

VSU Access Office for Students with Disabilities

Policies and Procedures

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This policy manual was approved by the Division of Student Affairs on January 2, 2008. It is designed to cover the major services provided to students with disabilities, but is not an all inclusive document.

For your convenience, this document can be provided in an alternative format. To request an alternative copy, please contact the Access Office in Nevins Hall at 229.245.2498.

The Access Office reserves the right to make changes and updates as needed. A hardcopy of this document including any changes or updates is located in the Access Office.

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Access Office for Students with Disabilities Policies and Procedures

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

Valdosta State University is an equal opportunity educational institution. It is not the intent of the institution to discriminate against any applicant for admission or any student or employee of the institution based on the sex, race, religion, color, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation of the individual. It is the intent of the institution to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent Executive Orders as well as Title IX, Equal Pay Act of 1963, Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974, Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

INTRODUCTION

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) gives individuals with disabilities civil rights protection that is similar to that provided to all individuals on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion. The act guarantees equal opportunity in employment, public accommodations, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications. In September 1973, Congress passed Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act that states, "No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall, solely on the basis of his/her handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

The Access Office for Students with Disabilities (Access Office) serves students who have documented disabilities, have met the Valdosta State University (VSU) admission criteria, and are otherwise qualified. The Access Office is the centralized agency for receiving disability related documentation and approving requested accommodations. Students voluntarily register with the Access Office and provide documentation to support their requested accommodations. The process of documentation review involves the assessment of the individual's disability with respect to the documentation presented and the accommodations requested. Documentation provided must meet **Board of Regents' criteria**. The types of disabilities served include learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, visual, hearing, mobility, psychiatric, and other health impairments. Services provided include test proctoring, classroom modifications, adaptive technology, sign language interpreting, notetaking, faculty notification, and assistance with campus accessibility.

Through the Access Office, the university seeks to meet individual needs by coordinating and implementing internal policy regarding programs, services, and activities for individuals with disabilities. The department functions as a source of information and as a communication link among individuals with disabilities, faculty and staff members, state rehabilitation agencies, and the community at large. The Access Office strives to provide equal access for all students while upholding the academic standards of Valdosta State University.

The philosophy of the Access Office consists of four basic elements:

- That no individual be discriminated against, denied the benefits of, or excluded from participation solely on the basis a disability;
- That physical and attitudinal barriers, inasmuch as possible, be removed;

- That individuals with disabilities have an equal opportunity to pursue their educational goals.
- That each student is unique with needs that are tailored to the individual.

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS

POLICY

All students, regardless of disability, must meet the established admission requirements of VSU. Eligible students may be granted a foreign language substitution in order to satisfy their college preparatory course requirements according to the **Boards of Regents' policy**.

PROCEDURE

Since students with disabilities must meet the minimum standards set forth by the university and non-standard (i.e. taken with accommodations) administrations of the ACT and SAT do not negatively impact a student's admission status, it is recommended that students with disabilities request accommodations on such standardized tests.

Students that were granted a foreign language substitution in high school may petition to have their course substitutions considered for the foreign language CPC requirement for admission to VSU. It is recommended that students interested in requesting this accommodation do so as soon as possible, preferably 6 months prior to request for admission. Documentation is sent to the Regents Center for Learning Disorders (RCLD) for review and consideration. In the event that the RCLD approves a foreign language substitution, the Access Office will notify the Admissions Office.

QUALIFYING FOR SERVICES

POLICY

Students requesting accommodations from the university must have a disability as defined by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Once accepted to the University, students may voluntarily disclose their disability to the University by submitting the "**Voluntary Disclosure of Disability Student Data Sheet**" along with appropriate documentation to the Access Office if they wish to request accommodations. In cases where documentation is deemed insufficient, the student may be required to participate in additional evaluation at their cost in order to receive accommodations. In the meantime, the student may be eligible for provisional institutional accommodations of a limited nature; however, no system-level accommodations can be granted provisionally. Some documentation, including LD, ADHD, ABI/TBI, must be reviewed by the Regents Center for Learning Disorders to ensure that it satisfies the **Board of Regents' Criteria**. Students may request accommodations at any time once they have registered for or are attending classes. However, any accommodations approved will be implemented from that point forward and are not retroactive.

