

Complete Policy Title

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Policy Number (if applicable):

Approved by

Senate

Date of Most Recent Approval

June 3, 2020 - effective September 1, 2020

Date of Original Approval(s)

February 14, 2001

Supersedes/Amends Policy dated

May 17, 2017, March 12, 2003, February 14, 2001

Responsible Executive

Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

Policy Specific Enquiries

[Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#)

General Policy Enquiries

[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

**DISCLAIMER:**

*If there is a Discrepancy between this electronic policy and the written copy held by the policy owner, the written copy prevails.*

---

---

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>SECTION I: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
PREAMBLE AND SCOPE .....	1
DEFINITIONS.....	2
GUIDING PRINCIPLES.....	3
<b>SECTION II: ROLES &amp; RESPONSIBILITIES.....</b>	<b>5</b>
STUDENTS.....	5
INSTRUCTORS AND CHAIRS.....	5
TEACHING ASSISTANTS.....	5
STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES.....	6
ASSOCIATE/ASSISTANT DEANS.....	6
ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION TEAMS.....	6
EQUITY AND INCLUSION OFFICE.....	6
CAMPUS STORE.....	7
LIBRARY.....	7
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR.....	7
MACPHERSON INSTITUTE.....	7
ADMINISTRATION.....	8
ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT (STUDENTS & LEARNING) AND DEAN OF STUDENTS.....	8
<b>SECTION III: GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES.....</b>	<b>9</b>
GUIDELINES.....	9
TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS.....	9
DOCUMENTATION.....	9
PROCEDURES.....	10
TIMELINESS OF SUBMISSIONS.....	10
SUBMITTING AN ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION REQUEST.....	11
INTAKE MEETING WITH A PROGRAM COORDINATOR REGARDING PERMANENT DISABILITY.....	11
REVIEW OF REQUEST.....	11
DEVELOPING THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN.....	12
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN.....	13
DURATION AND REVIEW OF ACCOMMODATION PLAN.....	13
STUDENT PARTICIPATION.....	14
RETROACTIVE ACCOMMODATIONS.....	14
DATA GATHERING & RECORD KEEPING.....	14
<b>SECTION IV: APPEALS.....</b>	<b>15</b>
RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN.....	15
STUDENT INITIATED RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN.....	15
APPEAL OF THE STUDENT-INITIATED RE-ASSESSMENT DECISION.....	15
STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES INITIATED RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN.....	15
APPEAL OF THE SAS-INITIATED RE-ASSESSMENT DECISION.....	16
ACCOMMODATION PENDING REVIEW OR APPEAL.....	16
<b>APPENDIX A: RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: OFF-SITE PLACEMENTS.....</b>	<b>20</b>

## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

### PREAMBLE AND SCOPE

1. McMaster University is committed to excellence in teaching and learning. The University strives to ensure every student is afforded an academic environment that is dedicated to the advancement of learning and is based on the principles of equitable access and individual dignity. At McMaster we nurture and support a culture of acceptance, inclusion and the celebration of diversity. Creating a learning environment that is accessible to all students is a value embedded within the University's fabric as well as our policies, services and practices.
2. Academic Accommodation is a shared responsibility. It is a highly collaborative process requiring engagement and full participation of multiple stakeholders, each playing a vital role in shaping a student's Academic Accommodation. The provision of accommodations for students with disabilities requires students, instructors and administrative staff to exercise creativity and flexibility in crafting solutions that meet the needs of the students, as well as to preserve the academic requirements of the University's courses/programs.
3. [Disability](#) is a concept that encompasses varied definitions including medical, socio-cultural and social definitions. Up to the present, the system at large, including at McMaster University, has relied on the definition of disability provided in the Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate (2000), from the Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC]. This approach is built upon a medical model of understanding disability. An alternate view is that of a social disability model that is exemplified within the definition of disability articulated by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is our institutional aspiration to work towards a campus community that adopts the social definition of disability by responding with the creation of universal design for instruction in accessible classrooms and the need for on-going consultation with people with lived experience with disability to guide the design of buildings and instructional resources. However, this Policy acknowledges, upholds, and aligns itself with the medical definition of disability to be in accordance with the OHRC's definition of disability and accompanying policies and statements.
4. The University recognizes that barriers to participation exist and adjustments to policies and practices of the University are required. This is accomplished through the prevention, identification and removal of [barriers](#) (such as a physical, architectural, technological, information or communication barrier, an attitudinal barrier or learning barrier, or a policy or practice) within the University systems, structures and policies.
5. This policy applies to all McMaster University students [any individual recorded by the University Registrar as enrolled in an educational course of study recognized by the Senate and for whom the University maintains education records (graduate, undergraduate, continuing education students, and students in shared institutional programs e.g. Mohawk College and Conestoga combined programs where they are registered as a McMaster student)].

