



Academic Accommodation and Mount Royal Faculty

Let's Demystify Academic Accommodation

Mount Royal University celebrates diversity and welcomes the contributions, experiences and full participation of students experiencing disabilities as valued members of our community. Higher education is the gateway to the workplace and community for our students; therefore, it is essential that the learning environment at Mount Royal be accessible to all members of the community. Access and Inclusion Services aims to foster diversity, inclusiveness and student success by ensuring that students experiencing disabilities receive equal opportunities for academic success.

May 2021
MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY
Access and Inclusion Services

Mount Royal University is committed to access, diversity, and equity. Access and Inclusion Services assists the University in creating an accessible learning environment that encourages full participation in academic courses for students experiencing disabilities.

Reasonable accommodations are tailored to the individual, flexible, and are determined by considering the barriers within the unique environment of a post-secondary institution.

Access and Inclusion Services facilitates reasonable academic accommodations for students experiencing disabilities in the academic setting. We encourage student development and partner with MRU faculty to create a more accessible, equitable and inclusive learning environment.

This handbook has been created to provide faculty with information about accommodating students experiencing disability-related barriers. The following pages provide information on:

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For additional information, faculty members are encouraged to visit the “Information for Faculty” page on the Access and Inclusion Services webpage:

<https://www.mtroyal.ca/AcademicSupport/ResourcesServices/AccessibilityServices/Professors/index.htm>

Academic Accommodations: The Basics

Types of Disabilities

Students registered with Access and Inclusion Services provide medical or psychological documentation from specialists; that documentation confirms the disability and outlines functional limitations associated with the condition. Disability categories include, but are not limited to hearing, vision, mobility, mental health, learning and attention regulation, autism, concussion, brain injury, and temporary or short-term impairments such as a broken arm or post-surgery limitations.

Students who register with Access and Inclusion Services must meet the same admission criteria and academic requirements and standards as all students, although the manner by which they meet those standards may vary.

Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodations are provided when students experience disability-related barriers in demonstrating their knowledge and skills. The accommodations provide equitable access for those students in order for them to have the opportunity to meet the academic standards of their courses and programs.

Students registered with Access and Inclusion Services have the right to utilize their academic accommodations on an as needed basis. For example, some courses may be designed with universal access in mind and therefore, few if any academic accommodations may be required.

Students in professional programs may require unique academic accommodations for field work/practicum placements or other licensing requirements.

Essential Requirements

The provision of accommodations will not change the essential requirements of a course or program curricula.

An appropriate accommodation enables a student to have the opportunity to successfully meet the essential requirements of the program, with no alteration in standards or outcomes, although the manner by which the student demonstrates mastery, knowledge and skills may be altered.

Faculty play a key role in the accommodation process by communicating what a student must know and demonstrate. When necessary, faculty assist with problem-solving based on their academic expertise. The question of fairness often comes up when providing students with alternate ways of performing academic tasks. Accommodations are intended to level the playing field to provide an opportunity for students experiencing disabilities to complete certain tasks differently, while still meeting the essential requirements and components of the curriculum. Students with accommodations are expected to demonstrate the same knowledge and skill development as their peers.

If you believe that implementing the accommodations listed in a student's Academic Accommodation Letter will compromise academic standards, contact the Access Advisor listed at the bottom of the letter. In some circumstances, the nature and degree of disability-related barriers may mean that no accommodation would enable an individual to meet the essential academic requirements or behavioural expectations of a course or program. In these cases, the University is not required to accommodate. However, efforts must be made to provide all reasonable options.

Mount Royal University has an academic accommodation appeal process outlined in *Policy 0517, Academic Accommodation for Students Experiencing Disabilities*. Generally, faculty who decline to provide an accommodation listed on a student's Academic Accommodation Letter must contact the Access Advisor immediately to discuss the situation. If the appeal goes forward the accommodation remains in place throughout the appeal process. Details regarding the appeal process are available from the student's Access Advisor.

