UMaine Disabilities Insider, August 27, 2012

University of Maine Disability Support Services

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Increase in Number, cont. from p. 1

- More frequent contact with faculty when students who have a disability need flexible attendance.

During the 2007 – 2008 academic year we had a significant increase in the number of tests and exams administered in East Annex, thus we began to ask faculty to locate a quiet space where students can test instead of sending them to DSS if there were more than 5 students who needed tests proctored (see inside article for information on test proctoring).

This only tells part of the story though. In addition to working with students who have documented disabilities, staff from our office frequently meet with students who are struggling academically and suspect they have a disability as well as consult with students with disabilities who are still in high school and considering coming to the University of Maine. In total last year our office met with over 500 students. This number is more than double what it was a decade ago.

It is our expectation that this trend will continue. Each year the number of students that we serve with disabilities will grow as advances in medicine, science, and education enable students previously excluded the opportunity of higher education. The faculty’s active participation is essential to ensure that our classes and programs are accessible.

Reminders
- Don’t forget to include a statement in your syllabus about disability accommodation. A sample statement can be found at www.umaine.edu/disability/information-for-faculty/.
- Please share this newsletter or information on to any TAs you supervise.
- You are not expected to be an expert in disabilities. Remember, we are here to talk through any questions or concerns.

Disability Support Services serves UMaine students with a disability. For faculty and staff disability services and accommodations, please contact Bonita Grindle at the Office of Equal Opportunity, 581-1227 or bgrindle@umaine.edu.

NON-DISCRIMINATION NOTICE

The University of Maine does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, including transgender status and gender expression, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, genetic information or veteran’s status in employment, education, and all other programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Director, Office of Equal Opportunity, 101 North Stevens Hall, 581-1226.
When a student requests test accommodations such as extra time or a quiet separate location where they can take tests, DSS reviews their documentation of disability and determines if the student is eligible for the accommodation. If we determine the student is eligible for test accommodations, a letter is prepared for each faculty member that informs them of the list of approved accommodations. The student with a disability is required to personally hand deliver the accommodation letters to each faculty member. We suggest to students that they visit faculty during posted office hours rather than try to catch an instructor at the beginning or end of class.

What if the student tries to talk to me in class when there are lots of other students around?

Our recommendation is that faculty suggest to the student that he or she meets at their office so that they can talk in private. This will allow the faculty and student to have a longer time to speak without the pressure of other students waiting for a turn, and will protect the student’s privacy. At that time, faculty should inform the student if a spot is available in the department where the student can take tests OR if the student will need to be proctored at our testing center in East Annex.

Who do we contact to arrange for our tests to be taken at DSS?

Our Administrative Assistant, Susan Spaulding, coordinates all the test proctoring arrangements. The test proctoring form helps to make sure there’s no confusion about what materials students are allowed to have with them during an exam. On the instructor’s portion of the form there is a place to check off if the student is allowed any materials in addition to the exam (calculator, notes, book, etc.). If nothing is checked, the student only goes into the testing room with the exam and a pencil. We keep all book bags, cell phones, jackets, hats, etc. in the main office until they return the exam to the proctor.

Can’t I just call Susan and let her know who will be taking the test in my class?

Over the years the number of exams we proctor at Disability Services has exploded. Since the 2006 – 2007 academic year DSS has proctored between 600 – 1000 exams each semester. As a result, if the student is required to test at East Annex, it is imperative to have the instructor fill out, and have the student or instructor return, our Test Proctoring Request Form at least three business days before the exam. This is the only way we can keep track of how many spots we will need to provide each day! Non-compliance with our testing policies will result in the student being sent back to the instructor for the accommodated testing in their department or office.

The questions here were sent to DSS by faculty this summer. If you find this Q&A helpful you can submit questions of your own or view additional questions and answers at www.umaine.edu/disability/information-for-faculty/.

When I receive an accommodation letter that states the student has an accommodation for a quiet room to take the test, but then he/she says, “it’s okay, I’ll take it in the room with other students” should I just say “OK,” or try to encourage the student to take advantage of the accommodation?

If a student chooses not to utilize a disability accommodation, it’s helpful in light of the legal mandates of the accommodation process that you communicate this information back to Disability Support Services. This will avoid the “he said, she said” issues that may arise if class performance isn’t what was expected. Ultimately, it is the student’s decision which accommodations they want to utilize, but it’s appropriate for faculty to talk with the student if they believe he or she has concerns about how the accommodation is provided.

What is the difference between providing an accommodation and lowering standards for a particular student?

An accommodation is any change in the learning environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables a person with a disability to have equal educational access. An accommodation is not meant to change the essential nature of a course but rather alter the environment or mechanics of the learning situation. If you believe that a mandated accommodation from the student’s accommodation letter is a fundamental alteration of the curriculum or standards, please contact Disability Support Services to discuss the problem. Ferreting out the difference between the “essential nature” of a course and a professor’s preferred format can sometimes be difficult. Instructors are not obligated to provide accommodations that are not specified in the accommodation letter. If a student makes a request beyond what we’ve included in the list of approved accommodations, or pushes for further adjustments beyond what is listed in the accommodation letter, contact Disability Services.