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A Student Guide to Accommodations to Address Disability-Related Barriers in Academic Practicum Requirements

May, 2021

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background to Academic Accommodation	1	Roles in the Accommodation Process	8
Accommodations: The Basics	3	Students	9
Types of Disabilities	4	Accessibility Services	9
Registering with Accessibility Services	4	Clinical and Practicum Faculty Member	10
Library Services	4	Deciding on Appropriate Accommodation Plan	11
Accommodations	5	Difficulties in Placements	12
Essential Requirements	5	Information for Objective Structured Clinical Exam	13
Privacy and Confidentiality	6	Appendix 1: Legal Framework	14
Developing Effective Accommodation Plans	7	Appendix 2: Task Analysis	15
		Appendix 3: Key Questions to Ask When Determining Accommodations	17
		Strategies and supports in Clinical Settings	19
		References	20
		Resources	21

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Introduction

Welcome to Accessibility Services.

This guide is design to assist you in understanding how to navigate accommodations for placements that are part of your academic practicum requirements that require experiential learning. It includes information on the process of requesting accommodations through registering with Accessibility Services; what is expected of you, your faculty member responsible for placements and Accessibility Services. It also outlines the framework for how decisions about accommodations for placements are made and what accommodations you might expect.

If you have any questions about how to begin the process or whether or not you may qualify for service, please go to:

accessibility.students.yorku.ca

Introduction to the Student Guide for Practicums and Placements

Over the past thirty years, there has been considerable focus and consensus on what constitutes reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions.

Accommodations that are appropriate for a classroom setting may not be suitable to meet the essential requirements in a placement setting.

For some students, the unique demands of the clinical environment reveal disability-related barriers that are unexpected with a need to consider accommodations differently than in the past. These challenges might include:

- the volume of new information,
- the variety of complex settings, and different expectations,
- adapting to different supervisors with different supervisory styles, interpreting their expectations,
- less predictability and varying degrees of structure,
- absences for disability-related reasons may adversely impact on colleagues, professional clients, and patients.
- disclosure issues are more difficult to navigate.
For example: Who to disclose to? What to disclose?
When to disclose?
- Managing externally imposed deadlines,
- Ensuring client care and confidentiality.

This booklet is designed to support the collaborative work between students, faculty and Accessibility Services to provide clarity and transparency to the accommodations processes as outlined within the Ontario Human Rights framework. Complying with the legal obligation to accommodate is the minimum expectation of universities.

While the focus of this handbook is on placements as part of practicum requirements, the approach to thinking through accommodations for other kinds of experiential learning opportunities would be similar. Many of the strategies in this handbook may be helpful in solving issues that may arise.





Academic Accommodations: The Basics

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services and discuss their placement accommodations well in advance of its start to allow for good decision-making and communication with everyone who is involved. In a paid co-op or internship placement, the participating partner should be consulted. Human Resources may be able to provide the required accommodation for co-ops or internships. Academic programs may include other experiential learning opportunities that are not tied to practicum requirements. Many of the strategies in this handbook may be helpful in solving issues that may arise.

Difficulties cannot always be anticipated and creative problem solving is required when problems arise. Getting in touch with your Accessibility Counsellor or contacting Accessibility Services when problems first arise is important so that they can be addressed before you experience failure.

Types of disabilities

Students registered with Student Accessibility Services may be registered in any of the following disability categories: D/ deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, low vision or legally blind, mobility or functional limitations, mental health issues, learning disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, concussion, brain injury or other medical conditions.

Students may also be registered for temporary disabilities such as a broken limb or short-term impairment after medical treatment or surgery. Assistance can be given for transportation for practicums, placements and labs as required, and for problem-solving the completion of academic work.

Within Human Rights frameworks students with disabilities are required to specify their disability-related functional limitations through documentation written by a licensed medical professional.

Registering with Accessibility Services

- Registration packages are available on the Accessibility Services web site: accessibility.students.yorku.ca
- Students complete the package and submit relevant documentation.
- Students meet with an Accessibility Counsellor for an intake interview. This counsellor will then work with the student moving forward.

