



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES (ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS)

STUDENT DISABILITY POLICY

**Approved by Academic Board, St. Augustine
at its meeting held on 2007 September 27**

CONTEXT

The Trinidad and Tobago Government's National Policy on Persons with Disabilities of December 2005 contains the following statement:

“Persons with disabilities are agents of their own destiny and equal citizens of this nation. They have the same rights and responsibilities and should enjoy equal access to the services available to each and every citizen”.

In order to take forward this declaration within its own jurisdiction, The University has established a Disabilities Liaison Unit (the Academic Advising/Disabilities Liaison Unit or AADLU). The Unit will actively further the interests of disabled applicants and students and will help the University to adapt its various provisions so that students with disabilities can successfully pursue and complete their academic studies at St. Augustine. The following policy statement gives expression to that intention.

²⁰⁴ POLICY COMMITMENTS

Purpose

The overall purpose of the policy is to affirm that the university is committed to providing access to disabled students and to enabling them to take part in all aspects of the University's academic and social programmes and to outlaw discrimination which may occur in the following ways:

- ❖ Treating a disabled person less favourably for a reason relating to the person's disability, than it treats or could treat a person to whom that reason did not apply.
- ❖ Failing to make a reasonable adjustment/accommodation which meant that a disabled person had been placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with a person who was not disabled.

Scope

This policy applies to all applicants to the University, all existing student members, and covers in as far as possible all locations of the Campus and where the Campus offers programmes.

Goals

- ❖ To co-ordinate and promote reasonable academic adjustments and appropriate disability services;
- ❖ To advocate responsibility for an accessible and hospitable learning environment through the removal of informational, physical and attitudinal barriers;
- ❖ To promote self determination and encourage increased personal responsibility for students with a disability.

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DISABILITY POLICY

The University of the West Indies (St Augustine Campus) is committed to promoting access to people with disabilities, while maintaining academic standards. A further commitment is to work towards supporting and enabling students with physical disabilities, sensory impairment, specific learning disabilities, special psychological needs and medical conditions which may have an impact on day-to-day activities, to take part in all aspects of the University's academic and social programmes.

To this end the University will, within available resources:-

- ❖ Encourage individuals with disabilities to apply to the University;
- ❖ Offer additional provision to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged in comparison with others at the application stage;
- ❖ Encourage provision of information in suitably accessible forms;
- ❖ Work towards the earliest possible identification of strategy aids and assessment of needs;
- ❖ Work towards a curriculum accessible to all students;
- ❖ Provide adapted examination arrangements for eligible students;
- ❖ Provide educational support services for eligible students;
- ❖ Remain committed to encouraging departments to be active in supporting students with disabilities by providing reasonable adjustments and alternative arrangements;
- ❖ Work with staff and faculty to make improvements to the physical and learning environment so that students with disabilities will be able to play a full part in the University;
- ❖ Continue to increase the provision for disabled students in the University's residential accommodation;
- ❖ Take steps to encourage students with progressive conditions, or who become disabled during their time at the University, to continue in their course of study;
- ❖ Provide the appropriate level of disability awareness to foster an inclusive community and endeavour to ensure appropriate training for those working directly with disabled students;
- ❖ Ensure that health and safety procedures are inclusive;
- ❖ Take active steps to consider feedback and the development of good practice in the support provisions for people with disabilities;
- ❖ Annually review this policy and plan ways to improve it.

WHAT IS A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?

Reasonable accommodations are adaptations to the learning environment that permit students with disabilities to be on an equal level at the University. The accommodations can sometimes modify non-essential elements of university programmes. AADLU will work with students to determine the appropriate accommodation.

Based on a person's needs, accommodations may include:

- ❖ Readers, note-takers, interpreters, qualified lab assistants;
- ❖ Priority registration;
- ❖ Introduction to faculty regarding classroom and academic accommodations, including testing alternatives and taping lectures;
- ❖ Individual and group counselling support;
- ❖ Referral and liaison to Governmental rehabilitation agencies;
- ❖ Special test arrangements (e.g. extended time for exams, separate testing rooms);
- ❖ Alternative print format (Braille);
- ❖ Course relocation to physically accessible classrooms;
- ❖ Other services and advocacy as needs are identified.

This list may be revisited from time to time.

