



# Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities Policy

**Category:** Academic – Students, Teaching, Faculty

**Approval:** Senate

**Responsibility:** Associate Vice-President Students

**Date:** March 12, 2013; revised September 22, 2026

## **Definitions:**

### **Academic Accommodation**

An academic accommodation is an individualized adaptation, adjustment, or support that removes disability-related barriers and enables a student to meet essential academic requirements. Accommodations are determined based on a student's functional limitations, not the diagnosis itself. They may include but are not limited to: human support services (e.g., interpreters, note-takers, readers), assistive or adaptive technology, alternate format materials, flexible or alternative deadlines, and adjusted testing arrangements (e.g., extended time, separate exam location).

Accommodations may be interim, provided pending the receipt or review of documentation, or retroactive, granted after a course requirement, test, or deadline when disability-related circumstances prevented timely disclosure or request. Academic accommodations are implemented collaboratively by the student, Student Accessibility Services (SAS), and faculty, ensuring that essential academic requirements are maintained while removing barriers to access.

### **Confidentiality**

Information shared in the accommodation process is confidential and must not be disclosed other than to individuals who need that information to implement accommodations, ensure safety and operational oversight, manage complaints and their resolution, or to otherwise maintain the integrity of accommodation processes. Confidentiality applies to documentation, discussions, and any communications regarding a student's accommodation needs. SAS, faculty, and staff are responsible for safeguarding this information in accordance with applicable privacy legislation.

### **Disability**

Disability within this policy is defined as per the statutory definition set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC). The definition of disability is evolving and changes in response to applicable human rights case law and Ontario Human Rights Commission Poli

cy Statements. Disability should therefore be interpreted broadly and with flexibility to include emerging disabilities and those for which diagnoses may be unclear or currently undetermined. Disabilities can include conditions that are permanent, temporary, episodic and/or suspected. Disabilities may be visible and/or non evident (invisible).

### **Dispute Resolution**

A formal process that provides a clear and transparent method for resolving disagreements related to accommodation decisions or their implementation. It ensures that students, SAS, and faculty and staff have an established pathway to raise and address concerns in a fair and timely manner.

### **Duty to Inquire**

The University has an institutional duty to inquire regarding students who may have disability-related needs. When Faculty or staff believe that a student may have a disability related need for accommodation or identify potential indicators of disability affecting a student's performance, they should refer the student to SAS rather than investigating or determining the need for formal accommodation themselves. Potential indicators of disability affecting performance may include observable signs of distress, repeated difficulties meeting academic requirements, or requests for unusual flexibility in course participation. Reasonable steps that faculty and staff may take to assist students include providing information about available supports, consulting with SAS, and engaging in a supportive discussion with the student.

### **Essential Academic Requirements**

The fundamental knowledge, skills, or competencies that all students must demonstrate to meet academic standards for a course or program are determined by instructors and academic units responsible for curriculum and implemented and assessed by the faculty member(s) with responsibility for each course. Essential academic requirements must be bona fide, reasonable, and necessary, and must ensure academic integrity.

Essential academic requirements may include independent research, thesis or dissertation work, comprehensive examinations, oral examinations, clinical or fieldwork, and other program specific milestones. Before determining that accommodation is not possible, SAS and the faculty instructor(s) must consider whether alternative approaches could meet the essential academic requirements without causing undue hardship.

Academic accommodations do not alter essential academic requirements; however, they may include alternative methods of demonstrating learning where these methods enable the student to meet the same requirements. Determination of essential academic requirements may involve consultation with appropriate academic leadership (e.g., Chair or designate) to ensure academic integrity is maintained.

Determination of whether a proposed accommodation would compromise essential academic requirements is made by the instructor in consultation with Student Accessibility Services and, where appropriate, academic leadership.

### **Experiential Learning**

Experiential Learning refers to structured learning activities that engage students in direct

experience and guided reflection in order to develop knowledge, skills, and professional competencies. Experiential learning may occur on campus or off campus and may or may not involve an external partner.

Examples include simulations, laboratories, community-based projects, case-based learning, applied research, service learning, and other course-embedded activities that extend learning beyond traditional lecture formats.

### **Functional Limitations**

The specific ways in which a disability affects a student's ability to perform academic tasks. They reflect the functional impacts of the disability, such as difficulties with concentration, memory, communication, physical mobility, sensory processing, or other functions. Functional limitations guide the design and implementation of accommodations, ensuring that interventions address barriers rather than diagnostic labels.

The relationship between a disability and the resulting functional limitations must ultimately be confirmed by a regulated health professional. Interim accommodations may be provided while documentation is pending.

### **Interim Accommodation**

A temporary accommodation provided while documentation is pending or under review. Interim accommodations ensure timely access to academic supports and prevent students from being academically disadvantaged during the evaluation process.

### **Reasonable Accommodation**

An accommodation that effectively addresses a student's functional limitations to ensure equitable access to academic programs or services. Reasonable accommodations may vary depending on course demands or format but are not intended to alter the essential academic requirements of a course or program.

Determining accommodations should involve the student in a collaborative process, but accommodations are designed to meet disability-related needs rather than personal preferences. They do not guarantee a level of achievement and must uphold academic integrity in accordance with applicable human rights obligations.

### **Retroactive Accommodation**

An accommodation granted after a course requirement, test, or deadline when a student demonstrates that disability-related factors prevented earlier disclosure or request. Retroactive accommodations are considered in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis. Requests must demonstrate that a disability-related barrier impeded timely disclosure, include appropriate documentation, and be made by the instructor in consultation with Student Accessibility Services and, where appropriate, academic leadership.

### **Student Accessibility Services (SAS)**

The office responsible for reviewing documentation, determining accommodation requirements, facilitating their implementation, and providing consultation to faculty, staff, and students. SAS ensures that accommodations comply with OHRC, AODA, and

University policy, and that processes are equitable, timely, and consistent.

### **Undue Hardship**

The point at which providing an accommodation would impose excessive or unreasonable difficulty on the University. Only three factors may be considered: cost, availability of outside funding, and health and safety requirements. All claims of undue hardship must be supported by objective evidence, including financial statements, budgets, or empirical data as appropriate. The University evaluates undue hardship on a case-by-case basis in accordance with OHRC guidance.

### **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**

An approach to teaching, learning, and assessment that proactively addresses the diverse needs of all learners by embedding flexibility and accessibility into curriculum, instructional materials, and learning environments. UDL minimizes barriers and reduces reliance on individualized accommodations by ensuring that learning remains accessible to students at all stages of their educational experience.

### **Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)**

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) refers to structured educational experiences that intentionally integrate academic study with supervised application in a workplace, clinical, professional, or community setting. WIL activities are formally connected to a course or program of study and may be paid or unpaid, credit-bearing or degree-recognized.

Examples include co-operative education, internships, placements, practica, clinical placements, field experiences, and applied research conducted in partnership with an external organization. WIL experiences require students to demonstrate essential academic requirements in applied environments that may be governed by both University policies and the policies of the host organization.

### **Policy Statement**

Trent University is committed to an academic environment where students with disabilities can participate without barriers. The university works proactively to identify, remove, and prevent disability-related barriers in undergraduate and graduate courses, academic programs, research activities, experiential learning opportunities, test and examinations, thesis and dissertation work, comprehensive examinations, field placements, and laboratory and studio activities, in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, up to the point of undue hardship.

Students with disabilities have the right to be treated with dignity, to have their personal information and privacy protected, and to receive reasonable academic accommodations based on documented functional impacts without being required to disclose a diagnosis. Academic accommodations are intended to provide equitable access to learning, research and academic progression while maintaining essential academic requirements.

Students are responsible for making their needs known as soon as they become apparent.

Faculty members, graduate supervisors, staff, and university leadership share responsibility for implementing academic accommodations, addressing barriers, and working with Student

## Accessibility Services.

The University assesses accommodation needs on a case-by-case basis and recognizes the role of intersectional identities in shaping disability experiences. Planning is undertaken in consultation with the student and may involve appropriate academic partners depending on the nature of the program or activity. Universal design principles are applied whenever possible to reduce the need for individual accommodations. Trent University is committed to a clear and efficient academic accommodation process that complies with legislation and collective agreements and maintains academic integrity.

## Responsibilities of Trent Stakeholders

Academic Accommodations involves a community of stakeholders to ensure barriers to academics are removed. These processes are the responsibility of each department; the following outlines key responsibilities.

### 1. Student Accessibility Services (SAS)

- 1.1 Receives and reviews each student's request for accommodation and documentation from diagnosing regulated healthcare professional(s);
- 1.2 Determines accommodation requirements in partnership with the student and any internal and external resources that are required.
- 1.3 Documents accommodation requests (and denial of accommodation), meetings, and actions taken;
- 1.4 Verifies student eligibility for Bursary for Students with Disabilities and the Canadian Service Grant for Services and Equipment and prepares rationale for equipment and/or services within parameters provided by provincial and federal funders;
- 1.5 Collaborates with educational teams to communicate and facilitate student accommodation;
- 1.6 Ensures the policy is interpreted and applied to promote the University's interest in supporting a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.
- 1.7 Ensures all accommodation decisions are made in a manner that balances accessibility with essential academic requirements, respects academic freedom, ensures student privacy and dignity, and maintains fairness for all students.

### 2. Student with a Disability

- 2.1 Notifies Student Accessibility Services (SAS) of their need for accommodation as early as possible, or as soon as the need becomes known;
- 2.2 Provides documentation from a diagnosing registered health professional that describes the functional impacts related to their disability within an academic environment;
- 2.3 Participates in the accommodation process in good faith and works collaboratively to develop and implement their accommodation plan with appropriate stakeholders, including SAS, instructors, graduate supervisors, program directors, and Exam Centres, as applicable. Informs SAS immediately of any changes in circumstances that may affect their accommodation needs;

- 2.4** Seeks resolution, when concerns arise about academic accommodations, through the procedures outlined.
- 2.5** Understands that responsibilities related to accommodation implementation may involve broader collaboration with educational teams depending on the nature of the accommodation and structure of the course and/or program.

### **3. Educational Team**

#### **3.1 Instructor of Record/Graduate Supervisor**

The Instructor of Record or Graduate Supervisor is responsible to:

- 3.1.1** Implement approved academic accommodations;
- 3.1.2** Consult and collaborate with the student and Accessibility Advisor when concerns arise regarding the implementation of an accommodation, and participate in resolution efforts where needed;
- 3.1.3** Include an accessibility statement in all course syllabi, directing students who require academic accommodations to contact Student Accessibility Services;
- 3.1.4** Support accessible course content and delivery methods to reduce barriers in the academic environment;
- 3.1.5** Consider retroactive accommodation requests, in consultation with Student Accessibility Services, including those related to missed tests or assignments.
- 3.1.6** Ensure digital copies of assessments are provided to the appropriate campus Exam Centre at least five (5) days prior to the assessment date, and that all relevant information and instructions are included when uploading to the Faculty SAS Portal; and
- 3.1.7** Maintain the confidentiality of students with disabilities.

#### **3.2 Other Members of the Educational Team**

Teaching assistants, lab technicians, placement coordinators, co-op advisors, graders/markers, thesis supervisor, supervisory committee, graduate program director, or other appropriate academic leadership and others supporting course and program delivery are responsible to:

- 3.2.1** Implement approved academic accommodations as directed by the Instructor of Record;
- 3.2.2** Consult with the Instructor of Record and/or SAS when concerns arise regarding the implementation of an accommodation;
- 3.2.3** Work with SAS to determine if experiential learning environments can provide suitable accommodations for the student when they start their placement;
- 3.2.4** Work with SAS to determine if work integrated learning environments can provide suitable workplace accommodations for the student when they start their placement;
- 3.2.5** Support accessible course content and delivery methods where applicable to their role; and
- 3.2.6** Maintain the confidentiality of students with disabilities.

#### **4. Administration**

- 4.1** The Associate Vice-President Students assumes overall accountability for the interpretation and application of this policy;
- 4.2** Senior Executives must ensure appropriate resources and services are available to carry out accommodation under this policy and have overall accountability for the University accommodation policy and program, including ensuring the University is in compliance with all legislative requirements.
- 4.3** Ensure that tests of undue hardship are assessed in accordance with Ontario Human Rights Commission guidance which consider: cost, outside sources of funding, if any, and health and safety requirements.
- 4.4** Administration is responsible for communicating information about accessibility services and accommodation procedures to students and faculty, and for ensuring that these processes are widely understood and applied.

#### **5. Equity and Human Rights Office**

- 5.1** Advises campus units, including faculties, schools, and administrative offices, on the duty to accommodate and related human rights matters;
- 5.2** Responds to inquiries, questions, and complaints regarding accommodation, discrimination, or harassment;
- 5.3** Provides guidance to students, staff, and faculty regarding their rights and responsibilities related to human rights and accommodation; and
- 5.4** Collaborates with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), instructors, and administrators to support inclusive practices and equitable access across the University.

**Contact Officer:** Associate Vice-President, Students

**Date for Next Review:** September 2031

#### **Related Policies, Procedures & Guidelines**

- a. Accessibility Policy
- b. Policy for Persons with Disabilities
- c. Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Procedures
- d. Customer Service Policy for Persons with Disabilities

**Policies Superseded by This Policy:** N/A