PROCEDURE

Orientation is an excellent opportunity for the student to initiate the accommodation process. New Student and Transfer Orientation sessions are offered throughout the summer and at the beginning of each new semester. Students who have not received orientation session information can do so by contacting the **Office of Orientation and Leadership Programs**. Accommodations are available during orientation and can be arranged by contacting the Access Office. Please be sure to contact the Access Office prior to your orientation date for an appointment and so that we may begin gathering the necessary information to develop the accommodation plan. Students and parents are also encouraged to check out **the Parent Resource Center (PRC)** to learn about the differences between disability services in High School and College.

RECORD MAINTENANCE AND CORRESPONDENCE POLICY

Student files are confidential to the extent allowed by law and are kept in a secured location in the Access Office. Records for students with disabilities are maintained in the Access Office until 5 years after last contact. The university maintains a secure computer database that allows for the monitoring of academic progress.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 protects the privacy of educational records, establishes the rights of students to inspect and review their educational records, and provides guidelines for the correction of inaccurate or misleading data. The Access Office complies with this act as outlined in the [VSU Catalog](#).

All correspondence to students registered with the Access Office will be by electronic mail. Students are responsible for checking their university assigned e-mail accounts for access to announcements regarding the Access Office.

PROCEDURE

Completion of the “[Voluntary Disclosure of Disability](#)” form authorizes communication with VSU faculty and staff regarding the student’s registration with the Access Office. Communication with other individuals outside of the university, such as parents, can be authorized by completing the “Information Release Form” form. This form allows the student to detail his/her wishes regarding the release of information.

Students should periodically check their e-mail accounts for announcements regarding upcoming events as well as registration deadlines.

ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS POLICY

When appropriate, academic accommodations will be made. It is generally considered non-discriminatory to adhere to academic standards that are essential to a course of study (i.e. setting a grade point average requirement for admission to a particular program). Requests for academic accommodations must be made in a timely manner. Accommodations can be made at any time during the semester; however, accommodations will not be provided retroactively. Therefore, all requests for services should be made to the Access Office according to the procedures outlined in the Policy and Procedures manual. Academic adjustments must be supported by the documentation provided to the Access Office by the student.

FACULTY NOTIFICATION POLICY

Faculty notification is initiated by the student in the form of a “[Request for Accommodations](#)” form. Students must pick up, deliver, and return their signed Accommodation Letters in a timely manner. Returned signed letters indicate that the student has notified his or her professors of the need for accommodations. It is understood that the instructor has not been notified in cases when the letter is not signed and/or not returned to the Access Office.

PROCEDURE

To request letters to present to faculty, students should complete the “Request for Accommodations” form. These forms will be available one month prior to the beginning of the semester online at

<http://www.valdosta.edu/access/Forms>. This form must be completed and submitted electronically as soon as possible each semester. Accommodation letters will then be generated by the Access Office staff. Students will receive email notification that letters are ready to be picked up in the Access Office. Students should pick up these letters, present them to their faculty for signing and accommodation implementation, and return them to the Access Office prior to receiving any testing accommodations.

As course experts, there may be instances where the faculty member believes that an accommodation will substantially alter the basic goal of a course. In these cases, the faculty member should immediately contact the Access Office to determine if an alternate accommodation will meet the needs of the student while upholding the academic integrity of the course.

REGISTRATION POLICY

Regular registration for new and returning students is the same for all students, regardless of disability status. However, during early registration, students who have registered with the Access Office are eligible for priority registration. This status allows the student to register on the first day of early registration. Students are encouraged to take advantage of this accommodation as it enables the university to make advance preparations for accommodations. Course prerequisites and registration holds are the responsibility of the student. The Access Office **does not** have the authority to “special add” or override students into restricted classes. The student’s desired schedule and choice of faculty member are not guaranteed by the Access Office.

