laboratory. A student with limited use of her hands may have difficulty manipulating lab tools and materials. A student who uses a wheelchair may be unable to access lab tables and computers, or maneuver in a crowded laboratory. Solutions to access barriers will vary considerably among individual students and the laboratory activities. Each student is the best source of information about his needs.

As a general suggestion, working closely with a lab partner or assistant can facilitate involvement in the lab activity for some students with disabilities. For example, a student who is blind could enter observation data into the computer while his partner describes the lab findings. Or, a student with limited dexterity in her hands and fingers could dictate instructions and procedures to her partner who manipulates equipment and materials and carries out the measurement process.

Allowing the student extra time to set up a lab or complete the work also can provide an effective accommodation for some students with disabilities. This may allow more time to focus on procedures and results and eliminate the stress that may result from time constraints.

To assure safety, provide a thorough lab orientation and provide necessary adjustments to procedures, depending on the specific disability. Have a plan established that may involve moving equipment, placing the student in a specific location in the room or involving another student as a back up in case of emergency.

The following paragraphs describe examples of accommodation strategies for specific disabilities.

**Blindness**
- Include tactile drawings or graphs, 3-D models and a lot of hands-on learning.
- Use a glue gun to make raised-line drawings.
- Make a tactile syringe by cutting notches in the plunger at 5-milliliter increments.
- Make a tactile triple beam balance by filing deep notches for each gram increment. Add glue drops on either side of the balance line so that the student will know when the weights are balanced.
- Create Braille labels.
- Identify increments of temperature on a stove using fabric paint.
- Use different textures such as sandpaper or yarn to identify drawers, cabinets and equipment areas.
- Place staples on a meter stick to label centimeters.
- Use 3-D triangles or spheres to describe geometric shapes.
- Use plastic foam and toothpicks or molecular kits to exemplify atoms or molecules.

**Low vision**
- Create large-print instructions.
- Use large-print reading materials that include laboratory signs and equipment labels.
- Enlarge images by connecting TV monitors to microscopes.
- Use raised-line drawings or tactile models for illustrations or maps.
- Verbally describe visual aids.

**Mobility impairments**
Basic requirements for a laboratory workstation for a student in a wheelchair include:
- Work surfaces 30 inches from the floor.
- A 29-inch clearance beneath the top to a depth of at least 20 inches, and a minimum width of 36 inches to allow for leg space for the seated individual.
- Utility and equipment controls within easy reach.
- Clear aisle width of 30 to 36 inches for maneuverability.
- Uncluttered lab layout.
- At least one adjustable laboratory workstation.

**Learning disabilities**
- Use a combination of written, verbal and pictorial instructions.
- Preferential seating to avoid obstacles and physical barriers and that provides visual access to demonstrations.
- Mirrors above the instructor or enlarged screen demonstrations.
- C-clamps for holding objects.
- Flexible connections to electrical, water and gas lines.
- Surgical gloves for handling wet or slippery items.
- Beakers and other equipment with handles. (Create alternative workspaces such as pullout or drop-leaf shelves and countertops, or lap desks.)
- Extended eyepieces so students can use microscopes.
- Single-action lever controls or blade-type handles in place of knobs.
- Alternate lab storage methods [e.g., a portable Lazy Susan or a storage cabinet on casters].

**Hearing impairments**
- Provide videotaped demonstrations or software with captioning.
- Provide written instructions or captioned video instructions prior to class.
- Use visual lab-warning signals.
- Provide preferential seating to view demonstrations and observe the instructor.

**Mobility impairments**
- Provide preferential seating to avoid obstacles and physical barriers and that provides visual access to demonstrations.
- Mirrors above the instructor or enlarged screen demonstrations.
- C-clamps for holding objects.
- Flexible connections to electrical, water and gas lines.
- Surgical gloves for handling wet or slippery items.
- Beakers and other equipment with handles. (Create alternative workspaces such as pullout or drop-leaf shelves and countertops, or lap desks.)
- Extended eyepieces so students can use microscopes.
- Single-action lever controls or blade-type handles in place of knobs.
- Alternate lab storage methods [e.g., a portable Lazy Susan or a storage cabinet on casters].
• Create opportunities to work with lab partners rather than alone.
• Extend the time allotted for setup and process.
• Provide role-model exercises/demonstrations and allow practice.

Health impairments
Some students may not be able to manage certain chemicals or materials. Alternative experiences will need to be considered in these cases.

Mental health or psychiatric impairments
• Allow for extended setup, process time.
• Use a combination of written, oral and pictorial instructions.
• Demonstrate and act out procedures.
• Allow for frequent, brief breaks.
• Provide preferential seating, particularly near the door.
• Decrease extraneous distracting stimuli.
• Allow the student to bring a water bottle.

For additional information on accommodating students in the laboratory, go online to www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty/Strategies/Academic/Science.

Accommodations in internships and field experiences
According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, clinical sites fulfill a dual role as educator and potential employer. These roles fall under the protection of overlapping civil rights legislation that requires the provision of reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Accommodations offer students with disabilities an equal chance to succeed or fail based on merit. They do not provide advantages over other students, but instead equalize the opportunity. Accommodations should not lower technical standards of a program.

