

Birmingham-Southern College

Academic Accommodation Information For Faculty and Staff

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Birmingham-Southern College is committed to making programs and services accessible to all students with disabilities and to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to insure equal opportunity.

Legal Mandates

The **Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on disability. Compliance with these laws requires that colleges and universities modify certain academic requirements so “that such requirements do not discriminate or have the effect of discriminating” against qualified students with disabilities.

When qualified students with disabilities request accommodations, Birmingham-Southern College has a legal obligation to provide appropriate accommodations. The obligation to accommodate students with disabilities does not require reduction of academic standards or course requirements, nor does it require acceptance of behaviors that pose a direct threat or disrupt the learning environment. If a particular requested academic accommodation is judged to be inappropriate, BSC is obligated to consider other reasonable accommodations.

Laws do not require that students with disabilities receive special advantages that place them in a better position to succeed than their classmates. Rather, laws require that students receive equal access to programs and services by removing physical and instructional barriers so students can compete based on their academic abilities. Requirements that are essential to a course or program of study, or to any certification or licensing essential, are not legally discriminatory.

Identifying Students with Disabilities

Students are responsible for informing BSC of their disability and their need for accommodations and services by presenting the Director of Counseling & Health Services with documentation verifying their disability. The documentation must state a specific diagnosis, describe the history and symptoms of the disability, specify which major life activities are substantially limited by the disability, and recommend accommodations to lessen the negative effects of the disability.

Students who choose not to self-identify when they enter BSC do not forfeit their right to identify themselves and to request accommodations at a later date. However, BSC is not obligated to provide accommodations and services for students with disabilities until they turn in the appropriate forms and request academic accommodations.

The Director of C & HS is responsible for receiving and holding all documentation related to a student’s disabilities. By law, faculty and staff do not have access to information related to the diagnosis of a student’s disabilities, but may be provided with information related to the services and/or accommodations requested by a student. Generally, no information is released without the informed, written consent of students.

Students must be diagnosed with a specific disability within three years of admission to the college to receive academic accommodations. Conditions such as test anxiety and pregnancy are not considered disabilities by law. Typically, services are provided for students with the following disabilities:

- Attention deficit disorders
- Learning disorders
- Mobility disorders
- Psychiatric disorders
- Sensory disorders
- Systemic (health-related) disorders
- Traumatic brain injury

Academic Accommodations

Providing academic accommodations is essentially a problem-solving process. Academic accommodations should enable students with disabilities to have access to the same programs and services available to other students, and to have their performances evaluated without the limiting effects of disability.

Academic accommodations for BSC students is recommended, based on documentation from the physician, psychologist, or other licensed professional that diagnosed the student's disability. Accommodations are considered on a case-by-case basis, as required by law.

The Director of Counseling & Health Services issues accommodation letters after documentation of a student's disability has been reviewed and accepted. These students, whose accommodation letters are sent to instructors, are recognized by BSC as students with disabilities, and are entitled to services under BSC policies. If students identify themselves as disabled to instructors, but do not have accommodation letters, they are NOT eligible for services under BSC policies. Faculty members are not responsible for providing accommodations that are not requested through the proper procedure.

Instructors should include a statement similar to one of the following in their course syllabus and repeat it during the first class meeting:

- If you are registered for academic accommodations, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability but have not contacted the Director of Counseling & Health Services, please call 226-4717 or visit Counseling & Health Services in the Norton Campus Center.
- Students who may need course accommodations are welcome to make an appointment to see me during office hours. Students with disabilities must be registered with Counseling & Health Services, in the Norton Campus Center., and must have provided a request letter and documentation before receiving academic adjustments.

Accommodation Letters

Letters are sent to instructors by the Director of C & HS but it is up to the student to discuss with the instructor methods for providing the requested academic accommodations. If instructors have questions or concerns about implementing accommodations, they should contact the Director of C & HS as soon as possible. If the Director is not contacted, instructors will be considered to have agreed to provide the recommended accommodations.

Accommodation letters delineate all services for which a student is *eligible*. Students are responsible for discussing with their instructors which accommodations they intend to actually *use* in each class.

Providing Academic Accommodations

Providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities is a collaborative effort between the student and his/her instructor. For example, extended time for exams should be arranged to match both the student's and the instructor's schedules. A student might start a test before the rest of the class, finish a test after the rest of the class, or take a test in two halves at two different times. Extended time adjustments should be appropriate and efficient for both the student and the instructor.

The same is true for reduced-distraction settings for exams. The instructor should arrange a location close to the regular classroom (with a minimum of distractions), so the instructor is available if the student has questions. Reduced-distraction settings do not have to be private, isolated locations and testing does not have to coincide with the scheduled exam time. Instructors should, if at all possible, provide academic adjustments in their own departments.