PROCEDURE

Prior to registration, students should meet with their academic advisors as outlined in the [VSU Catalog](#) in order to have their course schedules approved and registration flags lifted. During early registration, students registered with the Access Office are eligible for priority registration. These students will have access to registration from 7:00 AM until midnight on the first day of early registration. Thereafter, the students must wait until their regular registration time according to their designation as outlined in the [academic calendar](#) to resume registration. Students will receive email reminders regarding these dates via their VSU email accounts.

ACADEMIC LOAD ADJUSTMENTS POLICY

Students who have submitted appropriate documentation to the Access Office may be able to petition for a reduced academic load permitting them to participate in campus programs requiring full-time student status.

PROCEDURE

Requests for reduced academic load should be made to the Director of the Access Office. If documentation is deemed sufficient and the request is approved, the Access Office will provide a letter of support for this academic accommodation to the appropriate on-campus department. For requests involving off-campus agencies (e.g. NCAA, insurance or loan companies), a letter of support may also be provided. However, VSU is not responsible for acceptance or denial of this documentation by any outside or off-campus agency.

TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

Initiating requests for testing accommodations is the student’s responsibility. In the event that a faculty member is unable to proctor an exam with accommodations, tests may be proctored by the Access Office. Tests should be scheduled at the same time as the rest of the class. Students should negotiate alternative test times with their

professors in the following circumstances: the class meets outside regular business hours, provision of an accommodation will cause the test to extend beyond regular business hours, or there is a time conflict between other tests or classes. Regular business hours for the Access Office are Monday-Thursday, 8:00 am to 5:30 pm; Friday 8:00 am-3:00 pm. In cases where an exam extends beyond regular business hours and the faculty and student are unable to negotiate an alternate testing time, the Access Office may be able to extend hours. In these cases, notice of one week minimum will be required in order to readjust work schedules to meet the need.

PROCEDURE

Students who have negotiated with their faculty member to take a test with accommodations in the Access Office should notify the Access Office a minimum of two business days prior to the exam. The Access Office will contact the faculty member via email to make arrangements for procuring the exam as well as instructions for proctoring.

Students who miss exams scheduled with the Access Office will be required to notify their professors. The Access Office will not reschedule exams without the approval of the faculty. A student who is late for a scheduled exam must finish the test in the time remaining (extended time will be calculated from the scheduled time of the test, not the time of arrival).

Unless otherwise noted by the professor, students will not be allowed to enter the Access Office testing areas with anything other than a writing implement. All books, notes, purses, hats, cell phones, etc., must remain in the designated storage area during exams. All Access Office testing areas are monitored by a closed-circuit television for the purpose of proctoring.

CLASSROOM ADJUSTMENTS

POLICY

Classroom accommodations may include sign language interpreters; assistive listening devices; note takers; use of tape recorder; preferential seating and alternative testing. Students receiving in-class support services must attend classes on a regular basis or risk losing those services.

PROCEDURE

Classroom adjustments are made by submitting the “**Request for Accommodations**” form.

DEGREE REQUIREMENT MODIFICATION

POLICY

Students are expected to complete all degree requirements for graduation in their major. In accordance with university policy, only under unavoidable and exceptional circumstances will the faculty permit substitution for or exemption from the prescribed curricula. Specifically, the study of a foreign language has been deemed a fundamental requirement for many degree programs within the university. The ADA requires that universities offer reasonable accommodation to qualified students; however, it does not require the adjustment of standards that would fundamentally alter degree requirements. The Access Office should be contacted to discuss accommodations available to students seeking to fulfill a foreign language requirement. In addition, the Board of Regents does not support Math substitutions for core curriculum requirements.