Privacy & Confidentiality

A student's specific diagnosis is considered private medical information under Human Rights Legislation. Under no circumstances should you ask a student to disclose this information.

While some students are willing to talk about their disability, many others might be reluctant to do so. They might fear being denied opportunities or creating unwanted curiosity or concern. Encourage students to talk about the impact of their disability on their learning, rather than their diagnosis.

Because any category of disability contains a wide range of differences in how someone functions, knowing a student's type of disability is not particularly helpful without the more detailed information provided to the Access Advisor during the intake process. This information describes additional challenges due to other conditions, family and social supports, past experiences of learning and areas of strength that can compensate for difficulties.

It is also important to maintain a student's confidentiality in the classroom by not speaking about their accommodations in front of others.

Access and Inclusion Services Provides

- a review of the student's medical documentation and determines the need for, and types of, academic accommodations
- a place for students to discuss their disability-related needs and the appropriate accommodations and/or referrals to other support services on campus or in the wider community
- the development of an effective academic accommodation plan with the student
- ongoing support and problem-solving for disability-related issues that impact a student's academic and co-curricular experience (this frequently requires collaboration with faculty and staff)
- access to financial support (e.g. Canada Student Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities) and referrals to other funding sources
- access to assistive technology and software
- coordination of specialized services such as sign language interpreting and real-time captioning

Types of Accommodations

Accommodations depend on the impact of the disability within a particular program of study. They may include:

Classrooms, labs, and course work

- accessible classrooms and labs that are safe and provide appropriate supports
- sign language interpretation, note taking, audio recording
- accessible materials in alternate formats (e.g. braille, large print, digitized text, assisted-hearing devices)

Tests and exams

- writing within a test/exam space in which accommodations may be provided (e.g. fewer distractions, additional time, ability to take breaks or attend to physical needs)
- alternate formats such as large print or braille
- adaptable furniture and equipment (e.g. use of keyboard for writing, adjustable-height table, screen-reading software)

Practicum/placement

- guidance for requesting accommodations during practicum/placement
- development of safe, appropriate accommodations in the academic program and placement site

Outside the classroom

- liaising with Residence Services regarding disability-related needs
- referring students to campus and community resources
- peer mentoring and educational/support groups (e.g. for students experiencing barriers related to ADHD, mental health, and Autism Spectrum Disorder)
- co-curricular programming in partnership with campus partners (e.g. navigating disability and disclosure in the workplace)

Roles & Responsibilities: Who Does What?

Students, staff, and faculty all have responsibilities in the accommodation process and in creating an accessible environment. Each party brings an important perspective: the student has a unique and personal knowledge of their disability, the faculty members have content knowledge and an understanding of the required outcomes, and the Access Advisor has a broad-based knowledge of disabilities and their impact on academic performance. Roles and responsibilities may differ across academic divisions, so please check for specific procedures.

Faculty

- participates, when necessary, in structuring an accommodation plan that meets the essential requirements of the course/program and the needs of the students
- provides accommodations as outlined on the Academic Accommodation Letter, as appropriate, and works with the student and/or Access Advisor to find solutions if issues arise
- directs students to register with Access and Inclusion Services if an accommodation request is made but is not accompanied by an Academic Accommodation Letter
- makes every effort to develop an inclusive learning environment (e.g., provides clear information in the course syllabus and course policies regarding accommodations)

Student

- registers with Access and Inclusion Services once the need for academic accommodation has been determined
- provides appropriate and timely medical documentation to Access and Inclusion Services verifying the need for disability-related accommodation and outlining the restrictions and limitations of functioning within an academic environment
- informs faculty about the need for accommodation by providing an Academic Accommodation Letter for each course for which accommodation is being requested
- fulfills agreed-upon procedures to implement their accommodations, (e.g. informs their faculty and Access Advisor of difficulties in meeting deadlines)

Access Advisor

- verifies that there is a disability-related need that requires accommodation within a particular learning environment (e.g. classroom, lab, practicum setting)
- receives medical documentation from a qualified medical practitioner confirming a

- disability and the student's disability-related academic functional limitations
- uses best practices, input from the student and the medical documentation to develop accommodations
 - supports the facilitation of the accommodation process with the student, faculty and staff
 - works collaboratively with others in the MRU community to develop an accessible environment so that students experiencing disabilities are fully included in all curricular and co-curricular activities

Frequently Asked Questions

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GENERAL

What should I do if I think a student is experiencing a disability-related barrier?