Examples of Academic Accommodations

The following are examples of support services and accommodations they may be recommended, based on appropriate documentation and individual class requirements:

Testing Accommodations: Testing accommodations may include extended time, reduced distraction testing situations, orally administered tests, readers and / or scribes. Tests should be administered in each department, if possible. Students should discuss testing accommodations with their instructors at the beginning of each term. Extended time for lengthy assignments may also be offered.

Tape Recording, Note Taking, and Scribes: Students may tape record class lectures

and/ or request peer note takers. Scribes can also be used for students requiring such assistance.

Reading Assistance: Students may request alternate materials and / or readers. Students can find text-to-voice software at various sites on-line as provided by various software companies. Textbooks and handouts in alternate formats may include tape, Braille, and enlarged print.

Sign Language Interpreting and Real Time Captioning Services: Deaf and hard of hearing students may be provided with licensed interpreters or qualified captionists for class sessions, class-related activities, and BSC related events.

Removal of structural/telecommunication barriers.

Specialized and academic advising and priority registration assistance.

Academic Classroom Aids: Students may use calculators, dictionaries, laptop word processors, spell checkers and / or grammar checkers, computer adaptations (enlarged type, audio output, voice activated), modified keyboard, recorders for in-class and out-of-class work.

Alternate Formats for Assignments: Assignments may be submitted in formats other than those stated in course requirements, if appropriate (i.e. on cassette tape rather than in writing).

Seating in the front of the room.

Personal services are not considered to be academic accommodations. Examples of personal services include tutoring, transportation, and attendant care.

BSC Academic Accommodations Policies

Accommodation Letters

The following steps describe the accommodation process:

1. The student fills out the *Request for Academic Accommodations* letter upon entering Birmingham-Southern College or at a later date when academic accommodations are deemed necessary. As stated earlier, appropriate documentation must follow which states a specific diagnosis, describes the history and symptoms of the disability, specifies which major life activities are substantially limited by the disability, and recommends accommodations to lessen the negative effects of the disability.
2. Students should meet with the Director of Counseling & Health Services
3. The Counseling Center sends out a letter to the student, student's advisors and instructors.
4. The student discusses with each instructor how accommodations will be implemented, including accommodations for testing.

If the request for accommodations and documentation arrive after the beginning of a semester, letters to instructors will be sent in a timely fashion. However, instructors are not obligated to provide accommodations until they receive accommodation letters. Accommodations are not retroactive; instructors are not obligated to adjust grades on assignments or exams administered before an accommodation letter was received and discussed.

Excused Absences

Some students with disabilities may have an accommodation to excuse a reasonable number of disability-related absences. This accommodation is recommended only when a student's disabilities make it impossible to attend class because of debilitating illness, hospitalization, or other professional intervention. Excused absences, like all accommodations, are designed to provide equal access for students with disabilities: excused absences are not designed to permit students to receive credit for classes without demonstrating skills required in those classes.

The most important factor in the number of excused absences of a student with disabilities is the reasonable determination of what skills and performances are required for the class. For example, if class information is available through peer notes, textbooks, internet sources, etc. absences may not prevent students with disabilities from missing numerous class sessions and completing class assignments outside of class. If certain requirements can be met only in class -such as discussions or oral presentations-

fewer absences can be allowed. The best solution is to talk with the student about class requirements and possible modifications as early in the semester as possible.

Students who miss class because of disability-related absences are responsible for informing instructors that their absences were disability-related, getting notes or other materials from the classes they missed, and arranging to make up any tests or assignments missed. Instructors should talk with the students about the type of assignments missed, the amount of work needed to complete class requirements, and the quality that should be reflected in that work.

Readers/Scribes Policy

Readers are used for materials that are not available in alternate formats and for materials that are too difficult to access via adaptive computer software. Readers do not provide interpretations or explanations of documents read.

Scribes are used to translate oral information. Scribes write, word for word, the message that they are instructed to transcribe. Scribes can only question their source for clarification of information they may have heard incorrectly.

Tape Recording Policy

Students who are eligible to tape record class lectures should furnish their own recorder and cassettes. All tapes are for private use only; the information is to be treated as confidential and may not be shared with any other student, organization, media, or other entity. Failure to abide by the tape recording policy may result in a charge of academic misconduct.

Sign Language Interpreters/Captionist Policy

Sign language interpreters and captionists provide services for classroom instruction (e.g. lectures, discussion, lab, etc.) and academic requirements (e.g. group meetings, etc). Interpreters facilitate communication between deaf/hard of hearing and hearing individuals. Interpreters use a specific language to communicate spoken word to deaf clients. Interpreters may use their voice to communicate sign language to a hearing person. However, some deaf individuals prefer to voice for themselves. Captionists provide accurate, real-time transcripts for hard of hearing students. Captionists also may provide unedited transcripts as needed. Captionists use a court reporting stenograph machine that is linked to a laptop computer.