PROCEDURE

If it becomes necessary to request deviation from the prescribed course of study, students should contact the Access Office in order to request support for a foreign language substitution. The Access Office will then

review the students' documentation and submit a letter to the student's advisor and department head requesting consideration of a foreign language substitution as a reasonable accommodation based on disability. In accordance with University Policy, requests for course substitutions must be approved by the student's advisor, the head of the department, the dean of the school of the student's major, and the Registrar. If the substitution involves a Core Curriculum course, approval of the Vice President for Academic Affairs is also necessary. A "Request for Course Substitution/Waiver" form, available in the major's department, must be completed before approval is official.

TUTORING POLICY

Tutorial services are available to all students at Valdosta State University through the Student Success Center. Personal or private content specific tutoring is considered the financial responsibility of the student.

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICES POLICY

The Access Office will provide sign language interpreting for classes, meetings, or other university sponsored programs or events for students that are Deaf or Hard of Hearing that provide appropriate supporting documentation. In the event that interpreting services are required for an on-line class, interpreting will be done via a webcam or video phone.

Interpreters are expected to follow the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct as well as to comply with all Access Office standards and University policies. If a conflict with an interpreter arises, make an appointment with the Coordinator for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services immediately.

PROCEDURE

It is the responsibility of students requesting interpreting services to provide the Access office with their schedules immediately after registration. In the event of late registration, every effort will be made to secure accommodations as soon as possible. Any changes to a schedule prior to, or after the start of a semester, should be reported immediately in writing to the Coordinator for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. For classes, students should provide the Access Office with their schedules as soon as possible after registration. In addition, before notetaking/interpreting services begin, a "**Request for Accommodation Form—Deaf and Hard of Hearing**" should be submitted to the Coordinator for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services. Request forms are available online at <http://www.valdosta.edu/access/Forms> one month prior to the beginning of classes.

For one-time events, meetings, etc., students should submit the "**One-time Request for Interpreter**" form found at the same link above at least 48 hours in advance. Requests received less than 48 hours before the scheduled event will be considered and honored if possible.

In the event of an on-line class where a student has a videophone, arrangements will be made to have the lecture interpreted utilizing this technology. If the student does not have access to a videophone or a webcam, the Access Office can check-out a webcam to the student for the semester in which they are enrolled in the on-line class. As soon as the student is enrolled in the on-line course, a request for a webcam must be made to the Coordinator for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services to ensure receipt and proper functioning of equipment prior to the start of the class.

It is the responsibility of the student to inform the Access Office as soon as possible if he or she does require an interpreter for a scheduled class period. The Coordinator for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services should be provided with at least 24 hours advance notice for all changes, cancellations, and tardies to a class or event so that staff may be reassigned as needed. In extenuating circumstances when it is not possible to provide a 24-hour advance notice, contact the Coordinator for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services as soon as you know that you will be absent or late. Acceptable methods of contact include email, telephone, TTY, Video phone, text message. If three classes are missed without appropriate notification, interpreting services for that class may be suspended pending a meeting with the Coordinator for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services. If the student requesting accommodations is not present when class begins, the interpreter will wait 15 minutes for classes lasting less than 90 minutes, and 30 minutes for classes over 90 minutes before returning to the Access office for reassignment *unless* they have been notified by the student that he or she is en route.

NOTETAKING SERVICES POLICY

In the event that documentation supports assistance with notetaking as a reasonable academic accommodation, the Access Office will determine the appropriate level of notetaking services on a case by case basis and provide support for implementing the accommodation. Examples of possible notetaking assistance may include use of digital records, peer notetakers or paid notetakers.

PROCEDURE

Students requesting copies of peer notes should do so on the **Request for Accommodations** form at the beginning of each semester. An announcement recruiting a peer notetaker will be attached to the Accommodation letters. This should be presented to the professor with the accommodation letters during the first week of classes. Copies of peer notes will be disseminated via VSU email by the Access Office. If a student has not received copies of notes by the end of the first week of class, he or she should follow up with the professor. If no one has volunteered and no notes have been received by the end of the second week, the student should contact the Access Office so that alternative accommodations can be implemented.