Please invite the student to review on-campus services and to choose a support office/contact to begin a discussion about their concerns. For example, the student may want to book time with Student Learning Services or a Doctor or Counsellor at Wellness Services. Consult the Student Services & Support page on the MRU website:
<https://www.mtroyal.ca/AcademicSupport/>

Access and Inclusion Services meets with students who are referred to our department from any of the student support services on campus.

One of my students has disclosed their disability to me. What do I do with this information?

If a student discloses their disability/medical condition to you, this suggests that the student is experiencing enough challenges that they feel they need to seek help. It is reasonable for you to ask the student if they have accessed any of the on-campus services for support.

If the student does not mention Access and Inclusion Services, you can encourage them to contact the office to find out if they may be eligible for specific supports or accommodations.

If the student indicates that they have already registered with Access and Inclusion Services, encourage the student to contact their Access Advisor. If appropriate, you can also offer to contact the Access Advisor directly in order to address an ongoing situation in the classroom. The student, faculty member and Access Advisor may then collaborate on finding reasonable solutions.

If the student is not interested in working with Access and Inclusion Services (not all students experiencing disabilities are registered with Access and Inclusion Services) then it is reasonable to encourage them to access other campus services. Disability-related accommodations (ongoing or temporary) are not provided unless the student registers with Access and Inclusion Services and provides the necessary medical documentation.

How are academic accommodations determined?

Students provide documentation from a qualified medical professional that confirms they experience disability-related barriers that require academic accommodations. The Access Advisor reviews this documentation, meets with the student to determine their academic strengths and functional limitations, and considers best practices. When academic programs have specialized accommodation requirements, the Access Advisor consults with the academic program.

Am I required to accommodate a student's request?

When Access and Inclusion Services has determined a need for academic accommodation, the

student is accommodated unless there is undue hardship. Undue hardship consists of safety to self or others, the preservation of the essential degree requirements, and the cost of the accommodation to the institution. Academic accommodations should reasonably reflect (but not extend beyond) what is specified in the official Academic Accommodation Letter. It is not appropriate for a student to negotiate accommodations beyond those outlined in the letter. If a student requests an academic accommodation that is not previously identified, refer them to their Access Advisor to discuss the request.

What do I do if I disagree with the recommended accommodations?

Access and Inclusion Services Access Advisors support both faculty and students in negotiating the accommodation process. If you have questions about the accommodations recommended for a student, contact their Access Advisor. These discussions can be very useful for clarifying misunderstandings and reaching mutually acceptable solutions.

DESIGN & PLANNING

How can I create a more accessible learning environment?

In your syllabus, clearly state the knowledge and skills students need to know and demonstrate in your course/program. Include a section addressing disability-related barriers and accommodation, which will signal your openness to discuss student needs. You might say something along the lines of: “Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you experience disability-related barriers that may require accommodation, please feel free to approach me and/or Access and Inclusion Services.”

How do I modify a lab or practicum for a student experiencing a disability-related barrier?

Students experiencing disabilities may require accommodation in clinical placements, internships, cooperative placements, practicum placements and other experiential-learning courses.

Supports that have been suited to the classroom environment do not necessarily transfer to the placement environment.

Contact the Access Advisor to find a solution if what is being suggested will not work within your practicum/lab setting or could compromise the health and safety of clients, essential requirements, or requisite licensing processes.

DELIVERY

What is an Academic Accommodation Letter?

The Academic Accommodation Letter informs faculty that the student has registered with Access and Inclusion Services, and it lists academic accommodations to help you support the student in the classroom and through the evaluation process.