Together, the team (i.e., student, DSS service provider, site supervisor and field liaison) should identify accommodation options that could work in a particular clinical setting. The student must share strengths, challenges and accommodation ideas. DSS authorizes eligibility for accommodation based on documentation. The site supervisor and field liaison must identify the essential functions of the clinical assignment. For students uncertain of how their disability may affect their learning and performance, creative problem-solving skills are useful and several accommodation may need to be explored. Collaboration with vocational rehabilitative services is often helpful.

For more information, please see the VCU Professional Development Academy Web site at www.vcu-pda.org.

Examples of clinical accommodations:
• Modifying the work schedule.
• Tape recording meetings.
• Providing materials for training in electronic format.
• Extending the time to acquire performance skills.
• Using a fan in the office to create white noise.
• Supplying a sample or template for paperwork.
• Giving more frequent performance feedback.
• Approving use of a different method to complete a task (e.g., client notes completed electronically versus paper and pencil).
• Providing physical access.
• Considering ergonomic adaptations.

Online accommodations and electronic information
Provide online accommodations that are listed on the accommodation letter just as you would in a classroom environment. Not only must you provide these accommodations, but you also must remember that electronic information (e-mails, Web sites, word processor documents, etc.) must be accessible as well. For example, students with print-related disabilities may use assistive technology to read the Web or electronic information. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing need to have video captions or a text equivalent provided to access audiovisual information. Persons with epilepsy or seizure disorders can have difficulty with flickering text or objects, which can cause seizures. Persons with learning disabilities or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder may have difficulty navigating and/or attending to poorly organized and developed Web sites. Creating accessible electronic information is not only beneficial to students with disabilities but also can be beneficial to the general population.

For more information regarding accommodating students online or through Web accessibility, please contact the appropriate DSS service provider, visit WebAIM at www.webaim.org or see the enclosed CD.

Tips to make your electronic information accessible to all learners:
• Use a sans serif font such as Arial, Verdana or Helvetica.
• If you have images in your document, use ALT tags to convey meaning to the image.
• Eliminate objects or text that move, blink or flicker.
• PDF files are often inaccessible to individuals using screen readers. Make these files accessible or consider another file format such as plain text or Word.
• Use link labels that make sense. For example, avoid using "click here."
• Provide captioning or a transcript for all audio information.
• When conveying information in tables, use labels for columns and rows.
Types of accommodations

The service provider in the Disability Support Services office will provide assistance to ensure access to classes, programs, and activities, as necessary. Academic accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis.

Exam modifications

Student responsibility: Students who require exam modifications such as extended time, auxiliary aids, readers, scribes, proctors, interpreters or print enlargers should make arrangements for those modifications through the DSS office on their campus. Notification should be made at least one week prior to the exam date so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Faculty responsibility: The DSS office on the MCV Campus administers exams. The exams should be scheduled one week in advance. Faculty members and students should make all testing arrangements through the DSS office. You may call the office at (804) 828-9782 or stop by to make a testing appointment.

On the Monroe Park Campus, it is the student’s responsibility to notify the DSS service provider a minimum of one week prior to the exam. It is the faculty member’s responsibility to send the exam to the DSS office prior to the testing date. Exams can be mailed, delivered in person, e-mailed or faxed to DSS.

Faculty members are expected to provide exam modifications for students who require only isolation and extended test time, as listed in the student’s accommodation letter. However, if a room cannot be found, the faculty member should contact DSS for help in identifying a location.

If a faculty member is administering a special exam, the following procedures should be kept in mind:

• The student should be provided a space where the possibility of any disturbance is minimal.
• The test administrator may need to repeat the question several times to allow the student to process the information.

• The test administrator, to ensure accuracy, should repeat the answer given by the student.
• If the test is multiple-choice and administered orally, the test administrator may be asked to read the question and pair it with every possible answer. This process requires the extension of time limits. The VCU Honor System applies in all examination modifications.

Priority registration

Students may participate in priority registration by contacting the DSS service provider who can help them with the process in situations that are appropriate.

Auxiliary aids

The DSS service provider will assist in securing auxiliary aids for use by students with disabilities when such aids are determined to be essential for the provision of an equal opportunity in Virginia Commonwealth University’s programs, services and activities. Auxiliary aids are services, equipment and procedures that allow students with disabilities access to learning and activities in and out of the classroom. They include, but are not limited to, sign language interpreters, real-time captioning service, adaptive technology, alternative media (Braille, tapes, scanned text, enlarged print) and exam accommodations.

Interpreters

The DSS service provider will secure oral or sign language interpreters or computer-assisted real-time (CART) transcription services, when requested by students who are deaf or hard of hearing. A reasonable amount of time, typically four weeks prior to the first day of instruction, is requested. The university cannot guarantee that these services will be available for those students who do not request them at least four weeks prior to the first day of instruction.