Library Supports

With a referral from Accessibility Services, the Libraries are able to provide Transcription Services, Adaptive Equipment Lab, Adaptive Lab Room Booking, Building Accessibility and **Captioned Media**. The Adaptive Lab in Scott Library offers quiet, silent or private study spaces, accessible furniture, washrooms, scanners, computers, software, and printing. The Adaptive Lab is open during all Scott Library Hours to students who are registered with **Student Accessibility Services**. No group study work is permitted. The Lab is intended for quiet study only. The Lab offers individual study rooms, one large room with eleven computers and one room without computers for laptop use or silent study. Individual study rooms may be booked online through the **Adaptive Lab Room Booking** system

Library Supports Links:

Captioned Media: <https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/ask-services/captioned-media/>

Adaptive Lab Room Booking System: <https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/ask-services/accessibility-services/adaptive-lab-room-booking/>

Accommodations

Academic accommodations are provided when students experience disability-related barriers in demonstrating their knowledge and skills. Accommodations are required to be designed so as to provide equitable access for students with disabilities to meet the academic standards of their program. A student may have a disability but not require accommodation, if the student does not encounter barriers to their functional limitations. For example, a student with a chronic health disability managed well by medication, diet and appropriate coping strategies may decide not to register for Accessibility Services. On the other hand, a student may register, but not request that accommodations be provided until they experience a change in their health that then makes accommodations necessary.

It is reasonably requested and expected that students will seek accommodations in advance of actually needing them implemented, to achieve efficiencies that will benefit the student as much as the University and the placement setting. However, registration with Accessibility Services occurs on a continuous basis because students may be diagnosed with a disability at any point during their education and/or may recognize unexpectedly at any time that they need to exercise their right to request accommodation to remove barriers to demonstrating their academic knowledge and skills.

Essential requirements

The provision of accommodations must maintain the essential requirements of a program. *“An appropriate accommodation enables a student to successfully meet the essential requirements of the program, with no alteration in standards or outcomes, although the manner in which the student demonstrates mastery, knowledge and skills may be altered.”*¹

“Essential requirements” is a specific term used in human rights legislation, referring to the bona fide requirements of a task or program that cannot be altered without compromising the fundamental nature of the task or program. Determining what is an essential requirement and what is not is critical in distinguishing requirements that cannot be accommodated from what can and should be altered.”

- Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003)

Determining the essential requirements of an academic program provides a solid foundation for understanding what accommodation requests can be met and what will require further discussion to determine whether or not required competencies are being compromised. These essential competencies are normally linked to the licensing requirements of accrediting bodies but may also be bona fide determinations of appropriate course or program requirements previously approved by the University Senate.

When you apply for admission to your program you may ask questions about the flexibility within your program to accommodate your disability-related barriers. Clarity about the essential requirements provides a basis from which to open the conversation and explore what is possible and not possible.

1. Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2004). *Guidelines on Accessible Education* (ISBN: 0-7794-7191-1). Toronto, ON: Canada.

Outlining the competencies that students must demonstrate articulates what students are required to know and to do. Accommodation may mean that you demonstrate your knowledge and skills differently. For example: students may be required to demonstrate that they can incorporate and analyze information from multiple sources within a placement. How you demonstrate this competency may differ; you may use technology, others may use diagrams, still others may write bullet points. Leaving room for how a competency is demonstrated wherever possible leaves space to remove disability-related barriers and foster creativity. For example: providing breaks, flexibility in hours and an alternate type of setting may support the student to successfully demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Students with accommodations are expected to demonstrate the same knowledge and skill development as their peers. The Accessibility Counselor can work with you collaboratively to develop options that can address the barriers you may encounter while not compromising academic or professional standards. Collaboration between your faculty member, you and your Accessibility Counsellor in developing solutions to problems maintains a learning environment that supports your success.

In some circumstances, the nature and degree of disability may mean that no accommodation would enable an individual to meet the essential academic requirements or behavioral expectations of a course or program. In these cases, the University is not required to accommodate and may refuse to provide accommodations. However, all efforts must be made to provide all reasonable options that are well documented before the university declares it can't provide accommodation.

Privacy & confidentiality

A student's specific diagnosis is private medical information under Human Rights Code guidelines. Under no circumstances should you be asked to disclose this information.

Because any category of disability contains a wide range of differences in how someone functions, knowing a student's type of disability is not particularly helpful without the more detailed information provided during the intake process. This information is all important so that an assessment process can also take into account not just the specific impacts of the disability but also difficulties due to other conditions, family and social supports, past experiences of learning, and areas of strength that can compensate for difficulties.

For example, knowing a student has a learning disability is not particularly helpful without knowing the nature of the learning disability in the individual's case, what supports are most likely to be effective, what strategies the student uses effectively, how the student can demonstrate their strengths, how familiar the student is with coping with their disability and what social supports the student has available to them.

The accommodations process follows the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation (FIPPA). This means that information can be shared on a "need to know" basis. Accessibility Services will share information about the disability-related impact on learning that the student is experiencing with the Practicum Coordinator, academic administrators supporting placements and the faculty supervisor. They in turn may share relevant information with the preceptor/placement supervisor or other supervising members of the profession.

When you speak to your faculty members, academic administrators or placement supervisor, talk about the impact of your disability on your learning. Depending on your skill and comfort levels related to your disability, you may need to practice what to say and how to say it. Your Accessibility Counsellor can be a resource to assist you in learning these skills. Ask what you might encounter in a placement or practicum to gain a clear understanding. Talk about your interests, what you think might work for you and be open to faculty suggestions.

In rare circumstances, the provision of accommodations for you may have an unanticipated impact on the experience of other students. An example of this would be allergies to the dander of a service animal. Work with your Accessibility Counsellor to find a solution.

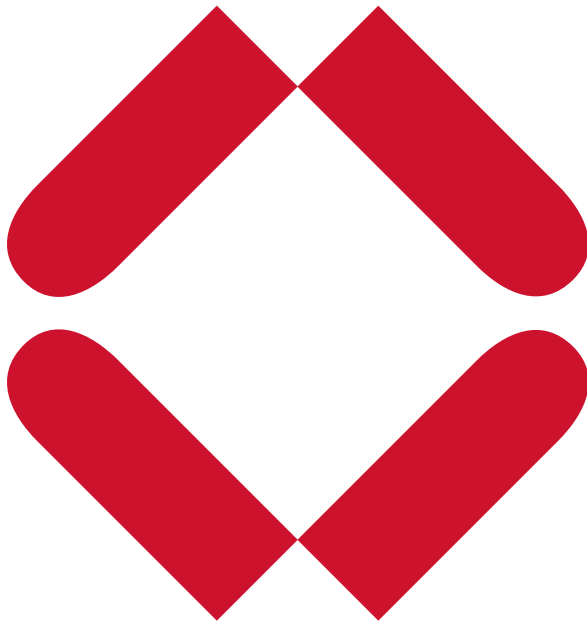
Developing an Effective Accommodation Plan

Deciding on reasonable accommodations in practical settings is a more complex task than in a classroom. A balance must be found between ensuring that you receive appropriate accommodation and ensuring that professional standards and responsibility based on licensing requirements are met.

Transparency with respect to required competencies assists the program, the placement setting and the student to work through the learning objectives and the assessment of competencies in each area.

Your Accessibility Counsellor can be a resource in develop an effective accommodation plan and can be a resource for other university services such as the library's transcription services that might support your learning.





Roles in the Accommodation Process

Student's Role in Accommodation

- Initiate communication and register with Accessibility Services.
- Provide requisite medical documentation about functional limitations from a medical practitioner able to speak to the disability, relevant treatments and recommendations (see Student Accessibility Services website).
- Inform the Accessibility Counsellor of upcoming placements ahead of time.
- Participate in the accommodations process. For example, identify accommodations that might assist in a particular setting, stay in contact with Accessibility Counsellor and alert them when problems arise, follow through promptly on recommendations.

