

DISABILITIES AT CTS A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS & FACULTY

Office of Academic Affairs

Campbell Hall 114

404.687.4521



OVERVIEW

Columbia Theological Seminary welcomes any student with a documented disability and accommodates special academic needs, which are determined on an individual basis with appropriate documentation. Such disabilities include learning, physical and mental impairments. Columbia Theological Seminary complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

By definition, a disability that qualifies a student for accommodations in higher education is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, (thinking, reading, concentrating), or working. Official documentation is required to verify a qualifying disability.

Any student with a documented disability is eligible to receive reasonable academic adjustments and auxiliary aids in the classroom and/or for testing at Columbia Theological Seminary, as long as appropriate documentation of the disability has been submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs. The Office of Academic Affairs is the designated office on campus for students with disabilities, who seek learning or classroom accommodations. The Office of Academic Affairs also provides support and guidance to instructors asked to make accommodations in the classroom. The academic administrator in the Office of Academic Affairs receives documentations and works with students on academic related matters. For other matters, such as access to campus facilities and residential accommodations, students should consult the Vice President for Business and Finance who serves as the 504 Coordinator.

Ann Clay Adams, Academic Administrator, is located in 114 Campbell Hall 404.687.4524

J. Martin Sadler, Vice President for Business and Finance, is located in 106 Campbell Hall 404.687.4512, who serves as the Section 504 Coordinator.

Qualifying for Accommodations

To establish that an individual is covered under Section 504, documentation must indicate that (a) a specific disability exists and (b) the identified disability substantially limits one or more major life activity. A diagnosis of a disorder/condition/syndrome in and of itself does not automatically qualify an individual for accommodations. The documentation must also support the request for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids. (Educational Testing Service, 2001).

Students are encouraged to initiate the registration process before beginning their studies so the accommodations are in place when needed. That is, accommodations are not "retroactive". Students are responsible for:

- identifying themselves

- establishing eligibility for services
- providing the appropriate documentation and current evaluations
- maintaining the seminary's academic standards
- advocating for themselves

All of the services provided are confidential unless the student provides written consent authorizing the office to disclose specific information to a third party.

Students who request accommodations are protected from discrimination Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A student who believes that he or she has been subject to discrimination may file a grievance. The procedure for filing a grievance is found in the final section of this guide.

DISABILITY SERVICES – HIGHLIGHTS FOR FACULTY AND STUDENTS

Accommodation Request Memo

Students requesting accommodations may do so at any time during their studies, or at any time in the semester. Accommodations memos will be prepared as soon as possible. Students who have filed for accommodations in previous terms, can pick up their accommodation memos from the Office of Academic Affairs during the first two weeks of classes of a new term and deliver them to their instructors. The student receiving accommodations shall meet with his/her instructors to discuss the accommodations listed in the memo. That discussion should include developing a plan for administering appropriate accommodations in light of the particular assignments and pedagogical methods used in the classroom. A plan for accommodations may include extended time for exams and quizzes, the provision of note-takers, and the possible alteration of course policies, such as the number of absences allowed. Both the student and instructor shall sign the accommodation memo form and return it to the academic administrator in the Office of Academic Affairs.

Exam Accommodations

Exam accommodations may include the provision of a less distracting environment and/or extended time. For example, students may require 1.5x or 2x additional time for testing. When meeting with an instructor early in the semester regarding the accommodations memo, the student and professor shall develop a plan for administering exams and quizzes. The instructor can provide an appropriate testing space or the Office of Academic Affairs can request a classroom. If the Office of Academic Affairs administers the exam, the student should adhere to the following procedures:

1. Obtain a test accommodation request form from the Office of Academic Affairs which initiates the process of

- 1) getting on the testing calendar
 - 2) assigning a room
 - 3) retrieving the test from the instructor
 - 4) providing a proctor in the case of proctored exams
2. Complete the form and submit to the Office of Academic Affairs a minimum of seven days prior to the exam or quiz. The office cannot guarantee implementation of the accommodation if the request is received with less than seven days notice.
3. Check CTS student e-mail account for confirmation and room assignment;
4. Students who are more than 15 minutes late for an exam must follow up with the instructor to reschedule and notify the assigned proctor. Exams should be administered at the regular exam time or as close to the exam time as possible. No early or late exams will be approved without written permission from the instructor. If the office does not have a copy of the exam or the student misses an exam scheduled through the Office of Academic Affairs, he/she needs to contact immediately the instructor and the academic administrator. A missed exam will be returned to the instructor or shredded.