Library assistance

The James Branch Cabell Library on the Monroe Park Campus and the Tompkins-McCaw Library for the Health Sciences on the MCV Campus offer accessible services to all students. The VCU Libraries staff will provide individualized orientations and assistance with library research and equipment. VCU students, faculty and staff are encouraged to call or make an appointment at the Cabell Library Research and Reference Desk, (804) 828-1101, or the Tompkins-McCaw Library Service Desk, (804) 828-0636.

Specialized equipment for accessing library resources is available. Equipment includes large-screen computer monitors with screen-enlarging and synthesized voice software, print-scanning and reading equipment, and closed-circuit television machines for enlarging printed text.

Textbooks

Upon request, the DSS service provider will order taped textbooks from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic for students with visual impairments and/or students with disabilities who have difficulty reading printed materials.

The DSS service provider also will provide arrangements for textbooks and other course-related materials not available from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. Students are expected to request the text and course materials at least four weeks prior to the first day of instruction.
Facilitating learning

Applying universal design techniques to instruction provides alternative approaches to meeting the learning needs of all students. UD is an educational approach for teaching all learners, regardless of diversity, by designing flexible classroom materials, using various technology tools, varying instructional/delivery methods and manipulating digital content. The primary theme guiding UD is that instruction and assessment approaches should include alternatives to make them accessible and appropriate for individuals with diverse backgrounds, varied learning approaches, abilities and disabilities. A significant result of incorporating UD strategies in education is that all students, with or without disabilities, can benefit from the variety of employed teaching methods.

So, what does all this mean to Virginia Commonwealth University faculty members? The premise is that if you design your course to use multiple methods and materials, and integrate accessible technology and digital formats whenever possible, there may be less of a need to make special accommodations. It is important to note that integrating UD techniques does not relinquish instructors from providing specific accommodations for students with documented disabilities; however, the need to do so may be greatly reduced. Additionally, most of the learning needs that students without disabilities have [i.e., international students/limited English speakers, students who learn best in a style different than the preferred teaching style of the instructor and older students] can be met through universally designed courses and materials. Teaching diverse learners will always have its challenges, but integrating UD principles into courses can effectively address many of them. For more information, please see VCU’s Professional Development Academy Web site at www.vcu-pda.org.

Examples of how to implement UD into instruction:
- Provide digital (audio, e-text or video) examples of lecture materials to expand flexibility.
- Use concept maps.
- Embed hyperlinks into instructional materials to support background knowledge.
- Highlight critical features in course materials.
- Offer multiple options for demonstrating mastery of content (i.e., digital portfolios, Web presentations, papers, etc.).
- Provide models of products and processes to encourage understanding.
- Include scaffolds to support learning such as templates, electronic writing and reference tools, and review previously learned materials and provide summaries at the end of the lecture.
- Make connections between course activities and students’ interests.

Specific disabilities and suggestions for facilitating learning

Please note that the following suggestions are examples only and not intended to be an exhaustive list. Academic accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis.
Learning disabilities

A student with a learning disability has average or above-average intelligence, but has difficulty acquiring, storing and/or retrieving information efficiently due to a marked pattern of strengths and weaknesses in the basic psychological processes used in an academic environment. The etiology is neurological, biochemical and/or developmental and can be expected to continue indefinitely. The student’s capacity for learning is present. It is only the means by which the information is processed that is different. However, students with learning disabilities may exhibit one or more difficulties in performing ordinary academic tasks such as:

• Acquiring a fund of information about the world.
• Sequencing events and ideas.
• Understanding abstract concepts.
• Spontaneously employing cognitive strategies.
• Switching strategies as appropriate.

• Distinguishing important from unimportant information.
• Reasoning in a deductive manner.
• Perceiving cause-and-effect.
• Remembering things seen and heard (short and long term).
• Sustaining attention to tasks.
• Listening to lectures and taking notes at the same time.
• Communicating effectively with written symbols.

Students with learning disabilities may:

• Omit or substitute letters and words.
• Exhibit poor handwriting.
• Use incorrect syntax and have spelling problems.
• Read slowly.

Students with learning disabilities also may exhibit the following traits:

• Distractibility.
• Anxiety.
• Deficient spatial organizational skills.
• Lack of social skills.

Suggestions:

• Provide a detailed and digital course outline clearly conveying course expectations, including objectives, material to be covered, requirements/expectations, exam dates, grading procedures, and due dates for written assignments. Read the course outline aloud to the entire class.

• Allow the student to record lectures, when approved by DSS.
• Assist in securing good note takers, when prescribed by DSS. Respect student privacy by keeping all disability-related information confidential.
• Develop a positive student-faculty member relationship by showing interest. A good relationship facilitates achievement. Meet with the student to arrange how authorized accommodations will be implemented, clarify concepts and discuss class progress.
• Highlight major concepts and terminology orally or visually (e.g., write new terms and names on the board or read aloud material on transparencies).
• Offer study questions that indicate the relative importance of content as well as the format of possible test questions.
• Provide early drafts of papers, providing pointers and encouragement for follow-up rewrites.
• Extend time for class work when appropriate.
• Provide modifications of exams such as additional time, isolation, oral versus written or essay versus objective when prescribed by the DSS service provider.
• For some students, merely allowing them a longer period of time to complete a test may suffice. For others, oral exams, hands-on demonstrations, open-book tests or true-or-false tests may be more appropriate. For the aphasic person to whom an oral test might be impossible, an exhibit could serve as a suitable substitute.
• Use a variety of visual and auditory methods to present information.
• Review material to assist students in the retention of information.
• Seat students in the front, if possible, to facilitate attention.
• Provide continuous feedback with weekly quizzes, meetings or e-mails.