In instances where other notetaking accommodations (peer notetaker, digital recording) will not meet the need, a paid notetaker may be approved. If three classes are missed without appropriate notification, notetaking services for that class may be suspended pending a meeting with their designated service provider. If the student requesting accommodations is not present when class begins, the notetaker will wait 15 minutes for classes lasting less than 90 minutes, and 30 minutes for classes over 90 minutes before returning to the Access office for reassignment *unless* they have been notified by the student that he or she is en route.

Whether they are receiving copies of peer notes or the services of an in-class notetaker, students should receive their notes within 24-48 hours after the scheduled class. If notes are not received in a timely manner, notify the Access Office as soon as possible. Students are only eligible to receive copies of notes for classes which they have attended. Copies of notes will not be provided when the student has been absent.

CLOSED CAPTIONING POLICY

Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing may request closed captioning of audio-visual materials used to supplement instruction or in University-sponsored events (e.g. VHS or DVD videos, streaming video or audio in online courses).

PROCEDURE

Captioning is requested as an accommodation by the student at the beginning of each semester on the “**Request for Classroom Accommodations—Deaf & Hard of Hearing**” form. Specific requests for media to be captioned are submitted by the professor on the “**Audiovisual Request**” form. In the event that a captioned copy of the media cannot be obtained in a timely manner, a transcript or detailed notes may be provided as an alternative accommodation.

HOUSING ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

The Access Office works in cooperation with VSU Housing and Residence Life to assist students with on-campus housing needs. If the Access Office determines that the documentation supports a reasonable accommodation, a request for accommodations will be submitted to Housing and Residence Life. In the event that housing is unable to meet a student need, an alternate accommodation may be requested (e.g. consideration to get out of a housing contract or to have a housing residency policy waived). Students must adhere to all Housing and Residence Life policies and deadlines.

PROCEDURE

To apply for accommodations in housing, students should complete the **Voluntary Disclosure of Disability** form and submit documentation from the appropriate diagnosing professional to support the need for housing accommodations as soon as possible after acceptance. Students should also indicate on their housing application that they are working with the Access Office and will be requesting accommodations.

In the event that a student’s documentation supports the necessity of a private room, every attempt will be made to find a location available from existing single rooms. Students will be required to pay the regular room rate. In the event that a space is not available and housing deems it is appropriate to provide a double room in place of a single room as an accommodation, the student will not be required to pay the double room rate. Students may wish to request a private room and pay the additional fee if it is not deemed a necessity based on disability.

BARRIER REMOVAL POLICY

Students may not be excluded from a requested course offering, program or activity because it is not offered in an accessible location. New construction will be planned in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines or the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards.

PROCEDURE

Any student wishing to address issues regarding physical barriers should meet with the Access Office.

ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT AND AUXILIARY AIDS POLICY

The Access Office has computer hardware and software available for use by students with a variety of disabilities. In addition, students with disabilities may use the computer labs located throughout the campus, include the Adaptive Technology Labs located on the first floor of the library, rooms 1060 and 1070. Any equipment loaned by the Access Office to a student and not returned will result in a hold being placed on the student’s record in the Registrar’s office.

PROCEDURE

Eligible students may request assistive listening devices, digital recorders, cassette tape players, and other adaptive equipment by contacting the Access Office. When checking out items from the Access Office, students must pick up their equipment and sign an “Equipment Check-out Form” acknowledging that they will return the equipment borrowed.

PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANTS

POLICY

The Access Office does not provide prescriptive devices, devices of a personal nature, or personal attendant care.

SERVICE ANIMALS

POLICY

In accordance with State Law, service animals assisting students with disabilities are permitted in all facilities of the university.

