Contact AccessAbility Services

General

Phone    (413) 538-2634
Fax       (413) 538-2827
Email     AccessAbility-Services@mtholyoke.edu
Web       www.mtholyoke.edu/AccessAbility
Location
Wilder Hall B4, enter at rear door, wheelchair accessible

Service Hours
Office   Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Exam space  Monday through Friday, by appointment only

Staff
Deborah L. Cohen, Director
extension  2504   email  dlcohen@mtholyoke.edu

Emily Dean, Technology Access Coordinator
extension  2524   email  edean@mtholyoke.edu

Liza Manchester, Learning Specialist
extension  2646   email  lmanches@mtholyoke.edu

Melissa Ebbeling, Administrative Assistant
extension  2634

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that the College name a coordinator who is responsible to coordinate the College’s efforts to comply with mandated obligations in maintaining access and equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in the College’s programs, activities, and services. The Section 504 Coordinator at Mount Holyoke College is Rene Davis. Faculty who have any suggestions, questions or concerns about campus accessibility or disability laws may speak with the Section 504 Coordinator by contacting:

Rene Davis, Section 504 Coordinator
Mary Lyon Hall, 413-538-3569  section504coordinator@mtholyoke.edu

Welcome to AccessAbility Services!

AccessAbility Services (Formerly known as Disability Services) was established to facilitate equal access for students with disabilities to all programs and activities at Mount Holyoke College. Our goal is to focus on the access of the college and the ability of each student. The efforts of AccessAbility Services are part of the college’s overall commitment to diversity.
AccessAbility Services coordinates and provides accommodations and support services to students with all types of disabilities. Over 400 students with documented disabilities are registered with the office. Mount Holyoke College appreciates that everyone is unique; therefore, each student who registers with AccessAbility Services is considered on a case by case basis. Our goal is to provide appropriate and necessary accommodations and services while supporting each student in developing the skills to lead an independent life.

Under the umbrella of Student Affairs, AccessAbility Services collaborates with all departments of the college to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to campus programs. AccessAbility Services can provide professional development to academic and administrative departments and engages in proactive institutional planning to ensure that the college is meeting the diverse needs of the student body. We welcome feedback, suggestions, and volunteer support.

AccessAbility Services is available to provide the college faculty with clear, practical information about teaching students with disabilities. We can provide you with information about disability laws, an explanation of your rights and responsibilities as faculty, the types of services and accommodations available at Mount Holyoke College, the policies and procedures that students must follow in order to receive accommodations, as well as strategies for teaching students with particular disabilities. We are also available to provide consultation to individuals and professional development to departments on Universal Design in Education, which is an approach to creating an inclusive classroom environment that meets the needs of students with diverse learning styles. Please do not hesitate to call AccessAbility Services with your questions. We are here to support you in your efforts to make your classroom accessible.

**What We Do**

AccessAbility Services is the only designated office at Mount Holyoke College for students to voluntarily disclose a disability, submit appropriate documentation for verification, and request accommodations. The college respects the student’s right not to disclose a disability or request accommodations. This decision rests with the student. Disclosure of a disability is voluntary; however, it is important to note that the college is
not responsible for providing accommodations to a student who has not provided appropriate documentation of a disability to AccessAbility Services and requested a reasonable accommodation.

**Summary of Services Offered**

- Reasonable accommodations
- Learning Specialist
- Academic and self-advocacy counseling and coaching
- Assistive technology
  - Kurzweil 3000 (text-reading and study skills tools)
  - JAWS (screen-reading)
  - Zoomtext (screen enlargement)
  - Dragon Naturally Speaking (voice recognition)
  - Inspiration (concept mapping)
  - Texthelp Read&Write Gold (text-reading and study skills tools)
  - Duxbury Braille Translation Software
- Advocacy
- Information on the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Sign language interpreters, FM, and CART
- Referrals to other campus services
- Exam space
- Text in alternate format (e.g. digital text, audio, Braille, large print)
- Accessible furniture
- Note takers, scribes, readers
- Foreign language and other course substitutions
- Physical education modification or waiver
- Housing and food accommodations/modifications
- Consultation and professional development to campus departments

**Relevant Legislation**

Mount Holyoke College is committed to its moral, educational, and legal responsibility for compliance with the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** and **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**, as amended in 1998. To this end, discrimination
against people with a disability is prohibited in the College’s programs, services, and activities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 1998 states that, “No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 states that, “No qualified individual with a disability shall by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of a public entity, or to be subjected to discrimination by such entity.”