Psychological disabilities

Psychological disabilities describe a broad range of psychiatric and emotional difficulties. The most common forms of disability are anxiety disorders, depressive disorders and schizophrenia. The type, intensity and duration of symptoms vary from person to person. Often symptoms can be controlled through medication and/or counseling. However, periodic episodes may occur that require a change in treatment.

Students with psychological disabilities may have problems with focusing attention and organizational skills, low self-esteem, difficulties with trust, or high levels of stress. Students with anxiety disorder may have reduced concentration, distortions of perceptions and a reduced ability to learn. Symptoms may include lightheadedness or hyperventilation. Students with depression may appear uninterested, inattentive, unable to concentrate, irritable or tired. Students with schizophrenia may have difficulty processing information or may express thoughts that seem fragmented.
Suggestions:
• Abstain from diagnosing or treating the psychological disorder.
• If discussions with the student are not effective or you are approached for therapeutic help, refer the student to DSS or the University Counseling Center.
• Call VCU Campus Police if any student exhibits abusive or threatening behavior.
• See suggestions for learning disabilities for additional ideas.

Blindness/visual impairments
Students with visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the use of corrective lenses are considered legally blind; therefore, most students with a visual impairment have some vision, but it varies greatly. Regardless of the degree of impairment, students with visual impairments should fully participate in classroom activities, such as discussions, group work and recording of notes with the aid of a note taker (reader and scribe), large-print, enlarged equipment or Braille and taped exams.
• Provide the course syllabus in advance to allow time for arranging the taping or Brailling of textbooks and other educational materials.
• If a service animal accompanies a student, the animal is working and should be ignored. Students need to be reminded that it is not appropriate to treat the animal as a pet. Service animals are permitted in most university buildings (there may be some exceptions in health care facilities).
• Assist students in securing a sighted student as a study mate or laboratory partner.
• Seat the low-vision student in the front row and face the class when speaking. The student may need a seat away from the glare of a window.
• Encourage taping of lectures.
• Provide large-print copies of all course materials and/or handouts.
• Plan and implement adaptations for laboratory classes, field trips and internships in advance.
• Be flexible with assignment deadlines.
• Consider alternative assignments for specific tasks that may be impossible for the student with a visual impairment to carry out.
• Use alternatives for assessing course achievement such as oral [reader and scribe], large-print, enlarging equipment or Braille and taped exams.
• Use tactile materials to present diagrams or charts.
• Speak in a normal voice. Students with visual impairments hear well, unless they also have hearing impairments.

Deafness/hearing impairments
A hearing loss can be considered a “hidden disability” because it is not always recognizable. Students who were born deaf or sustain a hearing loss at an early age have the most severe disability. Never having heard language, they tend to have problems with speaking, reading and writing English. American Sign Language may be their primary language.

Some students use interpreters, while others lip-read or wear hearing amplification devices. When an interpreter is used, speak directly to the student, not to the interpreter. Remember to refrain from talking down to the student who lip-reads or uses an assistive listening device. The student’s disability is hearing and does not affect her intelligence.

In the absence of an interpreter, communicate using a computer or pencil and paper. Use the department’s TTY for telephone communications, or call Virginia Relay at 711. The relay operator uses a TTY and will translate verbal communications to the student and the student’s TTY responses to the instructor.

Suggestions:
• Seat the student away from glaring light sources and in a spot where eye contact can be maintained.
• Discuss classroom acoustics for students wearing hearing aids to ensure the speaker’s voice is being heard. If acoustics are poor, move the course to a more suitable location.
• If an interpreter is used, allow the interpreter to sit or stand next to you so the student can see both of you.
• Draw the student’s attention before speaking. Consult the student concerning rate and volume; speak clearly and naturally. Avoid long periods of facing away from the student or speaking while writing on the chalkboard. Remember that lip readers need to see your face.
• Try to avoid movements such as pacing, turning your back to the class or putting your hands in front of your face while speaking, which will interfere with lip reading.
• Avoid standing in front of windows or other light sources.
• Communicate directly to the student, for example, “Will you?” in lieu of “Ask Sue if…”
• Repeat other students’ questions before answering.
• Provide extra time in labs for a student to find items you are pointing out. The student needs to get
instructions from the interpreter, locate materials and turn back for the rest of the discussion.

