

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY FOR A BETTER SUPPORT

Introduction

As part of its identity and mission, USEK is committed “to build a diverse and inclusive community where students, faculty, staff and alumni can develop a distinguished ability to adapt, work, learn and live in diverse environments.” Thus, and based on USEK’s mission and strategic goal to become an inclusive university, we are developing this guide (handbook/document) on how to provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities.

What is Disability?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), disability is “an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions” and is defined as follows:

- a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual;
- a record of such an impairment;
- being regarded as having such an impairment.

Classifications of Disabilities

Disability can be broken into a number of broad subcategories, but according to WHO, it includes 8 main types:

1. **Mobility and physical impairments:** this category includes upper and lower limbs disability, manual dexterity and disability with different organs of the body. It can be inborn, acquired with age or be the effect of disease (Examples of mobility impairment: wheelchair use, cane, crutches, or walker. Examples of physical impairment: arthritis or rheumatism, back or spine problem, broken bone or fracture);
2. **Spinal cord disability:** this disability mostly occurs due to severe accidents and causes dysfunction of the sensory organs;
3. **Head injuries/ brain disability:** disability in the brain occurs due to a brain injury. The magnitude of the brain injury can range from mild to moderate, and severe. It is not a hereditary type defect but is a degeneration that occurs after birth;
4. **Vision disability:** is defined as a decreased ability to see to a degree that causes problems not fixable by usual means, such as glasses or medication. It can include retinal degeneration, albinism, cataracts, glaucoma, muscular problems that result in visual disturbances, corneal disorders, diabetic retinopathy, congenital disorders, and infection;
5. **Hearing disability:** includes people that are completely or partially deaf, (deaf is the politically correct term for a person with hearing impairment). People who are partially deaf can often use hearing aids to assist their hearing. Deafness can be evident at birth or occur later in life from several biological causes. Deaf people use sign language as a means of communication;
6. **Cognitive or learning disability:** the impairment present in people suffering from various learning difficulties and includes speech disorders, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, visual processing disorder (related to a difficulty to interpret visual information, leading to troubles in reading, writing and in mathematics), and auditory processing disorder (related to a difficulty to interpret auditory information, leading to troubles in language development and reading)¹;

¹ *Dyslexia is connected to reading abilities*

Dyscalculia is associated with difficulties in math

Dysgraphia results in specific learning disabilities in writing

Auditory Processing Deficit is characterized by a struggle to understand and use auditory information

Visual Processing Deficit is a weakness in taking on and using visual information

7. Psychological disorders: include disorders of mood or feeling states either short or long term. Mental health Impairment is the term used to describe people who have experienced psychiatric problems or illness such as personality disorders, such as depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, traumas, dissociative disorder, eating disorder, insomnia, addictive disorder, neurocognitive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, etc.;
8. Invisible disabilities: or hidden disability, is an umbrella term that covers challenges that are primarily neurological in nature but not immediately apparent to others (invisible disabilities refer to a large variety of symptoms, including cognitive dysfunctions, learning disabilities, mental health disorders as well as hearing and vision impairments. It can also include chronic illness, fatigue, and dizziness, mental illness, asthma, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorders, Asperger syndrome, autism, bipolar disorder, etc.)

ACCOMMODATIONS PROCEDURE

Overview

“Reasonable accommodations” are necessary adjustments done to avoid any discrimination due to a student’s disability during their educational experience. Nevertheless, accommodation do not intend to modify the course’s learning outcomes and objectives and do not guarantee the student’s academic success. It remains the student’s responsibility for course time management, regular attendance and submission of assignments.

The rationale for seeking information about a student’s condition is to support the higher education professional in acknowledging the disability, understanding how the disability may affect a student, and making informed decisions about accommodation.

Procedure

The following procedure will indicate the student’s disability status and the kind of accommodation required which can be approved for, one semester, one academic year or on a temporary basis, depending on the need.

