

Ensuring Effective Faculty-Student Interaction

This checklist is intended to help guide faculty members in facilitating positive interactions with students with disabilities in the context of a science lab (course, program, or research environment) and highlights important considerations that a faculty member should take into account. It also provides tips on communicating effectively with the student, options for note-taking, and alternative testing methods.

Communication

- At the beginning of the term, be available to discuss any accommodation needs or course or laboratory concerns with students with disabilities.
- Encourage students who may have concerns to take advantage of faculty office hours.
- Review the appropriate safety and liability concerns with the student prior to the beginning of any laboratory work.
- Discuss emergency procedures and evacuation plans from the laboratory with students with disabilities at the beginning of the course.
- Be open to the student's suggestions and feedback regarding his/her specific disability and safety while in the lab.
- Suggest giving the student a tour in advance of classes so he/she can become familiar with the layout, exit routes, and equipment.

The Government of Ontario has published a useful [resource](#) with more information on communicating with persons with disabilities.

Course and Laboratory Accommodations

- Where possible, assist students with any accommodations approved by the institution's disabilities services office (DSO); for example, assist students to locate a peer note-taker in the class.
- Many disabilities pose challenges for a student to accurately record all lecture notes; instructors who make their notes available online or electronically minimize this barrier for students.
- Making class notes, handouts and lab manuals available in a digital/electronic format simplifies the process of converting the notes into Braille, or other non-print formats;
- If notes cannot be made available in a digital format, a number of accommodations are possible: using another student in the class to take notes on a laptop or by hand can serve to resolve the challenge of notes that are not accessible.

- Be flexible concerning the testing requirements for the course: not all testing needs to be completed in a written form; written testing is not the only way to insure a student's understanding of course content.
- "Oral tests, presentations, and group projects are among a rich assortment of alternative methods to evaluate course understanding" (Miner, Nieman, Swanson, and Woods, 2001, p. 45).
- Provide additional time for assignments and tests, if approved by the DSO.
- Work with the DSO and students to determine the appropriate alternative testing method for practical lab exams.
- If necessary, set up separate bell-ringer exercises in the lab for students, which will allow for more time for each station.
- When working with students with anxiety disorders or other mental health disabilities, provide a separate space, where possible, to complete labs where it is quiet and there are fewer distractions.
 - If required, allow for extensions on course assignments.
 - Repeat instructions for completing labs, and provide directions in multiple formats (for example, oral and written).

Transcription of Materials

- Where possible, faculty should meet requested deadlines for getting course reading materials to the DSO, to ensure that personnel have adequate time to convert those materials into alternative formats.
- Faculty should be aware that there may be occasions where materials have been ordered and are not available for transcription at the beginning of the course.
- When working with students with vision loss, instructors are responsible, where possible, for providing electronic copies of hand-outs in advance to the student.
- Instructors can provide hand-outs in digital formats to reduce time required for transcribing the material, and insuring students with vision loss receive materials at the same time as other classmates.
- Faculty can work with their library to help students review available resources (such as raised tactile maps), and assist with closed captioning of relevant materials.

References

Government of Ontario. (2013). [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. \(2005\). Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 Ontario Regulation 191/11 Integrated Accessibility Standards.](#)

Miner, D. L., Nieman, R., Swanson, A. B., & Woods, M. ed. (2001). [Teaching chemistry to students with disabilities: A manual for high schools, colleges, and graduate programs.](#) 4th Edition. American Chemical Society.