The Academic Accommodation Letter is also semester-specific so that faculty know that the student's academic accommodations are current, and faculty are not obligated to provide academic accommodations to a student who provides a letter that is out of date.

A conversation should be had between the faculty member and the student to discuss how the student's accommodations will be applied to the design of your course. The conversation may take place through any means (e.g., email, telephone, Google Meet, or in-person providing Alberta Health guidelines are adhered to). Feel free to contact the Access Advisor listed at the bottom of the letter if you have questions or concerns about implementing the recommended accommodations.

Students are required to provide their Academic Accommodation Letter to their faculty members a minimum of seven days in advance of a quiz, test, or midterm exam. Students wanting to use exam accommodations during the final exam period need to provide their Academic Accommodation Letter no later than the deadline indicated by Access and Inclusion Services each semester (typically, approximately one week prior to the end of classes).

Why don't students provide their Accommodation Letter at the beginning of the semester?

Students can be diagnosed with a disability at any time, so registration with Access and Inclusion Services continues throughout the academic year.

Some students try to complete their academic work without accommodations until they realize that they are unable to do so. Other students fear the stigma of being known as a student experiencing a disability.

What should I do if I get a limited illness medical note?

Medical notes may be provided to faculty by students experiencing a time-limited medical condition. If a student has an illness unrelated to their permanent disability (e.g. they get the flu or COVID-19), then a medical note for the flu or COVID-19 is appropriate. Each academic area has its own policies and processes regarding accommodation for illness or injury. Please consult your division for detailed information.

Access and Inclusion Services does not provide academic accommodations to students who are experiencing a short-term illness (e.g., the flu or COVID-19); however, if the illness results in the student experiencing an ongoing or chronic condition, they may be referred to our office for support.

What information can I share about a student's needs with other students or a support staff?

Always maintain the confidentiality of a student's registration with Access and Inclusion Services. There may be times when you need to communicate information about a student's accommodations to other staff involved in teaching the course, such as a lab assistant. Share information on a need-to-know basis and preserve the student's private information. When it comes to making decisions regarding accommodations, outline responsibilities for yourself and all course support staff.

Why do some students need to use a laptop in the classroom?

Laptops are an effective learning tool and it is appropriate for faculty to create clear messages about the use of laptops in the classroom. For some students, laptops are essential. Allowing the use of an assistive device (e.g. laptop or tablet) can support learning and bypass disability-related challenges to note taking.

Banning laptops for all students except those registered with Access and Inclusion Services is discouraged because it breaks the confidentiality of students registered with the office. Some faculty establish laptop-free zones in certain sections of their classroom to minimize disruption and distraction.

EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT

What is my role in the test & exam process for students with academic accommodations?

Test and exam accommodations are frequently required, and faculty members are responsible for keeping track of the students in their course(s) who require exam accommodations. Students must register with Access and Inclusion Services to write an exam in the Accommodated Exam Centre (located in Y201). If you receive notifications about accommodated test and exam seatings, please review the information for accuracy and respond to these notifications at your earliest opportunity (as soon as possible).

You will be asked to send a copy of the test or exam to Access and Inclusion Services using your secure faculty portal in Accommodate (the database used by Access and Inclusion Services).

Universal Design for Learning - Faculty members are encouraged to implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) wherever possible. When using UDL for exams, the following applies:

-if double (2x) is being provided to all students, students with an extended time accommodation would not receive additional time since double time is the maximum accommodation allowed.

-if 1.5x regular time is being provided to all students, students with an accommodation of 2x regular time would need to be provided with an additional .5x extension.

What do I do when a student asks for an extension on an assignment or other work to be submitted for evaluation in my course?

Access and Inclusion Services does not provide guidelines regarding assignment extensions. Such discussions are to be had with the student directly. Negotiate with the student to find an appropriate date to complete the work, being mindful of the University's deadlines and policies. Usually, students are granted a short extension beyond the deadline, or if at the end of the semester faculty may consider an 'I' grade.

How do I handle accommodations for alternatives to class participation?