Role of Accessibility Services

- Verify the presence of a disability requiring accommodation on behalf of the University.
- Provide relevant information on the functional limitations of the disability on a need-to-know basis.
- Engage in the interactive process to determine appropriate accommodations.
- Facilitate accommodations for students.
- Support faculty and staff to assess and meet their legal obligations. Act in the best interests of the student while also ensuring the legal responsibilities of the University.
- Ensure due process has been followed by all parties to explore and provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations.
- Understand the functional limitations of the student's disability as well as the overall requirements of the professional program and the essential competencies of the program, and the demands, tasks, types of settings in which the competencies are to be demonstrated.
- Establish contact with the Clinical Coordinators in individual programs if appropriate.

Role of Clinical/Practicum Faculty Members

Because licensing exams require a documented history of receiving accommodations, informally accommodating a student is problematic. Clinical and Practicum faculty members:

- Play a role in discussing effective accommodation when requested and in implementing accommodations. Discuss the most appropriate placement setting based on what might be anticipated with a particular disability (e.g., a placement in chronic care vs acute care).
- Only provide accommodations specifically recommended by the student's Accessibility Counsellor.
- Accommodate students with specific placement needs prior to any lottery systems being implemented.
- Be proactive in supporting the placement setting in implementing accommodations.
- Consult the student's Accessibility Counsellor early on when problems develop rather than waiting until the student is failing as not all challenges can be anticipated prior to the start of a placement but many can be resolved with timely attention.
- Respect the student's privacy by keeping confidential all information about the student's needs including the fact of their being registered with Accessibility Services unless there is a need to know for accommodation purposes.
- Ensure that those responsible implement accommodations appropriately, and maintain confidentiality but also understand that they should consult on a need-to-know basis if problems arise.
- Document the decision process for accommodations within the academic department so there is evidence that all efforts have been made to support the student. (Accessibility Services and faculty should do this after consulting with each other and coming to a resolution).
- In determining whether a particular accommodation would compromise the academic integrity of a course or endanger safety, consider doing a task analysis and asking some key questions similar to those outlined above. (See Appendix 2)

Deciding on Appropriate Accommodations

It is important to engage in *an interactive process* to determine the optimal and most appropriate accommodations for you. Based on your functional limitations outlined within the medical documentation, the accommodations process should involve the Accessibility Service Counsellor, faculty involved in coordinating practicums, staff in placement sites, and you.

Creative problem solving may be required to think of suitable options for difficult situations with dialogue between you, the faculty member, and the Accessibility Counsellor. The Accessibility Counsellor may pose questions to assist in determining what is essential to demonstrate and what accommodation options might be viable.

Experts in various aspects of disability may need to be consulted to determine what is required:

For example: when a student has a physical disability, an Occupational Therapy/ Physical Therapy/Ergonomic assessment may be helpful to determine what adaptive equipment and furniture may assist the student and to identify any safety concerns regarding the student's functional limitations. This type of professional assessment can support the effective determination about the essential requirements.

Factors to consider in this process include:

- Functional limitations arising from the disability assessed by the Accessibility Counsellor
- Previous accommodations (what has been effective and not)
- Articulating the skills that need to be demonstrated by analyzing the essential requirements
- Generating possible options for the task through creative problem solving
- Student input into what works for them and what doesn't
- Anticipating barriers prior to placements beginning: some take longer to arrange because e.g. they depend on service providers who may be scarce.

For example, if a student is Deaf and is going to be working in a busy clinic or hospital environment, then specific accommodations, sign language interpreters and adaptive technology need to be arranged well in advance.

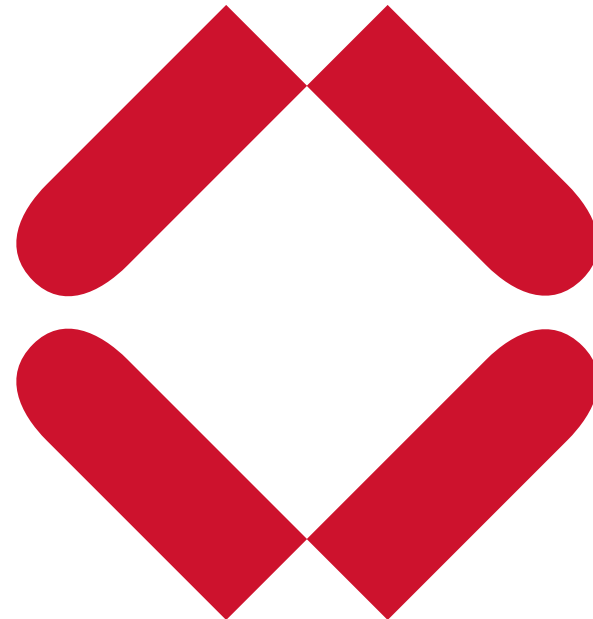
Aligning your need for accommodation with the placement setting may also be helpful. Particular placements may be more suitable if you need to be absent for medical appointments or if additional time is required to demonstrate a skill or complete notes.

In some instances, dialogue may help determine an alternate course of action from the degree of accommodation that is being requested. For example, students with specific phobias that may arise in the placement setting may require skill development in managing their phobia, before accommodations are requested that would unduly change the nature of the placement. Similarly, students with recent experiences of trauma may need to develop further skills before working with clients who have experienced a similar trauma. An open discussion with careful listening from all parties may assist in developing the best course of action. For more information on determining effective accommodations and examples for clinical settings, see Appendix 3.

Difficulties During Placements

Sometimes difficulties arise or crystallize in the middle of a placement. There may be insufficient time for you to demonstrate your knowledge and skills in the remaining placement hours or to work in a different placement setting. Alternate timelines may need to be explored.

In these instances, withdrawing from the course and having your fees refunded may provide the best course of action. Ask for a detailed summary of your strengths, areas for improvement and suggested strategies. They will provide clarity about what needs to change and will be helpful in funding a suitable placement.



Information for Students, Faculty and Academic Departments on Determining and Implementing Accommodations for Objective Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs)

Determining Accommodations for an Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) is a collaborative partnership between the student, the Accessibility Counsellor, the faculty member and academic staff members. This needs to take place well ahead of time as OSCE arrangements are frequently complex and time consuming.

Process

- Students should be encouraged to register with Accessibility Services by including information about these Services in Admission material, acceptance letters, student handbooks, and orientation sessions.
- If a student has **not** registered with Accessibility Services and is requesting accommodations, the student should go to Accessibility Services website to start the registration process. (accessibility.students.yorku.ca)
- The student meets with their Accessibility Counsellor to talk about accommodations for an OSCE.
- The Accessibility Counsellor will use the medical documentation outlining the student's functional limitations and their meeting with the student to determine, what, if any, accommodations are reasonable to provide for each section of the exam.
- The Accessibility Counsellor will contact the faculty member to understand each component before finalizing accommodations (as needed).

Examples of accommodations include:

- Extra time/reading software to read door notes.
- Students with motor problems may require an assistant or specialized equipment to perform a patient exam e.g., automatic blood pressure machine.
- Breaks, extra time or speech-to text software to enable some students to write up reports in a timely manner.
- Students with accommodations go first or last in the OSCE so ensure a steady rotation for other students.

Test and Exam Services do not administer the practical component of OSCEs, only the written component



Appendix 1: Legal Framework

Definitions

What is a disability?

The Ontario *Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, c.H.19 defines disability as:

- Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation, or disfigurement (including chronic health conditions, sensory impairments, functional or mobility disabilities)
- A condition of mental impairment or developmental disability
- A learning disability or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language
- A mental disorder

The term *disability* covers a broad range and degree of conditions. The *Code* is not exhaustive and does not speak to the complex and intersectional lives that people with disabilities lead or to the strengths that students registered with our service demonstrate every day.

