

Differences between accommodations- School Accommodations Officer vs. Student Accessibility Centre

Welcome to the School of Social Work! This may be your first year, or perhaps you are returning as a graduate student, whatever the case, welcome!

In this document, you will learn about the differences between the School's Accommodations Officer and the larger Dalhousie Student Accessibility Centre. Both provide accommodations to students with disabilities, but in different, but collaborative ways.

Who is Who?

First, there is the Dalhousie Student Accessibility Centre (SAC, https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html or email access@dal.ca). They provide accommodations for all Dalhousie students. You will normally be assigned a Student Access Advisor. Alyson Young (alyson.young@dal.ca) is normally the advisor assigned to social work students (BSW & MSW; campus or distance).

The second option is with me, the School of Social Work Accommodations Officer. I work solely with social work students across all programs. As a professor as well as a person with multiple disabilities, I rely on my own experiences of navigating accommodations at several Canadian universities as a student, but also on my own research and interest in accessible education & pedagogy and universal design for learning.

What are the Differences?

Broadly, the difference between the two approaches is that Dal supports the SAC and they often have more resources (software, hardware, honorarium for notetakers, staff, etc.) but they generally require medical documentation with direction about what kind of accommodations would be helpful. The SAC runs the notetaker program (where volunteer notetakers are paid an honorarium to provide notes). Additionally, SAC has physical space and equipment if you need to take your exam in a quiet place or need specific equipment. They have access to software like Dragon Naturally Speak (speech-to-text software), assistive technology (like electronic version of textbooks, and tech support that can be really helpful. Accommodations that require specialized equipment (ergonomic chairs, desks, computer equipment), specific spaces, or software are generally referred to as hard accommodations. They are also the place that sends notices to all your professors making request for formal accommodations.

My role as the Accommodations Officer is housed within the School and exists because of the [School's Accommodations policy](#). The School understands that getting medical documentation can be a barrier in and of itself, so I don't require medical documentation. The School strives to make accommodations easier to access for students with disabilities and to make the whole School more accessible in general. In my role, I can help with what is called soft accommodations. Soft accommodations don't generally require additional tools because they are more related to the social and relational aspects of access. For example, I help to negotiate extensions for assignments or alternative assignment formats (like changing a paper to a presentation).

Students can access both types of accommodations from both SAC and the Accommodations Officer. Together, SAC and the Accommodations Officer, can provide a complementary range of accommodations that ensure you are getting what you need in your classes or field. Only with your explicit permission do we discuss your accommodations. Otherwise information is not shared between the SAC and the Accommodations Officer.

What's the Process to Get Accommodations?

The process to access SAC can be lengthy, so once you gain admission to your program, my suggestion is to connect with them as soon as possible, even in April or May if you are anticipating starting in September. You can find out more about their specific process here: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility/accommodations-/requesting-accommodation.html Depending on the time of year, getting an initial appointment can take 2-4 weeks.

To get accommodations through the School, please email the Accommodations Officer, Dr. Eli Manning at eli.manning@dal.ca. I set up a time to connect with students so that I can explain the process and have a conversation with a student about what's working and what's not. If you can completed the [School's Accommodations form](#) prior to meeting with me, it can give me a sense of what might be helpful for you. Then, the student and I plan for how to make the accommodations request. Some students prefer to do this themselves and have me CC'ed on their email requests while others prefer that I contact their professors. Either way, we both know what needs to happen and who will do what. Generally, I can meet with students within 1-2 weeks of your initial request.

A Word about Accommodations

If COVID taught us anything it is that accommodations need to be flexible, responsive, and adaptable. When students begin their social work education, the context of their education may be different from their previous post-secondary experiences. For example, in social work classes, students are expected to engage in discussion, work in groups, and present their ideas in class whereas in students' previous experiences they may have just had lectures. So the context of social work education can be different than other academic or professional programs. Similarly, in social work, students will complete a field placement, which may require different and new accommodations because the context changes. This is normal! So, expect that you may need different and new accommodations throughout your social work education than you did in your previous university classes. Accommodations are not set in stone, they should be flexible enough to meet your learning needs if and when contexts, conditions, or you change.

Helpful Resources

Financial Support

As a student with a disability, you may be eligible for bursaries or grants to get you the financial support and/or equipment or services you need. There are two federal grants, distributed by provincial student loan programs, for students with disabilities. Each province has their own criteria for meeting the disability requirement, but generally it requires a health care provider's support. So long as you are eligible to receive even \$1 of a student loan, you should be eligible for these supports.