Clarify how participation may be an essential academic requirement of your course (e.g. language learning courses) and negotiate viable alternatives early in the course to prevent misunderstandings at the end of semester. Consider writing the terms of the agreement on the back side of the student's Academic Accommodation Letter and having both parties sign/date the additional information. Contact the Access Advisor to discuss options if needed.

What does "Adjustment to attendance policy" mean?

Although there is an expectation that students will attend most classes, this statement informs you that the student may need to miss class because of their medical condition. Contact the Access Advisor if you need assistance in establishing reasonable expectations for attendance.

Why do students experiencing disability-related barriers need extended time for exams?

Students experiencing disabilities often need more time to process the information required for learning or communicating knowledge due to neurological differences, chronic health issues that limit focus and concentration, or physical disabilities that require the use of assistive technology.

What do I do if a student requests a memory aid sheet/cue cards/dictionary?

These requests will be outlined in the student's Academic Accommodation Letter and follow stringent criteria. Students requesting a memory aid sheet must have it approved by the faculty member prior to the test/exam. Review the memory aid sheet and either approve it or ask for revisions from the student. If there are issues or concerns, you or the student can contact the Access Advisor.

What do I do if a student registered with Access and Inclusion Services is not meeting academic expectations?

Contact the student's Access Advisor if the student is in academic jeopardy as this may indicate that accommodations need to be renegotiated.

Communication & Contact

CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS

- Speak privately with the student through email, by phone, using Google Meet, or in-person (if Alberta Health guidelines are adhered to).
- Be straightforward and factual in your approach.
- Outline what you have observed and describe the services available.
- Allow time for the student to think about what you have said.
- Recognize that the student may not know that support for functional limitations within the Canadian context is legally mandated.
- If you think a student may not understand what you are saying, summarize your points in written form.
- Allow time and space for the student to ask questions and to clarify what it is they need to know.

REGISTERING WITH ACCESS AND INCLUSION SERVICES

- Student completes the Public Request Form on the Access and Inclusion Services webpage and uploads their documentation of disability:
<http://www.mtroyal.ca/accessibility>
- Student meets with an Access Advisor (virtually or in person) for an intake conversation, and they work together moving forward.

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS:

Faculty play an important role in recognizing a student in distress and supporting student wellness. If any student in your class is displaying concerning behaviour, please encourage the student to seek appropriate supports on campus (e.g., Student Counselling, Health Services). You may also wish to refer the student to the MRU Early Support program through the Office of Student Success. If the student is registered with Access and Inclusion Services, you may wish to inform the student's Access Advisor of your observations so that the Access Advisor can follow-up with the student.

EMERGENCY

Follow the MRU protocol:
Security: 403-440-5900

NON-EMERGENCY

Office of Student Success: 403-440-6544
Student Counselling: 403-440-6362

Language plays a powerful and important role in shaping ideas and perceptions. Sensitivity in how we present information relating to people experiencing disabilities can go a long way in overcoming the most difficult barrier to full integration and accepting attitudes. For suggestions on how to speak with people experiencing disabilities, chat with an Access Advisor.

Information to Support Faculty with Accessible Design

Universal Design is an approach to the design of all products, processes, procedures, systems, structures, and environments. The goal is to make these as usable as possible by as many individuals as possible.

Consider implementing basic universal design for learning principles to make your course accessible for a wide variety of learners in diverse life circumstances. When teaching a student experiencing a disability-related barrier, remember that many of the principles for inclusive design could be considered beneficial to any student. The idea of “universal design” is a method of designing course materials, content and instruction to benefit all learners.

Create learning environments in which students feel free to ask questions and discuss/apply the material to help them integrate their learning.

Consider these 10 tips:

1. Ensure your syllabus clearly articulates the essential course requirements and includes an accessibility statement.
2. Provide handouts (e.g. PowerPoint slides) and any other course information ahead of time and in electronic formats to assist students in preparing for and following the lecture.
3. Include the equivalent text alternative (alt text) for all graphics and images.
4. Use captioned or subtitled video and transcribed audio, where possible.
5. Use colour effectively by providing crisp, high-contrast handouts.
6. Avoid using animated, flickering or flashing content.
7. Use a font that is a sufficient size (i.e., 12 point or larger) and a readable style (e.g. sans

serif typefaces such as Arial or Calibri).

