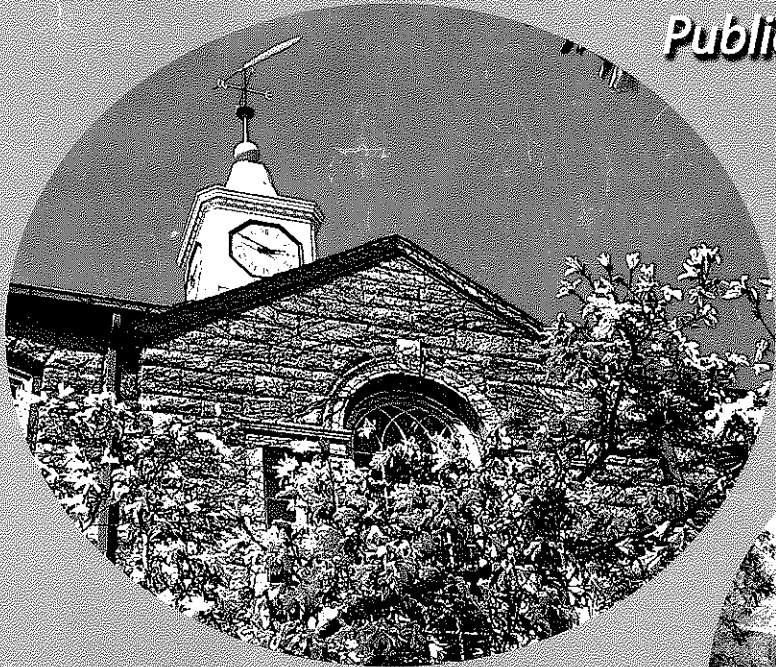


# Emerging Scholars: Students with Disabilities

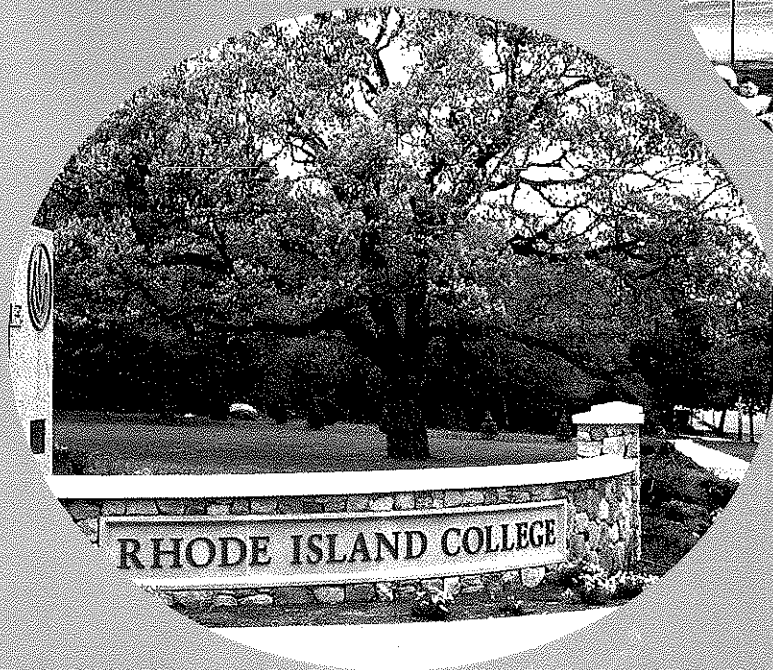
*A Handbook for Faculty and  
Administrators in Rhode Island  
Public Institutions of Higher Education*



*University of  
Rhode Island*



*Community College of  
Rhode Island*



*Rhode Island College*

# **Emerging Scholars: Students with Disabilities**

**A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators**

**in Rhode Island Public Institutions of Higher Education**

Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI),

Rhode Island College (RIC), and

University of Rhode Island (URI)

Produced by:

Disability Services for Students, Office of Student Life - (URI)

in cooperation with

Access to Opportunity, Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI)

Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities (RIC)

Student Life Office, Rhode Island College (RIC)

*Financial support was provided by US Department of Education, Grant # P333A020023-03: Changing the Culture(CTC):Enhancing the Inclusion and Retention of Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Institutions*

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**Emerging Scholars: Students with Disabilities**  
**A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators**  
**in Rhode Island Public Institutions of Higher Education**  
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UNIVERSITY OF  
Rhode Island

Dean of Students  
401-874-2101

Community Standards  
& Discipline  
401-874-2098

Commuter Housing Office  
401-874-2828 and  
401-874-5393

Disability Services for  
Students  
401-874-2098

Independent Student  
Services  
401-874-2097

Substance Abuse  
Prevention Services  
401-874-2101

Women's Center  
401-874-2097

TT via RI Relay  
1-800-745-5555  
Fax: 401-874-5574

To: Faculty and Administrators in Postsecondary Education  
About this handbook, Emerging Scholars: Students With Disabilities

We find that most faculty and administrators are committed to helping all of their students, including those with disabilities, learn in the best way possible, but they often have questions about working with their students who have disabilities.

At the same time, students with disabilities often confront negative attitudes and stereotypes in our society, which may present barriers to retention and graduation in postsecondary environments. There is also evidence that barriers exist in the employment of persons with disabilities. Indeed, government statistics show that students with disabilities graduate and are employed at lower rates than their non-disabled peers, while, in contrast, URI statistics show that the grades of students with disabilities, on average, compare closely to those of the larger student body.

The URI Office of Student Life, with the support of a US Department of Education Grant, "Changing the Culture: Enhancing the Inclusion and Retention of Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Institutions" has produced this Handbook as a resource to Faculty and Administrators at Rhode Island's institutions of Higher Education. The handbook is a collaboration of Rhode Island's three state-supported institutions (Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and University of Rhode Island), and addresses those institutions in particular, but we hope that other institutions will also benefit from the information herein.

Emerging Scholars: Students with Disabilities is divided into four sections

- I. Rights, Responsibilities and ADA/504 Laws
- II. Learning/Teaching Strategies and Frequently Asked Questions
- III. Description of Various Types of Disabilities
- IV. Accommodations at RI State Institutions of Higher Education

We hope you will find this handbook useful, and please visit our website [www.uri.edu/disability\\_services](http://www.uri.edu/disability_services) for more information. For questions specific to your own institution, please contact your institution's Disability Services provider (contact information is available on the last page).