## DEFINITIONS

6. For the purpose of interpreting this document:
  - a) words in the singular may include the plural and words in the plural may include the singular;
  - b) **SAS** means Student Accessibility Services;
  - c) for **graduate students**, the relevant Associate/Assistant Dean of their Faculty, is their Associate Dean in the School of Graduate Studies;
  - d) for students in **degree programs not offered by a Faculty** (e.g., the Arts and Science program), the Program Director is equivalent to the Associate/Assistant Dean of a Faculty, and the Chair of the Program Hearings Committee is equivalent to the Faculty Dean;
  - e) for students in Senate-approved certificate or diploma programs offered by the **Centre for Continuing Education**, the Director of the Centre is equivalent to the Associate/Assistant Dean of a Faculty, the program co-ordinator is equivalent to the Department Chair, and the Provost is equivalent to the Dean of the Faculty; and
  - f) for **students in the Faculty of Health Sciences**, the Assistant Dean of the Program is equivalent to the Associate/Assistant Dean of a Faculty.
7. All definitions in this Policy include, but are not limited to, the definitions articulated in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#).
8. **Disability** includes:
  - a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
  - b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
  - c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language; and
  - d) a mental health disorder/illness; or
  - e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*.
9. An **Academic Accommodation** for a disability is an individual arrangement that reduces or removes barriers that limit the ability of students with disabilities to participate in formal post-secondary education. Academic Accommodations are developed based on the functional limitation of the student as it relates to the academic environment. For example, a student may have a functional limitation that affects their ability to remain focused for prolonged periods. An Academic Accommodation is recognition that individuals may require adjustments in order to support their performance in a practice-based context or in the classroom and are intended to provide access for students with disabilities; they do not guarantee or

predict outcomes. Appropriate Academic Accommodation results in equitable opportunity to attain the same level of performance; or, to enjoy the same level of benefits and privileges experienced by others; or, if it is proposed or adopted for the purpose of achieving equitable opportunity, and meets the individual's disability-related needs. Accommodation is not a courtesy or a favour, neither is it a lowering of standards. Academic Accommodations are based only on functional limitations, not on individual preferences.

10. **Accessible Learning Environment:** The degree to which individuals with and without disabilities, can access the academic learning environment without encountering barriers.
11. **Barrier** refers to barriers such as a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, information or communication barriers, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a learning barrier, or a policy or practice, in relation to the academic learning environment.
12. **Interim Academic Accommodation:** An interim Academic Accommodation can be enacted on behalf of a student requesting an Academic Accommodation and implemented 'in good faith' pending receipt of supporting documentation for requests that related to a disability as defined in **Section II**.
13. **Functional Limitation:** A health condition that impairs/limits a student's academic functioning as a learner and/or access level. A functional limitation includes an impairment/limitation in the following areas: cognitive skills/ability; physical skills/ability; social-emotional skills/ability; fieldwork skills/ability.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

14. This Policy acknowledges, upholds, and aligns itself with the medical definition of disability to be in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's definition of disability.
15. It is our institutional aspiration to work towards a campus community that adopts the social definition of disability by responding with the creation of universal design for instruction in accessible classrooms and the need for on-going consultation with people with lived experience with disability to guide the design of buildings and instructional resources.
16. The University will strive to nurture and support all students to be as healthy as they can be and to reach their potential. Mental health and wellbeing are understood as key components to health. We will achieve this outcome through our ongoing commitment to creating an inclusive, supportive, and healthy educational environment ([Student Mental Health & Well-Being Strategy](#))
17. This Policy incorporates the principles of the [Policy on Ableism and Discrimination Based on Disability](#) and position paper [OHRC Policy Position on Medical Documentation](#) which include the following statements:
  - A disability may be the result of combinations of impairments and environmental barriers, such as attitudinal barriers, inaccessible information, an inaccessible built environment or other barriers that affect a student's full participation at the University.
  - The duty to accommodate exists to the point of "undue hardship." The Code only allows for three considerations when assessing whether an accommodation would cause undue hardship; these are: cost, outside sources of funding, and health and safety requirements. Accommodation may mean making rules, policies, practices or procedures more flexible to make sure that people with disabilities

are able to participate. It may also mean making changes to the built environment to remove barriers for people with disabilities.

- Generally, the accommodation provider does not have the right to know a person's confidential medical information, such as the cause of the disability, diagnosis, symptoms or treatment, unless these clearly relate to the accommodation being sought, or the person's needs are complex, challenging or unclear and more information is needed.
- Overbroad requests for private medical information, such as diagnostic information, undermine the dignity and privacy of people with disabilities. The ongoing stigma associated with many disabilities, especially and including mental health disabilities, means that requests for diagnostic information may pose a barrier to a person with disabilities proceeding with their accommodation request.
- Where more information about a person's disability is needed, the information requested must be the least intrusive to the person's privacy while still giving the organization enough information to make an informed decision about the accommodation.
- To implement appropriate accommodations that respect the dignity and privacy interests of people with disabilities, the focus should always be on the functional limitations associated with the disability, rather than a person's diagnosis.