- Assist the student in finding a volunteer note taker.
- Communicate in writing. Write all important information and changes on the chalkboard.
- Provide a course outline, a list of new specialized terminology and a copy of the lecture notes, if available, as soon as possible.
- Facing the student with the hearing loss and enunciating is important, but remember only about 0 percent of speech is visually discernible.
- Arrange an independent viewing area and extent of adaptations necessary.

Suggestions:
- Consider classroom accessibility and, if necessary, arrange for a change in classroom or building, if inaccessible.
- Secure the university’s emergency evacuation plan for the building and ensure that it is manageable for the student with a mobility impairment.
- Be aware that absences/lateness may be unavoidable due to exacerbation of the disability, problems with personal aides, inclement weather or elevator or wheelchair malfunctioning.
- Consider extending deadlines and using “incomplete” grades when appropriate.
- Assist in integrating the student for support and consistency by teaming him with a student who will take good notes, scribe in-class assignments or serve as a lab partner.
- Extend time limits for exams and consider oral, scribed or taped tests in isolation for students who are unable to write, fatigue quickly or write slowly.
- Arrange for access to resources or library assistance for required class research.

Mobility impairments
A wide range of conditions such as musculoskeletal disabilities (partial or total paralysis), amputation or severe injury, polio, arthritis, or active sickle cell disease may cause some mobility impairments. A student's strength, speed, endurance, coordination and dexterity may be impaired and the degree will vary from student-to-student and from time-to-time. Some students may at times have difficulty getting to and from class, performing in class, managing out-of-class or may be too sick to make it to class. Some students may experience fine motor problems and therefore have difficulty writing, holding a book, opening doors or grasping other materials. The best practice is to consult with the student regarding the areas and extent of adaptations necessary.

Speech disabilities
Speech disabilities include articulation, voice strength, chronic hoarseness, esophageal speech, fluency (stutter, stammer) and aphasia. Some speech disabilities are managed by devices and others by therapy, but all can be aggravated by anxiety.

Suggestions:
- Be patient and give students an opportunity to speak in class, but do not insist.
- Permit them additional time to express themselves and do not fill in the gaps.
- Feel free to ask a student to repeat a sentence.
- Address students using normal tone and volume. They are able to hear and communicate.
- Consider course modifications such as a one-to-one presentation and a computer with a voice synthesizer.

Other disabilities
AIDS – This is a virus that destroys the immune system and leaves a student vulnerable to infections. Students may experience extreme fatigue, nausea or other difficulties. Students with AIDS may be hesitant to self-identify, but when they do, it is important that the strictest of confidentiality be observed. Reasonable accommodations will vary depending on symptoms.

Cancer – The disease causes a wide range of effects, which vary significantly from one student to another. Some students experience vision problems, a lack of balance and coordination, joint pains, backaches, headaches, abdominal pains, drowsiness, lethargy, difficulty in breathing and swallowing, weakness, bleeding or anemia. The primary therapies for treating cancer are radiation, chemotherapy and surgery. Radiation and chemotherapy can cause violent nausea, drowsiness or fatigue, which interferes with academic functioning and causes absences. Reasonable accommodations are essential and will vary depending on the effects of the disease and/or treatment.

Seizure disorder – Students with seizure disorders, generally called epilepsy, are frequently reluctant to divulge their condition because they fear they could be stigmatized. Seizures are the result of an imbalance in the electrical activity of the brain. If a student has a seizure in class:
- Remain calm.
- Remove nearby objects to avoid injury to the student.
- Assist the student to the floor and roll a garment to form a pillow and place it under the student’s head.
- Position the student’s head to the side.
- Loosen any restrictive clothing.
- Do not force anything into the student’s mouth.
- Do not try to restrain movement.
- Call VCU Campus Police, (804) 828-1234.
Emergency concerns

There may be an occasion when a student’s condition needs immediate intervention in the classroom. The most likely examples are seizures, diabetic shock (insulin reaction) and heart attacks. Should such a situation occur, the quickest way to summon an ambulance is by dialing VCU Campus Police. They will call for an ambulance. The telephone numbers for campus police are (804) 828-1234 or (804) 828-4357.

Until emergency medical personnel arrive, there are some intervention techniques that should be started. CPR treatment should be started immediately if the person is not breathing. Such emergencies are rare, but campus police should be contacted immediately if a student should need CPR assistance. Security personnel are trained to respond to these situations. If you have CPR training, you may begin the technique until assistance arrives.

Building evacuation routes

Faculty members who have students in their classes who might have problems leaving the building during emergencies should discuss evacuation procedures the first week of class. Remember, in cases of fire or other emergencies, elevators may be rendered inoperative.

- **Visually impaired students.** Most visually impaired persons will be familiar with the immediate area they are in. In the event of an emergency, tell the student specifically how and where to exit. Have the student take your elbow and escort him. This is the preferred method when acting as a “sighted guide.” As you walk, tell the person where you are and advise him of any obstacles. When you have reached safety, orient the person to where he is and ask if any further assistance is needed.