Thank you. Your interest and concern will help college students with disabilities to achieve equality in higher education.

Pamela Rohland,  
Director, Disability Services for Students, University of Rhode Island  
Project Director, Changing the Culture, USDE Grant #P333A020023-03



UNIVERSITY OF  
Rhode Island

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE  
Green Hall, 35 Campus Avenue, Kingston, Rhode Island 02881-1303  
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Robert L. Carothers  
*President*

February 12, 2004

Dear Colleagues:

Since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, there has been a sea change in the ways in which our society addresses the needs of the differently abled. Indeed, rather than further separating people with disabilities from what are traditionally considered mainstream populations, the ADA has served to assist us to understand that disabilities are more broadly present in our society than previously understood. We now realize that accommodation for disabilities must take a myriad of forms from the wheelchair accessible doorway to the note taking assistant in a classroom. As a community of scholars, we have learned to look beyond the disability to the ability. We now recognize that students with physical and learning disabilities enrich our campus with their unique perspectives and range of talents. In fact, among them have been some of our most successful recent graduates.

While the medical and research communities continue to unravel the complexity of many disabilities and make astounding progress in their diagnosis and treatment, those of us outside the medical profession often find it difficult to keep abreast of the range and definition of disabilities let alone our appropriate role in assisting students who are so challenged. Fortunately, we are a community dedicated to the welfare of our students and have managed to serve many disabled students well through sensitivity and commonsense. However, we also realize that there is an information gap between their needs and our understanding. To assist us in improving our ability to meet the needs of students with physical or learning disabilities, the Office of Disability Services has prepared this Guide. I am sure you will find it informative and helpful in assisting students who may enroll in your classes. I encourage you to make a note in your syllabus inviting students with documented disabilities to talk with you, thereby ensuring that they have an opportunity to succeed through appropriate support. Please also be aware of the considerable assistance that the Office of Disability Services can provide you in working with students with documented disabilities.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Carothers  
President



Community College of Rhode Island

January 9, 2004

Changing the Culture:  
Disabilities Services for Students in the Office of Student Life  
University of Rhode Island

Access, Mentoring and Disability Services  
Community College of Rhode Island

Office of Student Life  
Rhode Island College

Dear Changing the Culture Personnel:

As President of the Community College of Rhode Island I support the collaborative efforts of Changing the Culture (CTC): Enhancing the Inclusion and Retention of Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Institutions and the newly developed, inter-institutional faculty handbook.

In today's global society it is recognized that disability is simply another form of diversity and students with disabilities enrich our campus community and strengthen our collective cultural competencies. At CCRI there is strong, ongoing commitment to students with disabilities. This commitment is demonstrated in a number of ways, most visibly, in the resources made available through the coordinated efforts of administration, support staff, and faculty.

I encourage faculty and staff to utilize the resources available through the Disability Services for students and colleagues who serve as Disability Resource Mentors. These services can facilitate the generation of additional knowledge and competencies in which to strengthen the community of learners.

Further, I encourage faculty to continue to explore creative ways to include students with disabilities in their classes and share these successful efforts with colleagues to expand resource opportunities.

This handbook serves as an additional resource for the college community and I invite faculty to use this valuable resource.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas D. Sepe'.

Thomas D. Sepe  
President

President  
(401) 456-8101  
TDD: (401) 456-8061



January 28, 2004

To My Colleagues in the Rhode Island Higher Education Community:

On behalf of Rhode Island College, I am pleased to support the work of the *Changing the Culture* initiative and specifically, to commend those at the University of Rhode Island, the Community College of Rhode Island, and Rhode Island College who have collaborated on the development of this faculty handbook, **Emerging Scholars: Students with Disabilities**.

Rhode Island College embraces the diversity within our society and appreciates the importance of understanding and respecting differences in ability, language, and cultural background. We recognize the need to provide faculty, staff, and administrators with accurate, appropriate, and up-to-date information so that they may promote this philosophy of inclusiveness.

This handbook is intended as an important resource that will provide critical information on individual rights, responsibilities, learning strategies, and accommodations for persons with disabilities.

Developing a supportive culture that celebrates diversity has long been a high priority for Rhode Island College. I consider the *Changing the Culture* initiative, through its seminars and publications, to be an important component of Rhode Island College's comprehensive effort to recognize and honor diversity. We are pleased to be a partner in this effort.

Sincerely,

John Nazarian  
President



**150 Years...  
and Still Growing**

Rhode Island College Sesquicentennial 1854-2004  
600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue Providence, RI 02908-1991



**Section I.**  
**Rights, Responsibilities, and ADA/504 Laws**

The primary focus of disability discrimination laws for higher education is balance: the rights of individuals with disabilities balanced with the institution's desire to preserve the integrity of its programs. (Heyward, 1992)

Whether you are a student with a disability, or faculty interacting with a student with a disability, you have rights AND responsibilities. Consider the following:

**Student Rights and Responsibilities**

<b>Rights</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
Nondiscrimination. Equal access.	Request "reasonable" modification.
Individualized assessments.	Meet eligibility standard for qualified status.
Right to non-disclosure of specific disability to faculty. (Confidentiality)	Provide necessary information to Disability Services to obtain accommodation letter.
Effective academic adjustments/aids.	Present accommodation letter to faculty for signatures. Make best effort to demonstrate mastery of course material. Know that accommodations are never retroactive. (They do not apply to time before approval.)