Note-Taking Accommodations

Columbia Seminary may appoint student volunteers or pay students who are enrolled in a course as note-takers for a student registered for this accommodation. Students approved for this accommodation should meet with the instructor to discuss the need for a note-taker and make a

request to the academic administrator. Notes submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs are only for students registered for disability accommodations. Instructors shall make an announcement to the class about the need for note-takers to provide notes for a classmate. The instructor will not compromise confidentiality. An example of an announcement is as follows: "A note-taker is requested for this class by the Office of Academic Affairs. The note-taker's responsibility is to attend class regularly, take accurate, legible notes and provide a copy of them to the academic administrator in the Office of Academic Affairs. If you are interested in serving as the note-taker for this course, please notify Ann Clay Adams at adamsa@ctsnet.edu." At the end of the semester, students may receive a credit in a future semester toward their Seminary Service hours based on their service as a note-taker, or may receive compensation. Copies of the notes should be submitted to the academic administrator within 48 hours of the class. Students who receive notes should also come by within 48 hours to make copies of the notes, once the academic administrator alerts the student that the notes are available.

Alternative Format for Required Textbooks

Students are responsible for identifying and registering for classes as soon as possible. Once classes have

been selected, students are responsible for obtaining the required reading lists, and deciding which books they need to obtain, and the format(s) indication in the student's documentation. The academic administrator will work with the student in obtaining the necessary format, if it is not readily available to the student through the student's own efforts. In the cases, when alternative form text books must be obtained through publishers or through special services, the student may need to provide proof of having purchased the text in order to receive the text in another format. The academic administrator will make every effort provide the text in the format that is indicated in the student's documentation at no additional cost to the student. Students should be aware that 4 weeks notice is necessary to process all requests.

Degree requirement alternatives

Degree requirements for every degree program are listed in the CTS catalog (available in print and online). Courses listed as required or as required distribution electives are considered essential components of the academic program at Columbia Theological Seminary¹. This includes the study of a biblical language in the MDiv degree. Accommodations to students with disabilities will permit, in the majority of cases, all students to meet the requirements. In a few cases, however, even accommodations may not overcome certain types of learning disabilities in meeting a requirement, such as the required language course(s). If an alternative course format cannot be provided which will allow for the objectives of the course to be achieved, the student with a documented disability may enter into a process for determining whether the requirement is essential for the student's earning of the degree. The student will petition the director of the degree program in which the student is enrolled. The degree program director, along with two faculty serving on the Basic or Advanced Degree Program Committees (depending whether the student is a basic or advanced degree student) will consider the petition. The petition should include a statement citing the course(s) for which accommodations are not effective in allowing the student to complete the course in a passing manner. The degree director and additional faculty will consider a series of alternatives as essential requirements, as well as whether the essential requirement in question can be modified for a specific student with a disability. The degree director will inform the student of the decision within 15 days of receiving the petition. The student has the right to appeal the decision made by the degree director and additional faculty to the Academic Standing Commission. The decision of the Academic Standing Commission's decision will reflect a careful, thoughtful and rational review of the requirements of the degree, which the student is seeking. With the student's consent, the Academic Standing Committee may consult with an outside expert. The decision of the Academic Standing Commission shall be rendered within 15 days of receiving the appeal and will be final.

Priority Registration

¹¹ The teaching faculty at CTS determines and stipulates the essential components of each degree program and designates them as required courses. Every five years, a deliberative process occurs which reviews degree requirements in each program. The faculty as a whole votes on any changes in degree requirements.

The academic administrator determines if priority registration is an approved accommodation and notifies the registrar's office. Priority registration allows students to register before the scheduled registration period for other students. Students with this accommodation will not be able to register if any registration holds (i.e., academic or business) are in place. The academic administrator notifies the students of the time period in which students should make plans to meet with their academic adviser to discuss an academic plan and course selection. Once the advising and other campus holds are lifted the student will be allowed to register for courses.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who qualifies for disability accommodations? “To establish that an individual is covered under the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, documentation must indicate that a specific disability exists and that the identified disability substantially limits one or more major life activities. A diagnosis of a disorder/condition/syndrome in and of itself does not automatically qualify an individual for accommodations. The documentation must also support the request for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids” (Educational Testing Service, 2001).