- **Hearing-impaired students.** Persons with hearing impairments may not perceive audio emergency alarms; an alternative warning technique is required. Two methods of warning:
  - Write a note telling what the emergency is and the nearest evacuation route (example: “Fire. Go out rear door to right and down. Now!”).
  - Turn the light switch on and off to gain attention. Then indicate through gestures or in writing what is happening and what to do. It may be prudent to escort the hearing-impaired student as you leave the building.

- **Students with mobility impairments.** Students with mobility impairments present one of the biggest concerns in building evacuation. Most elevators will not operate and should not be used during a fire alarm. In general, if there is no immediate danger (obvious smoke or fire), a student with mobility impairment should either stay in place or be moved to a refuge area such as a fire-rated stairwell until emergency personnel determine the nature of the situation. Officials may then decide that no evacuation is necessary. If there is no immediate danger, or if there is a fire drill and emergency personnel feel that the student with mobility impairment should be moved, they may remove the student using the elevator with an override key, or they may carry the student out of the building using special techniques and evacuation chairs.

If there is imminent danger and if evacuation cannot be delayed, the disabled student should be carried or helped from the building in the best and fastest manner. The disabled student is the best authority as to how he should be helped from the building. A person may be carried using a two-person locked-arm position or may sit in a sturdy chair, preferably one with arms. The best procedure is to let professional emergency personnel assist in the evacuation of these students if possible.

Additional evacuation considerations:

- Some students in wheelchairs may have electric artificial respirators attached. These persons should be given priority assistance if smoke or fumes are present, because their ability to breathe will be seriously jeopardized.
- Some students have no strength in their upper trunk or neck.
- If the wheelchair is left behind, leave it where it does not block others.
- Students using crutches, canes or walkers should be treated as if they were injured persons for evacuation purposes.
Connecticut, FacultyWare provides a broad range of information and tools to enhance the design and delivery of instruction for diverse college students.

- "Going to College: Expanding Opportunities for People with Disabilities" (www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/getzel-742x). With this research-based book, edited by Virginia Commonwealth University faculty members, users will learn how to create welcoming college classrooms through the use of universally designed instructional strategies; address specific needs of students who have psychiatric or learning disabilities and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder; learn students’ rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act; and help students practice for and make the transition to the working world, using resources such as internships, career centers and business partnerships.

- The Ohio State University Partnership Grant (http://telr.osu.edu/dpg/fastfact). The Fast Facts publications offer information to help faculty members learn about disabilities, the legal requirements for working with students with disabilities and appropriate accommodations.

- Faculty Administrative Modules in Education (http://telr.osu.edu/fame). FAME is a resource to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities in higher education. FAME helps faculty members and administrators understand students’ rights and responsibilities, universal design for learning, Web accessibility, college writing and climate assessment.

- FacultyWare (www.facultyware.uconn.edu). The product of the Universal Design for Instruction project at the University of Connecticut, FacultyWare provides a broad range of information and tools to enhance the design and delivery of instruction for diverse college students.

- DO-IT: University of Washington (www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty). DO-IT provides a space for post-secondary faculty members and administrators to learn about creating classroom environments and activities to maximize the learning of all students.

- Center for Applied Special Technology (www.cast.org). CAST is a nonprofit organization that uses technology to expand opportunities for all people, especially those with disabilities.

- Center for Teaching Excellence (www.vcu.edu/cte). CTE provides basic and advanced information about the teaching/learning process through group workshops, self-study materials and individual consultations.

- Professional Development Academy (www.vcu-pda.org). PDA provides information and resources for students with disabilities, faculty and staff members and administrators.

- Student resources

  VCU provides many services to students with and without disabilities to assist them in their academic journey. For more information about these services, please see the VCU Resource Guide at www.students.vcu.edu/rig.

  - Disability Support Services (www.students.vcu.edu/dss, www.vcuhealth.org/vp/sassdss). DSS determines academic accommodations for students with disabilities including program and exam modifications, classroom accommodations and auxiliary aids.

  - Special Services for Students (MCV Campus) (www.vcuhealth.org/vp/sassdss/academicss). SSS is a confidential service that helps individual students find ways to deal with the demands imposed by the health sciences curriculums and to help them become effective and efficient learners.

  - Campus Learning Center (www.vcu.edu/clc). The Campus Learning Center provides quality academic support to all VCU undergraduates. From one-on-one tutoring to sup-
plemental instruction sessions, the center offers free ways for students to gain a clearer understanding of a subject and to develop better methods for reviewing new information.

- Career Center (www.students.vcu.edu/careers). The Career Center offers both individual and group career counseling and advising. Workshops are offered on resume writing, interviewing, career connections, internships and preparing for a career fair. Career counseling services include exploring issues such as making career choices, learning more about your career interests, skills and values and talking about how a career affects your life and vice versa.

- University Counseling Services (www.students.vcu.edu/counsel). The University Counseling Service provides free professional counseling and consultation to all students enrolled at VCU.

- The Writing Center (www.vcu.edu/uc/services/writing). The Writing Center offers various kinds of writing support for students writing in any discipline.

Frequently asked questions

Whom do I contact about questions I may have pertaining to disability-related issues?

