Faculty & TA Training

Working with AccessibleNU & Students with Disabilities

Northwestern
Part I: Overview of AccessibleNU
We Are All Here to Assist You

http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/about-us/meet-the-staff/index.html
Staff and Contact Information

**Evanston Campus**
Alison L. May, Assistant Dean of Students & Director
a-may@northwestern.edu

Lauren Pourian, Assistant Director
lauren.pourian@northwestern.edu

Jim Stachowiak, Assistive Technology Director
james.stachowiak@northwestern.edu

Sam Milgrom, Testing Coordinator & Administrative Assistant
accessiblenu@northwestern.edu;
sam.milgrom@northwestern.edu

Phone: 847-467-5530
FAX: 847-467-5531
2122 Sheridan, Suite 130
Evanston, IL 60208

**Chicago Campus**
Aggie McGrane, Associate Director
agnes.mcgrane@northwestern.edu

Séan Harry, Department Assistant (shared with CAPS)
sean.harry@northwestern.edu

Phone: 312-503-4142 (Aggie)
FAX: 312-503-4173
Abbott Hall, Suite 500
710 N. Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, IL 60611

**Both Campuses**
https://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/

accessiblenu@northwestern.edu
AccessibleNU (ANU) Statistics & Primary Duties

• Served 1,154 students (undergrad, grad, professional schools) with long-term disabilities in 2017-18
  – About 64% were undergraduates
  – Limited support for students with temporary injuries
• Evaluate documentation and engage in interactive process with students to determine reasonable accommodations
• Send accommodation emails to and follow-up communications/consultations with faculty
• Support students in improving self-awareness, developing effective strategies, and strengthening self-advocacy skills
• Provide guidance to University community regarding accessible facilities, events, and programs
• Proctored over 2,050 exams in 2017-18
• Universal Design for Learning (NUDL) summer faculty trainings
Students by Primary Disability

**Health & Medical Conditions**: 16%
- ADHD: 28%
- Mobility-Related Impairments: 3%
- Autism Spectrum: 1%
- Psychological Disabilities: 27%
- Deafness & Hard of Hearing: 1%
- Traumatic Brain Injury: 1%
- Learning Disabilities: 20%
- Visual Impairments & Blindness: 2%
- Temporary Medical or Injury: 1%
- Psychological Disabilities: 27%
- Autism Spectrum: 1%
- Psychological Disabilities: 27%
- Deafness & Hard of Hearing: 1%
- Traumatic Brain Injury: 1%
- Learning Disabilities: 20%
- Visual Impairments & Blindness: 2%
- Temporary Medical or Injury: 1%

*Northwestern*
Observations Re: Primary Disability

• The majority of ANU students have invisible conditions
  – Unfortunately, this can lead to skeptical reactions from faculty and others
    • Majority of disabilities in the general population are invisible
  • However, our particularly low number of students with mobility impairments likely speaks to access barriers on campus
Intersecting Identities

In addition to having a disability, ANU students are reflective of the University in terms of other marginalized identities.

• ANU students
  – Qualify for Pell Grants
  – Are first-generation-college students, and
  – Represent underrepresented minority groups at the same rates as non-ANU students.
ANU’s high rate of growth over the last 10 years is consistent with other universities’

• 19% increase in students served last year by ANU
Growth (2)

• National statistics
  – Approximately 11% of undergrads have a disability (National Council on Disability, 2015)
    • C.f., only about 9% of Northwestern undergrads are registered with ANU
  – Approximately 8% of master’s and 7% of doctoral students have disabilities (US DOE, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).
    • C.f., only 3.6% of graduate/professional students are registered with ANU
Why the Increase?

• Disability legislation/special education
  – Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990)
    • ADA Amendments Act (2008) broadened the definition and categories of disability
  – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990)
    • Given the time needed to ratify and implement laws, students entering K-12 in the mid 1990s would be the first to get equal access to their education
      – Significant since Northwestern has the same admission criteria for all students

• Medical advances
• Increased awareness
• Decreased stigma, especially for visible conditions
Part II: Legal Guidance
ADA & Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

- Protect individuals from discrimination on the basis of their disability, perceived disability, or history of having a disability.
- Require universities to provide reasonable accommodations to students with known disabilities in order to afford students an equal opportunity to participate in the institution's programs, activities, and services (including extracurricular activities).
- Restrict disability-related inquiries.
Who is a Person with a Disability?

1. A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, including:
   - Standing
   - Lifting
   - Learning
   - Reading
   - Concentrating
   - Thinking
   - Communicating
   - Working
   - Breathing
   - Seeing
   - Hearing
   - Sleeping
   - Walking
   - Major bodily functions (including digestive, neurological, brain, endocrine, etc.)

2. A person who has a record of such an impairment

3. A person who is regarded as having such an impairment
Examples of Qualifying Physical or Mental Impairments

- Learning Disabilities
- Speech/Language Disorders
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Psychological Conditions
  - Bipolar Disorder
  - Major Depression
  - Anxiety/Panic Disorder
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Allergies & Asthma
- Sleep Apnea & Narcolepsy
- Diabetes
- Crohn’s & Celiac Diseases
- Autism Spectrum
- Cerebral Palsy
- Epilepsy
- Tourette’s Syndrome
- Cancer
- Hard of Hearing and Deafness
- Visual Impairment and Blindness
- Mobility Impairments Requiring the Use of a Wheelchair
- HIV/AIDS
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Partially or Completely Missing Limbs
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Intellectual Disability
What Do ADA & 504 Prohibit?

Overt Discrimination

Examples:

• Penalizing a student for having a disability
• Denying a student access to a program because of her disability (e.g., refusing to work with a student because the faculty member is concerned that the student’s disability will prevent the student from being successful in the course or program)

Harassment (Hostile Environment Discrimination)

Examples:

• Making repeated offensive remarks about a student’s disability or need for accommodation
• Imitating the symptoms of a disability
• Voicing negative assumptions/stereotypes about a disability

Divulging Confidential Information

Information about a student’s disability is confidential. Instructors should use caution to avoid inadvertently identifying a student with a disability to classmates or other faculty.

Retaliation

Retaliation against an individual who complains of discrimination or who seeks an accommodation is unlawful.
What Do ADA & 504 Require?

**Reasonable Modifications:** Universities are required to make reasonable modifications in their practices, policies, and procedures, and to provide auxiliary aids and services for persons with disabilities.

**Examples include:**
- Priority registration
- Extended time for tests (most common)
- Note-taking assistance or recording of lectures
- American Sign Language interpreter
- Permission to type notes and essay exams
- Texts et al. course materials in audio or other alternate format
- Accessible online course materials
- Special housing arrangements
- Reduction or cancellation of meal plan
- Allowing course substitutions for certain pre-requisite courses
- Allowing extended time within which to complete degree requirements
When is a Modification *Not* Reasonable?

A modification or adjustment is *not reasonable* if it would:

1. Fundamentally alter the essential nature of the course, curriculum, or program;
2. If it constitutes services of a personal nature (such as private tutoring);
3. If it would result in an undue administrative or financial burden for the institution, or;
4. If it would result in posing a direct threat to the health or safety of self or others.
How Do Courts Analyze Failure to Accommodate Claims?

If a student claims that her university failed to accommodate her, courts will typically consider:

1. Did the decision makers engage in “reasoned deliberations” as to whether the requested modifications would change the essential academic standards of the program;

2. Did the decision makers discuss the “unique qualities” of the requested accommodation, and;

3. Did the decision makers consider alternative accommodations and why were alternative accommodations not feasible?
Interactive Process

• Discussion between ANU, faculty member, and, sometimes, student to determine reasonable accommodations in non-straightforward circumstances

• More details regarding the justification for and procedures related to engaging in the interactive process are on our website.

• Please don’t hesitate to contact ANU whenever you have questions or concerns.
Service Dogs

You should be aware of the University’s Service, Assistance, & Other Animals policy.