Responsibilities: (Students with Disabilities)

Prior to receiving accommodation students requesting such must:

- (1) Contact AADLU within the first three weeks of the semester to receive forms A, B, and C;
- (2) Return all forms properly completed by a recognised professional within the **first three weeks** of school to the Head of AADLU who will arrange for the student to be interviewed. (Requests after the deadline may not be accommodated except in special circumstances to be determined by AADLU);
- (3) Ensure that all appropriate and correct (no older than two years) documentation from their qualified professional that identifies the disability and makes recommendations for accommodations, is

recorded with AADLU (See ²⁰⁷2). **(Requests for accommodation should not be sent to the Examinations Section);**

- (4) Submit to a re-evaluation of disability status at the beginning of each semester where applicable or at the time of requesting same or additional recommendation;
- (5) Work with staff of AADLU to design a contract that stipulates the types of accommodations to be received and to receive the appropriate information about various reasonable accommodations that best apply in a given situation.

Objectives of AADLU

The primary objectives of the Unit for Disabilities are:

- ❖ to assure equal access to all aspects of the university experience for students with disabilities through reasonable accommodations;
- ❖ to assist in the co-ordination of appropriate services based on the student's individual needs;
- ❖ to interface with Faculties and Administration to promote a clearer understanding of the needs of disabled students.

Responsibilities: (University)

Overall responsibility for the development, implementation and working of this policy lies with the University Administration and the Head of AADLU.

Heads of Departments, Sections and Units have the following responsibilities to:

- ❖ Assist in the implementation of the policy;
- ❖ Ensure that all staff (including administrative staff) are aware of and follow the policy;
- ❖ Attend appropriate training courses and ensure/advise that staff attend;
- ❖ Inform students, on identification of a disability, that requests for accommodation must be made through AADLU;
- ❖ Work with AADLU and the student to review/consider/provide appropriate accommodations.

DISCLOSURE AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All applicants are encouraged to disclose their disabilities so that appropriate support can be made available to them. All information and documentation regarding an applicant or student condition will be used exclusively for the purpose of planning and implementing appropriate support, in order that the disabled person may gain the maximum from their educational opportunity at the University. Information relating to an applicant or student support requirement will be shared only with University staff directly working in the planning or delivery of the person's support.

Information and documentation submitted or redirected to AADLU will be treated as confidential. Strict measures to protect its contents from unnecessary disclosure to other members of staff not directly involved with the support of the students will be observed at all times. This duty may only be overridden by health and safety circumstances related to the person or to others.

Information about the individual's condition or support provisions will not be disclosed to or discussed with any individual outside the University, including parents or guardians, without the written consent of the student. This also applies to members of staff not directly involved in the provision of support of the person.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Students and staff have the opportunity to comment on the quality of the service received through evaluation questionnaires and focus groups.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The University, through AADLU will create an alliance/partnership with other concerned groups (e.g. Government organisations, local support groups) and academics, to establish a Disability Support Network Group and a Disability Access Working Party to attend to the issues that affect staff or students with disabilities.

The Disability Support Network Group will discuss current disability issues and inform the University of urgent issues which need addressing. Members of this group will include the Deputy Principal, Head of AADLU, Director of Student Services, Student Medical Officer (or nominee), Student Counsellors, a member of the Faculty Advisor Working Group (to be established), a member of the Estate Division and the Accommodations Officer.

The Disability Access Working Party will review all plans for new buildings, extensions to buildings and adaptation to buildings to ensure that the facilities comply with current regulations and legislation (if any) relating to physical access and special facilities for people with disabilities. This Working Party will also be responsible for regular reviews of existing buildings and university sites to identify any deficiencies with regard to access.

Both the Disability Support Network Group and the Disability Access Working Party report to the Deputy Principal and to the Estate Manager, wherever applicable.

WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

A “person with a disability” is defined as someone who meets one of the following three criteria in the civil rights definition of disability:

1. Has a physical or mental condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
2. Has a record of such physical or mental condition; and/or
3. Is regarded as having such impairment, whether actually having the impairment or not.