How do I request disability accommodations? It is the responsibility of the student to self-identify as an individual with a disability by contacting the academic administrator to schedule an appointment. The student should submit copies of all documentation and the registration packet for disability services to the academic administrator prior to the meeting. During the meeting the academic administrator will explain the registration process, discuss eligible accommodations, review course expectations, and discuss policies and procedures related to disability support.

What type of documentation is needed for the meeting? Letters, evaluations, and reports from a qualified credentialed provider that include the credentials of the provider, date of most recent diagnosis, diagnosis, a list of functional limitations in the academic environment, suggested reasonable accommodations, and results from all supporting assessments. We encourage clinicians and professional diagnosticians to use the guidelines provided by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) to validate a student's disability. If the student has multiple diagnoses, including a psychiatric disability, we use the guidelines for documentation of psychiatric disabilities in adolescents and adults provided by the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

Note: In the case of learning and attention deficit disabilities, the evaluation must have been completed after the student's eighteenth birthday. Ordinarily, the evaluation must be completed within the last three years. Students who have been in post-secondary education environments within the last three years may submit documentation and accommodations used in seeking a previous degree if the documents meet the standards already listed, and requested accommodations have not changed. If Columbia Theological Seminary requires further evaluation of a student for whom an evaluation was

conducted within the last three years, then the Seminary will be responsible for any costs.

How is approval of the accommodation determined? The academic administrator evaluates the request. As part of the process, the academic administrator may review the request with an outside consultant, a faculty member, and/or the student's provider to consider the following criteria:

1. The disability documentation supports the request for a specific accommodation;
2. The accommodation is reasonable and effective as mandated by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
3. Whether or not the student can participate in the particular program without the accommodation;
4. Consideration of the types of alternative or combination of alternative accommodations available to provide the student with the same or similar content and/or level of instruction for the particular course, degree requirements or other academic program;
5. Whether the accommodation will fundamentally alter the particular course, degree requirements or other academic program as determined by the appropriate instructors who teach the courses, or dean of faculty;
6. Whether a requested accommodation constitutes an undue financial and administrative burden to the institution.

How long does it take the academic administrator to render a decision? Students are encouraged to request disability accommodations upon learning about the diagnosis or the need for an accommodation. Ordinarily, the academic administrator needs a minimum of three days to process accommodation requests once all of the required documentation is received. The academic administrator will accept and process emergency requests for disability accommodations and requests for academic adjustments, as necessary.

What happens after the academic administrator renders a decision? The academic administrator e-mails the student to let the student know the outcome and provides the student a copy of the drafted accommodation memo. If need be, the student may suggest a further meeting. Once the student agrees to the draft, the academic administrator will prepare a memo for each of the student's classes and send the copies to the student through campus mail. In addition, the academic administrator will send an electronic copy to each of the student's instructors. The memo will not include the reason a student is registered with the office, only the approved accommodations. The student receiving accommodations should meet with each instructor before or at the beginning of the semester to discuss the accommodations listed in the memo including developing a plan for administering exams and quizzes, the need for note-takers and the attendance policy. Both the student and instructor should sign the accommodation memo and the student should provide a signed copy of the form to the academic administrator before the third week of the semester. It is the student's responsibility to have the memos

signed and to inform the academic administrator about any changes made to the student's schedule.

What if students disagree with the approved accommodations? Students should follow up with the academic administrator to discuss any concerns or questions about the accommodations. The academic administrator may ask the student to provide additional documentation if necessary.

Do students have to use all of the approved accommodations for all of their courses? No. Students should meet with their instructors within the first two weeks of the semester to discuss their disability accommodations. If a student does not plan to use an accommodation for a certain class, he or she should write "refused" next to the accommodation checklist before submitting to the academic administrator.

Do students have to reapply for services each semester? No. Once a student is registered the student does not have to re-submit documentation unless he or she requests an additional accommodation that is not supported by the student's documentation on file.

What accommodations might a student receive? Reasonable accommodations are accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the courses, curriculum, degree requirements and program objectives or place an undue financial and administrative burden on the college. The following non-exhaustive list represents possible accommodations, auxiliary aids and services, that might be offered to students with disabilities at Columbia Theological Seminary, relevant to their diagnosed disability.