• If a student enters your class with a dog, there are only two questions you can ask (see p. 5 of policy):
  1. Is the dog required because of a disability?
  2. What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

• Non-service animals are generally not permitted in the classroom unless you are notified by ANU.

• Contact ANU if you have questions or concerns.
  – Be advised that under the ADA, students with service dogs are not required to register with ANU although many do.
Part III: Reasonable Accommodation Process
Registering with ANU

• Visit “Register with ANU,” a quick link from any page of our website for an overview of the application/registration process
  – Student completes application and submits documentation of disability that meets our criteria for registering
  – ANU staff meets with student for intake appointment
    • Discuss manifestation of condition
    • Discuss requested accommodations (ANU may request additional documentation)
    • Determine reasonable accommodations based on above items and what we know to be the essential elements of your courses
    • Student signs accommodation agreement
Implementing Accommodations

• ANU facilitates most academic accommodations. As a few examples, we
  – Proctor exams or assist instructors with ≥4 ANU students in making arrangements to proctor themselves
    • ANU will proctor for all students with higher level testing accommodations (e.g., double time, computer use, private room)
  – Hire and pay note-takers
  – Convert text to alternate formats
  – Provide assistive technology
Accommodation Emails

• For each quarter/class in which they are needed, student requests accommodation emails to be sent to instructors
  – Keep track of accommodation emails and other details related to ANU students using the new faculty portal.

• Students are directed to meet with instructors to discuss implementation, but you can follow up too.

• Although encouraged to request emails early, students cannot be required to do so.
  – See Section IV.
Accommodation Emails (2)

- May appear auto-generated, but ANU is an email/call away
- TA/course liaison can be added
- Specify needed accommodations, but not disability (which is confidential)
- Most accommodations should seem straightforward
ANU-Instructor Collaboration

Below are a few examples of common reasons or ways in which ANU and instructors interact:

• Accommodation emails, new **faculty portal** for managing accommodations
  - **Login** with your NetID and password from any ANU webpage
• Procedural questions about implementing accommodations
• Consultation regarding an ANU student’s performance, behaviors
• Questions regarding reasonableness of accommodations
• Speculation that a student has a disability
Possible Issues Encountered During Reasonable Accommodation Process

1. Student may fail to do one or both of the following in a timely fashion:
   - Request accommodation emails
   - Discuss implementation of accommodations with instructor/TA

2. Accommodation may not be applicable and/or the student may need support beyond accommodations
   - Creative alternatives can usually be generated when ANU, student, and instructor collaborate
   - Academic coaching through ANU or other supports such as those advertised by NUHelp may be needed

3. An accommodation isn’t reasonable given the essential elements of the particular course or program (less common)
   - At the least, an alternate but equivalent accommodation can usually be worked out, or accommodations can be implemented for sufficient portions of the class

ANU can facilitate with the above situations. Please also review our interactive process.
ANU Rights & Responsibilities

Students’

http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/students/rights-responsibilities/index.html

Faculty

http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/faculty/rights-responsibilities/index.html

ANU exists to uphold **both** parties’ rights and responsibilities. We hope you’ll review our [faculty pages](http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/faculty/rights-responsibilities/index.html), request a brochure, and/or contact us with questions or concerns.
Part IV: Why Students Wait - Stigma
Notification & Stigma

“I wish she had reached out earlier!”

• Students with disabilities are often reluctant to register and/or request accommodations
  – Accommodations as “special/unfair treatment”
  – Stigma/want to be like everyone else
  – Concerns about confidentiality
  – Some students’ language/communication skills are impacted by their disabilities
  – See next slide for more reasons

• In contrast to the unfortunate stereotype that they are working the system, many wait until they feel they do not have a choice (e.g., after a poor first exam performance) to request accommodations.
Disability Microaggressions at NU

Disbelief/Denial/Ascription of Unintelligence
• You have a disability? Which one? It must be mild!
• You don’t have a disability. You’re too bright.
• Challenging a student to forego his note-taker accommodation
• But you look healthy! But you’re so pretty!