Virginia Commonwealth University provides services for students with disabilities on both the Monroe Park and MCV campuses. Please contact the following service providers of Disability Support Services for information about eligibility of services and accommodations:

Monroe Park Campus
University Student Commons
907 Floyd Avenue, Room 102
P.O. Box 842529
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2529
Phone/TTY: (804) 828-2253
Fax: (804) 828-1944
www.students.vcu.edu/dss

MCV Campus
Virginia Mechanics Institute Building
1000 East Marshall Street, Room 202
P.O. Box 980124
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0124
Phone: (804) 828-9782
TTY: (804) 828-4608
Fax: (804) 828-4609
www.vcuhealth.org/vp/sassdss

What is DSS?

DSS offers services and support for VCU students with disabilities that provides them equal opportunity to benefit from all programs, services and activities offered at VCU. DSS offers the following services:

- Recommendations for program accommodations in accordance with recent documentation.
- Referral to appropriate student support offices on campus.
- Information and assistance in the area of academic planning.
- Liaison activities between faculty and students with disabilities.
- Referral to off-campus resources.
- Alternative testing.
- Consultation with public school special education administrators, rehabilitation or high school counselors, parents and prospective students concerning the university’s services for students with disabilities.

DSS will not:

- Perform psycho-educational diagnostic assessments.
- Offer self-contained classes or training programs for students with learning disabilities.
- Ask faculty to compromise the quality of instruction or evaluation or sacrifice class standards.

Why can’t I just work with a student without contacting DSS if I think the person has a disability? Why do I have to go through that office?

It is unwise to treat any student differently than you would others in your courses. If you provide modifications or accommodations to a student two outcomes may occur.

1. If you are treating a student as disabled, the student may in fact not be disabled, and therefore may feel you have discriminated against him.
2. If you provide modifications or accommodations for a student without going through DSS first, the other students in the classroom may feel that you are offering the student preferential treatment.
Why do students with disabilities need textbook information before classes begin?

For some students, reading a textbook can be a laborious or impossible task due to a reading disability or a visual impairment. These students require textbooks in an alternative format in order to have access to the information presented in the books. To put the books in another format (i.e., digital, audio or Braille), they are scanned or ordered on tape through Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic. Both processes are time consuming and can take months to complete.

Do I need to be careful about what I say to students with disabilities?

Metaphors are a part of the English language and are a natural way to communicate. For example, saying “Do you see what I mean?” or “See you later” is not considered offensive to a student who is blind or visually impaired, and there is no need to apologize. People with disabilities also may use such metaphors to get their point across.

Why do students with disabilities need extra time on a test even if they understand the material being tested?

Students with disabilities may use assistive technology or services that require additional time to use. Also, students with learning disabilities may require extra time to process and comprehend the information on the test or to write their answers to the questions.

Can I look at a student’s documentation concerning his or her disability?

The student’s documentation is given in confidence to the DSS service provider. By law, students have the right not to share any information about their disability. However, some students may choose to share information with their professors. As long as a student has a letter of accommodations from DSS, the professor is required to implement the accommodations. If you have any questions about the accommodations, please contact the DSS service provider to discuss your concerns.

Are a student’s medical records maintained in confidence?

Medical information from a student must be collected and maintained on separate forms and kept in a separate medical file along with other information required to be kept confidential under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The student’s medical information must be kept confidential even if the student is no longer registered at the university.

How will I know if a student needs an accommodation in my classroom?

The student will give you an accommodation letter that verifies that she is qualified to receive accommodations. This letter also states what types of accommodations the student will need. If you have questions or concerns about the letter of accommodations, please contact DSS instead of asking the student.

A student approached me after class, and told me that he has a disability and would like accommodations although he did not give me a letter from DSS. Do I provide the accommodations?

You are under no obligation to provide accommodations to students who do not have a letter of accommodations. Direct that student to DSS so that the service provider and the student, together, can determine what accommodations are necessary to meet that student’s needs, if the student is eligible for services.

What should I do if a student with a disability cheats on an exam?

Students with disabilities are required to uphold the same honor code stated in the VCU Honor System. A student with a disability who breaks the honor code must face the same consequences as a student without a disability.

There is a student in my class who tells me that he has a disability even though it does not look like he has a disability. How do I know if he really has a disability?

Disabilities are often described as “visible” or “invisible.” Invisible disabilities are those in which the characteristics are not obvious to an independent observer, and they may involve cognitive processing or psychological challenges. Typical invisible disabilities include learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, traumatic brain injuries and psychological impairments. Encourage students to get a letter of accommodations from the DSS service provider. The service provider reviews student documentation to determine if the student has a disability and authorizes appropriate accommodations.

Is it fair to other students in my class to give students with disabilities extra time on tests and assignments?

By providing the extra time, the student can be evaluated for what she knows about the material being tested rather than the effects of her disability, thereby, leveling the playing field.

I’ve had several students request accommodations in the middle or at the end of the semester. Why do students wait so long to let me know that they need support?