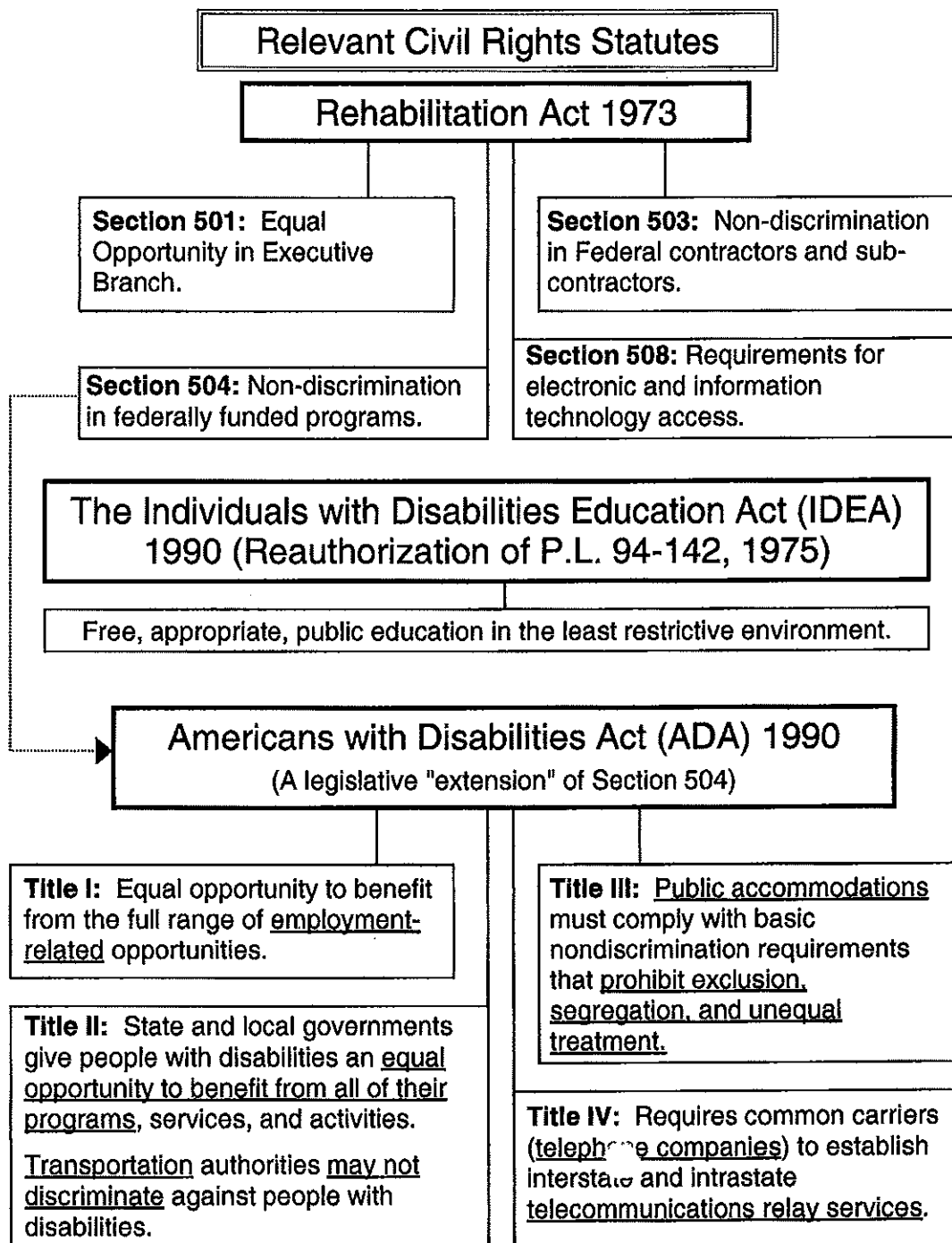
(Ward & Johns, 1995)

## Faculty Rights and Responsibilities

Rights	Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to determine content of each course, and how it is taught.</li> <li>• Decide how to best instruct students and assess student learning.</li> <li>• Consult with knowledgeable professionals on methods to accommodate learning needs of students with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasonably accommodate students who provide documentation of a disability through Disability Services.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to be informed of accommodation needs in each semester, to be able to support students with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain student confidentiality by not asking for specific information on student disability.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain academic standards of courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand policies and law regarding students with disabilities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Question and negotiate specific accommodations to ensure that they will not change essential requirements of course.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign Accommodation Letter from Disability Services in a timely manner.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to award grades appropriate to the level of student's mastery of course material.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that some behaviors are not related to disability, and that there is no obligation to treat these students differently than any other.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be treated respectfully by all students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforce student handbook policies equally for all students.</li> </ul>

(Ross Center for Disability Services, 2003)

(For more information or support, contact the Disability Services administrator of your institution)



(U.S. Department of Justice, 2002)

## **Relevant Civil Rights Statutes Text.**

### **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

“No otherwise qualified person with a disability in the United States... shall solely by reason of ... disability, be denied the benefits of, be excluded from participation in, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” (American Council on Education. (n.d.).)

### **The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

“The ADA upholds and extends the standards for compliance set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to employment practices, communications, and all policies, procedures, and practices that impact on the treatment of students with disabilities...renewed attention is being focused on disability access to institutions of higher education. This focus includes the whole scope of the institution’s activities including facilities, programs, and employment.”

### **A Person with a Disability is Someone Who...**

1. Has a physical or mental impairment that is current and substantially limits one or more major life activities;
2. Has a record of such impairment; or
3. Is regarded as having such an impairment.

(Only persons with current & documented disabling conditions are eligible for accommodations. Persons as in 2 & 3 are protected from discrimination but not necessarily eligible for accommodations.)



(Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, public law 101-336, 42 U.S.C., 12101-12132)

**Section II.**  
**Learning Teaching Strategies and FAQ's**

**Teaching Strategies for Inclusion of Students with Disabilities**

- As a way of creating a more welcoming higher education environment for students with disabilities, in particular, faculty are encouraged to communicate support early in every semester. For example one could include the following statement on the syllabus:  
*“Any student with a documented disability is welcome to contact me as early in the semester as possible so that we may arrange reasonable accommodations. As part of this process, please be in touch with Disability Services for Students office at <address and phone here>.”*
  
- Students, disabled and non-disabled, come from many cultural, social, & educational backgrounds. They also bring a variety of learning styles and abilities to your course (i.e. there are visual, auditory, and hands-on learners). Provide a variety of experiences so that all students can begin to internalize the concepts you teach. You might provide an opportunity for small group discussion for students who learn by talking. Later, review the group of concepts and ask students to draw a diagram of the processes you described. You might also ask students to write a brief summary of the lecture contents as if they would explain it to another individual. Varying the style of lecture and the activities during class will include the broadest segment of learners; and students with disabilities are less likely to need accommodations for equal access.
  