8. Repeat student questions and comments out loud to help students follow the discussion.
9. Request electronic versions of textbooks when ordering.
10. If you have a course webpage make sure that it meets the WCAG 2.0 website guidelines: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/>

MRU's Academic Development Centre (ADC) will provide assistance with implementing Universal Design principles within your courses. Various resources and workshops are available.

Contact Access and Inclusion Services

Location: Y201

Admin Team: 403-440-6868

Email: accessibility@mtroyal.ca

Fax: 403-440-7255

Website: www.mtroyal.ca/accessibility

Additional Resources

The following universal design resources have been grouped into sections on Books and Websites, under each reference is an indicator as to whether the information addresses such topics as Universal Instructional Design (UID), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and/or the level of education the article(s) addresses (e.g., secondary, post-secondary), etc.

More information can be found on the Access and Inclusion Services webpage:

<https://www.mtroyal.ca/AcademicSupport/ResourcesServices/AccessibilityServices/universal-design-for-learning.htm>

Books

Bowe, F. (2000). *Universal Design in Education*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

- UID, K-12, post-secondary, continuing education

Burgstahler, Sheryl E., & Cory, Rebecca C. (Eds.). (2010). *Universal design in higher education*.

- UID, UDL, higher education

Meyer, A., Rose, D.H., & Gordon, D. (2014). *Universal design for learning: Theory and Practice*. Wakefield, MA: CAST Professional Publishing.

- UDL, Guidelines, examples

Thomas, C. A., Bartholomew, C. C., Scott, L. A. (2009). *Universal design for transition: A roadmap for planning and instruction*. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brooks.

- UID for transition, secondary

Websites

ACCESS to Post-secondary Education through Universal Design for Learning

http://accessproject.colostate.edu/udl/documents/udl_quick_tips.pdf

- UDL, post-secondary, Quick Tips graphic

ACCESS How Do You Teach: A UDL Checklist

http://accessproject.colostate.edu/udl/documents/how_do_you_teach_checklist.pdf

- UDL, post-secondary, checklist

Alberta Human Rights Commission. (2010, September). Interpretive Bulletin: Duty to accommodate students with disabilities in post-secondary educational institutions. Retrieved from

http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/bulletins_sheets_booklets/bulletins/duty_to_accommodate_students.asp

- Legal responsibilities and principles, BFER's

CAST (2011). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.0*. Wakefield, MA: Author.

<http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines/downloads>

- Background, guidelines, checklist, technology

CAST [UDL in Higher Ed](#)

- Curriculum design guide, examples, resources

CAST Toolkit <http://udl-toolkit.cast.org/home>

- Open source software for UDL web-based course curricula and content development

Roberts, B. (2014, December 8). Accommodation vs. Accessibility: A Proactive Approach. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwxWmTgDNnw>

- UDL, post-secondary

University of Guelph UID Homepage

<http://opened.uoguelph.ca/en/students/universal-instructional-design.asp>

- UD, UID, post-secondary

University of Guelph Accessible Instruction

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/diversity-human-rights/accessibility/accessible-instruction-resources>

- UID, post-secondary, tip sheets, Educator's Toolkit, UID e-module for educators

University of Guelph Quick Start Implementation Checklist

<http://opened.uoguelph.ca/en/students/resources/uidquickstart-implement.pdf>

- UID, post-secondary, implementation checklist

University of Guelph Faculty Workbook – Face to Face Classes

<http://opened.uoguelph.ca/en/students/resources/uid-workbook-FTF.pdf>

- UID, post-secondary, faculty workbook classroom teaching

University of Guelph Faculty Workbook – Teaching at a Distance

<http://opened.uoguelph.ca/en/students/resources/uid-workbook-DE.pdf>

- UID, post-secondary, workbook for distance education