In order to be eligible for accommodation services, a student with a disability must go through the following steps:

1. Complete and submit the confidential ‘Accommodation request form’ (check form in annex 1):
 - a. At the Admissions Office (in the case of new candidates, the form will be attached to the admission file);
 - b. At the Student Affairs Office (in the case of enrolled students);
2. Submit supporting medical documentation from a relevant qualified professional² as evidence of the needs of the student, and containing a clear statement of the recommendations for adjustments and accommodations (in documenting a learning disability, individuals should follow the guidelines for documentation);
3. The admissions office or the Student Affairs Office should send the student’s file to the Office of the Deputy President for Students (ODPS):
 - a. In the case of psychological disorders and part of the invisible disabilities, the student is required to schedule an appointment with the UCC³;
 - b. In case of cognitive and learning disabilities, the student is required to meet with a special need teacher (orthopédagogue);
 - c. In case no referral is needed (depending on the disability), the ODPS will proceed immediately with step (4);
4. If found eligible⁴:

² Disability documentation must be certified by a licensed physician, psychologist, audiologist, speech pathologist, rehabilitation counselor, physical therapist, occupational therapist, or other professional health care provider. Documentation must reflect the student's present level of functioning with respect to the major life activity affected by the disability. The diagnostic report should include, where appropriate, specific recommendations for accommodations as well as an explanation as to why each accommodation is recommended.

³ The student is referred to UCC and/or to the special need teacher for the ODPS/ LTEC to provide him/her with the necessary accommodations and support. These accommodations and support will help the students better achieve their personal and academic path.

⁴ In some circumstances, the University may request a student to provide additional documentation to further support specific test results or clinical observations.

- a. The ODPS will inform the student’s head of department by email, and consequently the student’s instructors and the concerned student support officers and USEK employees about the required accommodations;
 - b. Or the OPDS will inform LTEC when faculty members need to be prepared (follow training) to have a given case in their classrooms. LTEC will contact the department to get a full list of instructors and will organize the needed training/workshops.
5. The student must follow up with the instructors on how to apply the accommodations to each course.

Guidelines for Documentation

The provision of all reasonable accommodations and services is based upon an assessment of the impact of the student's disabilities on his or her academic performance at a given time in the student's life. Therefore, it is in the student's best interest to provide recent and appropriate documentation relevant to the student's learning environment.

A comprehensive assessment battery and the resulting diagnostic report should include the following:

- diagnostic interview,
- assessment of aptitude,
- academic achievement,
- information processing and a
- diagnosis

The diagnostic report should include specific recommendations for accommodations as well as an explanation as to why each accommodation is recommended. The evaluators should describe the impact the diagnosed learning disability has on a specific major life activity as well as the degree of significance of this impact on the individual. The evaluator should support recommendations with specific test results or clinical observations.

If accommodations are not clearly identified in a diagnostic report, the disability service provider should seek clarification and, if necessary, more information.

Accommodations for Disability Types

Referring to the ADA (American Disabilities Act), here are some examples of accommodations for different categories of disability:

Disability Type	Accommodation Example
Mobility & physical impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notetaker, scribes, lab partners • Classrooms, labs and field trips in accessible locations, using accessible transportation • Change classroom location • Computer with speech input, voice output and alternative keyboard • Wheelchair-friendly furniture and room arrangement (e.g., adjustable tables, space for a wheelchair, lab equipment located within reach) • Use of ramps and raised platforms for student’s access • Class materials available in electronic format • Extended time for completion of activities
Vision disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify course instruction (availability of auditory software, large-font presentations and/or Braille materials) *; • Use alternative formats for coursework completion, presentations delivery and exams; • Appoint individuals who can assist these students as note-takers, readers, scribes or other essential roles. • Offer additional time for assignments and tests, as well as getting to class.

	<p>* Some of the most common forms of adaptive technology for students who are blind or visually impaired</p> <p>Screen Readers: These devices enable visually impaired students to read onscreen text using a speech synthesizer.</p> <p>Screen Magnification: This application automatically zooms in on text and graphics in order to assist students with low or limited vision.</p> <p>Adaptive Keyboards: Most blind and visually impaired students are able to operate standard keyboards. For those who are not, specialized keyboards come with locator dots on important keys.</p> <p>Portable Notetakers: These pocket-sized devices are designed to assist blind and visually impaired students with Braille-friendly buttons and/or a standard QWERTY keyboard. In addition to recording lectures, a note-taker may also be used to read books, compose assignments and find directions.</p> <p>Braille Display: Refreshable Braille displays use pins to transcribe on-screen text into tactile Braille the user can feel with their fingertips.</p>
Hearing disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify course instruction (facing the class, incorporating visual aids, providing captioning, transcript of the information and written notices, repeating all questions/comments made by other students). • Use alternative formats for coursework completion, presentations delivery and exams. • Use of assistive devices*. • Offer additional time for assignments and tests, as well as getting to class. <p>* Some of the most common devices used by deaf and hard of hearing students:</p> <p>Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs): These amplifiers separate sounds from background noise by bringing sound directly to the student's ear. They consist of a microphone, a transmitter and a receiver. The <u>Inductive loop systems</u>, the <u>FM systems</u> and the <u>Infrared systems</u> are the 3 commonly used systems.</p> <p>Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART): Used to convert speech to text. This system is also referred to as captioning. It is accomplished through the use of a stenotype machine, computer, or other software to capture the spoken words which are then displayed on a screen as text.</p>
Cognitive or learning disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify individual course instruction (whether adjusting content, the presentation of content, or the learning environment, individual course instruction identifies specific needs of a learner and tailors' information to make it more accessible while still presenting the same core content). • Extended time on exams and assignments, as well as arriving to class. • Alternative testing arrangements/locations. • Alternative formats for coursework completion, presentations delivery and exams. • Use of assistive devices** <p>** Some of the most common devices</p> <p>Talking Word Processors/Speech-to-Text: Speech-to-text technology is especially helpful for students with dyslexia or a physical impairment, as it allows them to dictate a paper or assignment and have it translated into a text document.</p> <p>Digital Recorders: Students who struggle with ADHD and find themselves distracted in class often use digital recorders, allowing them to record lectures or classroom instruction and listen to it later in a space where they can concentrate.</p>
Psychological disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time on exams and assignments • Alternative testing arrangements/locations

Invisible disabilities	<p>Speech impairment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative assignments for oral presentations (e.g., written assignments, one-to-one presentation) • Course substitutions • Flexibility with in-class discussions (e.g., consider online discussion boards)
	<p>Chronic health condition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notetakers • Flexible attendance requirements • Extra exam time and allowances for breaks • Assignments made available in electronic format • Use of email to facilitate communication

Campus and Buildings Accessibility

Students using wheelchairs:

- can use the gates [A, B, C] to access the campus;
- can use the elevators in buildings A, B, C, D and H;
- can access Zouki from the entrance 2nd entrance (building E side);
- can access the amphitheater John Paul II, using the elevator or from the 2nd floor;
- can access the following bathrooms: buildings A, D;
- can request special accommodation for the commencement ceremony.

Students with mobility and physical impairments:

- can access staff parking B instead of student parking;

Annex 1 - Accommodation request form (Confidential):

Section 1 – Personal Information:

- ID:
- Name:
- Email:
- Major:

Section 2 – Disability Information:

Kindly select the relevant disability type:

- Mobility / physical impairment, please specify:
- Spinal cord disability
- Brain disability
- Vision disability
- Hearing disability
- Cognitive/learning disability (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia), please specify:
- Psychological disorder (e.g. chronic depression, generalized anxiety, bipolar disorder), please specify:
- Invisible disability (ADHD, autism spectrum, epilepsy, migraines, etc.), please specify:

Please provide additional information needed about your case (current treatment, history, etc.):

Please list the accommodations you are seeking (as per the recommendation of a qualified professional):

Section 3 – Certification and Declaration of Consent:

The information provided to USEK’s administration regarding the student’s disability is confidential and will not be connected to your records. However, once the accommodations letter has been processed it will be shared with your head of department, your instructors, the concerned student support officers and USEK employees (if needed).

I certify that the information provided on this form is accurate; and in order to be eligible for the accommodations at USEK I must complete this form, submit the supporting medical documentation and meet with a specialist assigned by USEK (if needed).

Full Name:

Date:

Signature: