

Identifying the Essential Requirements of a Course or Program

This guide outlines the criteria for identifying and evaluating the essential requirements of courses and programs in the context of accommodating students with disabilities. It describes how to creatively analyze these requirements, and how to work with students with disabilities to best adapt to them.

The "**essential requirements** of a course or program refer to the knowledge and skills that must be acquired or demonstrated in order for a student to successfully meet the learning objectives of that course or program" (Rose, 2009, p. 10). Essential requirements are those skills required for qualification in the discipline.

Essential requirements can be defined by two factors:

- 1) "Skills that must be necessarily demonstrated in order to meet the objectives of a course; and
- 2) Skill that must be demonstrated in a prescribed manner" (Oakley, Parsons, and Wideman, 2012, p. 5).

To assist faculty in identifying an essential requirement, we provide some questions for consideration:

- "What is being tested?
- What is the nature of the task?
- Does it have to be done in only one way?
- If so, why?" (Roberts, 2013. p. 52)
- Will performing this task in an alternative manner ultimately interfere with the student's successful performance in the discipline, program, or course?

When exploring whether tasks can be completed in more than one way, it is necessary to examine whether modifying the manner in which a task is completed will compromise the student's ability to achieve the objective of the task (Roberts, 2013).

Of note is the evaluation method used to judge successful development of a competency associated with an essential requirement. It is extremely important to avoid confounding the evaluation method with the actual competency. For example, if a student must understand how to design, interpret, analyze, and troubleshoot a scientific experiment ("competency"), does this mean that the student must perform the experiment unaided ("measurement")?

Where possible, be flexible and creative concerning methods for completing tests and assignments. Oral examinations and group projects are some examples of alternative assessment methods for a course (Miner, Nieman, Swanson, and Woods, 2001).

While compromising the essential requirements of a course can be grounds for denying accommodations, the institution must be able to demonstrate how this would happen.

To appropriately adapt accommodations to essential requirements:

- clarify the essential requirements of the discipline and what assistance the student will require to meet these learning objectives; and
- clearly outline the role for the use of accommodations in the graduate setting.

References

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

Oakley, B., Parsons, J., and Wideman, M. (2012) *Identifying essential requirements: A guide for university disability service professionals*. Inter-University Disability Issues Association.

Roberts, B. (2013). A lifeline for disability accommodation planning: How models of disability and human rights principles inform accommodation and accessibility planning. Doctoral Dissertation. Kingston: Queen's University.

Rose, M. (2009). [Accommodating graduate students with disabilities](#).