“Qualified” in the context of a college setting means “meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the education program or activity,” with or without the use of reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids or services.

“A person with a disability” means, “any person who has a physical or mental impairment (disability) that substantially limits them in a major life activity. Major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working. A major life activity also includes the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.” – Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Sec. 12102)

Faculty and staff who would like to learn more about disability laws or who have questions regarding compliance are encouraged to contact Deborah Cohen, Director of AccessAbility Services, at dlicoehn@mtholyoke.edu or (413) 538-2504 or Rene Davis, 504 Coordinator at section504coordinator@mtholyoke.edu or (413) 538-3569.

Rights and Responsibilities

Summary of Rights
A qualified student with a disability at Mount Holyoke College has the right to:

- Be treated with dignity and respect
- Receive reasonable accommodations
- Receive an education in an integrated environment—meaning a setting that allows students with disabilities to interact with non-disabled students to the fullest extent possible
- Equal access to education, programs, services, jobs, activities, and facilities
- Confidentiality of records provided to AccessAbility Services

Mount Holyoke College has the right to:

- Establish academic course and degree requirements, including determining essential standards and requirements for courses, degrees, programs, activities, and services
- Request and receive, through AccessAbility Services, documentation of a disability when an accommodation is requested
- Deny a request for accommodations and services if:
  a. if an individual fails to provide the required documentation
  b. the provided documentation does not support the requested accommodation,
  c. the student fails to make the request in a reasonable time period (as described in this manual),
  d. the requested accommodation poses a health or safety risk
  e. the requested accommodation imposes an undue financial or administrative burden or fundamental alteration to a program, service, or activity
- The College may also offer an alternative effective accommodation and will engage in an interactive process with the student regarding alternative accommodations.

Summary of Responsibilities

A qualified student with a disability at Mount Holyoke College has the responsibility to:

- Meet qualifications and requirements for courses, programs, services, and activities
- Abide by the college’s Standards of Social Conduct and the Honor Code
- Self-identify to AccessAbility Services as an individual with a disability if an accommodation is wanted
- Provide proper documentation of a disability from a qualified professional in the field of the disability if requesting an accommodation
- Request an accommodation in a timely manner (as described in this manual)
- Notify AccessAbility Services in a timely manner if there is a problem with an accommodation
- Follow published procedures for obtaining reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and auxiliary aids or services
- Follow campus policies and procedures as set forth by the college

Mount Holyoke College has the responsibility to:

- Provide equal access to courses, programs, activities, and services
- Practice non-discrimination in accordance with state and federal laws

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1 A student with a disability who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in Mount Holyoke's education program or activity is a "qualified student with a disability." 34 CFR 104.3

http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/textidx?c=ecfr&SID=5f075504ad46325ebf1406c08088e915&rgn=div8&view=text&node=34:1.2.1.3.1.134.3&idno=34
• Provide reasonable accommodations in a timely manner
• Provide courses, programs, services, jobs, activities, and facilities that are available and usable in the most integrated and appropriate settings
• Meet accessibility standards for classroom materials provided by the College, such as presentations, handouts, videos, exams and websites as required by applicable law or as described in an approved accommodation
• Maintain confidentiality of records and communications as required by federal law

Categories of Disabilities at Mount Holyoke College

• Learning
• Autism
• Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity
• Psychological
• Visual
• Hearing

• Speech
• Mobility
• Chronic illness
• Traumatic brain injury
• Manual

Accommodations: What is an Accommodation?

An accommodation is a legally mandated modification or service that gives a student with a disability an equal opportunity to benefit from the educational process. Accommodations are provided at no cost to the student. An accommodation may be:

• Changes to an environment or task to allow a student with a disability to participate
• Provision of course material in alternate format
• Removal of architectural barriers
• Modifications to policies, practices, and procedures
• Provision of auxiliary aids and services
• Other adaptations and modifications that will allow students to participate in campus activities, programs, and services

Reasonable accommodations are not intended to eliminate a student’s disability or responsibilities, but to support the student’s own efforts to circumvent obstacles to learning. Accommodations should not lower academic standards or compromise the integrity of academic programs. Students receiving accommodations are expected to
meet essential course and degree requirements and to abide by the college’s Honor Code. Accommodations are not substitutions for faculty academic decisions such as course content, grading, or syllabus requirements. These determinations are not within the jurisdiction of AccessAbility Services.

Examples of Accommodations

Classroom Accommodations: preferential seating, excused disability-related absences, extensions on assignments, captioning, course material in alternate format, sign language interpreter, assistive technology, permission to take breaks, permission to bring a beverage or snack, accessible furniture, recording device, laptop, note taker, lab assistant, service animal, personal care attendant

Testing Accommodations: extended time, reduced-distraction location, reader, scribe, computer for essay exams, spell/grammar check, calculator, other assistive technology, breaks, alternate format such as large print, audio text, braille, lined paper instead of Scantron, oral instead of essay, essay instead of oral, permission to stagger or make up missed exams

Housing Accommodations: single, private bathroom, wheelchair accessible, quiet floor, ground level, bed shaker, strobe light, outside light switch, alternate door handles and light switches, hand rails, Braille signage, air conditioning, scent free/non-toxic, comfort animal

Alternate Courses and Waivers: foreign language substitution, modified or waived exercise courses, other course substitution or waiver

Other Accommodations: relocation of classes/events/meetings to an accessible location, accessible parking or transportation, full time status and privileges with reduced course load

The Accommodation Process

AccessAbility Services is committed to balancing two equally essential principles when determining reasonable accommodations:
Four Key Players Involved in the Accommodation Process

AccessAbility Services
determines reasonable accommodations

Faculty
determines essential course requirements and standards & implements academic accommodations

504 Coordinator
ensures compliance with Section 504 & ADA by collaborating across departments, responding to reports of discrimination, and guaranteeing meaningful access to programs, services and activities

Students
implement due diligence to receive accommodations

Role and Responsibilities for Faculty
o Develop and communicate legitimate **academic standards and requirements** for the course, program, or activity (see AccessAbility Services website for examples)

o Adhere to college processes and procedures

o **Implement accommodations** when presented with an Accommodation Letter in a timely and effective manner. Be sure to implement accommodations in a timely and effective manner without posing additional undue burdens on the student

o Do not implement accommodations without receipt of the Accommodation Letter from AccessAbility Services

o **Contact AccessAbility Services** immediately if you have **concerns that any of the specified accommodations will conflict with the format of your course**

o **Contact AccessAbility Services** to discuss any concerns about how to implement specific accommodations

Please respect the expertise of disability specialists in AccessAbility Services. However, if you believe any of the specified accommodations will fundamentally alter essential components of your course, lower academic standards, pose a health or safety risk or cause an undue burden, you have the right to question the accommodation. The Director of AccessAbility Services will engage in an interactive process with faculty and students to determine if the accommodation is reasonable. At the conclusion of this process the decision of the Director is final. No further action may be taken by faculty to contest the accommodation decision; students, however, may appeal accommodation decisions which may result in a subsequent alteration. At the end of the process, the accommodation must be implemented.