PROCEDURE

In accordance with State Law, service animals are permitted on the college campus and in its facilities. Technically speaking, a service animal means any guide dog, signal dog or other animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including but not limited to guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing, providing minimal rescue or protection work, pulling a wheelchair or fetching dropped items. Therapy or companion animals are not service animals and are not covered under the ADA. To be permitted on campus, a guide dog must be specifically trained to perform a service function. Furthermore, the animal should wear a harness, cape, identification tag or other gear that readily identifies its working status. Guide dogs whose behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others may be excluded regardless of training or certification.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

POLICY

As stated in the undergraduate catalog, students are expected to punctually attend all lecture, laboratory sessions and field experiences in courses for which they are registered. The Access Office does not issue any excuses for absences and cannot require any professor to alter his or her attendance policy. The Access Office can provide written verification of a disability based on appropriate documentation. This verification may address the legitimacy of and ask for consideration regarding absences.

PROCEDURE

While consideration of absences can be requested via an accommodation letter at the beginning of each semester, students encountering disability-related attendance issues should make an appointment with the Access Office as quickly as possible.

In situations where a student's attendance or performance is interfering with a course to the extent that they need to withdraw, students should follow University policies and procedures for withdrawal. A student may request to be withdrawn from the University for medical or hardship reasons. The student must contact the Dean of Students Office to make a request for a medical withdrawal and the Dean of their Academic Major for a hardship withdrawal. The Dean of Students Office staff will assist the student through the process of a medical withdrawal. It should be noted that a Medical Withdrawal can only be requested after mid-term. A student

wanting to withdraw before mid-term must follow the Withdrawal from Course Policy stated in the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs. It is the student's responsibility to withdraw officially in accordance with university regulations.

STUDENT CONDUCT POLICY

All students, including students with documented disabilities, are held to the VSU **Student Code of Conduct**.

GRIEVANCE POLICY

Any student having a grievance related to a disability is entitled to prompt and equitable resolution of his/her complaint.

PROCEDURE

Initial, informal attempts to resolve grievances in the Access Office should be initiated as soon as possible, but no later than the end of the academic semester following the semester in which the grievance occurred (e.g. if the incident occurred in the spring semester, an initial attempt at resolution must be completed by the last day of summer semester). Allegations should be communicated in person or in writing to the administrative officer most directly concerned, excluding the person accused of the improper act. Specifically:

- In the Access Office, initial attempts at informal resolution of a grievance may be made to the Director of the Access Office (229) 245-2498.
- If equitable resolution of grievance is not reached through informal discussion, counseling, mediation, agreement of the parties, or administrative action by the Director, students may seek a resolution through the Vice President of Student Affairs (229) 333-5359.
- A further informal attempt at resolution may be made through the **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program**, involving a mediator, or independent third party, who acts as a facilitator in the resolution of a dispute. Information on the ADR Program can be obtained through the Academic Affairs Office (229) 333-5950.
- A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of an informal inquiry conducted in the preceding manner may formally seek equitable resolution of a grievance through the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs and Multicultural Affairs (229) 333-5463.

INTERNSHIPS AND PRACTICA POLICY

Students must initiate the accommodation process and participate actively throughout the process of identifying a placement agency and negotiating accommodations for internships and practica.

PROCEDURE

Students requiring accommodations for an internship or practicum placement should initiate requested accommodations as far in advance as appropriate based on their specific academic program requirements and deadlines. Students should initiate a meeting with their academic department and the Access Office at least one semester prior to placement during which information about internship expectations might be shared and accommodative planning can begin. The student and department should seek a placement agency that (1) will provide an appropriate educational experience, (2) will make reasonable accommodations for the student, and (3) will negotiate with the student and the university to provide the services needed. The student, department,

and Access Office should determine the accommodations needed, including resources and adaptive/assistive equipment, in advance of negotiations with the placement agency. Because it may be difficult to know what accommodations will be needed until the agency is involved and the nature of accommodations may vary across agencies, departments may prefer early agency involvement in identifying needed accommodations. The student, the department, the Access Office and the placement agency will develop an accommodation plan which will be provided in writing by the Access Office to all parties. Placement agencies are also subject to ADA requirements and may have a contact person who is familiar with the accommodations already being provided to agency employees. The agency ADA contact person may be able to provide assistance in making arrangements for student placements.