

Accessibility: The University of Maine System's Commitment to People with Disabilities

The University of Maine System is committed to providing access to the University for people with disabilities. Our goal is to enable students, staff, applicants, and the public to participate in the academic, employment, cultural, and recreational life of the University. Under University policy and federal and state laws, qualified people with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations that will allow them access to University programs, jobs, services, and activities unless the accommodation would pose an undue hardship on the University.

A person with a **disability** is anyone who either has, used to have, or is treated as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially affects a major life activity (such as seeing, walking or working); significantly impairs physical or mental health for six months or more; requires special education, vocational rehabilitation or related services; or is on a list of health conditions established by State law. A **qualified** person with a disability is someone whose experience, education, and training enable the person to perform the fundamental job duties or meet essential course or program requirements, with or without a reasonable accommodation. An **accommodation** is any change in the work or learning environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables a person with a disability to have equal employment or educational opportunities.

People with disabilities have a right to ask for an accommodation and are encouraged to talk directly with the responsible faculty member, supervisor, or other staff person. Faculty, supervisors, and administrators are responsible for responding to accommodation requests. The attitude and responsiveness of faculty and staff with whom people with disabilities interact often determine, even more than physical barriers, the degree of access they feel they have to the University. If an accommodation is requested by someone whose disability is not apparent, the University should request medical documentation. Some of the common types of accommodations requested include:

- A student with a hearing impairment who needs a note taker or qualified interpreter in class.
- A student with a learning disability who needs additional time to complete an exam.
- A visually impaired job applicant who needs assistance to complete a job application.
- A full-time employee returning from a medical leave who asks to work part-time for medical reasons relating to a disability.
- A person who needs the graduation ceremony to be held in wheelchair accessible facilities.

A faculty member or supervisor who receives an accommodation request should explore possible accommodations with the person who has a disability. University policy, the

law, and common sense require that a flexible interactive process which involves the person with a disability be used to select an effective, reasonable accommodation. Asking about the disability itself is inappropriate and unnecessary. The discussion should focus on accommodations that would help the person meet the requirements of the job or program. A supervisor or faculty member must **not** seek documentation of the disability or deny an accommodation request without consulting with the Equal Opportunity Director and carefully following University procedure. All requests for accommodation must be carefully documented.

Note: The University's Procedure for Accommodating Individuals with Disabilities is available from the University Equal Opportunity Director.

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