

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

April 2015

Dear Deans, Directors, Chairs, and Faculty,

Just over 3% of the MSU student body registers with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (1,532 in 2014) after documenting a disability that affects major life activities. MSU is recognized internationally for our positive response to helping people reach their highest potential despite the disability challenge and our faculty and staff continue to be an integral part of our success in responding to the student's documented need.

Approximately 70% of the students registered with the RCPD experience some requirement for modification to the typical testing experience. The **vast majority need a testing time extension** to enable them to self-compensate for the disability challenge at hand. Others with more involved need rely on solutions ranging from a reduced distraction setting in the classroom, separate testing space, or specialized equipment. The need for an accommodation is communicated in the form of a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) document. The VISA serves as the basis for a conversation with the student about how the faculty and student will work together to establish as inclusive an environment as possible (see <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/services/visa>). The administration of course-based evaluations/testing is in the purview of the instructors and therefore remains a primary responsibility. However, RCPD can be good partner in helping reach reasonable plans for testing needs of students and indicates an RCPD specialist of record on each VISA should the instructor and student need help working out reasonable classroom accommodations. Instructors are essential in the first-line efforts to find solutions with students that address the needs stated on the VISA.



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Of late, RCPD is finding that many instructors are erroneously interpreting the VISA as evidence that testing cannot occur in their classroom or under their direct control. RCPD seeks increased dialogue and partnership with faculty to change this interpretation and to provide guidance, as appropriate, on alternative options. Most testing accommodations should be managed directly by faculty using guidelines established by their units or through consultation with the RCPD. However, RCPD's ability to facilitate testing outside the classroom, department, or college is finite with eight (8) testing spaces outfitted with specialized equipment for situations where disability needs require specialized modifications (electronic text magnification or voice input computers as examples). Therefore, we need to restrict testing here to those whose needs are distinctively linked to technology found only at the RCPD. In cases where student needs involve readers or scribes, RCPD is ready to dispatch readers and scribes to remote locations where faculty are administering tests. Students are able to request this of the RCPD as needs arise. When testing at the RCPD is necessary, we require student partnership with instructors to facilitate the experience. Students must reserve testing space seven (7) days in advance (allowing time to secure needed arrangements), faculty must complete an Alternative

Testing Site Authorization (ATSA) form available at <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/documents> establishing the parameters of testing outside the control of the instructor, and deliver/retrieve testing materials to the RCPD main office in 120 Bessey Hall.

Just as is the case when requesting ATSA, the requirement for accommodations should be presented by students to faculty at the start of a semester or at least seven (7) days prior to the need for the accommodation. Under most circumstances, this will allow sufficient time to make arrangements. In some cases significant extenuating circumstances may dictate that a student be accommodated on shorter notice. However, this is the exception. Instructors are encouraged to work with a representative of RCPD in making a decision and, if necessary, determining the appropriate accommodation.

Approximately 1.5% to 2.0% of the students in a large class may require some type of testing accommodation. Based on the VISA, the following are a few commonly used testing accommodations and how instructors can enact them:

1. **Percent (%) Extended Time** – work with the student to formulate a plan to allow them to start a test early or finish late. When classrooms are too closely scheduled to allow enough time before or after class, work with departmental or college facilities to locate a suitable testing location available for the time needed. This might include unit conference room space. Particularly in large classes, work with the Office of the Registrar at the beginning of the semester to schedule a classroom. This can be done either through the Office of the Registrar scheduling system (<https://roomscheduling.msu.edu/>) or by contacting Registration and Room Services in the Office of the Registrar (avoid hallways and other public spaces that are distraction producing).
2. **Reduced Distraction Environment**—Facilitates testing in the classroom by allowing students to select a seat near an edge, corner, or other location in the classroom in a manner that reduces distractions during testing. Students may be encouraged to wear earplugs or otherwise situate themselves in a manner that facilitates focus on the testing task.
3. **Separate Room**—Denotes a need to find more extensive separation for a student. This may be due to specific disability challenges or when a reader or scribe will be involved as interactions would be distracting to others in the classroom. For a fuller explanation of alternative testing concepts visit: <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/programs/alternativetesting>. The instructor is encouraged to seek guidance from RCPD in order to clarify specific needs and determine the degree to which specialized assistance from RCPD staff may be needed.

In each case above, faculty are responsible for actively managing their testing needs and units are encouraged to collaborate with RCPD as they seek solutions. In cases where challenges of time or space are significant, involvement of

departmental and college space and staffing may be essential. **It is recommended that administrative units (colleges/departments/programs) develop guidelines that will assist instructional staff in identifying alternative space options in those more limited instances in which it is needed.**

We request a refreshed awareness by deans, associate deans, departmental chairs, and faculty that there is a distinct need to empower faculty and instructors to administer tests in a manner directly under their control in nearly every case. The RCPD is prepared to assist faculty in understanding the specific needs of a student and in considering options that will best address those needs. In cases where the student's accommodation needs are intense enough to merit testing at the RCPD, we are ready to help with reservation of a testing space. As stated on the student's VISA provided by the RCPD, students share in the responsibility for securing accommodations including provision of ample notice to faculty of such need.

If there are any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact Michael Hudson, Director, Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities.

Sincerely,

June Youatt, Provost

Paulette Granberry Russell, Director
Office for Inclusion & Intercultural Initiatives

c: Doug Estry
Michael Hudson