Reducing Barriers for Students with Disabilities

Disability Resource Center
Amanda Newman
August 20, 2019

Disability Resource Center Mission

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.

Variety of Disabilities

Visually apparent or hidden? Permanent or temporary? Chronic?


A person with a disability is one who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity.

DRC: What we do

• Identify disability-related barriers
• Provide exam accommodations/adaptation
  – Extra time; large print; braille
• Offer adaptive technology in computer labs
  – Screen readers; text to audio
• Create alternative text materials
  – E-text; books on “tape”
• Arrange peer note-taker assistance
• Schedule sign-language interpreters and CART services
• Request special housing and dining accommodations
• Document service animals and comfort animals

Accommodations at NIU

• Student responsibility
• DRC responsibility
• GA/TA responsibility

Student Responsibility

• Initiating services
  – Unlike high school, students must reach out to the DRC, make an appointment, in most cases provide documentation, and if registered with the center, must adhere to policies and practices in our department.
DRC Responsibility

- Mandated by Northern Illinois University
  - The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)
  - The ADA Amendments
  - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
  - Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act

- The DRC supports faculty, GAs/TAs and staff, in addition to students

GA/TA Responsibility

- Consider adding the NIU Disability Statement in your syllabus
  - You MAY NOT ask a student what their disability is nor may you make comments about the validity of approved accommodations. If you have questions or concerns, please call me.
  - Students are encouraged to set up accommodations at the beginning of the semester but may ask that they be implemented at any point during the semester (but nothing is retroactive unless approved by faculty).
  - Focus on what you can do to make your course material, content, instructional methodology, activities and assessments accessible for all students using the concept of Universal Design.

FORMS

- Letter of Accommodation: must be given to GA/TA by the student before accommodations are activated. Ideally, students will request a confidential conversation about what the accommodations mean and how they will be utilized.
- Exam Accommodation Form: to be completed first by the student, then GA/TA, and submitted to the DRC by the student to schedule the exam
- Provide the exam to the DRC in a timely manner
  - Email, Drop it off, Request that our courier pick it up

Accommodation Examples

- Ability to leave class-medically related
- Additional time for in-class assignments
- Captionist, sign language interpreter, FM system
- Priority seating in class
- Snack/beverage in class
- Tape record lectures
- Extra time on exams
- Alternate material format
- Wheelchair accessible desk
- Copies of PowerPoint slides/lecture notes
“Reasonable” Accommodations

- “Reasonable” means:
  - Necessary for access and/or equitable participation in the program and/or to best ensure valid examination results
- Unless:
  - A fundamental alteration or lowering of academic standards
  - An undue burden
  - A direct threat to the health and safety of others

“Reasonable” does not mean reasonable in the eyes of the GA/TA or what seems fair to other students

Questions?

- Contact the Disability Resource Center
drc@niu.edu
815-753-1303
DRC Resources
http://www.niu.edu/disability/resources/faculty.shtml
- More resources available through Faculty Development and Instructional Designed associated with this presentation.