- Permission to tape record lectures
- Extended time on quizzes, tests or exams (for example, 1.5 or double time)
- Testing area/room with minimal distractions
- Note-taker
- Use of an electronic spell checker for classroom tests, quizzes, and written assignments
- The use of a scribe to record text information
- Permission to complete written assignments orally and/or by tape
- Permission to use text to speech programs
- Free use of a scanner to prepare materials for reading programs
- Alternative format for textbooks
- Preferential seating
- Use of assistive technology and software

- Facilities modification
- Permission to take frequent breaks
- Priority Registration
- Others as recommended by specialists

What should students do if the accommodations are not implemented? Students should attempt to resolve situations at the lowest level if possible. If the situation is not resolved by talking and meeting with the instructor(s), the student should follow up with the academic administrator and ask for assistance with resolving the problem. The academic administrator can facilitate a meeting between the student and instructor, talk with other college administrators and serve as an advocate. Disability accommodations are a legal mandate and students have rights.

How can students submit a grievance? Columbia Theological Seminary has a student written complaint policy, which covers grievances and complaints related to disability services and disability accommodations, as well as other areas. This policy and procedures are found in the Columbia Theological Seminary Student Handbook. Grievances and complaints related to disability services and disability accommodations follow the same protocol as other complaints and should be directed to the member of the President's Council (vice president or dean) that oversees the area related to the complaint. For complaints related to academic matters, the complaint would be submitted to the dean of the faculty. For complaints related to campus facilities, the complaint should be submitted to the Vice President for Business and Finance. Should the student believe that the student has been discriminated against due to his or her disability; the student should consult the following policy and follow the procedure within it:

It is the policy of **Columbia Theological Seminary** not to discriminate on the basis of disability. **Columbia Theological Seminary** has adopted an internal grievance procedure providing for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints alleging any action prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794). Section 504 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. The Law and Regulations may be examined in the office of J. Martin Sadler, Vice President for Business and Finance, 404.687.4512, who has been designated to coordinate the efforts of **Columbia Theological Seminary** to comply with Section 504.

Any person who believes she or he has been subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability may file a grievance under this procedure. It is against the law for **Columbia Theological Seminary** to retaliate against anyone who files a grievance or cooperates in the investigation of a grievance.

Procedure:

- Grievances must be submitted to the Section 504 Coordinator, J. Martin Sadler, Vice President for Business and Finance, within **60 days** of the date the person filing the grievance becomes aware of the alleged discriminatory action.
- A complaint should be in writing, containing the name and address of the person filing it. The complaint must state the problem or action alleged to be discriminatory and the

remedy or relief sought. CTS will also accept oral complaints from individuals with disabilities, if, due to their disabilities, they are unable to file a written complaint. CTS will memorialize the individual's complaint in writing and the individual will certify that the written complaint is an accurate representation of the student's complaint.

- The Section 504 Coordinator (or her/his designee) shall conduct an investigation of the complaint. This investigation may be informal, but it must be thorough, affording all interested persons an opportunity to submit evidence, including the opportunity to present witnesses, relevant to the complaint. The Section 504 Coordinator will maintain the files and records of **Columbia Theological Seminary** relating to such grievances, in accordance with the CTS records retention policy.
- The Section 504 Coordinator will issue a written decision on the grievance to the complainant and subject(s) of the complaint regarding the outcome of the investigation no later than 30 days after its filing.
- The person filing the grievance may appeal the decision of the Section 504 Coordinator by writing to the **President's Council** within 15 days of receiving the Section 504 Coordinator's decision. The **President** shall issue a written decision in response to the appeal no later than 30 days after its filing.
- The availability and use of this grievance procedure does not prevent a person from filing a complaint of discrimination on the basis of disability with the U. S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

Columbia Theological Seminary will make appropriate arrangements to ensure that persons with disabilities are provided other accommodations and other appropriate auxiliary aids and services, if needed, to participate in this grievance process. Such arrangements may include, but are not limited to, providing sign language interpreters for the deaf, providing taped cassettes of material for the blind, or assuring a barrier-free location for the proceedings for individuals with mobility disabilities. The Section 504 Coordinator will be responsible for such arrangements.

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