

September 1, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Our campus community is committed to providing equitable access to the full RIT experience for students with disabilities. Guided by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, student accommodations are coordinated by the Disability Services Office (DSO).

What do we mean by “disability?”

As of August 2021, 13.1% of the RIT student body utilizes accommodations related to disability and/or hearing status. Students who may receive support from DSO include (but are not limited to) those with:

- Permanent or temporary disability
- Lifelong or acquired disability
- Apparent or invisible disability (e.g. learning disability, mental health disability, chronic illness)
- D/deaf and hard-of-hearing students who may or may not identify with the term “disability” (in partnership with NTID Access Services)
- Students facing new or changed access barriers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

Importantly, the lived experience of disability can vary in different environments, can be visible or hidden, can be static or episodic, and can become a factor in a person’s life at any point. Please [refer students to DSO](#) if you believe they may benefit from accessibility support.

How are student accommodations coordinated?

Students requesting accommodations engage in a consistent and thorough process with DSO:

1. Student submits an application for accommodations and documentation of their disability to DSO.
2. Student attends intake meeting with DSO. DSO then determines the appropriate accommodations the student should receive within each of their courses.
3. DSO sends out faculty accommodation notification letter to instructors (students are also copied on this communication).
 - Note that individual faculty accommodation letters contain the specific, DSO-approved accommodations a student has requested to use in that course.
 - **Faculty should [reach out to DSO](#) with any concerns or questions about specific accommodations**, i.e. if there are concerns that an accommodation presents

a fundamental alteration in your course(s), you should contact DSO to discuss the accommodation(s). Any denial of specific accommodations must be discussed, approved, and documented by DSO. Faculty should not deny approved accommodations to students without DSO involvement. Once an accommodation has been approved and communicated, it must be honored.

4. Faculty formally acknowledge the accommodation notification letter in the [MyDSO Faculty Portal](#).
5. Student and faculty communicate about access needs in specific courses.
 - Once a student has accommodations in place with DSO, they are able to request the accommodations they wish to use in each course via the [MyDSO Student Portal](#). Once this has been done, students are encouraged to discuss their specific access needs with instructors.
 - It is acceptable for faculty to initiate conversations about DSO-approved accommodations even if the student has not contacted them.
6. Faculty implement accommodations (with support from DSO, if needed).

What should be included in faculty syllabi?

DSO suggests the following statement be included in faculty syllabi, and discussed with students at the start of a course. If this is not already in your syllabus, please consider including it in your spring semester courses:

“Students needing accommodations due to any type of disability are encouraged to connect with the [Disability Services Office \(DSO\)](#). RIT is committed to making all facets of the student experience accessible. DSO takes an individualized approach to coordinating necessary accommodations for RIT students, and helps coordinate accommodations and other access supports in the context of this class. Learn more about how students can apply for accommodations with DSO [here](#).”

What Strategies Can Faculty Employ to Promote Accessibility in Courses?

- Create a clear and consistent organizational structure for your course.
- Recognize that regardless of hearing status, students may process information at different speeds.
- Consider pacing and time-related access factors. For example, students engaging with spoken content via ASL or captioning will benefit from a pause to review each new slide before lecture begins. Build time into your teaching rhythm to allow for this access.
- Ensure course readings and other materials are shared in accessible formats. Specifically, focus on making sure scanned documents are legible, complete, and don't cut off content at the margins. Folks who use assistive technology to access written words lose access to content when scans are of poor quality.

- Be mindful of color contrast and opt for large size font, especially at the whiteboard/chalkboard. Some students with certain types of learning disabilities find sans serif font much more accessible than fonts with serifs.
- Present or provide access to information in multiple modalities.
- During lectures, describe visual content aloud and/or provide image descriptions for pictures/graphs/charts.
- Read aloud content appearing on your lecture slides; this is helpful because learners vary in the way they engage with written content.
- Caption your video content. Per [RIT's guidelines for captioning audio-visual media](#), all audio-visual content presented in courses must be captioned, regardless the presence of a specific accommodation.

Thank you for your support and partnership in creating an accessible and inclusive campus community.

Sincerely,

Ellen Granberg, Ph.D.
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs