

Students with Disabilities

The MSU Approach for Inclusion

MSU, like other institutions of higher education, has significant populations of students, faculty, and staff with disabilities within its community. MSU values full participation by persons with disabilities in all aspects of campus life. Faculty, staff, administrators, and persons with disabilities each play a role in facilitating an environment of inclusion and opportunity.

Federal legislation including the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 require that academically qualified students with disabilities must be reasonably accommodated in instruction and academic assessment. In order to be eligible for services, students must have a clearly documented disability. A disability is legally defined as a physical or mental impairment substantially limiting one or more major life activities (e.g., walking, speaking, seeing, hearing, sitting, breathing, learning, or caring for oneself).

The Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) upholds a mission to lead MSU in maximizing ability and opportunity for full participation by persons with disabilities. The RCPD is available to faculty, staff, and students to foster understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities under disability-related legislation.

Registration with the RCPD is essential for students and employees with disabilities in order to facilitate timely and effective assistance. Staff at the RCPD is ready with information, resources, and guidance for the campus community in order to facilitate an effective campus experience for persons with disabilities. RCPD determined accommodations are intended to provide equal access as required by law; they should not fundamentally alter the course/program or create an undue financial or administrative burden to the faculty or university. As disabilities are individualized and may produce different impacts or needs for accommodation in different settings, the services and accommodations may vary slightly in some situations or change over time. Faculty members are encouraged to work collaboratively with the student and seek support from RCPD.

This document provides answers to a few of the most commonly experienced issues and additional support is available by visiting www.rcpd.msu.edu or calling 884-RCPD.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How does one register with the RCPD?

Persons with disabilities who require or may require accommodations should register with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities. The following steps outline the process used to register:

- Formally identify as a person with a physical, sensory, cognitive, or psychological disability via secure/confidential web registration at myprofile.rcpd.msu.edu or by contacting an RCPD Disability Specialist.
- Upon receipt of a request to register, an RCPD Disability Specialist contacts the individual to schedule a confidential needs assessment. The specialist also requires submission of recent medical or diagnostic documentation of disability prior to registration with the office. As each disability is unique, an RCPD specialist provides details on what constitutes appropriate documentation for a particular disability. At a minimum, documentation of a disability must appear on official letterhead from a licensed medical, diagnostic, or psychological professional and include a diagnosis, scope or degree of involvement, and summary of related functional limitations. As many reasonable accommodations require significant pre-planning, registration with the RCPD prior to situations requiring accommodations is essential.

2. How do you know if someone has a disability, given that over 2/3 of all disabilities are invisible?

Once a student has registered with the RCPD, he/she receives a formalized document titled Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA). The VISA provides information about disabilities in general, the RCPD, and specifics about the individual's needs, including an office contact person and accommodations that have been determined to be reasonable for the student.

3. Who validates disabilities and the individual's needs?

Disability-related determinations are conducted by the RCPD and communicated to faculty via the student. Students are responsible for discussing accommodation needs early in the semester to avoid crisis or last-minute surprises. Students retain responsibility for initiating contact with faculty. RCPD's formalized VISA aids the student in a dialogue with faculty around disability-related needs and expectations. Faculty concerns about student accommodation needs are readily resolved by faculty-initiated contact with the RCPD Disability Specialist listed on the VISA.

4. How can I prevent last minute/surprise accommodation requests?

RCPD encourages students to disclose accommodation needs early and share the RCPD VISA in advance of accommodation needs. Faculty and program planners can further this effort by including statements about disability accommodation in their syllabi or program announcements. Two model statements are presented below.

Model Statement for Course Syllabi:

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Accommodations for persons with disabilities, with documentation from the MSU Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, may be requested by contacting [insert Professor name or "me"] at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

Model Statement Inviting Disability Accommodation Requests for Programs:

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Accommodations for persons with disabilities may be requested by contacting [Name, Affiliation, contact info] by [date]. Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

5. Does RCPD recommend modifications to testing?

Modification to testing (often involving extended testing time) is a frequently used accommodation. The testing accommodation is described on the RCPD VISA. Note that testing should be conducted in the most inclusive environment possible (usually the classroom with other students) but this is sometimes not possible. Please reference the RCPD *Alternative Testing Guidelines* or a Disability Specialist to ensure a streamlined experience.

6. How do I make course textbooks accessible for students with disabilities?

Many disabilities impact one's ability to use printed textbooks. For those students, RCPD operates an accessible textbook production program. Students requiring books in accessible formats (Braille, audio, or large print) must pre-plan in order to receive the alternative format in advance of the required reading. RCPD requests faculty adherence to university and bookstore textbook ordering protocols and timeframes to provide ample time for RCPD conversion to an accessible format. Late book changes are troublesome as they represent wasted production time and delayed textbook availability. Faculty adopting electronic textbooks must ensure these materials include accessibility for students with disabilities including blindness or visual impairment. The RCPD Media Access Specialist is available to help faculty explore and facilitate accessibility of instructional media.