The University of the West Indies (St. Augustine) recognises the following:

- ❖ Arthritis
- ❖ Attention Deficit Disorder
- ❖ Blindness/Low Vision
- ❖ Cerebral palsy
- ❖ Communication disorder, deafness/hearing impairment
- ❖ Dyslexia
- ❖ Emotional/Psychological disorder
- ❖ Epilepsy
- ❖ Multiple Sclerosis
- ❖ Medical Disorders
- ❖ Specific Learning Disabilities
- ❖ Spinal Cord Injuries
- ❖ Temporary Disabilities
- ❖ Traumatic Brain Injuries
- ❖ Other Health Impairments

This list is not exhaustive and may be revised from time to time.

Documentation Required

Correct written documentation that verifies the existence of the disability must be provided by each student registering a disability, to the Head of AADLU no later than the third week of each semester (**Forms A, B, C** to be completed by the student and his/her private physician**). Professional assessments should be returned to the above office within the specified time.

Verification of the disability should include diagnosis, description of the functional limitation that may affect academic performance, a rating of seriousness and a recommendation for accommodation. Documentation must contain the printed and signed name of a physician, psychologist, rehabilitation specialist, educational specialist, or any authority qualified or certified to assess the disability. This person cannot be related to the student.

How is a disability verified?

AADLU is an office reporting to the Deputy Principal, with the responsibility for obtaining written documentation in order to verify the existence of disability. Verification includes a diagnosis, description of the functional limitation that may affect academic performance, rating of severity and recommendation for accommodation. Documentation used to verify a disability should contain the printed and signed name of a Physician, Psychologist, Rehabilitation Counsellor or other authority qualified to assess a disability and who is not related to the student. AADLU may request additional documentation and all documents will be regarded with the strictest confidentiality.

Diagnostic Report

The diagnostic report must contain:

- ❖ Specific diagnosis and date of onset;
- ❖ Severity of disability;
- ❖ Date of diagnosis and date of last contact with student;
- ❖ List of standardised test or other measures used to assess the following:
 - aptitude,
 - achievement
 - information processing;
- ❖ Summary of student's educational, medical and family history that may relate to the disability, and which must demonstrate that difficulties are not the result of sensory impairment, serious emotional disturbance, cultural difference or insufficient instruction;
- ❖ Summary of how diagnosis was reached including description of which learning disability definition was used for the diagnosis and the

- description of how the learning²¹² disability substantially limits a major life activity;
- ❖ List of the functional limitations caused by the disability which may affect programmes in higher education;
 - ❖ Recommendation for necessary and appropriate accommodations to equalize the student's educational opportunity while at the University, e.g. auxiliary aids and services, academic adjustments and other reasonable modifications;
 - ❖ Other information relevant to the student's academic adjustment.

Functional Limitations

A disability must limit function (functional limitation) before a student can receive an accommodation, e.g. programme access. A physical or mental condition in and of itself does not necessarily require accommodation unless there is a logical link between the functional limitation stemming from the disability and the accommodation requested. AADLU will first identify the functional limitation(s) through discussion with the student and review the documentation. The student is then given information about the accommodation(s) that suits him/her and the student chooses the accommodation(s) that addresses his/her functional limitation(s) in the most suitable way(s).

WHAT IS AN ACCOMMODATION?

An academic accommodation is an alteration in the usual way in which students perform academic tasks. Part of a task may be changed through an accommodation if the changes do not remove an essential course or programme requirement:

- e.g. Writing the examination in a course typically would be an essential course requirement. However writing the answers on essay examination forms by hand typically would not be essential. Therefore a student who has a difficulty writing by hand because of a disability may require the use of a word processor to complete the examinations.

In the example above, the use of a word processor would be an academic accommodation.

The purpose of academic accommodation is to provide students who have difficulties with the opportunity to achieve their academic potential in essentially the same tasks that other students are required to complete. Accommodation does not fundamentally alter the content of the examinations, the standards used to assign grades, or the requirement that the students independently demonstrate their knowledge of course material.

Some examples of accommodation include:

Classroom Accommodations

- Use of sign language interpreter
- Permission to obtain print copies of overhead transparencies
- Use of FM system
- Permission to record lectures

Examination Accommodation

- writing an examination in a quiet location to reduce distraction

- Use of assistive devices (e.g. a computer equipped with specialised software)²¹⁴

Other Academic Accommodations

- Alternative form textbooks (e.g. audiotape, electronic, large print, Braille)
- The use of an assistant in a lab

Prepared by the Academic Advising/Disabilities Liaison Unit (AADLU)