18. The provision of an accommodation is based on three principles:

- a) **Dignity:** Students with disabilities have the right to receive educational services in a manner that is respectful of their dignity. Human dignity encompasses individual self-respect and self-worth. It is concerned with physical and psychological integrity and empowerment. Dignity is harmed when individuals are marginalized, stigmatized, ignored or devalued.
- b) **Individualization:** Each student's needs are unique. At all times, the emphasis must be on the individual student and not on the category of disability. Two students with the same disability may have very different needs; for example, while some students with visual impairments read Braille, many do not. Different effects of a disability and different learning styles will or may call for different approaches.
- c) **Inclusion and Full Participation:** Inclusion is exemplified by policies, programs, services and activities designed inclusively with the needs of all students in mind. Inclusivity in design emphasizes full participation and recognizes that all students have varying abilities and needs.

19. All personal information, including supporting documentation (e.g. personal health information) requested by the University to facilitate the Academic Accommodation process, shall be handled in accordance with the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#) and the [Personal Health Information Protection Act](#).

## SECTION II: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

### STUDENTS

20. Students must meet University and program/degree requirements, including participation in classes, labs, clinical or practicum placements, tutorials, etc.
21. Students seeking an Academic Accommodation are required to participate fully in the Academic Accommodations process. This participation includes:
  - a) when the student is aware of their disability and the need for Academic Accommodation, contacting SAS before classes or academic work begins;
  - b) providing the information required so that SAS can assess the duty to accommodate and develop Accommodation Plans;
  - c) after the approval of the Accommodation Plan, should the student have any questions they may choose to speak with their instructor, SAS advisor or Faculty Office to review steps for the implementation of the Accommodation Plan;
  - d) notifying SAS of any changes that may impact already established Accommodation Plans in a timely fashion.

### INSTRUCTORS AND CHAIRS

22. Instructors and Chairs are responsible for implementing the approved Accommodation Plan, as applicable, by:
  - a) referring all accommodation requests related to disability (that have not been previously accommodated) to [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#);
  - b) implementing the Accommodation Plan requests with the support of SAS and their academic units, and participating where appropriate in the development of Accommodation Plans.
  - c) working collaboratively with SAS, the student, and the Associate/Assistant Dean to find a satisfactory resolution in those instances where the Instructor believes that an Accommodation Plan puts at risk the student's ability to meet course/program requirements (see [Appendix B: Essential Requirements](#) and [Appendix C: Off-Site Placements](#)).
23. Instructors, in collaboration with the MacPherson Institute, should consider instructional elements of their course that minimize the need for accommodations.

### TEACHING ASSISTANTS

24. Teaching Assistants are responsible for implementing the approved Accommodation Plan, as applicable, by referring all accommodation requests related to disability (that have not been previously accommodated) to SAS.

## STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

25. [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) is the central resource for disability advising and the development of Accommodation Plans for students with disabilities. SAS is responsible for co-ordinating the Academic Accommodations process, which includes:
- obtaining and storing relevant disability related information (e.g. documentation related to any functional limitation);
  - assessing the University's duty to accommodate; and
  - working collaboratively with Faculty Offices, Instructors, students and academic units to inform accommodation decisions and develop Accommodation Plans.

## ASSOCIATE/ASSISTANT DEANS

26. Associate/Assistant Deans have a key leadership role within academic units and are responsible for:
- working with the pertinent Accommodation Team and SAS to develop, refine, and implement Accommodation Plans as necessary.
  - working with the academic unit and Instructors to define the academic requirements of programs and courses;
  - consulting with the Faculty Dean, where necessary, on resources required for accommodations;
  - working with Chairs and Directors to ensure Instructors are implementing Accommodation Plans as specified; and
  - working with the Accommodation Team and SAS to make informed decisions related to complex or retroactive accommodations, as well as appeals.

## ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION TEAMS

27. The Academic Accommodation Teams ("Accommodation Teams") are informal networks of individuals within academic units who have the knowledge and expertise required to inform decisions related to Academic Accommodations. Accommodation Teams complement the expertise residing centrally in SAS and support the Associate/Assistant Deans in the consideration of complex and/or retroactive Academic Accommodation decisions and appeals. In some areas there may be Accommodation Teams specific to the departments and professions within that Faculty.

## EQUITY AND INCLUSION OFFICE

28. The [Equity and Inclusion Office](#) is responsible for providing education and training on the duty to accommodate, accessibility and broader human rights, equity, and inclusion matters for staff, students and faculty. The Equity and Inclusion Office is an intake office for any complaints related to harassment and/or discrimination based on disability. When there has been a failure to accommodate, a failure to accommodate reasonably, or a failure to consider a retroactive accommodation, Equity and Inclusion Office staff will work with complainants to identify appropriate avenues of recourse as per the [Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#).



## CAMPUS STORE

29. The Campus Store is responsible for implementing the terms of any agreed upon Accommodation Plan, as applicable, by:
- accessing required learning resources in formats appropriate to individual student need;
  - making every reasonable effort to provide students registered through SAS equal access to information; and
  - providing publisher information to Library Accessibility Services (LAS) in Mills Library for students who may require textbooks in a different format (e.g. audio, Braille, large print, etc.).

