

Continuity and Accessibility

In response to precautions being taken in relation to COVID-19, accessibility considerations for students with disabilities must be included as part of campus migration plans as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504, and NYS Human Rights Law will still apply. Everyone must work together to assist both faculty and students who never planned to teach or take courses online, and whose residency has been disrupted. Efforts to reshape entire academic programs do not redefine the obligations of institutions to provide individual academic adjustments or modifications. Balance providing access and academic judgement.

Students may have difficulty obtaining documentation from secondary institutions and/or medical providers at this time. As such, offices are encouraged create mechanisms to permit students to receive accommodations when documentation of the disability is not readily available. Offices should also permit students to send pictures of their documentation. Ultimately, these offices can conduct the interactive process with students through teleconferencing solutions.

Institutions should be prepared for an increase in accommodation requests. Campuses may especially experience an increase in chronic health and [mental health \(link\)](#) disability accommodation requests. People with [serious chronic health conditions \(link\)](#) are at a higher risk of getting sick from this illness. As such, it is paramount to protect campus community members with immunocompromised disabilities. Maximum flexibility for these students are strongly encouraged. Continue to determine appropriate accommodations through an interactive process. Ensure this process is accessible to students remotely.

It is also important to note, students who utilize assistive technologies (e.g., text-to-speech software) may only have access to these technologies at the physical campus. Therefore, campuses may need to consider how those students with disabilities can use such assistive technology to independently access remotely. There may also be alternative software or other technologies available on the student's home computer to provide equivalent access.

Transitioning to online instruction may change the accommodation plans for students with disabilities. The barriers that exist at the intersection of one's disability and course design may be different from the original course format. Some accommodations faculty used before may no longer apply, and some accommodations not considered previously may need to be considered now. While students are not required to disclose their disability to the institution, students should be provided contact information for your campus Accessibility/Disability Services office and offered the opportunity to update their accommodation plan as needed.

Teleconferencing/Lecture Capture Technologies

Be aware that not all teleconferencing software is accessible to individuals with disabilities. Moreover, utilizing these technologies in certain ways may create additional barriers to participation. To make sure students can fully engage in the online learning environment:

- Identify the accessibility barriers for the product of your choosing and limit interactions of inaccessible features.
- Provide accessibility features and resources to enable using the product independently.
- Establish responsibility for quickly addressing equal access needs, such as closed or live captioning. Consider using Microsoft Office PowerPoint with the [Presentation Translator Plug-in \(link\)](#), or [Google Slides with live captions \(link\)](#).

- As screen sharing occurs, audio [description \(link\)](#) is needed to provide the important visual content to people who are blind or visually impaired.

Additional third party or open-source digital learning technologies used to facilitate instruction, such as polling software, must also be evaluated for accessibility. If the required technology is inaccessible to users with disabilities, work closely with your campus disability services office to create equally effective access for the known barriers. Be open and flexible to alternative technologies and/or methodologies that meet the course's learning objectives.

Digital Content

As various types of content are uploaded to the Learning Management Systems (LMS), establish a plan to prioritize making course materials and related technologies accessible to all learners. It is recommended to use the following hierarchy:

- Content for registered students with disabilities
- Large enrollment courses
- Required courses

There are numerous free or campus-sponsored tools to enhance the inclusiveness of the course. Here are some basic universal design tips:

- If you post a PDF, make sure it is searchable text and not just an image.
- If you post a [PowerPoint \(link\)](#) presentation, use larger size fonts and high-contrast color schemes. Avoid the use of color or animation to convey information.
- If you post a video, check and see if it has intelligible captions. At minimum, use automatic caption features (e.g., [YouTube \(link\)](#)) and improve accuracy as needed.
- If you post audio, also share a written transcript. The [Google Docs Voice Typing feature \(link\)](#) creates a transcript for you.
- If you post photographs, graphs or other media, add [alternative text \(link\)](#) to describe the image and its context.
- If you are a campus that uses Ally or other accessibility tools in your LMS, leverage them.
- If you use a new technology for engagement/discussion, check with your campus disability services office to be sure all your students can use it.

Online Exams/Quizzes

For courses moved online, the process for scheduling and delivering exams and quizzes may change. As campuses plan to deliver exams online, ensure that assistive technologies (e.g., screen reader, text-to-speech) are not blocked from taking exams remotely. While proctoring/testing systems allow for exam security, they may pose barriers to students with disabilities.

To extend time on exams and quizzes, most, if not all, LMS have built-in features to accomplish this. However, you may need to extend the time manually for the individual student for each exam and quiz.

Additional Resources

- SUNY's Electronic & Information Technology (EIT) Accessibility guidance and free, unlimited user access to self-paced online accessibility training through Deque University may accessed by

logging into SUNY Blue. Visit [blue.suny.edu \(link\)](https://blue.suny.edu) and enter your campus credentials. Navigate to Enterprise Projects > SUNY EIT Accessibility. If your campus does not have a Deque University administrator, contact your campus EIT Accessibility Officer.

- Check out [20 Tips for Teaching an Accessible Online Course \(PDF\) \(link\)](#).
- For individuals who have a chronic illness, please feel free to share this resource to speak with others who understand this time of heightened stress: [Beyond My Battle Support Group \(link\)](#).

Any additional questions should be directed to Nazely Kurkjian, Coordinator of Disability, Diversity and Nontraditional Student Services: Nazely.Kurkjian@suny.edu.