Duty to accommodate

The Ontario *Human Rights Code* guarantees the right to equal treatment in education without discrimination on the ground of disability. York University has a duty and is committed to considering accommodations when:

- Accommodations are requested by a student
- We become aware of a student's accommodation needs in a reasonable time
- Accommodations do not cause undue hardship to the University (e.g., safety to self and others, cost, and academic integrity of programs of study)

We will arrange appropriate, effective, and respectful accommodations to remove barriers so that all students meet the same academic standards. Requests for accommodation are considered in good faith.



Appendix 2: Task Analysis (IDIA, The Role of Disability Service Professionals in Determining Essential Requirements, 2004)

1. What is the purpose of the course?

What is it that students are expected to know and demonstrate? What is the content knowledge that is required? What skills in using the content need to be demonstrated?

2. Is the competency integral to the learning of the course?

For example: presentation skills may be more important in some settings and program outcomes than in others

Covering telephones over lunch hours may not be essential to the practicum requirements

3. Does the skill need to be performed in a prescribed manner?

For example: are there institutional notetaking systems that must be utilized to enhance communication across teams?

Are there systems for dispensing medication that must be adhered to in order to meet safety requirements?

Are there protocols for ensuring the health and safety of children and vulnerable adults?

4. Would accommodations require a fundamental alteration to the nature of the program?

For example, an aide working under the clear direction of a student is different from an aide performing a task without direction.

5. What are the outcome variables that are absolutely necessary? Why?

What knowledge and skills must be demonstrated to successfully meet program requirements?

6. Safety concerns must always be considered with assurances that appropriate measures have been taken to ensure the safety and well-being of those being served. Consultation may be required to understand institutional requirements with respect to safety.

7. What methods of assessing outcome variables are absolutely necessary? Why?

What specific licensing requirements are being considered in the mode of assessment?

Within the workplace is there only one way for a skill to be performed or is there some variability?

8. Is there only one way for the skills/knowledge to be demonstrated?

Is the type of assessment being calibrated to the workload demands of placement instructors or to the demands of professional placement settings to perform skills and demonstrate knowledge in prescribed ways?

For example, is there a placement setting that has greater flexibility for performing a skill?

Being accurate under stressful conditions or the physical demands of intensive care may be more difficult to demonstrate than in a day surgery clinic? At the same time what constitutes sufficient demonstration of the skill to meet licensing requirements?

9. Can adaptive equipment, software or technology such as a computer be used.

Are there learning aids such as charts that can support accuracy and be used on the job?

Can information be provided in an alternate format such as typed rather than only spoken or handwritten?

Is it possible to provide visual cues for students learning to use equipment that has to be manipulated?

10. Would there be any significant consequences if this skill was performed at varying levels of competency?

For example, accurate measurement for dispensing medication is no- negotiable on the grounds of patient safety.

Although policy development requires a clear recognition of the importance of interpersonal bonds, being able to form a strong relational bond with clients may not be as important in a policy placement than in a clinical setting.

Adequate skills in navigating physical spaces may be sufficient to meet the requirements of most placements; but not within an emergency setting where time may be of the essence.

Appendix 3: Key Questions to ask when collaboratively determining appropriate accommodations:

1. Will the proposed accommodations result in a failure to meet any essential requirements of the program?

For example, a student can't meet the clinical requirements for client care and interdisciplinary teamwork due to required absences. Efforts to generate options must be demonstrated and documented.

2. Will the accommodations legitimately jeopardize the safety of others?

Examples:

A student with a visual impairment or a physical disability may have difficulty ensuring client safety. Would it be viable to have an assistant in this case?

A Pharmacy student with dyslexia may make errors with numbers when dispensing medication. However, if the student has set up an effective self-checking system and there are no demonstrated errors then, one cannot assume that there may be harm to patients.

Before concluding that there are safety concerns, creative accommodation possibilities must be considered and documented.

3. Would the accommodations fundamentally alter the education program?

Examples:

Some students benefit from a longer learning period before they acquire the required skills. While logistically this can present difficulties, the essential skill requirements can be met by the student.