Minimization
• Everyone has problems. We all have some disability.
• A student asks a peer who has AD/HD if he can have some stimulant medication
• I get it: I’m totally OCD about my files!
• Whoops, I must be dyslexic!
• Let me know how I can help, although I obviously can’t be your therapist.
  – From a psych professor to a student explaining that she (the student) has bipolar disorder.
• You’re lucky to always be able to get a parking spot!

Laziness/Effort Misattribution/Myth of Meritocracy
• Don’t let people tell you you can’t do things; you just need to spend more time in the library and learn how to study.
• You just need to try harder/apply more effort
• Those “LD” kids are the spoiled ones whose parents could afford testing.
• A student whose performance is variable on similar seeming tasks is viewed as trying at times but not others

Assumption of Abnormality/Brokenness
• Viewing the student’s condition as a challenge to fix/cure yourself
  – Trying to get student with OCD to give a high-5
• To a student in a wheelchair with a perplexed look: “What’s wrong…aside from the obvious?”
• Using the terminology “suffers from” or “confined/restricted to.”

Alien in One’s Own Land
• I don’t want a bunch of special ed. kids in my class!
• They’re not going to get extra time in the real world.
• There are students with learning disabilities at NU?

Denial of Privacy/Objectification/Others
• Commenting on tremors, frequent hand-sanitizing, et al. potentially disability-related behaviors
  – May force self-identification
• Student reported being asked to explain her condition to multiple PhDs in her program instead of being informed about ANU because they “had the necessary expertise.”
• If I’m writing you a recommendation letter, I’ll need to include the fact that you used accommodations.
• Grabbing a blind student’s cane and leading him around (without permission or knowing where he’s going)
• Commonplace albeit potentially offensive phrases such as “the blind leading the blind” or “don’t have a leg to stand on”

All of the above have been said or done to ANU students or staff.
Concerns about Fairness: Extended Test Time

• Especially from their peers, ANU students hear about how extended time is unfair
• Extended time does not mean permission to finish
• ANU typically hasn’t granted more than double time
• Consider if it’s it feasible to give the whole class extra time
• A few studies demonstrating fairness of extended test time:
**Fairness** does not mean that everyone gets the same thing; **fairness** means that everyone gets what they need.

The pronoun “they” is used in recognition of a wider range of genders.
Applicability & Reasonableness of Accommodations

*In contrast to the thinking, “They won’t get extra time in the real world...”*

- ANU students typically self-select courses/majors for which they are otherwise qualified (i.e., that play to their strengths)
- There is often not a 1:1 correlation between taking a test about a procedure (which typically involves reading) and performing it
  - E.g., surgery, lab work

Also, Consider...

- How many timed tests have you taken since completing your education?
  - And when can’t you peek at your book/notes and a computer?
- There’s often a note-taker at meetings, and it’s not uncommon to receive PowerPoint slides for presentations
- Deadlines are frequently extended for conference submissions/registration, applications for programs/workshops, etc.
- Accommodations are also required in the workplace
  - Increasing incentives to hire employees with disabilities
  - Growing number of consortia that identify candidates through offices such as ANU
    - Lime Connect
    - Work Force Recruitment Program
Potential Alternatives to Common Accommodations

• **Universal Design for Learning** presents a means of restructuring your course/syllabus to front-load flexibility and other supports, often reducing the need for accommodations or other requested exceptions from students.

• See [faculty reflections](#) and [syllabus/assignment/feedback examples](#) developed from ANU’s summer NUDL trainings.