- Provide lecture outlines, study guides and other handouts to assist students with the major course concepts. These aids provide structure to help focus the learning that naturally occurs through note taking and reviewing.

- Some faculty provide lecture notes or lecture outlines in an on-line format. Opposing the belief that online notes reduce attendance, many students find that they can be better prepared to engage in learning for each class. Students with disabilities, who would normally require a note taker, have independent, equal access to course information.
- Use a multi-sensory approach when providing information to students. Increased learning can occur when material is presented simultaneously in a variety of ways, such as visual images with auditory descriptions.
- Gain students' attention when highlighting significant points by using eye contact, voice inflection, and body gesturing.
- Provide concrete examples and practical applications of material whenever possible.
- Review important points several times during the lecture.
- Give assignments both orally and in written format to avoid confusion.
- Develop a positive student-teacher relationship.
- Focus on student's ABILITY, not the disability.
- Avoid negative stereotypes and keep performance expectations high. Consider the following:

Claude M. Steele, in *A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance* (1997), described how ability stereotypes and lowered expectations of women and African American students had a serious impact on learning and achievement for those groups. Other under-represented students, including those with disabilities can be similarly impacted by ability stigmatization. Dr. Steele recommends "wise strategies" to help all students. Many of these strategies are simply good

teaching and are also found in Inventories of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Such strategies are essential for students with disabilities:

1. Maintain optimistic teacher-student relationship.
2. Offer challenge over remediation.
3. Stress the expandability of intelligence (i.e. that intelligence can expand in response to training).
4. Affirm the social belongingness of the student in the learning environment.
5. Value multiple perspectives.
6. Use non-judgmental responsiveness: i.e. Socratic directing of student work with less emphasis on right or wrong.
7. Build the student's sense of competence and self-efficacy in the learning environment.

The preceding ideas, considered to be part of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), are good teaching practices that are helpful and important for all students. Universal Design concepts are important if we are to effectively include students with disabilities in higher education environments. The sections that follow describe strategies that are specific to students with sensory disabilities; these strategies would be used in addition to the above principles of Universal Design.



CCRI Photo

## **Strategies for Teaching Students with Visual Disabilities:**

- Oral reading is encouraged over silent reading.
- While using transparencies or Power Point materials, verbally describe what is being presented. If using a chalkboard, consider using colored chalk for increased contrast.
- Provide paper copies/large print copies of the power point or transparencies DURING lecture. For some visual lecture supports the student and professor may need to be creative in adapting the visuals to give the student the same access to lecture as other students in the course.
- When calling on the student with a visual impairment, always use the student's name.
- Try to avoid lecturing in front of bright windows, as it tends to be distracting for some individuals.
- Seating toward the front of the classroom is recommended for some students with visual disabilities.
- Provide reading lists as soon as possible so that those students receiving books on tape will have time to order the books through the Office of Disability Services.
- In office situations, it may be appropriate to describe the position of the chairs and/or doorways to help orient the student.



## **Strategies for Teaching Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing:**

- Try to limit external and internal noise by closing doors and/or windows.
- Whenever possible, face the class so as to allow the student to see your face and gestures during the lecture. Avoid placing obstructions in front of your mouth (e.g. hands, notes).
- Try to avoid lecturing in front of bright windows, as they tend to be distracting to visual communication.
- Use visual aids during lecture.
- Repeat the questions that other students ask before answering the question. This is particularly helpful when the student uses an assistive listening device.
- During group conversations or seminar classes, all participants should raise their hands and be called on to speak. This way, the student with the hearing loss can identify the speaker in order to focus their speech reading on the speaker.
- When using an interpreter, speak at a normal rate and speak directly to the class or the student in a normal voice. Speak clearly, but do not over-enunciate. Please do not address the interpreter directly during the class; the interpreter is the medium for your communication to the student.

## Frequently Asked Questions

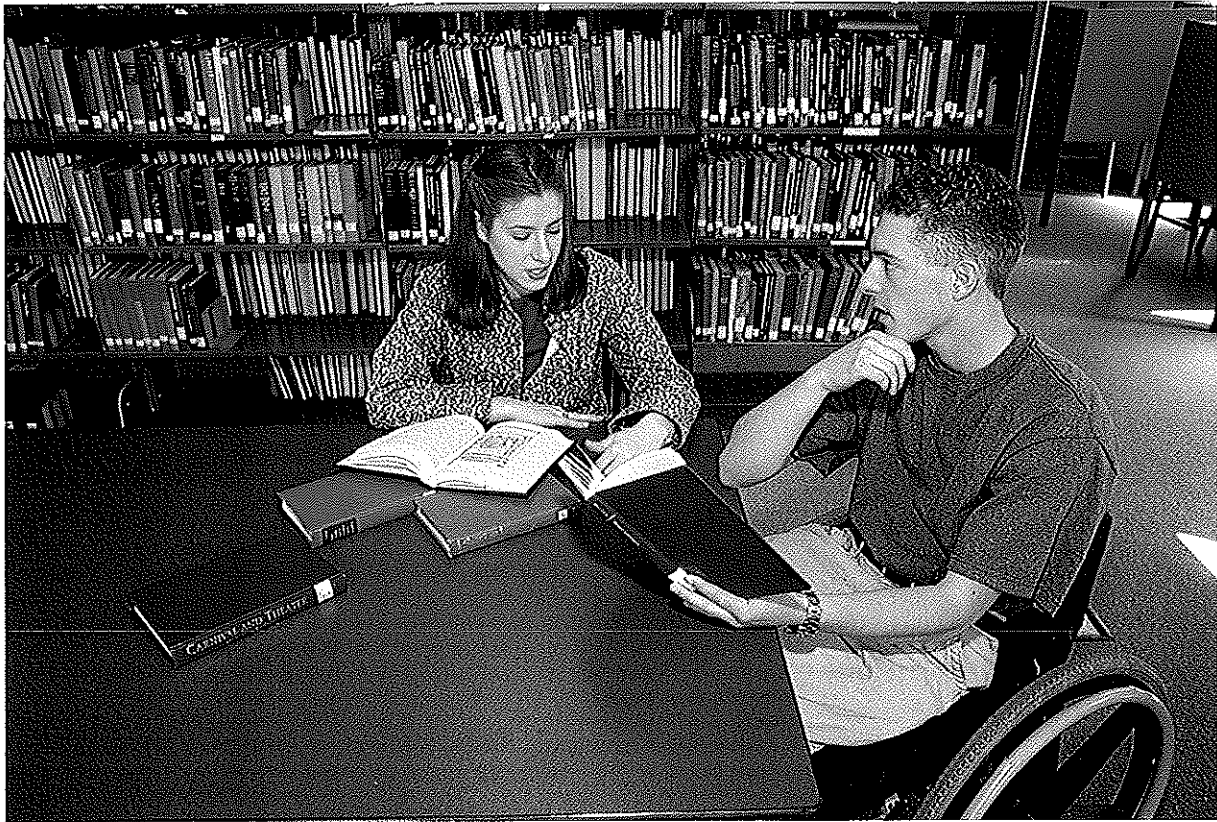
- Will providing a student with accommodations give him or her an advantage over other students?
  - No. Providing accommodations simply levels the playing field so that the student with the disability has an opportunity that is equal to the other students' to learn and demonstrate mastery of course material.
- Do I have the right to deny a student an accommodation if I feel that it is not necessary in my course?
  - While accommodations should never change course standards or the essential function of the course, denying an accommodation might be interpreted as excluding the student. It would be more appropriate to discuss (with the student and Disability Services) how the requested accommodation could be adjusted to the format/goals of your course. When a letter from the Disability Services office is presented to a professor, please know that the accommodations being requested are based on a thorough review of the student's documentation of disability. They are necessary for the student's equal participation in the course.
- Will providing accommodations mean that I will have to restructure my course and lessen the requirements of the course?
  - Again, accommodations should never change course standards or the essential functions of the course. All students, including students with disabilities, must meet the requirements of a course - with or without accommodations. Accommodations are adjustments that help ensure that students are not excluded from the course because of a disability.