**Role and Responsibilities of AccessAbility Services**

o **Implement the accommodation process** which must…

  * Be conducted in a **timely manner**
  * Be conducted by a **disability professional** who can **provide judgment free from bias and discrimination**
  * Include a **deliberative process** in which the disability professional considers
    o All accommodation requests on a case by case basis
    o Equally effective alternatives to requested accommodations
    o The major life impact of the disability on the student
The impact accommodations would have on the academic standards and requirements of the course and the classroom environment
Support faculty in helping them understand and implement the specified accommodations

Include an **Accommodation Letter** which is tailored to the student, not to each individual course. If an accommodation listed on the letter does not apply to your course structure, you may disregard it

Clearly communicate in a timely way accommodation decisions to both faculty and students, including rationale, opportunity to supplement missing data and the student’s right to appeal a decision

**Role and Responsibilities of the 504 Coordinator**

- Coordinate efforts to comply with Section 504 of Rehab Act and ADA
- Ensure students with disabilities have meaningful access to programs, services, and activities
- Promptly and equitably respond to reports of possible discrimination / access barriers and accommodation appeals
- Educate and collaborate across departments

**Role and Responsibilities of Students with Disabilities**

- Self-identify to AccessAbility Services
- Provide necessary documentation
- Request accommodations
- Schedule accommodation meeting with professor
- Abide by policies and procedures
- Meet course requirements
- Provide “due diligence”
  - Notify professors and AccessAbility Services in a timely manner of problems with accommodations or access barriers
- Do not abdicate their role and responsibilities to other agents
- Do not misuse accommodations for other than intended purpose
Eleven Steps to Accommodating Students with Disabilities and Meeting Compliance Obligations

1. On your syllabus, clearly detail course requirements and academic standards including your grading rubric and attendance policy. Make a verbal statement inviting students with a disability to request accommodations. Put a statement, such as the following, on your syllabi, “If you have a disability and would like to request accommodations, please contact AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4, at (413) 538-2646 or accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu. If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter which you should bring to me as soon as possible.”

2. Encourage students with accommodation letters to meet with you privately to discuss their needs. Appreciate that for many students, this can be intimidating. **Help to make this process a positive experience** by treating your student with compassion and respect.

3. Read the accommodation letter carefully and **discuss the logistics of each accommodation**. Here are some things to consider: If extra time on exams is needed, should the student arrive early or stay late? If reduced-distraction test location is needed, will you use a nearby empty classroom, a quiet office, or send the student to AccessAbility Services? How and where will the student get the exam? Once you and the student have agreed to logistics, write them down on the enclosed receipt. Keep the accommodation letter and receipt in a secure location for your own records. Before planning each test, check your accommodation letters and make appropriate plans to ensure that each accommodation is met. The student is not responsible for reminding faculty, reserving test space or renegotiating accommodations throughout the semester.

4. Some accommodation letters may also include other information, such as suggestions of teaching strategies that would help the particular student, information about the particular disability, or how to respond in case of a seizure or other medical emergency. Call AccessAbility Services with any questions about information provided in the Accommodation Letter.

5. If you believe the specified accommodations will fundamentally alter an essential requirement of your course, pose a health or safety risk or an undue hardship, please contact the AccessAbility Services Director and explain your concern. Other appropriate methods of accommodation may be considered; but it is ultimately the decision of the AccessAbility Services Director to determine
accommodations. **Professors do not have the authority to deny an accommodation.**

6. Accommodations are not meant to give a student with a disability an advantage over other students, make the course easier, or in any way change essential requirements or standards of the course or major. Students with disabilities should neither be graded differently than other students nor given additional requirements in order to receive accommodations. Rather, **accommodations are intended to level the playing field for students with disabilities by removing barriers to learning or to demonstrating what a student has learned.**

7. Please **respect confidentiality**. Do not talk about a student’s accommodations or disability in front of others. **It is prohibited for faculty to ask what the student’s disability is.** Likewise, faculty may not ask students to provide a copy of their disability documentation. An accommodation letter from AccessAbility Services is the only document a student needs to present to faculty and staff in order to receive accommodations. When a student brings you an accommodation letter, you may ask her how she learns best and what activities she finds difficult. If a student reveals areas of difficulty, discuss possible solutions.

8. **Remind your students the importance of seeking assistance.** Consider posting names and locations of campus support services such as Library, Information, and Technology Services (LITS), Speaking, Arguing and Writing (SAW), AccessAbility Services, and the Counseling Center. Post your office hours and contact information for tutors in your department.

9. If a student requires course material in alternate accessible format, remember that you are required to provide this at the same time that you provide your course material to students without disabilities. **Please carefully read Guidelines for Creating Accessible Course Material.** Contact your RIS liaison for assistance in locating accessible materials or AccessAbility Services with any questions about accessible course materials.

10. Check in with your students periodically to make sure that their accommodations are working satisfactorily. Keep in mind that some students feel intimidated about discussing concerns with their professors. Sending a simple, friendly email can help to facilitate communication.
11. Contact AccessAbility Services at (413) 538-2634 or dlicoherent@mtholyoke.edu for suggestions, support, assistance with accommodations, and strategies for making your course accessible. Our office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Helpful Information for Advising

- Students are sometimes shy about disclosing a disability. It is considered invasive to ask someone what their disability is. Instead, try asking questions such as:
  
  o “What are your areas of strength?”
  o “What are the areas where you’ve experienced difficulties?”
  o “Have you used helpful support services to assist you with your academics?”
  o “Is there anything you’d like me to know about areas where you’ve had difficulty so that I can let you know about helpful campus resources?”

- If a student discloses a disability, ask how it impacts her/him. Once a student describes areas of difficulty, discuss possible solutions. Refer the student to helpful campus resources.

- Keep in mind that most countries do not have civil rights laws to protect people with disabilities. An international student may be especially shy if she comes from a country where having a disability is not respected or supported.

- Respect confidentiality. Let students know that their disability information will not appear on their academic transcript.

- Students with documented disabilities who struggle with foreign language or math may be eligible for an alternative. To qualify, students must receive approval from the Director of AccessAbility Services and the Dean of Studies.

- AccessAbility Services does not provide psycho-educational evaluations to students who suspect they may have a learning disability. We can refer students to agencies and psychologists who provide this testing.

- AccessAbility Services has the discretion to offer provisional accommodations and services to students who do not have documentation of a disability or who have a short term injury or illness.
• Students who have difficulty with or are unable to engage in physical exercise may request a modification or waiver of the activity requirement by contacting AccessAbility Services.

• Withdrawing from courses or the college mid-semester may affect a student’s ability to graduate on time as well as financial aid benefits. Please encourage students to speak with their academic dean, AccessAbility Services counselor, and with someone in Student Financial Services before withdrawing.

• Students with disabilities may be eligible to maintain full-time status with a reduced course load. If a student is requesting this option, consider academic and financial implications. Things to consider: Are there prerequisite courses that are only offered alternating semesters? Will taking a reduced course load impact the student’s ability to graduate with her class? Can she take summer courses? If she is on a scholarship, will it cover her tuition if she needs to stay an extra semester? Refer students to AccessAbility Services to request the reduced course load accommodation. Consult with colleagues including the Academic Deans and Director of Student Financial Services to discuss if and how a reduced course load would impact the student.

Tips for Creating an Inclusive, Accessible Classroom

A Winning Syllabus Includes:

• Your contact information including a campus phone number, email address, office hours, office location

• An overview of the course including any pre-requisites

• A detailed outline of all assignments with due dates

• Your required reading list (post this during registration time)

• Dates of all quizzes and exams and their allotted time

• An invitation to request disability accommodations

• A clear grading rubric
• Your expectations for class participation and requirements for class activities outside of scheduled class hours. Be specific

• Your attendance policy as it relates to course activities and grading

• Guidelines for appropriate classroom behavior

• A statement about academic integrity and the College’s Honor Code

**Guidelines for Creating Accessible Course Materials**

Many of our students have what can be referred to as a “print disability”. This can be a learning disability, a visual impairment, or a physical disability. Although the manners in which the disability occurs vary, they all share one characteristic: individuals with a print disability cannot access print in the standard way.

The accommodation for these students is “text in alternative formats” or “digitized text” that can be transformed as needed to braille, large print, or audio via text-to-speech software. AccessAbility Services will coordinate the necessary digitation of the course materials based on a student’s specific needs. This process can take up to four weeks and we ask your assistance with the following:

**Textbooks and Printed Materials**

• Seven weeks before the start of the semester, post your required textbook information on ISIS including the title, author, edition, publisher, and ISBN for required book.

• Post your syllabus on Moodle. Provide AccessAbility Services with a draft of your syllabus, including the required reading order, so we may better prioritize.

• Provide AccessAbility Services with your course packet if not posting it on Moodle.

• Be certain that all handouts can also be available for students in electronic format as Word documents or searchable PDF files.

**Moodle Resources and E-Reserves**
• Whenever possible, source reading materials from the library databases as these are most often accessible full-text PDF files. Contact your RIS liaison if you need assistance with this.

• If digital materials are not readily available and you will be copying/scanning to create PDF files, please consider the following guidelines:
  o Select “clean” source materials free of underlining, margin notes, or highlights and avoid materials that have been copied multiple times. It is always best to copy/scan directly from the book or journal source using the Xerox Multifunction Devices (MFD).
  o Be consistent with filenames on Moodle to ensure they match the syllabus reference. Recommended format: author’s last name and title.
  o Post your materials at least two weeks before they are due in class. This allows us time to further digitize if necessary and still provide the student time to complete the reading.
  o Utilize the “book scanning” features of the MFD’s whenever possible. If you need assistance, please see your department administrator or contact Emily Dean at edean@mtholyoke.edu or extension 2524.
  o Always scan in black and white. Do not use the “auto detect” setting on the MFD.

PowerPoint Presentations

• Post to Moodle before class meeting so that student can print and use as a guide in class, or view it on a laptop in class if they cannot clearly see the projection in class.

• Utilize default auto layouts that best fit the purpose of your slide content and avoid using text boxes. This will ensure the all content is translated into the outline view if needed.

• Use effective color contrast between background and text for readability.
• Use sans serif fonts (e.g. Arial, Tahoma, Verdana) and be certain the font size is sufficient to be readable from all areas of the room. It is best to test this in your particular classroom at the start of the semester.

Audio, Video, YouTube and Publisher Media

• The audio content of video materials may need to be transcribed or captioned for a student with a hearing impairment. Commercially produced videos, DVDs, as well as publisher produced media may already have this available via subtitles. Please consult with AccessAbility Services as producing transcripts or captions is a very time consuming process, and if not feasible, will require a plan to provide and equal alternative form of access to the content.

• When using publisher content via CD, DVD or a publisher’s web portal, please contact the publisher and inquire about accessibility of the interface and content before implementing in your courses. If you need assistance, please contact AccessAbility Services.

General Helpful Teaching Strategies

• Learn students’ names.

• Discuss class rules the first day, inviting input from students.

• Encourage students with disabilities to meet with you privately to review their accommodation letter and discuss their learning needs.

• Provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities.

• Be sure there are no architectural barriers; rearrange seats as necessary.

• Consider ways to plan and adapt activities so students with disabilities can participate. Call AccessAbility Services for suggestions.

• Arrive to class on time and prepared.

• Give out or post daily outline and notes.

• Try to face students when speaking.

• Remember the power of positive language and humor.
• Refer to your students as “women and men” rather than “girls and boys”.

• Be clear and consistent when communicating; avoid vague promises.

• Model the behavior you wish your students to demonstrate.

• Encourage freedom of expression; model appropriate dissent.

• Foster comradery, e.g. class buddies, study groups, team work.

• Model appreciation of diversity and inclusiveness. Use inclusive language.

• Avoid changing essential elements of the course once it has begun.