## LIBRARY

30. The Library is responsible for making every reasonable effort to provide equal access to information for students with disabilities, and implementing the terms of any agreed upon Accommodation Plan, as applicable, by:
- accessing required learning resources in formats appropriate to individual student need;
  - obtaining e-versions and converting file formats of learning materials e.g. required texts, course websites, A2L posts, course-packs, supplementary materials, etc.;
  - closed captioning media used in the classroom and online; and
  - helping students with disabilities navigate and access Library services and supports.

## OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

31. The Office of the Registrar is responsible for implementing the terms of any agreed upon Accommodation Plan, as applicable, by:
- scheduling and coordinating accommodated exams;
  - providing special timetabling or classroom use;
  - ensuring that University admissions policies and procedures are inclusive and accessible;
  - making special arrangements for students with disabilities at convocation ceremonies; and
  - working closely with SAS to ensure that the accommodated exams are scheduled and executed effectively, while also ensuring that Academic Integrity standards are met.

## MACPHERSON INSTITUTE

32. The MacPherson Institute will provide assistance and support to Instructors that facilitate the academic success of students with disabilities. Areas of focus include providing educational opportunities, resources and support for instructors that encourage application of pedagogical methods that support accommodations and encourage overall accessibility, e.g. universal design; identification of essential requirements.

**ADMINISTRATION**

33. The term "Administration", as used in this Policy, refers to individuals and groups responsible for the University's academic programs and academic support services and includes the: Provost; Associate Vice-President (Students & Learning) and Dean of Students; Vice-Provost (Faculty); Vice-Provost (Teaching & Learning) and Director of the MacPherson Institute; Deans; Associate Deans/Assistant Deans; Department Chairs; and Directors of Schools and Programs. Members of the Administration shall ensure that:
- a) students with disabilities *who have been approved* for accommodation under this Policy, are accommodated in line with this Policy and as per their Accommodation Plans; and
  - b) staff and instructors are familiar with this Policy and have the knowledge and resources necessary to implement Accommodation Plans.

**ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT (STUDENTS & LEARNING) AND DEAN OF STUDENTS**

34. The Associate Vice-President (Students & Learning) and Dean of Students ("Dean of Students"), is responsible for the oversight of the Policy and for monitoring progress and addressing issues that arise in its execution. To inform this process, the Dean of Students will coordinate meetings at least once per year with key stakeholders, including Associate/Assistant Deans, SAS, and the Equity and Inclusion Office.

## SECTION III: GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

### GUIDELINES

35. The following guidelines apply to all requests for Academic Accommodations:
- students are not to seek accommodation directly from their professors, instructors, and/or teaching assistants. Accommodation requests should be directed to SAS or the Faculty Office;
  - students are not required to reveal their private medical information, such as the cause of the disability, diagnosis, symptoms or treatment (unless these clearly relate to the accommodation being sought - see [Documentation](#)) to register with SAS, or receive accommodations or supports;
  - students may request interim accommodations for disabilities (this includes mental health disabilities) pending receipt of medical documentation;
  - both Temporary and Permanent disabilities will be accommodated;
  - requests for accommodation should be submitted in a prompt and timely manner. Requests made after a deadline has passed may be considered Retroactive Accommodations;
  - students who make an accommodation request directly to an Instructor, prior to having an accommodation plan in place, should be informed by the Instructor that they must submit their request to SAS.

### TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

36. **Permanent Disability** is where a functional limitation will occur for *more than one academic term* or as defined by a regulated health professional.
37. **Temporary Disability** may be a short-term injury or illness (such as mononucleosis, a broken limb or concussion) or an episodic condition (e.g. mental illness) where a functional limitation generally occurs within one academic term or less or as defined by a regulated health professional.
38. A **Retroactive Accommodation** may be for either a Permanent or Temporary Disability when the request is made after-the-fact (e.g. after a course has been completed), as the result of the discovery or diagnosis of an existing disability of which the student was previously unaware.

### DOCUMENTATION

39. The University complies with the [Policy on Ableism and Discrimination Based on Disability](#), Section 8.7, "*Medical information to be provided*," which sets out the type and scope of medical information to be provided to support an accommodation request.
40. Requests for information and/or supporting documentation will, where possible, be limited to the nature of the limitation or restriction, in order to assess needs and make an appropriate academic accommodation. Requests for information and/or supporting documentation may include:
- that the student has a disability (without disclosure of the medical diagnosis);
  - the functional limitations or needs associated with the disability;

- c) whether the student can perform the course/program/degree requirements, with or without accommodation, including participation in classes, labs, clinical/practicum placements, tutorials, etc.
  - d) the type of accommodation(s) that may be needed to allow the student to fulfill course/program/degree requirements.
41. Students are required to provide documentation that supports their accommodation request before a decision or Academic Accommodation plan is developed. Supporting documentation **does not require the disclosure of a medical diagnosis but must be sufficient** to allow the University to determine appropriate accommodation measures and/or explore reasonable alternatives.
  42. An interim Academic Accommodation may be enacted on behalf of a student requesting an Academic Accommodation and implemented 'in good faith' pending receipt of supporting documentation.
  43. For **Temporary Disability** accommodation requests, the Associate/Assistant Dean may determine that while documentation was requested, it may not always be necessary and students may be accommodated in 'good faith' for a temporary disability.
  44. Documentation will only be considered if completed and signed by a registered and regulated health professional (i.e. medical doctor, registered psychologist, registered occupational therapist, registered speech and language pathologist, etc.) or a recognized and credible expert (e.g. McMaster University's Sexual Assault Response Coordinator).
  45. The University may make inquiries to request documentation, as appropriate, to confirm the need for and/or type of Academic Accommodation required. The University may initiate a detailed request for supportive documented information, tailored to the particular accommodation request. The University reserves the right to seek additional assessments or opinions about the nature of the functional limitation(s) as it relates to the student's disability.

## PROCEDURES

### Timeliness of Submissions

46. SAS requires adequate time to review requests and coordinate needed arrangements. Some accommodations take longer to arrange than others (e.g. sign language interpreters and transcriptions), and students with these types of requests should be particularly cognizant of the timing of their requests. Failure to make a request or supply the required documentation in a timely manner may delay the approval and/or implementation of the requested accommodation.
47. New students and transfer students are encouraged to contact SAS and submit their accommodation request as soon as possible after they receive their offers of admission, or by August 1st of the academic year, whichever comes first.
48. Students whose circumstances change or who develop difficulties after the aforementioned dates should contact SAS and their designated faculty contact immediately, to initiate a review of their Accommodation Plan.

### Submitting an Academic Accommodation Request

49. SAS and the Faculty Offices work collaboratively and share information in order to facilitate academic accommodation requests. This includes transferring the facilitation of a request between offices where appropriate (e.g. a Temporary Disability accommodation may require the scheduling of rooms or invigilators, which is the responsibility of SAS; or the accommodation requires deadline extensions that the Faculty Office is able to arrange with the Instructor).
50. Students must submit an Academic Accommodation Request Form with the appropriate documentation (see [Documentation](#) above) to either the Faculty Office or [Student Accessibility Services](#) in order to request an Academic Accommodation.
51. SAS or other Intake Offices (e.g. Faculty Office) may refer the request to another office, as deemed appropriate in order to review the Academic Accommodation request.
  - a) SAS is responsible for all **PERMANENT DISABILITY** requests. Students may elect to drop off the Academic Accommodation Request Form to their Faculty Office; however dropping the form off at the Faculty Office may delay the facilitation of the request.
  - b) SAS or the Faculty Office may process Temporary Disability requests and Retroactive Accommodation requests.

### Intake Meeting with a Program Coordinator regarding Permanent Disability

52. Students requesting Academic Accommodation for Permanent Disability must meet with a Program Coordinator in SAS.
53. At the meeting the Program Coordinator will review with the student the following:
  - a) the request, including documentation, and academic program information;
  - b) the need for accommodation and other supports; and
  - c) the process for the activation of Academic Accommodations.

### Review of Request

54. The office facilitating the request (SAS or the Faculty Office where appropriate) shall review the request for Academic Accommodations and determine whether the request meets the criteria for Academic Accommodation under this Policy. The office may consult with the Equity and Inclusion Office, or other relevant resources throughout the process.
55. In complex situations, once documentation is received, [Student Accessibility Services](#) and the Faculty Office will consult with each other, the Accommodation Team, and the student, as appropriate before a decision or accommodations plan is made:
  - a) greater consultation may be required when there are concerns related to a practicum or placement, in cases where there are challenges in meeting accommodation requirements, or in cases related to the student's ability to fulfill the requirements of the course/program;

- b) SAS and the Faculty Office will work to coordinate the request and assist with the provision of the accommodation, including exploring alternative forms of accommodation when the student may not be able to fulfill the requirements of the course/program without accommodation;
- c) Should further guidance be required, the Faculty Office and/or SAS may consult with the appropriate senior administrator, and other offices as appropriate, including the Equity and Inclusion Office, the Student Wellness Centre, and the [Student Support and Case Management Office](#).

56. SAS/the Faculty Office shall:

- a) inform the student in writing that the request has been:
  - (i) denied and provide the reasons for denying the request; or
  - (ii) accepted and provide next steps for the development of the accommodation plan.
- b) send a copy of the letter to the other office (SAS/Faculty Office).

#### **Developing the Accommodation Plan**

- 57. SAS will work with the student to develop a proposed accommodation plan based on the student's needs (as determined by SAS after consultation with the student, review of the documentation, and in consultation with the Faculty Office, including the instructor where appropriate) and any available course/program information and requirements.
- 58. Throughout the development of an Accommodation Plan, all parties should review the plan and are encouraged to discuss openly the needs and special considerations necessary in order to prepare for implementation. Through the development process, if there are questions/concerns, all efforts will be made to resolve the matter informally.
- 59. If, at any time during the development of an Academic Accommodation plan, the Chair, the Associate Dean and/or the Faculty Dean believe that there are substantial financial implications to granting the requested accommodation, the Accommodation Plan should be forwarded directly to the Provost. The Provost shall review the plan and work with the Associate/Assistant Dean to implement an appropriate plan.
- 60. If there are concerns about the Accommodation Plan, outside of financial hardship, the person with the concerns shall notify the Associate/Assistant Dean, who shall consult with their Accommodation Team and SAS, as appropriate. In exceptional circumstances and where further guidance is required, other offices and administrators may be consulted (Vice-Provost (Faculty), Dean of Students, Equity and Inclusion Office, Student Wellness Centre, and/or the Student Support and Case Management Office).
- 61. In some circumstances, SAS may request permission to consult with the student's health care provider to seek further information or clarification, in order to assist with the development of the Academic Accommodation plan.
- 62. In some cases SAS may need to seek independent consultation (such as the Regional Assessment Resource Centre, an independent Occupational Therapist, etc.) in order to assist with the development of the academic accommodation plan.

63. Once the Accommodation Plan has been finalized, if the student agrees with the Accommodation Plan, the coordination for the implementation of the plan will commence as quickly as possible.
64. If the student does not agree with the finalized Accommodation Plan they may request a Re-Assessment (see clauses 82-84).

#### **Implementation of the Accommodation Plan**

65. New accommodation plans will also include how (e.g. electronically or at the discretion of the student) and to whom (e.g. instructors) the plan will be communicated. SAS can provide a print form of the accommodation plan, in order for the student to hand-deliver the letter.
66. Returning students should confirm with SAS that the Accommodation Plan is still accurate and to confirm their preference for communicating the Accommodation Plan to instructors. Returning students can choose to have their plan communicated electronically to instructors or to opt for a print form of the accommodation plan.
67. At any time, a student may request a printed copy of their Academic Accommodation Plan from SAS, should they wish to have hard copy to discuss with their instructor(s).
68. SAS will provide notice to the Office of the Registrar for examination accommodation or classroom accommodation. A **minimum of 10 business days** is normally necessary to make special arrangements for examinations.
69. SAS will notify the Library and Campus Store for accommodations relating to specialized literature in appropriate formats for the student. The student must contact the Library and/or the Campus Store, with any additional requirements they may need to facilitate the request.

#### **Duration and Review of Accommodation Plan**

70. Once the accommodation has been approved, the Accommodation Plan for a Permanent Disability remains active and does not need to be renewed during the student's University academic career.
71. Should circumstances change that may require a revision of the Accommodation Plan (Permanent/Temporary Disability) or an extension of the Accommodation Plan (Temporary), an expedited review will occur in compliance with clauses 57-64 *Developing the Accommodation Plan*, to develop an Accommodation Plan to meet current needs.
72. Where need for accommodation review is warranted a review can occur at any time and may be initiated by the student, SAS, or the Faculty Office. Any such review may require a review of documentation and request for an updated assessment.



### Student Participation

73. If the student does not participate or denies any need for accommodation, the University reserves the right to document the conversation with the student and/or obtain written acknowledgement from the student that an accommodation is not desired. Failure to follow through with organized accommodations without advising SAS and/or the Faculty/School in a timely manner may result in the University being unable to fulfill the Academic Accommodation requirement for that particular situation.

### RETROACTIVE ACCOMMODATIONS

74. An Academic Accommodation for either a Permanent or Temporary Disability is considered retroactive when the request is made after-the-fact (e.g. after the end of an academic term), as the result of the discovery or diagnosis of an existing disability that the student was previously unaware of.
75. Retroactive accommodation requests will be assessed upon the unique factors for each case, which may include:
- timeliness of the request (e.g. when did the student know about the disability, how much time has passed between making the request and the time period that the request is for, etc.)
  - nature of the accommodation requested;
  - supporting documentation provided;
  - amount of course work completed during the term; and
  - the student's academic record.
76. When a retroactive accommodation is granted, the University may request further documentation and/or assessments to determine the student's readiness to return to studies, and/or to determine whether additional, and in some cases Permanent Academic Accommodations are necessary.
77. If granted, the Faculty Office will work with the appropriate individuals or offices to facilitate the accommodation. The decision will be communicated to the student in writing.

### DATA GATHERING & RECORD KEEPING

78. SAS is responsible for collecting data on Academic Accommodations at the University. The data shall be kept and maintained by SAS and includes data provided to that office by the Faculty Offices.
79. SAS shall maintain a confidential record for all Academic Accommodation requests. These records are property of the University and will normally be destroyed 7 years after last use.
80. Instructors should retain any accommodation documents for the same period of time that they must retain marked coursework. When that time lapses, that material shall be destroyed, with that marked coursework
81. The Accommodation Team should forward any accommodation documents to the Faculty Office, as appropriate.



## SECTION IV: APPEALS

### RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN

#### Student Initiated Re-assessment of the Accommodation Plan

82. The student may request a Student-Initiated Re-Assessment of the Accommodation Plan by submitting, in writing, an explanation as to why the plan is not adequate and what accommodation they seek, to the Director of SAS.
83. The Director of SAS, upon receipt of the request, will notify the Faculty Office to discuss the Accommodation Plan; the explanation submitted by the student; and, a review of the requirements of the course and/or program to make a recommendation for next steps related to an Accommodation Plan. The Director of SAS may request the student provide additional supporting documentation from a regulated health care provider or participate in an assessment in order to complete the Re-assessment.
84. The decision on the Re-Assessment will be made by the Director of Student Accessibility Services. The Director will communicate the outcome of the decision to the student. The Faculty Office will be informed of any changes to the accommodation plan. If there are changes to the Accommodation Plan for courses the student is currently enrolled in, SAS will communicate those changes to the instructor(s). The coordination for the implementation of the plan will commence as quickly as possible.
85. If the Director of SAS decides the request for Re-assessment is denied and the Accommodation Plan will be not revised, they will notify the student of the decision and the reasons

### APPEAL OF THE STUDENT-INITIATED RE-ASSESSMENT DECISION

86. Students may appeal the Student-Initiated **Re-Assessment decision** not to revise the Accommodation Plan, when they believe that there has been a procedural error in the application of the Policy. The appeal must be filed within **3 weeks of receipt** of the decision, to the Senate Board for Student Appeals as outlined in the *Student Appeal Procedures*.

### STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES INITIATED RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE ACCOMMODATION PLAN

87. SAS normally conducts annual reviews of established Accommodation Plans. The Director of SAS may, at their discretion, initiate a Re-Assessment of the Accommodation Plan.
88. SAS will inform the student when a Re-Assessment has been initiated by the Director. The re-assessment may include a request for updated documentation from the student's treating health care provider and/or a further assessment (e.g. an independent medical evaluation).
89. The outcome of the Re-Assessment will be communicated to the student. The Re-Assessment of the may include: a change in the accommodation plan; recommendations for course-load; completion of a series of meetings with a learning strategist or other support specialist/program.

### APPEAL OF THE SAS-INITIATED RE-ASSESSMENT DECISION

90. Students may appeal the SAS-Initiated Re-Assessment decision to the Dean of Students within 15 business days of the communication of the decision by the Director of SAS.
91. The Accommodation Plan approved by SAS will be applied and shall remain in effect unless and until it is overturned on an appeal by the student. This means that submitting an appeal will not prevent the decision of the SAS-initiated Re-Assessment from being carried out.

### HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINT

92. If the student believes that a decision may be a violation of their human rights, such as when there has been a failure to accommodate (denial of the request) or a failure to accommodate reasonably (the student believes the Accommodation Plan does not provide reasonable accommodation) they should contact the Equity and Inclusion Office to identify appropriate avenues of recourse as per the [Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#).

### ACCOMMODATION PENDING REVIEW OR APPEAL

93. The University recognizes that decisions involving accommodations must be made expeditiously to assist students in their ongoing courses. Once the Faculty Office has approved an Accommodation Plan, it shall be implemented promptly. In the event that a student appeals the approved Accommodation Plan and the appeal is pending, the instructor, the Faculty Office, and SAS shall determine what portion, if any, of the plan is reasonable to implement immediately. Any such accommodations shall remain in place until there is a final disposition of all appeals.

## APPENDIX A: RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

This Policy is to be read in conjunction with the following policies, statements, and legislation. Any question concerning the application of this Policy or related policies shall be determined by the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) or the Vice-President (Administration) as appropriate, and in conjunction with the administrator of the other policy or policies. The University reserves the right to amend or add to the University's policies and statements from time to time (this is not a comprehensive list):

- [Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances \(RISO\)](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Accessibility – University Policy](#)
- [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#)
- [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#)
- [Graduate Course Outlines](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Code](#)
- [Personal Health Information Protection Act](#)
- [Professional Behaviour Code for Graduate Learners, Health Sciences](#)
- [Professional Behaviour Code for Undergraduate Learners, Health Sciences](#)
- [Statement on Building an Inclusive Community with a Shared Purpose](#)
- [Statement and Guidelines on Inclusive Communications](#)
- [Workplace Accommodation, Policy on](#)
- [Workplace Accommodation, Guide and Procedures](#)
- [Research Integrity Policy](#)
- [Student Appeal Procedures](#)
- [Undergraduate Course Management Policies](#)

## APPENDIX B: ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

1. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has noted that while courts and tribunals have provided little guidance on the definition or nature of essential requirements, terms that have been used include indispensable, vital and very important<sup>1</sup>. “For example, it may likely be an essential requirement that a student master core aspects of a course or curriculum. It is much less likely that it will be an essential requirement to demonstrate that mastery in a particular format, unless mastery of that format (for example oral communication) is also a vital requirement of the program. Educators must provide accommodation, up to the point of undue hardship, to enable students to meet these essential requirements”.<sup>2</sup>
2. In a university setting, the essential requirements of a course/program may include, but are not limited to, the knowledge and skills that must be acquired or demonstrated in order for a student to meet the learning objectives of the course/program successfully. Essential requirements are the expected learning outcomes of a program or course and involve the successful demonstration of specific knowledge, skills and abilities. Although there may be variations in the language used to describe an essential requirement within each program or course, the objective of outlining the essential requirements is to help students understand what they must be able to demonstrate at the end of the course or program.
3. Essential requirements can be defined by 2 factors: 1) a skill that must be necessarily demonstrated in order to meet the objectives of the course and 2) a skill that must be demonstrated in a prescribed manner.<sup>3</sup> Conclusions about inability to perform essential requirements must not be reached without actually testing the ability of the student.
4. A particular challenge arises with managing accommodations for students in professional programs because of the need to separate the educational elements of the university curriculum from the perceived professional competencies of the practicing clinician. As Oakley et al.(2012) have reported, education is deemed a service under Human Rights Legislation even when students are participating in off-campus training programs in the clinical setting or in field placements.<sup>4</sup> In these settings, students are entitled to the same type of accommodation as they would receive in the classroom. Clearly, however, some accommodations that are appropriate for the classroom will be inappropriate or inadequate in the clinical or practicum situation.
5. In this situation, SAS will liaise with the relevant Faculty to consider how the particular profession would normally accommodate individuals with such disabilities. In this way, the essential requirements related to the clinical tasks in the placement will be considered along with the academic requirements. Professional programs have distinct essential requirements outlined for undertaking the educational programs or curricula that will include expectations for functioning as a practicing professional in the career that is the planned outcome for students in that program. Students may elect to complete the program if feasible but not to sit any certification examinations offered by the profession or to seek registration in regulatory bodies such as regulatory colleges<sup>5</sup>. There may be occasions, particularly in a professional program

---

<sup>1</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003). The Opportunity to Succeed: Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities. Pages 61-62 Available at [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Oakley, B., Parsons, J., & Wideman, M. (2012). Identifying Essential Requirements: A guide for University Disability Professionals. Kingston, ON: Queen's University..

where an accommodation contradicts an essential requirement. For example, providing extra time for a learner in a particular clinical setting might in fact impact on patient/client safety. However, it is incumbent upon the University to conduct a thorough task analysis of an essential requirement before developing an accommodation plan or denying an accommodation on the basis that the accommodation breaches the academic integrity of the education program.

6. Increasing application of the principles of universal design in educational programs may allow more students to meet the essential requirements of the learning environment without accommodation, although for some students, differential treatment may still be required to allow equal opportunity to enjoy the same level of benefits and privileges of success in the educational program.
7. Continuing advances in technology both in the classroom and in the clinical and practicum setting in professional programs necessitate close cooperation and liaison between SAS, Accommodation Team and resources, and students, in order to optimize accessibility of students to meet the essential requirements of courses and educational programs.

## APPENDIX C: OFF-SITE PLACEMENTS

1. In order to engage in the academic accommodation process as it applies to the experiential learning setting, multiple stakeholders may need to be involved, including the fieldwork coordinator (the faculty member who organizes fieldwork), the on-site supervisor, the preceptor (University or clinical supervisor who oversees individual fieldwork experiences) and SAS.
2. The University's duty to accommodate exists independently from the placement entity. Ideally, all parties will collaborate on the development of an appropriate accommodation plan that meets the student's needs. However, in the event of a disagreement or misalignment of expectations (or where there is some conflicting third-party policy etc.), we cannot force or impose a particular accommodation measure on a third party, without some contractual mechanism. Ultimately, in the circumstance where all parties cannot agree, the only appropriate accommodation that satisfies McMaster's duty may be to explore another placement. Academic accommodation extends to off-campus coursework such as fieldwork, placement, internship and out-of-the classroom learning experiences.
3. In some Programs (such as the Bachelor of Social Work) graduation from an accredited program allow students to register with a regulatory college. Demonstrating readiness for practice is an essential requirement for graduation from these programs.
4. Notification of accommodation need for placement, fieldwork and practicum, is flexible according to individual student circumstances.
5. The vastness of placement/fieldwork and practicum settings and academic requirements for such activities is too extensive to easily detail in one procedure. However, regardless of the nature of the program or degree the following process will apply to all students and all requests for academic accommodations within a placement/fieldwork or practicum setting:
  - a) students will meet with SAS Program Coordinator to review the Academic Accommodation Plan in the context of an off-site placement.
  - b) placement criteria for consideration may include: documentation, academic program information, placement evaluation criteria, need for accommodation and other supports for the learning environment and review process for activation of academic accommodations;
  - c) the accommodation request is shared with the off-site learning placement location. The placement may or may not be able to accept the accommodation request on their site.
  - d) SAS may need to consult with the Faculty Office before the accommodation is implemented;
  - e) where necessary, SAS may request additional documentation or the ability to consult with a student's regulated health care provider(s) to seek further information regarding the student's functional limitations in order to make a determination of the most appropriate academic accommodation;
  - f) in some cases, SAS may need to seek independent consultation before activating an academic accommodation;
  - g) notice to Faculty Office is then facilitated by or provided directly from SAS outlining the accommodation for the off-site learning environment;
  - h) if the accommodation plan is not accepted by the off-site learning placement location, the University will explore other off-site learning opportunities, within reason; and
  - i) where a need for accommodation review is warranted, this can occur at any time.