- Do I need to provide accommodations to any student that indicates a need for accommodations?
  - No. Only those students who have provided official accommodation request letters (or forms) from the Disability Services Office should receive accommodations. The official accommodation request *is the professor's assurance* that there is a legitimate need for accommodation and that the student has followed the appropriate channels. When students request accommodations without a letter they should be referred to the Disability Services office.
  
- What about students whose native language is not English? Must I provide accommodations on exams to them as well?
  - ESL (English as a Second Language) is not a disability, but is an issue of skill development with a new language. Therefore, students with ESL are technically not protected by disability discrimination statutes. However, these students often experience some of the difficulties that students with Learning Disabilities experience. Providing extended time on exams to a student who is new to the English language would allow you to evaluate the student's knowledge base from your course, rather than his/her skill with English.
  
- I have a student with a disability who is failing my course. Is there something that I should be doing differently to help this student succeed?
  - All students, including those who have disabilities, can fail courses. However, as you would with any student in trouble, it is appropriate to address the issue with the student and/or the Disability Services office. It is

possible that different accommodations or different preparation strategies will help the student succeed.

- Isn't it true that students can simply pay a psychologist to write a recommendation to get them waived out of foreign language or math courses?
  - No. All recommendations for course substitutions are based on complete Psychological Education assessments. These assessments must clearly substantiate a disability and/or must demonstrate that a student cannot reasonably participate in 2<sup>nd</sup> language learning, even with accommodations. Staff members at Disability Services carefully evaluate the documentation provided and recommend a foreign language substitution to the degree granting college. Those students who receive this substitution can be required to take alternative courses to fulfill the Foreign Culture requirement. In rarer circumstances, substitutions for Math courses may also be recommended.
  
- I received an accommodation letter requesting that a student in my class be given extended time on exams. There are classes taught in the same classroom before and after my class, so how can this student get extended time if they can't begin early or stay after class?
  - In this instance, the professor is asked to find an alternative time and place for the student to take the exam so that the student is assured the necessary extended time in which to take the exam. A possible alternative is to have the student take the exam during office hours in the professor's office or another private space in the department. Another alternative is to call the scheduling office and schedule an available room on

campus in which the student can take the exam during a time when the professor or proctor is available. Professors may also ask for assistance from Department Chairs, Deans, or other offices as described by institutional policy. At CCRI and RIC, Disability Services are able to help professors make these arrangements.



URI photo by Nora Lewis

### Section III. Descriptions of Various Types of Disability

We will describe and define some specific disabilities and related teaching strategies that may be of assistance in understanding some of the most common disabilities encountered in higher education environments. However, when students request accommodations the request letter will not identify the student's particular disability; and it is generally not appropriate to ask about such confidential information. However, all students with disabilities (particularly those in selective institutions) are qualified students of that institution. Generally there are no special admissions procedures for student with disabilities; they have succeeded in meeting the institution's admission criteria just as have their non-disabled peers.

It is also important to note that students with disabilities, in general, do as well or better than their non-disabled peers on academic performance measures (when comparing the cumulative and current grade distribution scores of students with disabilities to the larger student body). Therefore, it is appropriate to expect students with disabilities to meet course and program criteria, albeit with reasonable accommodations, since they are qualified and able to do so. Many accommodations are specific adjustments to the course, exam, or program so that the course evaluations do not unduly reflect the disabilities that follow.



CCRI Photo

## **Cognitive Disabilities**

### **Learning Disabilities (LD):**

Learning disabilities (LD) are a diverse spectrum of disabilities involving difficulties with written language, reading, verbal expression, or mathematics. Students with learning disabilities have at least average intelligence and often do as well academically as their peers. However, they often work harder in the academic environment to compensate for weaknesses in processing or memory (Ouellett, 2000). In a LD of written expression, an individual may have poor handwriting, poor organizational skills in writing, and/or poor grammar, spelling, and punctuation. In a LD involving reading (like dyslexia), oral and silent reading will often contain errors, distortions, and substitutions. In an expressive language LD, an individual might have difficulties with complex sentence structures and word retrieval. In a LD involving mathematics, difficulties with perception, attention, and sequential processing are often present (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV, (1994) pp. 42-58).