• Leave time each class for questions, answers, and student feedback.

• Give frequent, scheduled quizzes. Consider dropping the lowest score(s).

• Provide study guides, practice exams, and thorough review sessions.

• Share your mnemonics and other memory strategies.

• If possible, offer multiple sections on exams with different types of questions (e.g. multiple choice, short answer, true or false, graph, map, essay) and allow students to choose two out of three of the sections. Within each section allow students to choose any eight out of ten questions to answer. If you include essay questions, allow students to pick from a selection of questions.

• Consider allowing students to choose between an exam and a project.

• Return quizzes and exams promptly and make time to thoroughly review answers.

• Return final papers and projects with detailed comments.

• Break large assignments into small parts with specific due dates.

• Use visual, auditory, and experiential teaching methods.

• Vary activities and participation to keep students engaged.

• Encourage students to raise their hand before speaking. Give gentle cues if a student is speaking too long or off topic.
• Offer weekly office hours.
• Provide early and regular feedback about student progress.
• Use Moodle to post your syllabus and assignments.
• Be approachable and maintain appropriate boundaries.
• Notify your dean if a student is missing.
• Contact AccessAbility Services for support or with concerns.
• Maintain confidentiality about your students’ disabilities and accommodations.
• Address problems as soon as they occur; seek help from colleagues as needed.
• If you meet with a student to discuss behavior concerns, follow up with an email. If the problem persists or is disruptive, notify your department chair.
• If a student exhibits behavior that is threatening to self or others, or appears to be in medical distress, call the police for help.
• Refer students to helpful campus and community resources. If you suspect a student may have a disability, refer her to AccessAbility Services.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do so many students wait until mid-semester to request accommodations?
“I wanted to try to make it on my own.”
“I wanted my professor to get to know me first.”
“I didn’t want my professor to think I’m stupid or lazy.”
“I don’t want to be labeled as having a disability.”
“I thought I was doing better.”
“I was just diagnosed.”

In an environment that values mental competence and intellectual achievement, it can be especially difficult for students with learning and psychological disabilities to request accommodations. You can help students to feel comfortable disclosing their needs by putting a statement on your syllabus inviting students to bring you their accommodation letter as soon as possible. Remind students that it is good to have the accommodations in place as a safety net, even if they aren’t used.
Do I have to provide an accommodation if a student doesn’t bring me an accommodation letter?

No. Remind students the first day of class to please bring you an accommodation letter from AccessAbility Services.

Is it OK to provide an accommodation to a student who does not have an accommodation letter?

No. AccessAbility Services is the only designated office at Mount Holyoke College where students can request accommodations. If a student shows up to class with an obvious injury, such as her dominant hand in a cast, it is fine for you to give the student a copy of your notes or extra time to write an assignment. Short term injuries and illnesses are not considered disabilities. However, if a student with a short term injury needs assistance, such as a note taker, please refer her to AccessAbility Services and we will try to offer short term help.

I have a student who is trying hard, but writes poorly and keeps failing exams. She has not brought me an accommodation letter, but I think she may have a learning disability. What should I do?

Speak to the student privately. Let her know you are concerned and want to help. Encourage her to attend your weekly office hours and let her know about any tutoring support available in your department. Ask her if she ever received any kind of assistance in a resource room and suggest that she schedule an appointment with the AccessAbility Services Director to discuss her learning challenges. Also discuss whether it would be best for her to withdraw from the course.

When my student brings me an accommodation letter, is it OK to ask what the disability is? If I do not know what my student's disability is, how am I supposed to know how to teach her?

This is an inappropriate question. It is considered impolite and an invasion of privacy to ask someone what type of disability she has. When she brings you her accommodation letter, ask her how she learns best. Ask her if there are specific types of activities or exams that are difficult for her to do because of her disability. This type of questioning shows your interest in making the classroom environment accessible. For example, if she tells you she needs to see everything in writing, this may be an indication that she has difficulty hearing or with auditory processing or auditory memory. Posting your PowerPoint notes, providing visual demonstrations, and putting all instructions and assignments in writing will help her. If a student does disclose her disability, don’t
assume that you know how it affects her. Ask her about her functional limitations so you have an understanding about her learning style and needs.