The first is a federal bursary available to students with disabilities, which provides up to \$4000 each school year. Because it is a bursary, you do not need to pay it back like you do student

loans. For more information, please visit the federal website for instructions:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/education/grants/disabilities.html>

The second is a federal grant for students with disabilities for services or equipment. For example, if you need an ergonomic set up or the services of an academic scribe, you can apply

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/education/student-aid/grants-loans/disabilities-service-equipment.html>

Accessibility, Studying and Reading Support

Dalhousie has two learning strategists, who are Registered Psychologists, available only to Nova Scotia residents currently. Learning strategists can help you identify what habits, tools, or processes would support your reading, learning, notetaking, writing, and studying unique to you! They can be very helpful for students with autism, ADHD, attention challenges, learning disabilities, or students who are struggling with reading or studying (challenges staying focused, problems with concentration, finding comprehension elusive, etc.). You can access the learning strategists through Dalhousie Health and Wellness Centre, via Counselling. First you need to book a counselling appointment to assess your needs, and in this meeting, you should say you want to see a learning strategist. Appointments can be booked online at https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness/appointments/book-your-appointment.html or by calling 902-494-2171 during office hours (Monday-Thursday, 8am-7pm; Friday, 8am-6pm; Saturday, 12-4pm). It can take a while to see the learning strategist often because they have a couple months waiting list depending on the time of year.

Alternatively, you could access private resources like at ADDvocacy (<https://www.addvocacy.org/>) for academic coaching. These are fee for service, so you need to pay to access this, but you may get in quicker than through Dalhousie Health and Wellness. You can apply to funding for this through the federal grant mentioned above.

Written Guides

Also, if you haven't checked out the Guide for Working Solo, I would suggest doing so. I wrote it for students with disabilities specially in COVID and online, but it may be helpful to you as a way to set up or alter your study habits. It's available on the Social Work Resources BrightSpace page under Content>Accommodations or here:

<https://dal.brightspace.com/d2l/le/content/8297/viewContent/1904415/View>. It's based on my decade of experience as a (grad) student with multiple disabilities as well as educational resources regarding accommodations and accessibility. You may find it useful, but you may already have a robust study plan in place for yourself. Also, I'd love any tips you have that aren't in there. I see it as a living document and the more we share what's worked for us the better!

In Summer 2022, one of our MSW Students, Sammy Koladich, wrote her own tips on accessibility that you may find useful and interesting. She reflects on what would have been helpful for her to know at the start of her social work education. You can find her guide on the Social Work Resources BrightSpace page under Content> Accommodations or here:

<https://dal.brightspace.com/d2l/le/content/8297/viewContent/3283494/View>

I also wrote a guide about how to deepen your reading practice. I was never taught how to read academic work and my family couldn't help either. So only once when I was in graduate school and I was flailing, did I finally learn how to read academic literature. So this document is meant

to make explicit some of the ways reading and notetaking can support your learning while making the process more clear. It is intended for both undergraduate and graduate students. You can find it on the Social Work Resources BrightSpace page under Content>Accommodations or here:

<https://dal.brightspace.com/d2l/le/content/8297/viewContent/2202381/View>

I hope this helps to explain the differences between the Dalhousie Student Accessibility Centre and my role as the School's Accommodations Officer.

OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SAC AND SSW ACCOMMODATIONS OFFICER

| Student Accessibility Centre | | School of Social Work Accommodations Officer | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Benefits | Challenges | Benefits | Challenges |
| Robust resources (equipment, technology, software, space, people) | | | Limited resources, one person (Accommodations Officer) |
| | Potentially lengthy intake & requirement of medical documentation | Quicker access to accommodations & no requirement of documentation | |
| Dedicated staff/advisor to support students with disabilities | | | One aspect of service role of one full time faculty member |
| | | Can recommend and advocate with your instructors for extensions, alternative assignment formats, etc. from a faculty perspective | |
| Central system to keep track of your accommodations with automated requests sent directly to your instructors each semester | Can be more challenging to add or change accommodations | Flexible and adaptable accommodations if things change | Negotiated process between student and Accommodations Officer to request accommodations |

****SAC and Accommodations Officer can work together, with your explicit consent, to provide you a full complement of accommodations that seek to get you what you need to successfully complete your program.**