### **Strategies for teaching students with Learning Disabilities:**

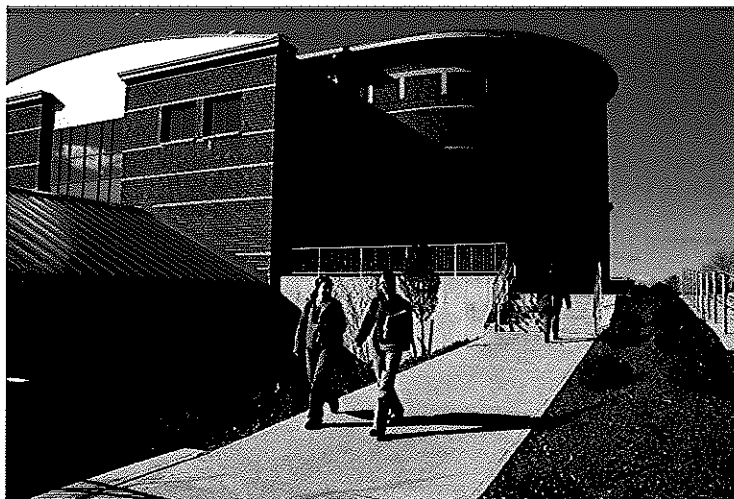
- Provide a written outline of the information to be discussed.
- Preview and summarize each discussion topic.
- Most LD involves the auditory domain, so provide ample visual aids and problem-solving experiences to support class lecture. Multi-sensory discussions are crucial.
- Provide concrete examples and practical applications of material where possible.
- Give assignments both orally and in writing to avoid confusion.
- Focus on student's ABILITY, not the disability.
- Maintain performance expectations that are equal between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

**Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):**

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is characterized by persistent difficulties with attention, task completion, and general organization. ADHD is also sometimes characterized by impulsivity and restlessness. While many people exhibit such difficulties, individuals who are diagnosed with ADHD experience these characteristics to an excessive degree, resulting in interference in the academic, social, and occupational environment (Ouellett, 2000).

**Strategies for teaching students with ADHD:**

- Provide a written outline of the information to be discussed.
- Preview and summarize each discussion topic.
- Use a variety of activities during each class session; (i.e. small group problem solving & hands on activity interspersed with lecture)
- Encourage the student to choose a seat that is in the center of activity or close to the lecturer.
- Give assignments both orally and in writing to avoid confusion.
- Focus on student's ABILITY, not the disability.
- Maintain performance expectations that are equal between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.



URI photo by Nora Lewis



### **Asperger's Syndrome:**

Individuals with Asperger's Disorder commonly have an IQ in the range of average to above average and show no language delays. These same individuals show unique features that can negatively influence their ability to learn presented material and hinder their potential to succeed academically. These features include restrictive interests, a need for routine or sameness, poor concentration, and social deficits. With the use of suggested teaching strategies, individuals with Asperger's Disorder are often able to gain a firm understanding of presented material and successfully perform academically.

### **Strategies for Teaching Students with Asperger's Syndrome:**

- Provide accurate prior information about change and expectations
- Provide written instructions that are concrete and specific
- Establish a buddy system where appropriate
- Provide as much structure and routine as is appropriate to the situation
- Encourage student to break assignment into small sections
- Understand and be patient with some behaviors that may be part of the disability: i.e. avoidance of eye contact, slow response time, upset with crowds or noise or confusion, upset by change, persistence with topics of interest, etc.



URI photo by Nora Lewis

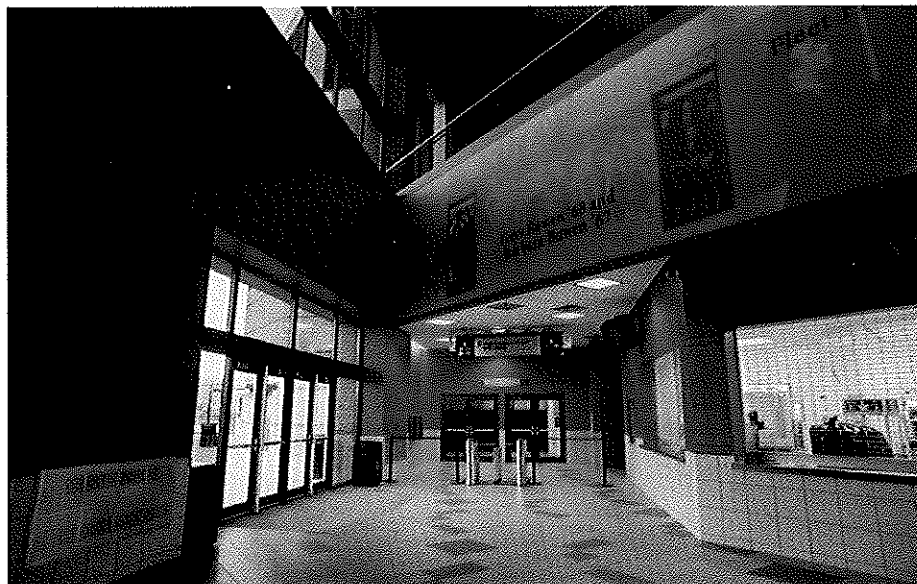
## Mental Health Disabilities

*Mental Health disorders refer mainly to those disorders identified by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 4<sup>th</sup> edition (DSM-IV), published by the American Psychiatric Association (1994).*

Although there are many kinds of psychological disorders, almost all are diagnosed when an individual experiences significant distress from the symptoms or some type of impairment in functioning. Often, side effects of medications for various psychological disorders can cause other difficulties, such as drowsiness, difficulties with attention, restlessness, and/or slower thought processing (Ouellett, 2000).

The DSM-IV states that many “(mental health) disorders are not diagnosed until adulthood.” (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV, 1994. p. 37) Because the first onset of many psychological disorders is between the ages of 19-24, college students commonly face adjustment to a new diagnosis and medications at the same time that they are also adjusting to college.

The following page describes some common mental health disabilities:



URI photo by Nora Lewis

### **Depression:**

Depressive disorders come in different forms, and each type of depression varies in terms of its duration and severity. Major depression is a period of disabling depression where an individual experiences changes in eating habits and sleep patterns. An individual with major depression may not experience pleasure in usual activities and may feel hopeless, or even suicidal.

Dysthymia is a low level, chronic type of depression. While dysthymia does not often involve severe impairment in functioning, it can cycle with periods of major depressive disorder (National Institutes of Health, 2000).

