



Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities

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BACKGROUND

The School of Social Work Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities exists to address accommodations that would complement those formal accommodations available through the Student Accessibility Centre at Dalhousie University. Our policy is based on self-identification, and therefore students do not need formal medical documentation in order to access School accommodations. Faculty and staff will work with students to the best of our ability, guided by university policies and School resources.

The School of Social Work is committed to providing students with (dis)Abilities a supportive environment that will foster their learning and create a sense of belonging, beginning in the admissions process through to graduation and extending to alumni.

The policy is in keeping with university services for (dis)Able students and the global recognition of (dis)Ability rights¹. Further, this policy is in keeping with the Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles of the School of Social Work, specifically section 4 & 5 which states “we believe in:

- Building a diverse and inclusive school environment. Towards that end, we recognize the importance of altering the cultural context of the school in ways that are welcoming to the cultures and belief systems of historically marginalized groups and communities.
- The importance of accessible education; respectful and collaborative approaches to working with groups and communities; academic and intellectual freedom; collegiality; and open, democratic, and inclusive decision-making.”
- In order to best serve students with (dis)Abilities, the School takes a collaborative approach to accommodation, which includes sharing pertinent information between necessary staff and faculty in order to develop and fulfill accommodations as well as to address issues that may arise. Personal information will be respected and protected to comply with relevant privacy legislation.

INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL RIGHTS

In recognition of the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons, ratified in the House of Commons, December 2010, specifically section E and J, whereby:

- Recognizing that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the

¹ “Disability is written as (dis)Ability: ‘(dis)’ to respect the person’s social and physical connection with disability, and ‘Ability’ to highlight the creative and innovative ways of dealing with societal barriers” (MacDonald & Friars, 2009 citing MacDonald, 2008).

Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities

interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

- Recognizing the need to promote and protect the human rights of all persons with disabilities, including those who require more intensive support.

INFLUENCING SYSTEMIC FACTORS

We understand the bases for the recognition of:

1. EuroWestern values, worldviews, and beliefs are the foundation of university wide educational processes and principles. EuroWestern knowledge does not recognize marginalization associated with race, sexual orientation, ability, age, class, gender, etc.
2. Hierarchical roles, which reinforce rigid structures without recognition of the complexity involved with intersecting identities.
3. Admission and university policies and procedures that do not reflect the concepts of inclusion and accessibility.
4. Physical structures, which deny access or serve as a barrier to access must be redesigned or augmented with accessible structures.
5. Self-identification is often difficult given the assumptions, biases and stereotypes experienced by students with (dis)Abilities both within and outside the University.

GUIDING VALUES, BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES

- Belief in the dignity and rights of all persons
- Support of an Affirmative Action Policy which includes Persons with (dis)Abilities,
- A belief that it is not 'good enough' to welcome students into our School, it is critical to create a supportive environment that will foster their learning and create a sense of belonging, beginning in the admissions process through to graduation and extending to alumni
- A commitment to be proactive and current with respect to (dis)Ability inclusion, access and accommodation
- To come from a critical (dis)Ability perspective that is
 - committed to enhancing Universal Design for Learning and
 - committed to implementing creative pedagogical processes in addressing students with (dis)Abilities' learning needs
- Acknowledgement and recognition of the faculty position designated to promote (dis)Ability scholarship, pedagogy, and curriculum

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION

We hold as a foundational principle that people with (dis)Abilities are empowered to self-identify at any point in their lives, including throughout their social work education. Ideally, students would self-identify at time of admission so that accommodation plans can be put in place as early as possible. However, given the complexities of issues, this does not always take place. We therefore are committed to working with students when issues arise at any point in their program.

ACCOMMODATION POLICY

In fulfilling this mission, the School is committed to working toward full accessibility and accommodations through the application of universal design, whereby accessibility will be applied as a general principle. Universal design extends past physical space but includes pedagogy as well as program design and the university as a structure and experience.

I. Structural barriers

Structural barriers within the School, including classrooms within & beyond the Mona Campbell building be examined for accessibility. If these areas are inaccessible, an accessible alternative will be sought. If there is inaccessibility within the Mona Campbell building, a report will be written and sent to Facilities Management. The School will then advocate for accessible structures.

II. Electronic communication/ online learning

Examine any new communication/learning system for its accessibility, using W3C ([World Wide Web Consortium](#)) standards or the more up-to-date online assessable tool. W3C, through the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), develops:

- guidelines widely regarded as the international standard for Web accessibility
- support materials to help understand and implement Web accessibility
- resources, through international collaboration

The School Accommodation Form as well as the contact information for the Accommodation Officer will be available within BrightSpace courses under Learning Resources.