Interpreters and captionists are not tutors, instructors, note takers or counselors and should not engage these roles. Ultimately, interpreters and captionists are responsible for ensuring that the environment is appropriate and conducive for interpreting.

Note Taker Policy

There are two ways students can obtain a peer note taker. The student can approach a classmate with the request, or instructors can ask a volunteer from the class (by asking if a student in the class would provide copies of their class notes). When a class member volunteers, instructors should introduce the volunteer to the student privately, without mentioning that the student has a disability. A note taker needs to be someone who attends class regularly, takes legible notes, and can give notes to the student in a timely manner.

Instructional Strategies

Creating an accessible environment

- Include a statement about academic accommodations in your syllabi. If possible, have syllabi and reading lists available before class begins. Early access to syllabi assists students who need different formats for class materials (e.g. Braille, audiotape, sign language interpreters, etc)
- In your first class meeting, invite students with disabilities to discuss accommodation needs with you. Remember that students with disabilities who request accommodations must have applied for such and have documents on file with the Director of Counseling & Health Services. If a student requests accommodations but has not gone through the accommodation process, please refer them to the Counseling Center.
- Use web pages and email to make course information available. Text-based web pages are easier to navigate with assistive computer technology.
- If possible, arrange your room in a circular or semi-circular manner. If you cannot rearrange furniture, leave a few front row seats open for distractible students, deaf students who use interpreters/captionists, and students who use service animals.
- If your classroom or building is not accessible to students with mobility disorders please consider moving to an accessible site, or call the Director of Counseling & Health Services to discuss the situation. If field trips are required, verify that transportation and off-campus sites are physically accessible.

- Respect the privacy of students with disabilities; avoid mentioning accommodations in front of others (i.e. “John, will you need an accommodation for this exam?” or “Students who need extended time for exams please leave the room now.”) If you need to address a disability-related issue immediately, try conferring with the student in the most discreet manner possible.
- Avoid fostering dependence in students with disabilities.
- When in doubt about if and how to assist students with disabilities, ask them! If your offer for assistance is declined, do not insist on “helping.”
- Above all, interact with students with disabilities in the same manner as other students.

Teaching Accessibly

- Face the class when speaking. Many students with hearing or attention disorders depend on seeing your face for information.
- Repeat or re-word lengthy or complex oral instructions.
- Always try to preview and summarize content during each class session.
- If you use the board to describe information, complete some examples in advance. Examples can be presented by using overhead projectors, power point, or web sites.
- Make copies of handouts available in large print. Remember it is important that students with disabilities receive information in a timely manner, comparable to non-disabled classmates. This may not always be possible, but BSC has an obligation to make every effort to do so.
- Read aloud information presented on the board or overhead. Also, try to have printed copies of board or overhead information available.
- Repeat questions or comments from class members. Repetition affords students with sensory and cognitive disabilities an opportunity to clarify and /or gain information that may have been missed.
- Provide study guides for quizzes and exams, or provide guidelines for studying effectively (i.e. “Concentrate on lecture notes, and chapters 1, 2, and 5, in your text.”)
- If possible, provide alternate ways to complete assignments. For example, give students an option of taking 5 quizzes or completing 5 brief essays.

- Provide timely feedback on assignments and tests. Students retain information better when the information is current.
- Always try to present key terms and concepts visually and orally.
- Stress the importance of time management, study skills, and organization.
- Students with disabilities do not need sympathy; they need academic modifications to meet the expectations of an academic environment.

Grievance Process

According to federal law and Birmingham-Southern College policy, instructors cannot deny accommodations for students who have documentation and have followed the proper procedure in the *Request for Academic Accommodation* guidelines, without input from the student, the Director of Counseling & Health Services, and appropriate BSC administrators. The purpose of the grievance process is to arrive at a final determination of what accommodations are appropriate for a specific situation if accommodations recommended are questioned.

Questions and concerns regarding accommodations for students with disabilities should be directed initially to the Director of C & HS. If the Director cannot resolve issues involving academic accommodations, a meeting with the faculty member, the Provost's Office, the Director of C & HS, the Dean of Students, and the student (if appropriate) is the second step in resolving disagreements. If an agreement concerning an accommodation request is not reached at this point, the final step in the conflict resolution process involves the dissenting party filing formal appeal. During the appeal process, the student is entitled to receive accommodations recommended by the Director.

An appeal of accommodation requests should clearly state the basis and rationale for the objection and should be transmitted as a confidential document to the Provost. The Provost will consider the appeal and render a final decision, which will be communicated to all parties.

Steps in the Grievance Process

1. Consult with Director of Counseling & Health Services
2. Meet with the Director, faculty member, and student (if appropriate)
3. Submit a written appeal to the Provost

If a complaint is not resolved through the BSC Grievance Process, students may file a formal complaint with the regional Office for Civil Rights in Atlanta, GA. The Office of Civil Rights investigates complaints alleging violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

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