If the number of patients/clients seen per day is reduced and the placement is extended, the learning experience of the placement is not fundamentally altered.



4. Before determining that accommodations can't be made without compromising academic integrity, a fair process that is well documented needs to be undergone to determine what accommodations may be possible.

For example, a student with autism spectrum disorder who experiences considerable anxiety may find it very difficult to cope with the uncertainties of a placement environment, particularly one that is quite unstructured.

Accommodations for this student might include:

- choosing an appropriate setting e.g., chronic rather than acute care
- visiting the site as an observer prior to beginning the program
- having a designated mentor and weekly sessions to review cases
- providing feedback in writing
- referring a student for counselling and coaching support
- Supporting the student to recognize the structure in what may seem to be unstructured

Things to keep in mind when collaboratively determining appropriate accommodations:

Accommodations need to be flexible and may need to be adjusted within different settings.

Every accommodation and recommendation to the student must be well documented. If, after all the supports have been put in place, the student cannot meet essential requirements, further action can be pursued.

The Accessibility Counsellor should be involved when there are requests for accommodations that involve additional costs (adaptive furniture; equipment; software; service provision to access information). Student Accessibility Services will facilitate the provision of necessary resources in consultation with academic departments.

The *2018 OHRC Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities* outlines the requirement that students needing additional time to complete their academic studies should not incur additional costs.

Each program needs to develop a mechanism to track the additional costs students may accrue and work with Accessibility Services to address these issues.

Strategies and supports in Clinical Settings

Additional time and effort may be needed before the student reaches the required level of competency. Ways to support this learning include:

- Having a **designated mentor** with whom the student can meet with on a regular basis to problem-solve, discuss concerns, and complex cases. This person should not be in a position to evaluate the student.
- Providing more **opportunities to observe** experienced clinicians in the community. If possible, providing an opportunity for the student to work in a similar setting prior to beginning a formal practicum/placement.
- Having **protected time** to read charts and write up case notes etc. This facilitates checking and re-checking procedures to reduce error, and allows time to follow up on patient issues needing attention. This also allows time to organize notes in a coherent, logical manner with all relevant information included.
- If a student is struggling academically and requires remediation, having a **consistent person to meet with** once or twice a week helps to establish a relationship, and also provides the basis for measuring progress more effectively.
- **Having a modified case load**, at least in the initial stages of a placement, if appropriate. As the student gains confidence and competence, this case load can be gradually increased until the student is able to maintain a full case load.
- Taking time away from a placement so that the student has time to receive treatment, work on strategies, obtain equipment and be trained on it. Ways in which this time would be made up can be negotiated.
- **Modifying the schedule**/reducing overnight hours to a 10pm end time, and substituting a day-time weekend call. In some circumstances students may need a longer placement with reduced hours.
- Using **simulation labs** (sim labs) to provide learning opportunities and time for practising and honing skills.
- Starting their placement two to three days earlier as an observer to allow the student extra time to familiarize themselves with the environment, routines etc.
- **Introducing Adaptive technology** to help compensate for information processing differences or to enhance learning. (Kurzweil (text-to-speech), Inspiration, a mind-mapping program, Live Scribe pen, Dragon Professional)



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Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate OHRC, (2001, revised 2009)

Policy on Preventing Discrimination based on Mental Health Disabilities and Addictions, OHRC (2014)

The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-Free Education for Students with Disabilities OHRC (2003)



Resources

Association of Medical Professionals with Hearing Loss – www.amphl.org

Canadian Association of Physicians with Disabilities – www.capd.ca

Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education – HSMcoalition.org

Council on Access, Prevention and Interprofessional Relations (American Dental Association) – altdentalcareers@ada.org

Exceptional Nurse – www.exceptionalnurse.com

National Organization of Nurses with Disabilities – www.nond.org

Society of Healthcare Professionals with Disabilities – www.disabilitysociety.org

Society of Pharmacists with Disabilities – www.pharmacistswithdisabilities.org

Society of Physicians with Disabilities – www.physicianswithdisabilities.org

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