III. Accommodations

- a. The main goal of the accommodations process is to allow (dis)abled students, staff, and faculty to creatively construct accommodations that meet the academic needs of students with (dis)Abilities. The School of Social Work seeks to supplement services if not provided through the Student Accessibility Centre. Therefore, the School strongly encourages students to access accommodations first through the Student Accessibility Centre and then through the School. Services through the Student Accessibility Centre will remain with the Centre, for example special arrangements for examinations, scanning reading materials, note takers.
- b. Students will be encouraged to identify their accommodation needs with the Student Accessibility Centre at the beginning of their education (or at the point that they require accommodation) and at the beginning of each course with their instructor and field placement with the Field Education Coordinator or Distance Field Placement Coordinator. We encourage students to access the Student Accessibility Centre to address their primary and formal accommodations. If students go through the Student Accessibility Centre, the Centre will send letters to all their instructors identifying the need for accommodations, and possibly including specific accommodation requests.
- c. If the student is not registered with the Centre but self-identifies as having a (dis)Ability,

Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities

the School will work with that student to find appropriate accommodations through the School's Accommodation Officer in conjunction with the instructor.

- d. We recognize that some students are not informed about their rights before coming to the School and therefore might not recognize the right to accommodation until part way through the year. Or, students with mental health (dis)Abilities might cope with their (dis)Abilities through avoidance.
- e. Various accommodations can be sought, from extensions on written papers, options which are oral, time extensions to write exams, writing in an alternative quiet space, other creative options as negotiated between faculty and the student. Accommodations in field placements may also be arranged such as having additional time to complete their placement without penalty.
- f. ***Process for requesting School-based accommodations:***
 - i. To access School-based accommodations, students first need to complete the [School Accommodation Form](#), available from the Student Services Coordinator or the Accommodation Officer. The form will be kept in the student's file located in the Student Services Coordinator's office.
 - ii. The student is welcome to meet—virtually, by phone, or in person—with the Accommodation Officer to discuss their needs further.
 - iii. The student is encouraged to speak with each of their instructors teaching a course to discuss potential options. When preparing for field practicum placement, students are encouraged to speak with either the Distance or Campus Field Education Coordinator.
 - iv. The initial request for accommodation will be welcomed at any point through the year, with every effort to organize accommodations proactively for future courses.

IV. **Resources**

- a. In effort to be proactive, information about resources for students with (dis)Abilities will be available:
 - i. on the School website
 - ii. in welcome information for incoming students and acceptance letter
 - iii. in any incoming and returning student orientations
 - iv. in Student Handbook and field manual
 - v. in each syllabus
 - vi. on each BrightSpace website
- b. Information about resources to be included will include, but is not limited to:
 - i. Dalhousie Student Accessibility Centre - https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html
 - ii. School of Social Work Accommodation Officer role, responsibilities, and contact information
 - iii. School of Social Work Accommodation process and form(s)

Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities

iv. Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities

- c. Specifically related to BrightSpace, the Welcome Page should include information on what is (dis)Ability, including self-identification; the benefit of accessing accommodations for learning and student success; name and contact information of Accommodation Officer, brief description of their role & responsibilities; and a link to the process of accommodations. Supplementary information such as the Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities in full text; fuller description of the Accommodation Officers, their role & responsibilities; School of Social Work Accommodation process and forms should be available under Learning Resources.

V. Curriculum Reviews

- a. Curriculum reviews will include an examination of multiple ways of learning and knowing. Instructors are encouraged to review their assignments for inclusive evaluative methods as well as expand their pedagogical techniques that are inclusive of multiple ways of learning. For example, all assignments should not be text-based, as in research and writing assignments. Innovative ways of teaching are encouraged.
- b. MSW and BSW Coordinators offer serve as a resource in multiple and varied ways of evaluating learning outcomes.
- c. The annual faculty retreat could be an opportunity to further Universal Design for learning approaches. Faculty meetings may also be a regular opportunity for faculty to highlight teaching innovations or creative accommodations and generate ideas and shared pedagogy.

VI. Field Practicums

- a. Field is a key component of our curriculum and a link between the academic and practice worlds; therefore, finding a balance between a student's accommodation needs and the agency requirements is essential.
- b. To secure accommodations in a timely fashion, students should identify their accommodation needs on their Student Accommodation Form at the beginning of the program or upon request for accommodation when they submit the field package (see field manual). Students who are not sure if they have completed a Student Accommodation Form should speak with the Accommodation Officer or the Student Services Coordinator. The Student Accommodation Form is an internal School document, which is not shared with prospective field placements, but only necessary staff and faculty.
- c. The Field Education Coordinator and Distance Field Placement Coordinator can request additional information from relevant faculty or staff, or seek clarification from the student, if need be. Coordination of accommodations between the student, the Agency Instructor and the Faculty Advisor will be facilitated by the Field Education Coordinator. Established accommodations will be recorded on the student's file.