### **Bipolar Disorder:**

This disability is characterized by dramatic shifts in mood. These changes alternate between a high or irritable mood (mania) to a low, hopeless mood (depression), sometimes with periods of normal mood in between. While experiencing mania, a person may have poor judgment, excessive energy, or racing thoughts. While experiencing depression, a person might experience changes in sleep patterns, feelings of guilt, lowered self-esteem, and pessimism (National Institutes of Health, 2001).

### **Anxiety Disorder:**

Anxiety disorders involve chronic feelings of excessive and irrational fear or dread. Some common anxiety disorders include panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, specific phobia disorder, and post traumatic stress disorder (National Institutes of Health, 2002). In each of these disorders, feelings of anxiety cause significant problems in daily functioning.

## **Strategies for Teaching Students with Mental Health Disabilities:**

- Provide a written outline of the information to be discussed.

- Preview and summarize each discussion topic.
- Use a variety of activities during each class session; (i.e. small group problem solving & hands on activity interspersed with lecture)
- Give assignments both orally and in writing to avoid confusion.
- Focus on student's ABILITY, not the disability.
- Demonstrate empathy and develop a positive student-faculty relationship.
- Demonstrate a willingness to be flexible with the student; allow extended time on assignments and attendance flexibility where appropriate.
- However, maintain performance expectations that are equal between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.



URI photo by Nora Lewis

## **Sensory Disabilities**

### **Vision Disabilities:**

Visual impairments are characterized by problems in the structure or function of the eye, resulting in visual perception of 20/70 or less in the better functioning eye, after best possible corrections. Visual impairments may also be characterized by a constricted peripheral field or a progressive loss of vision, resulting in a functional impairment. Vision difficulties may co-occur with other illnesses, such as diabetes or multiple sclerosis. Some examples of visual impairments are cataracts, glaucoma, retinitis pigmentosa, and a detached retina (Ouellett, 2000).

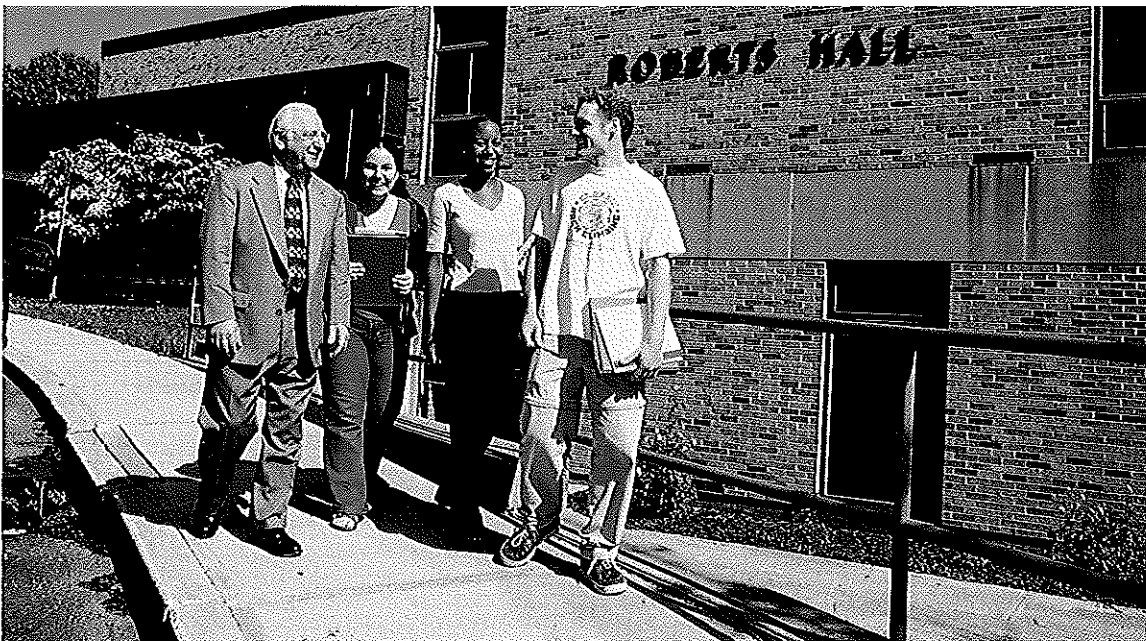
### **Strategies for Teaching Students with Visual Disabilities:**

- Oral reading is encouraged over silent reading.
- While using transparencies or Power Point materials, verbally describe what is being presented. If using a chalkboard, consider using colored chalk for increased contrast.
- Provide paper copies/large print copies of the power point or transparencies DURING lecture. For some visual lecture supports the student and professor may need to be creative in adapting the visuals to give the student the same access to lecture as other students in the course.
- When calling on the student with a visual impairment, always use the student's name.
- Try to avoid lecturing in front of bright windows, as it tends to be distracting for some individuals.
- Seating toward the front of the classroom is recommended for some students with visual disabilities.
- Provide reading lists as soon as possible so that those students receiving books on tape will have time to order the books through the Office of Disability Services.
- In office situations, it may be appropriate to describe the position of the chairs and/or doorways to help orient the student.

### **Hearing Disabilities:**

Hearing disabilities involve impairments in the auditory system that can range from mild to profound. Individuals who are deaf may be unable to understand speech using only their sense of hearing. Persons who are Deaf (with a capital D) may have profound hearing loss, but are culturally and linguistically involved in a community that relies on American Sign Language (or other international signed language). The primary mode of communication for those individuals is this visual/manual system; and it may be the primary mode for receiving a course lecture, for example. (Moore & Levitan, 1993) Individuals who are hard of hearing can rely on speech and oral language as their primary mode of communication, but still experience difficulties in hearing. (Self Help for the Hard of Hearing, 2004).

Regardless of level of hearing loss, and preference for American Sign Language, students who are deaf and/or hard of hearing will need to rely on lip-reading, visual cues, and possibly sound amplification during lectures and communication with faculty.