• Some accommodations may still be necessary even if you UDL your course.
Part V: Classroom Climate

What can you do to make students feel more comfortable approaching you (early)?
Syllabus Statement

- Students tell ANU they feel most comfortable coming forward when instructors use the ANU syllabus statement and reference it in class.
- **Disability is a domain of diversity.** As such, consider students with disabilities along with other diverse students when creating your course climate.
  - Sample Diversity & Inclusion statement: “I am firmly committed to diversity and equity whereby barriers are removed to create space for all individuals to fully engage in all areas of campus life. Each student’s voice has something of value to contribute and students are therefore encouraged to communicate and participate during class meetings. We must take care to respect the individual backgrounds, personal identities, intellectual approaches, and demographics expressed by everyone. Individual differences can deepen our understanding of one another and the world around us thus making us global citizens. I strongly adhere to the Northwestern University non-discrimination policy: and reserve our classroom as a safe space for unique and meaningful dialogue. Remember to keep confidential all issues of a personal or professional nature that are discussed in class.”
Emphasis on Resources

In your syllabus/on your Canvas site, list resources that are applicable to your class. This normalizes the experience of difficulties and help-seeking.

• TA and instructor office hours
• A number of academic and health resources are available on NUHelp’s site and in the NUHelp app
• Although not disability-specific, consider listing additional support services:
  – Student Assistance & Support Services (SASS; case-management, emerging concerns/crisis)
  – Student Enrichment Services (support for first-generation college & low-income students)
  – International Office
  – Campus Inclusion & Community (CIC; includes Sustained Dialog program)
    • Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA)
    • Gender & Sexuality Resource Center
Essential Elements

- Include a clear statement in syllabus about **essential elements** of your course
  - What knowledge or mastery must a student demonstrate to pass your course?
  - In which ways/formats must they demonstrate this knowledge/mastery?
  - Reiterate prerequisites
  - You are not required to accommodate essential elements, only peripheral ones
    - If you give an essay test, the student may be eligible for extra time on the test, but you would not be required to give a multiple-choice format or oral exam instead.
  - Clearly articulated essential elements can alert a student early if the student is otherwise qualified for the class or needs to drop it
Is it an Essential Element?

“Students can miss ≤ 3 classes.”

• Is this because the course is heavily participation- or discussion-based, involves frequent group work, or requires frequent presentations?
• How was the number 3 arrived at?
• Consider: are particular class sessions more essential than others?
• Consider: when students miss classes, it’s tougher for them to excel, so they’re already penalized for missing class.
• ANU is here to work with instructors and students to uphold essential elements and work out reasonable course accommodations.
  – The next 3 slides illustrate how ANU, students, and instructors collaborate to implement reasonable accommodations and how essential elements may limit accommodations.
Hi, AccessibleNU,

So far, I have received notices like this [students needing flexibility] on 4 students in my upcoming XX course. (Which is only 50 students in total.) I am sensitive to individual differences in student needs and do my best to be accommodating. For extra time on the exam, that is easy to do and I am happy to help.

But it’s probably important for your office, and the students involved, to know ahead of time this is an intense laboratory course, in which attendance is essential to success. (See the attached syllabus.) Particularly in the lab section, there is a great deal of hands-learning of statistical techniques, experimental design, and scientific writing. If a student misses these sessions, s/he will quickly fall behind and have real challenges doing the required writing assignments. There are four in total, and they build upon each other. There is no way to get prepared for these projects other than attending class and actively engaging.

There are other sections of XX where that is less the case. If attendance is going to be a challenge, students may want to give some thought to selectively enrolling in those sections. I do not say this in an effort to “off-load” students with disabilities; rather I think it’s better to be clear up front so adjustments can be made in advance of difficulties.

(Professor Name)
Successful Collaboration

In the previous email, the instructor did a number of helpful things that put ANU in a better position to support him:

- Contacted ANU the first week of class
  - Provides students the opportunity to drop/add if necessary
- Explained why certain accommodations were reasonable but not others
- Shared a copy of his syllabus
  - Gives ANU and the instructor the opportunity to identify if alternative accommodations may be reasonable
- Contacted ANU prior to turning students down for an accommodation
  - Reduces likelihood of student feeling negative response could be discriminatory
  - Prevents the student being in the awkward position of negotiating their accommodations
Communicating with Students

The next slide illustrates instructor communication to a student after the instructor and ANU followed the previously illustrated collaborative process. You’ll note the following:

• Acknowledgement that the instructor has contacted ANU
• Clear explanation of the accommodations, limits thereto, and the reasoning behind them
• Appreciation of a contribution made by the student
Dear (Student),

Your TA (insert name) and I have been in discussion with each other as well as Alison May from ANU to map out some more definite guidelines for you, particularly in terms of turning in your lab reports.