VII. Accommodation Officer Role and Responsibilities

- a. An Accommodation Officer designation will be appointed, and with appropriate workload credit, by the Director of the School.

Accommodation Policy for Students with (dis)Abilities

- b.** Once the Accommodation Officer has been appointed, all School staff and faculty, including sessional faculty, will be notified by email. The School website will maintain up-to-date information on who the Accommodation Officer is, their contact information, and role.
- c.** All first-year students will be made aware of the Accommodation Officer through the welcome material for incoming students including their acceptance letter, BSW/MSW Orientation as well as the Student Handbook. The Accommodation Officer will attend both online and on campus student orientations to make visible their person and their role. At the beginning of the Fall semester, first year students who identify as (dis)Able will be encouraged to request a meeting with the Accommodation Officer to discuss their accommodations. Other students who have not identified on the Affirmative Action form in their application can also seek the services.
- d.** The Accommodation Officer will be responsible for designing and maintaining the School Accommodation Form. If accommodations are requested from the School, beyond the regular services provided by the Centre, the form will be filled out and put in the student's file located in the Student Services Coordinator's office.
- e.** The Accommodation Officer serves as a consultant for staff, sessional instructors, field instructors, and faculty, and is available to discuss accommodation options. Further, the Accommodation Officer will be available to the Program Coordinators for consultation upon their request.
- f.** Guided by the Accommodation Officer, the School will work towards developing a toolkit and providing training to all sessional instructors, including 'campus and distance instructors prior to the term beginning. The CASWE (dis)Ability Caucus may have resource material to draw from.
- g.** The Accommodation Officer will also liaison with the Student Accessibility Centre and the Faculty of Health Affirmative Action Committee, advocating for accessible policies and procedures.
- h.** The Accommodation Officer will provide an accommodation analysis with respects to policies and practices within the School, the Faculty and the University every 3 years. A critical reflexive approach will be taken within the School examining assumptions and beliefs. The School engages in critical (dis)Ability research, guidance from and conversations with the Accommodation Officer, development of best practices regarding implementations of accommodations, and so on.
- i.** If an instructor anticipates a failing grade being assigned to a student with a (dis)Ability who has their needed accommodations, that instructor would consult with the Accommodation Officer to determine if further accommodations would be helpful. The Accommodation Officer would offer to assist the instructor in devising alternative evaluative methods.
- j.** Scholarship and research will accompany the Accommodation Officer position, which could include highlighting the accommodation practices within the School in an academic journal article, or research associated with accommodations, which could include (dis)Able students' experiences within social work employment.
- k.** Resources available to the Accommodation Officer to assist in carrying out their role and responsibilities are to be discussed with the Director, but could include workload designation, Teaching Assistant and/or administrative support.

VIII. Diversity and Equity Committee Role and Responsibilities

- a. The Diversity and Equity Committee (DEC) will facilitate an annual review of the School's Accommodation Policy in consultation with the Accommodation Officer, the BSW Committee, and the MSW Committee. The Accommodation Officer will work with DEC to review this policy as well as submit their analysis of accommodations to DEC.

IX. References and Resources

UN Declaration on The Rights of Disabled Persons

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RightsOfDisabledPersons.aspx>

Universal Design

<http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/The-7-Principles/>

Universal Instructional Design

<http://opened.uoguelph.ca/student-resources/universal-instructional-design>

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)

<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/royal-commission-aboriginal-peoples/Pages/final-report.aspx>

Dalhousie University - Universal Design for Learning - Web Accessibility

<http://dal.ca.libguides.com/c.php?g=359559>

Universal Design for Learning book – University of Victoria

By Teresa Dawson and Laurie Keenan

[Universal Instructional Design \(UID\) book](#)

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines – University of Victoria – Educator Worksheet

[UDL Guidelines - Educator Worksheet](#)

Universal Design for Learning in Postsecondary Education Reflections on Principles and their Application by David Rose, Ed.D., Wendy Harbour, Ph.D., Catherine Johnston, Ed. D., Samantha Daley, Ed. D., and Linda Abarbanell, Ed. D. [National Center on Universal Design for Learning Resource Library](#).

National Educational Association of Disabled Students - 'Enhancing Accessibility in Post-Secondary Education Institutions: A Guide for Disability Service Providers' -

<https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/> or Enhanced PDF version -

https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/eag_en.pdf