Bowdoin College

A Faculty Guide to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

To ensure that our programs, activities, and services are accessible to all matriculating students, Bowdoin College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Documented disabilities may include a learning disability; attention deficit disorder; a visual, hearing, or mobility impairment; or a physical or mental illness. The Office of the Dean of Student Affairs (ODSA) is responsible for creating an accessible community where students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate as fully as possible in all aspects of the educational environment. Students who seek accommodations need to provide current (usually within the last 3 years) and appropriate documentation that shows they have a disability. The documentation must also provide evidence of a substantial limitation to learning, or other major life activity and describe the current impact of the condition on them. On the basis of this information, the ODSA may make recommendations of reasonable accommodations that the College should provide and, when requested by the student, communicates these accommodations (by letter) to the appropriate faculty members or other persons.

It is important to note that there are two federal laws which prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Postsecondary schools are required to provide auxiliary aids and services to ensure that no individual is excluded or treated differently. Some examples of academic accommodations are:

- Priority course registration
- Reducing a student’s course load
- Preferential seating
- Sign language interpreters and/or FM system
- Readers, taped texts, or alternate formats
- Note takers
- Extended time on tests and in-class assignments
- Alternative test formats, such as orally
- Quiet testing space
- Recording devices
- Use of a laptop computer in class and/or for tests and in-class assignments
- Spelling aids and/or calculators
- Assistive technology (computer software)
- Flexible attendance requirements

What are my responsibilities as a faculty member?

Providing reasonable accommodations is a shared responsibility between the ODSA and the faculty. It is the student’s responsibility to make the faculty member aware of the need for an accommodation by asking the ODSA to send a letter listing the accommodation(s). When you receive the letters of accommodation from ODSA, you are responsible for providing the accommodations listed.

What do I do if I cannot provide a recommended accommodation?

Accommodations are appropriate academic adjustments necessary to ensure that students with documented disabilities have equal educational opportunities at Bowdoin. A reasonable accommodation is one that is consistent with the academic standards of the College and does not require substantial course or program alteration. Final authority for determining the most appropriate and effective accommodation rests with the College and is based on the nature of the course or program and the individual student's disability-related need. If the accommodation does not seem to fit the course requirements, or you encounter difficulty providing the necessary accommodation, contact Lesley Levy, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs.
What if I have not received a letter, but a student approaches me about receiving accommodations?

Though most students with disabilities identify themselves during the enrollment process, a student may choose to disclose a disability at any point during his/her tenure at Bowdoin. If you are approached by a student or an advisee who discloses a disability, he/she should be referred to Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, Lesley Levy.

It is recommended that faculty members include a Statement Regarding Accommodations for Disabilities on their course syllabi. In addition to providing information for students who have not yet disclosed a disability, it indicates a faculty member’s willingness to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. An example disability statement that can be used or adapted for course syllabi: “Students seeking accommodations based on disabilities must provide documentation to Lesley Levy, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. Students are encouraged to address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. Additional information regarding the accommodations process for students with disabilities can be found at: http://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/student-handbook/college-policies/accommodation-policy.shtml”

Why am I not given more information about a student’s particular disability?

The nature of a student’s disability, the content of the supporting documentation, and other records on file with the ODSA are confidential. Information will be released to others only as necessary to administer the College’s accommodation of the student’s disability. Students are encouraged to discuss their disability and learning styles with faculty and are free to disclose any information that they choose. However, students should not be compelled to disclose any information beyond what is written in the accommodation letter. With the student’s permission, further information can be shared to support effective accommodation. Faculty members who feel they need more information about a student in order to provide effective accommodations should contact Assistant Dean Lesley Levy. Please be aware that all information (including accommodation letters) regarding a student’s disability is to be kept confidential. Discussions or meetings with students regarding a disability and/or accommodations should occur in private.

Do I have to give accommodations if a student speaks to me the day-of or day-before an exam?

Students are encouraged to contact each faculty member regarding their need for accommodations in the first 2-3 weeks of the semester, or as soon as possible following the identification of a disability. Attempts to arrange accommodations with less than 5 days notice are not considered reasonable, unless a special request is made by the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs.

How should I grade the work of students with accommodations?

You should grade the work of students with accommodations for documented disabilities the same as you would grade the work of any other students.

What should I do if I suspect a student has a disability, but has not self-identified?

If you suspect a student may have a disability, you should contact the student’s Dean and his/her Academic Advisor and discuss the basis of this perception. You can also contact Lesley Levy, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and Elizabeth Barnhart, Director of the Baldwin Program for advice. Ideally we can help the student make arrangements for testing to determine if a disability exists, and if so the appropriate accommodations to implement.