*Is it reasonable to give a student with a disability fewer or easier assignments?*

No. Faculty should never compromise the academic integrity of a course by holding students with disabilities to lower standards. At the college level, we generally accommodate by process, not content. If a student is unable to do a particular assignment because of her disability, you may give her a substitute assignment that is relevant and equally intellectually challenging.

*I have a student who has a serious illness and is frequently hospitalized. I hate to fail her because she is trying so hard and gets A’s on all of her assignments. What should I do?*

When a student discloses a disability that may impact attendance, contact AccessAbility Services. If the student is eligible for accommodations, she will bring you an accommodation letter that may specify permission to have additional absences, extended time on assignments and permission to make up missed exams. Consider whether the format of your class allows you to offer these. Some factors to think about include, does your course require in-class participation or group projects? If these are essential requirements of the course, notify the Director of AccessAbility Services right away. The Director may consider alternative accommodation options. If in-class participation is not essential to your course format, consider allowing the student to work on projects independently. Help her find a buddy who will share notes when she is sick.

*I have a student who seems increasingly despondent. She has been missing classes, not turning in assignments on time, and she looks like she’s not taking care of herself. I’m concerned for her well-being. What should I do?*

Ask to speak with her privately after class. In a kind, gentle way, let her know that you’re concerned (“I’m concerned because you’ve been missing classes and falling behind on assignments; and I can’t help but notice that you seem unhappy. I wanted to check in with you to let you know that I care about you and to see if I can offer assistance.”) Start with empathetic listening to help her feel comfortable speaking with you. Try to offer reassurance that it is not unusual for students to struggle and there is a lot of support available on campus. Discuss an action plan that includes both emotional and academic support. Encourage the student to call Counseling Services immediately. Refer her to other helpful campus departments. If appropriate, discuss flexible options for catching up on your course work. If she is too far behind, encourage her to withdraw. Follow up with an email and if appropriate, fill out a mid-semester report.
If a student seems to be in emotional distress, try to keep her calm. Ask her if she has thoughts of suicide. If she does, do not leave her alone. Call Counseling Service immediately at (413) 538-2037. Ask for the triage person and consult about what to do/how to help, or to request a same day appointment for the student. If there is no response, contact the Campus Police at (413) 538-2304. Immediately report your concern to Marcella Hall, Dean of Students, at (413) 538-2550.

**Helpful Campus Resources**

Alcohol and Drug Awareness Project (ADAP)  
Pattie J. Groves Health Center  
Phone: (413) 538-2616  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/adap](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/adap)

Campus Police  
Phone: (413) 538-2304  
**Emergencies dial 1-911 from a campus phone**  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/campuspolice](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/campuspolice)

Career Development Center  
Daniel L. Jones Building  
Phone: (413) 538-2080  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/cdc](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/cdc)

Counseling Service  
Pattie J. Groves Health Center  
Phone: (413) 538-2037  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling)

Dean of Students  
Mary Lyon Hall  
Phone: (413) 538-2550  
[https://mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents](https://mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents)

Health Service  
Pattie Groves Health Center  
Phone: (413) 538-2121  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/health](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/health)

International Student Support  
Donna Van Handle, Dean of International Students  
McCulloch Center  
Dwight Hall (first floor)  
Phone: (413) 538-2072  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/global](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/global)

LITS Complex (Williston Library, Miles-Smith, Info Commons, MEWS)  
Contacts: [https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/contacts](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/contacts)  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits)
Office of Religious and Spiritual Life  
Eliot House  
Phone: (413) 538-2054  
https://www.mtholyoke.edu/religiouslife

Ombudsperson  
Safford Hall  
Phone: (413) 538-2413  
https://www.mtholyoke.edu/ombuds