Some students with disabilities attempt courses without obtaining their accommodations. They may feel embarrassed to disclose their disability, or they may feel they do not need the accommodations. At the middle or end of the semester, they may realize that they need to access the accommodations to which they are eligible to receive, in order to maximize their classroom performance. You can help facilitate the process of students disclosing formally to the university by including the following statements in your syllabus:

• If you are a student with a disability and you need assistance with your course work, please speak privately with me after class or during my office hours.
• If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.
• Students who are requesting any accommodations on the basis of disability should schedule an office appointment with me as soon as possible, ideally within the first three weeks of the semester. Please schedule this office appointment by [indicate your preferred method for communication]. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach me before or after class to discuss your accommodation needs.

When the student speaks with you concerning his disability, refer the student to DSS if he does not have an accommodation letter.

If a student presents an accommodation letter in the middle of the semester, does the letter cover the student from the beginning of the semester?

The student’s accommodations begin at the point that you receive the accommodation letter. Accommodations are not retroactive and hence will not apply to any of the student’s work prior to receiving the letter of accommodations.

Do I need to change my academic standards and objectives to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

No. Students with disabilities are held to the same academic standards as all VCU students. However, students with disabilities may require modifications or accommodations so that they may fully participate in the lessons, assignments and tests.

What kinds of disabilities will I see among students in my classroom?

Qualified impairments or chronic illness may include, but are not limited to:
• AIDS.
• Attention deficit disorder.
• Bipolar disorder.
• Cancer.
• Cerebral palsy.
• Chronic fatigue syndrome.
• Depression.
• Diabetes.
• Epilepsy.
• Hearing loss/deafness.
• Learning disabilities.
• Multiple sclerosis.
• Muscular dystrophy.
• Post-traumatic stress disorder.
• Traumatic brain injury.
• Ulcerative colitis.
• Visual impairments/blindness.

I mainly teach through lecturing. Is this a problem for students with disabilities?

Students with an auditory processing deficit or hearing loss may have a difficult time relying only on lectures to access information. Whenever possible, it would be helpful to add a visual prompt to your lecture. This would enhance learning not only for those students with auditory processing problems, but also for the students in your class who are visual learners. They also can benefit from having an outline or script of the class material prior to class lecture.

If a student is unable to take notes in my class, what should I do?

Students generally obtain note takers. Students may locate note takers on their own before involving the instructors, or they may request assistance from their instructors in locating a note taker. Students must present the instructor with a letter that requests his assistance in locating a note taker in the class. If students or instructors are unable to find a note taker in the class, the student and/or instructor should inform the appropriate DSS office so that a note taker can be located or other arrangements can be made. If overhead displays are used, students may request paper copies from instructors.

What services are available to students with disabilities at VCU?

If students decide to disclose their disability and receive accommodations, the first step for the student is to visit the DSS service provider. The service provider will decide if the student is qualified to receive accommodations. If qualified, a decision regarding the types of accommodations that will benefit the student will be made. VCU provides many services to students with or without disabilities to assist them in their academic journey. Students can access these services regardless of disclosing their disability. A more detailed description (telephone number, hours of operation, contact name, etc.) of each service is listed in the VCU Resource Guide online at www.students.vcu.edu/rg. Some of the services include:

• Academic Success Center.
• Professional Development Academy.
• Special Services for Students (MCV Campus).
• University Career Center.
• University Counseling Services.
• Writing Center.

What is VCU’s policy on attendance for students with disabilities?

DSS does not determine course attendance policies at VCU. In some cases, attendance is fundamental to course objectives, for example, students may be required to participate in hands-on learning activities, to interact with others in the class, to demonstrate the ability to think and argue critically or to participate in group projects. Faculty members or the departments are responsible for setting attendance policies as well as policies on makeup work and missed quizzes and exams. However, faculty members are free to be flexible in situations where the disability is clearly a mitigating factor. Faculty members should make their policies clear so that students can make informed decisions about what courses to take. Faculty members can do this by announcing course policies on the first day of class and by including this information on their syllabus.
For additional copies of this handbook, please contact:

**Disability Support Services**  
**Monroe Park Campus**  
University Student Commons  
907 Floyd Avenue, Room 102  
P.O. Box 842529  
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2529  
Phone/TTY: (804) 828-2253  
Fax: (804) 828-1944  
www.students.vcu.edu/dss

**MCV Campus**  
Virginia Mechanics Institute Building  
1000 East Marshall Street, Room 202  
P.O. Box 980124  
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0124  
Phone: (804) 828-9782  
TTY: (804) 828-4608  
Fax: (804) 828-4609  
www.vcuhealth.org/vp/sassdss

**Office of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Services**  
901 West Franklin Street, Suite 114  
P.O. Box 843022  
Richmond, Virginia 23284-3022  
Phone: (804) 828-1347  
TTY: (804) 828-1420  
Fax: (804) 828-7201  
www.vcu.edu/eeoaa

**Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services**  
Sitterding House  
901 Floyd Avenue  
P.O. Box 843017  
Richmond, VA 23284-3017  
Phone: (804) 828-7525  
TTY: (800) 828-1120  
Fax: (804) 828-2180  
www.students.vcu.edu
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