Because it is often a safety issue, and always a fairness issue, since you work with a partner on the experiments in the lab, you *must* have a completed pre-lab when you arrive for your lab session in order to perform the experiments in this class.

As lab lectures are on Fridays and you don't have your lab session until the following Wednesday, you should plan to begin working on this right after lab lecture so that if something comes up, you still have plenty of time to complete it before Wednesday.

We can be slightly more flexible for the post-labs. As the class policy is that students must turn in their lab reports 24 hours after completion of the experiment, we will give you up to 48 hours. i.e., you should turn in your reports by 6 p.m. on Fridays. The lab door is unlocked until 5 p.m., so I would actually encourage you to get it in by then. You'll have to put it in the drop box if the door is locked.

Please e-mail (insert TA name) each week to let her know when you have turned it in. If there is an extenuating circumstance preventing you from turning it in by 6 p.m. on Fridays, you will need to e-mail her no later than 6 p.m. on Friday to discuss a potential later time to turn it in.

Please let us know if you have any questions. I also want to add that I appreciate your insightful participation during the Friday lab lectures.

(Professor Name)
Emerging Student Behaviors

ANU has received increasing questions around students exhibiting some of the following behaviors:

• Difficulty with boundaries
  – Monopolizing class, office hours
  – Sending frequent, lengthy emails
  – Over-sharing
  – Highly individualized and/or frequent requests for support
  – Invading others’ space
    • Cornering/following faculty/TA or peers

• Poor social or communication skills
  – Limited eye contact
  – Lack of intonation when speaking
  – Speaking too softly or loudly
  – Blunt/abrupt, seemingly rude, or other socially inappropriate behavior
  – Unusual, tangential comments/responses during class and/or in writing

• Tendency to be very literal/concrete in thinking
• Quick to become overwhelmed
Responding to Emerging Behaviors

• Consider establishing a classroom behavior/norm contract from the outset.
  – Start with core expectations you have (and be direct). These may seem obvious to you.
    • Don’t forget items related to inclusion/civility and “airtime” rules.
  – Consider allowing the class to develop additional items for the contract.
    • Increases accountability/buy-in
• Supplement oral with written instructions when revising assignments, dates, etc.
• Redirect responses to bring students to an answer.
• Invite additional/alternative ways a student can participate
  – Potential alternative to group work
  – Online posts for students who have lots to share
• Allow breaks during class.
• Be sure that if you use absolute terms, it is what you mean.
• Always feel free to contact ANU for guidance. Especially if we know the student, we can provide individualized guidance.
Part VI: Conclusions
Summary

• The number of students with disabilities attending college is increasing nationwide.
• Northwestern has a legal responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations to students registered with ANU.
• ANU notifies you of accommodations, many of which will be routine and relatively easy to implement, especially with ANU’s assistance.
• Students with disabilities are often reluctant to ask for support, so create a welcoming class climate where students feel comfortable approaching you with accommodation requests.
• If any accommodations do not seem straightforward or would cause you to alter your course content, delivery, or type of assessment, contact ANU via email or phone (847-467-5530).
Become Involved

- **Faculty Advisory Board**
  - Contact your ANUFAB member with questions

- **Universal Design for Learning**
  - Attend our summer [NUDL faculty training](northwestern.edu/accessiblenu)
    - $500 stipend offered

- **See our faculty pages, especially FAQs**

Ask for one of our window clings to signal ANU students are welcome.
Thank You for Your Partnership

This presentation and our faculty webpages will be updated to reflect your questions and feedback.