Rhode Island College Photo

## **Strategies for Teaching Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing:**

- Try to limit external and internal noise by closing doors and/or windows.
- Whenever possible, face the class so as to allow the student to see your face and gestures during the lecture. Avoid placing obstructions in front of your mouth (e.g. hands, notes).
- Try to avoid lecturing in front of bright windows, as they tend to be distracting to visual communication.
- Use visual aids during lecture.
- Repeat the questions that other students ask before answering the question. This is particularly helpful when the student uses an assistive listening device.
- During group conversations or seminar classes, all participants should raise their hands and be called on to speak. This way, the student with the hearing loss can identify the speaker in order to focus their speech reading on the speaker.
- When using an interpreter, speak at a normal rate and speak directly to the class or the student in a normal voice. Speak clearly, but do not over-enunciate. Please do not address the interpreter directly during the class; the interpreter is the medium for your communication to the student.

### **Physical Disabilities:**

Physical disabilities include all conditions that limit a student's mobility or energy level. Such conditions may be associated with the neurological, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, or respiratory systems, and these conditions can be either congenital or resulting from illness or injury (Ouellett, 2000).

**Section IV.**  
**Accommodations at RI Public Institutions of Higher Education**

**Disability Services in  
RI Public Institutions of Higher Education  
Vision and Mission Statements**

*VISION:*

*The Rhode Island State Higher Education community encourages contributions to the learning environment from members of all its cultures, including students with disabilities.*

*MISSION:*

**Disability Services recognizes disability as cultural diversity and fosters an inclusive environment for all students in the higher education community through education, awareness, and accessibility.**

**We accomplish this mission by:**

- **recommending and coordinating reasonable accommodations in a variety of domains (exam, course, program, housing, transportation)**
- **encouraging development through self-advocacy and personal decision making**
- **supporting a commitment to academic success and student retention**
- **providing training and information to faculty and administration that uphold the inclusion of persons with disabilities**



## What are Accommodations?

Accommodations are adjustments or changes that allow the student with a documented disability to have equal access to university courses and programs. All accommodations are recommended on a case-by-case basis and depend on

- discussions with the student,
- a thorough review of current documentation, and
- consistency with institutional policy.

Accommodations never lower course or program standards, but are adjustments that allow the student to participate in the course or program on “an even playing field” with other students. Therefore, as much as possible, the disability does not unfairly bias the program or course evaluation. For example:

Due to dyslexia, or reading disorder, a student’s reading rate is relatively slow and reading comprehension is affected under time-limited conditions. However, given the extended time accommodation, the impact of the disability is greatly lessened and the faculty can be more assured that the exam grade is a truer reflection of student knowledge, not his/her disability.

Typical accommodations available at the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and Community College of Rhode Island are listed on the following pages. This list is not exhaustive, and the student must document a need for any accommodation recommended by the disability services provider.

## Sample of Accommodations Available on a Case-By-Case Basis at Rhode Island Institutions of Higher Education

### Program Accommodations

- foreign language course substitution
- reduced course load with full time status
- priority registration

### Classroom Accommodations

- tape recorded lectures
- notetakers
- books on tape/readers
- sign language interpreters
- physically accessible classrooms

### Exam Accommodations

- extended time on exams
- private, quiet testing space
- alternate exam format (only w/ specific documentation)
- use of visual cues/formulas (only w/ specific documentation)

### Housing Accommodations (URI & RIC only)

- wheelchair accessible rooms
- single rooms
- rooms adapted for deaf/hard of hearing occupants

### Adaptive Equipment and Software

- FM assistive listening devices
- tape recorders and tapes
- 4-track tape recorders
- Closed Circuit TV Text Enlargers
- Jaws for Windows
- Kurzweil Reader (1000 and 3000)
- Naturally Speaking
- MAGic (screen enlarging software)

### Transportation Accommodations (URI only)

- assistance arranging rides through shuttle bus service
- provision of a wheelchair accessible van
- temporary accessible parking stickers

**Sample Accommodation Letter from DSS**  
**(Variations of such forms are used at each institution  
to identify accommodations.)**

CONFIDENTIAL

TO: Professor (*Professor's name here*)

FROM: Pamela Rohland, Director, Disability Services for Students  
Bette Nee, Coordinator, Disability Services for Students

DATE:

RE: Accommodation(s) for: (*Student's name here*)  
Student's SSN:  
Course: Section:

The above-named student is enrolled in your course. The Disability Services for Students Office has thoroughly reviewed this student's documentation of disability. Based on this documentation, we are recommending the following accommodations as necessary adjustments for the student to participate in your class.

*Specific accommodation inserted here*  
*Accommodations are different for each student and are based on documentation*

Please discuss each accommodation with the student so that it is appropriate to both the student's needs and the format of your course. If you have any questions or would like assistance with this process, please call 874-2098.

Students bear primary responsibility for advance notice to the URI Office of Student Life/Disability Services for Students and their professor(s) when the above services must be modified or if other assistance is needed. The student must adhere to all course requirements outlined by the professor, as well as University standards of behavior.

Please feel free to contact the Director of Disability Services for Students at 874-2098 regarding any aspect of this request. Thank you for assisting us in providing equal access and opportunity for all students.

Signature of student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Faculty Member \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please sign and return the original copy of this letter to the Office of Student Life/Disability Services for Students. Thank you. Students and professors may make copies of this letter.**

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**Notes:**

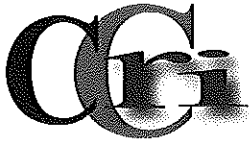
**Notes:**

**Notes:**



**Participating Rhode Island Public Institutions  
of Higher Education**

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**Community College of Rhode Island  
Disability Services for Students**

Knight Campus, Suite 1054  
400 East Avenue  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886  
(401) 825-2164

Flanagan Campus, Access Suite #3216  
1762 Louisquisset Pike, Lincoln RI 02865  
(401) 333-7329

Liston Campus, Down City & Satellite Locations  
One Hilton Street, Providence, RI 02905  
(401) 455-6064

TTY (via RI Relay) 1-800-745-5555

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**Rhode Island College  
Student Life Office**

Craig-Lee Hall 127  
600 Mount Pleasant Avenue  
Providence, Rhode Island 02908  
401-456-8061  
TTY (via RI Relay) 1-800-745-5555

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**University of Rhode Island  
Disability Services for Students**

330 Memorial Union  
Kingston, Rhode Island 02881  
401-874-2098  
TTY (via RI Relay) 1-800-745-5555

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Office of Student Life

Disability Services for Students

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