The Disability Resource Center
4th Floor Health Services Building
815-753-1303  drc@niu.edu  www.niu.edu/disability

The mission of the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is to create an accessible, inclusive, sustainable learning environment, where disability is recognized as an aspect of diversity that is integral to the campus community and to society.

The goals and objectives of the Disability Resource Center are to:

- Promote and facilitate access through creative outreach and training, collaborative partnerships, innovative programs, and proactive solutions;
- Create inclusive environments by engaging and supporting the campus community in progressive system change;
- Increase the recruitment, transition, retention and graduation of students with disabilities;
- Consult regarding reducing barriers for persons with disabilities; and
- Ensure the effective delivery of accommodations.

Who is responsible for determining students’ disability accommodations?

The Disability Resource Center has been designated by the University to determine appropriate disability accommodations for NIU students in consultation with several entities. Decisions for accommodations are based on the student’s clarification about specific needs and limitations as well as past history; documentation as needed from a qualified care provider; and assessment of the student’s functional limitations.

A student has asked for accommodations. How can a TA know that the student truly has a disability and needs accommodations?

The TA may ask a student to provide a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) verifying that the student has registered with the Disability Resource Center. Such students, if registered, will be given an LOA within 48 hours of requesting one. Due to confidentiality requirements, the specifics of a disability cannot be disclosed to anyone without the student’s consent. Do not ask the student what disability they have.

What obligations do TA’s have to honor requests for disability accommodations that are made late in the academic semester?

The DRC continuously reviews documentation and registering with the office is a process that may take several days to weeks. Reasons why a student may appear to have registered late with the office include: medical offices’ delay in sending appropriate documentation and recent discovery and diagnosis of a previously unknown disability. Whatever the reason, students may make requests for accommodations at any time during the semester or their academic career, and all instructors are therefore required to honor them upon receiving the Letter of Accommodation. However, the TA is not required to provide accommodations retroactively for prior assignments, exams, etc., before receiving the Letter of Accommodation from the student.

What recourse does the TA have if they disagree about student’s requests for accommodations?

While registered students’ requests for accommodations have been verified and are supported by the DRC, some students may occasionally ask for unreasonable accommodations which are not authorized by the DRC. To clarify any confusion, the TA should first contact the student’s Access Consultant (listed on the LOA). If further attention to the issue is required, the Director of the DRC is also available to discuss any concerns.
What are some TA responsibilities/best practices with respect to students’ disability accommodations?

a. Include a statement in the course syllabus about disability accommodations. A sample statement can be found at: http://www.niu.edu/disability/accessibility_statement/index.shtml

b. Announce at the beginning of the semester in class that students with disability accommodations can meet with the instructor confidentially at the end of the class or in the office to share the Letter of Accommodation from DRC or to discuss accommodation needs.

c. Know that students’ disability accommodations are confidential information and cannot be disclosed to anyone without student’s consent or discussed in class. The Letter of Accommodation should not be placed in student’s files in the department or college offices.

d. Check http://www.niu.edu/accessibility/ for best practices on disabilities and accessibilities.

Making courses accessible:

- When showing a video or YouTube module in class, the video needs to be closed-captioned before presenting the materials, if you have a student requiring that accommodation.
- Online quizzes with audio content need to be closed-captioned or a transcript provided, if you have a student requiring that accommodation.
- A TA who records audio with PowerPoint presentations needs to ensure the audio portion is closed-captioned or a transcript provided, if you have a student requiring that accommodation.
- A TA who uses online images for course material needs to ensure the images have alternative text descriptions for students with visual impairments.
- A TA who posts documents as assigned readings to Blackboard would benefit from posting the documents in MS Word. MS Word documents can be read by screen readers.
- When handing materials out in class, students with visual impairments should receive the materials through email before the class so the student has the opportunity to review the material via accessible technology.

Who can the TA contact if they have any questions or need additional information about disability accommodations? The TA may contact an Access Consultant in the DRC at our main office at 815-753-1303, email at dre@niu.edu or visit us at the 4th floor of the Health Services Building.

If you judge a fish by its ‘ability’ to climb a tree, it will spend its entire life believing it’s stupid.