

# Assisting Students With Disabilities

## LUTHER COLLEGE DISABILITY SERVICES

A Guide for Faculty

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### What is Equal Access to Education?

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that “no otherwise qualified handicapped individual shall, solely by reason of the handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program of activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

Compliance with this law requires that academic institutions like Luther provide the same opportunity for students with disabilities to have *access* to the educational program that it provides for other students.

In other words, equal *access* to education is achieved when physical and instructional barriers to learning are removed and the student is allowed to compete on the basis of his or her academic abilities alone. The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) recently reinforced the provision of the Rehabilitation Act by requiring that all public facilities, services, and communications be accessible to persons with disabilities and that auxiliary aids and services be provided unless an undue burden would result.

### Who qualifies as a disabled individual under the law?

The ADA defines an individual with a disability as a person who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of that person,

- has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.

Major life activities include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, and working. This definition covers a broad range of disabilities. Instructors are encouraged to contact the Student Academic Support Center (SASC) if there is a question about the nature or extent of a student’s disability.

### What are your responsibilities as the instructor?

Generally it is the instructor’s responsibility to ensure that the learning environment is accessible. **If a student identifies herself or himself** as having a disability and requests accommodations, the instructor should direct the student to SASC. Due to the very personal and private nature of some disabilities, it is important that instructors create an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable about coming forward to discuss any special needs they may have. Instructors can demonstrate their openness and willingness to help students by including on the syllabi a statement encouraging students to make an appointment with the instructor if they need course adaptations or accommodations, if they have any emergency medical information that the instructor needs to know, or if they need special arrangements in the event the building must be evacuated. It is also suggested that instructors bring the statement to the attention of the students at the first class meeting and inform them that the Disability Services office (at SASC) is available to assist them.

It is strongly recommended that the instructor make arrangements to meet with students who choose to identify themselves in order to discuss in detail the

particular accommodations that will be or may be necessary. Also, an instructor may:

- inform the students of the services available from Disability Services (at SASC),
- inquire into the extent of the disability as it relates to fulfilling course requirements,
- discuss the possible accommodations that may be made, and
- contact Disability Services (at SASC) if the instructor has any further questions.

Instructors may also look to her or his academic department for assistance in providing accommodations.

### What is Reasonable Accommodation?

Reasonable Accommodation is the term used by the ADA for modifications made to the learning environment that helps to create equal educational opportunity. It does not require that students with disabilities be given special advantages in order to help them pass, nor does it require that they be graded on a scale different from their classmates.

On the contrary, reasonable accommodation refers to steps that can be taken without significant difficulty or expense. Such modifications allow otherwise qualified students to fulfill course requirements, but do not change or reduce the academic standards of a course or degree program. In short, reasonable accommodation is an effort to provide each student with a suitable and appropriate learning environment.

### What are some possible accommodations at Luther College?

All requests for accommodations must be initiated by the student in a timely manner as specified in the **Procedures for Using Disability Services** (available at SASC).

The Disability Services office (at SASC / 1270) is a valuable resource for instructors seeking accommodation alternatives. The following are examples of accommodations initiated by students

and facilitated by instructors, the instructor's department, and/or SASC that may be necessary to ensure equal *access* to education. Instructors may:

- provide alternative ways to fulfill course requirements,
  - ✓ extra time for in-class writing and reading assignments (reader available through SASC)
  - ✓ list of specialized vocabulary words
  - ✓ advanced viewing of audio/visual materials (assistance available at SASC)
  - ✓ taped lectures (recorder available at SASC)
  - ✓ notetaker (available through SASC)
  - ✓ seating in front of class
  - ✓ written directions for assignments
- develop and implement innovative teaching techniques,
- provide supervised tutorial assistance and adaptive technology,
  - ✓ reading services (Kurzweil personal scanner)
- tailor course requirements to individual needs, and
- modify testing procedures to ensure accurate measurement of a student's academic abilities and not his or her disability.
  - ✓ time-and-a-half or double-time extended exam time (proctor and space available at SASC)
  - ✓ separate room for exam administration (proctor and space available at SASC)
  - ✓ use of computer for writing exams (proctor and technology available at SASC)
  - ✓ use of dictionary and pocket speller
  - ✓ rescheduling of final exam (proctor and space available through SASC)
  - ✓ test directions/questions read out loud (reader available through SASC)
  - ✓ oral exams