

Faculty Information 11/02/2019

**STUDENTS WHO ARE WHEELCHAIR USERS**

**OVERVIEW**

A student may use a wheelchair for numerous reasons, and these reasons will vary with each individual student. Some of the conditions that may necessitate the use of a wheelchair include, but are not limited to, paraplegia, quadriplegia, Muscular Dystrophy, Multiple Sclerosis, Lupus, neurological disorders, Traumatic Brain Injury, as well as other conditions, including temporary disabilities. The needs of each individual student who is a wheelchair user are unique, and will depend largely on what parts of the body are impacted. For example, the individual whose legs are the only part of the body impacted may simply need an accessible environment where he/she can navigate campus without encountering physical barriers and where the classroom is set up to accommodate a wheelchair (example: classroom with adjustable tables). The needs of a student whose upper body is impacted as well as lower body will require more extensive accommodations. It is important to survey your environment to ensure that there are no physical barriers and that classrooms and labs are physically accessible. If you notice any barriers, please contact the Director of SDRS so that these may be remediated as quickly as possible. Contact SDRS@TAMUC.edu or call 9903-886-5150. While SDRS may not be the office to remove the barriers, SDRS can ensure that the appropriate departments and individuals are made aware of the barriers and the urgent need to remove/remediate the barriers immediately.

For some students, their disability impacts more than just their legs and they may require additional accommodations. Depending on the nature of the disability, it may impact fine motor skills, the ability to use one’s hands, cognitive skills, respiratory functioning. Faculty should talk privately and confidentially with the individual student to ascertain his/her needs, based upon the unique nature of the student’s disability. Faculty should adhere closely to the Accommodations Letter from SDRS. If there are questions, contact SDRS, not the student.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FACULTY**

* Include a statement in your syllabus inviting students with disabilities to meet with you privately so that you may confidentially discuss the students’ needs and reasonable accommodations. Also, at the beginning of each semester, verbally invite students with disabilities to meet with you privately to discuss their individual and unique needs. Talk about the requirements of the class, special needs of each student (on a case-by-case basis, as each student’s needs are unique), and strategize as to how to implement the reasonable accommodations defined by the Student Disability Resources and Services. If you and the student note any needs that are not met by existing accommodations, contact SDRS immediately and refer the student to schedule an appointment so that the needs can be identified and appropriate reasonable accommodations can be noted.
* Never make an assumption about a student or that student’s abilities. Each student is unique, and his/her disability impacts him/her in varying ways. Always be respectful of each student. If you have concerns, contact the Director of the Student Disability Resources and Services (SDRS).
* Some students may require preferential seating as a reasonable accommodation. Discuss the accommodation with the student and together determine the best seat for that individual. If a special table or chair is needed in the classroom, contact the SDRS so that arrangements can made for the necessary accommodation.
* It is possible that if the classroom and/or lab environment are accessible, the student may not require any additional accommodations and may function as independently and successfully as any other student. Some students choose to remain seated in the wheelchair while others may choose to transfer from the wheelchair to a classroom chair.
* Depending on the severity of the impact of the disability and/or medical conditions, a student may have a personal attendant in class. The personal attendant is employed by the student to provide support for personal needs and help the student access materials (such as a backpack that may hang beyond the reach of the student). The attendant should not participate in the class in any way. Unless the attendant is necessary for critical health concerns, once the student is in class with all materials, the attendant should wait outside of the classroom. If you have questions regarding a personal attendant, please do not ask the student. Contact the Director of SDRS at SDRS@TAMUC.edu or call 903-886-5150.
* Some classes, such as those that include labs, may require a student assistant (different from a personal attendant). The student assistant is hired by SDRS to support accessibility to lab activities for students with certain disabilities which may require assistance as an accommodations. Please note that student assistants do not perform the work required by the student. The assistant is present to follow directions given by the student to ensure that the student is able, through the accommodation of a student assistant, to have access to perform the same lab tasks and demonstrate the same mastery of course content as the rest of the class.
* If a class, lab, or assignment is scheduled in a room or building that is not accessible, the class, lab, assignment will need to be moved to an accessible location. For questions and/or assistance, contact SDRS.
* Always respect the chair. It is an extension of the individual’s body space. Do not lean against it or touch it without permission of the student. When having a prolonged conversation with the student, it is appropriate to either sit or kneel, so that you are at eye level with the student and the student is not straining his/her neck looking up at you.
* Speak directly to the student, not a third party, in a normal voice.
* Some students who use wheelchairs have other disabilities that may impact their functioning and need for additional accommodations. The student may use an assistive writing device or write using an adaptive computer. The student may require a note taker and/or scribe. If the student requires a note taker, SDRS requests that the professor either announce to the class that SDRS is hiring note takers (without revealing who the notes are for, in order to protect the student’s right to confidentiality) or that the professor approach several good students in class and let them know that SDRS is hiring note takers. At all times, protect the confidentiality of the student.
* Students who use a wheelchair due to a brain injury may need to have directions repeated. These students may use alternatively formatted text, rather than standard print. The SDRS can assist you in converting handouts, syllabus, PowerPoints into an accessible format. Additionally, depending on the nature and impact of the brain injury, some students may exhibit behaviors that could be disruptive to the class or require intervention. Should this occur, contact SDRS. If an intervention through SDRS does not remediate the disruptive or inappropriate behavior, it may become a conduct issue and need to go through the standard university conduct process.
* Other students who use a wheelchair do so due to chronic health issues and/or illnesses. In addition to some of the accommodations previously described, these students may experience a higher absentee rate due to illness and/or hospitalization. Please work with the student on an individual basis to allow make-up work as appropriate. It may be that in some cases, an Incomplete is the appropriate alternative. As the professor, only you can determine when a student has missed too many classes to make up work.
* Respect and implement the reasonable accommodations noted by the SDRS. If you have any questions, contact the Director of the SDRS at sandi.patton@TAMUC.edu .
* Be sure that, at all times, you maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the student. If you need to discuss issues or testing arrangements with the student, do so privately.

**Texas A&M University Commerce Student Disability Resources and Services**

Gee Library, Suite 162

903-886-5150

E-mail: StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

**Texas A&M University-Commerce at Frisco – 9700 Wade Blvd, University Hall 105, Frisco TX**

Frisco@tamuc.edu

(972) 377-1665

**Universities Center at Dallas – 801 Main Street, Suite C340, Dallas TX**

Dallas@tamuc.edu

(214) 954-3600

**Collin Higher Education Center – 3452 Spur 399, Mckinney, TX 75069**

CHEC@tamuc.edu

972-599-3122

**Mesquite Metroplex Center – 2600 Motley Drive, Suite 100, Mesquite, TX 75150**

Russell.blanchett@tamuc.edu

972-882-7520

**Navarro Partnership – 3200W 7th Avenue, Corsicana, TX 75110**

Virginia.monk@tamuc.edu

903-875-7619

***REMEMBER****:*

***ALL*** *students must meet the same academic standards for credit in your class. Standards should NOT be lowered. Students with disabilities may use reasonable accommodations, but they are held to the same academic and Code of Conduct standards as any other student.*