

## The Accessibility Services Office

### Advising Students with Disabilities

Good advising means treating all students as individuals and becoming familiar with their personal interests, academic goals, and career plans. It also means recognizing that different populations of students, including students with disabilities, often face unique challenges or barriers, particularly as they transition from high school to college. For example, many students with disabilities are unaware of their accommodation rights and needs and lack self-advocacy skills.

#### What Are Faculty Responsibilities?

Academic advisors are not expected to be disability experts, but they can support students with disabilities in a number of ways. As a starting point in this process, advisors might review the yellow “Advising Information Form for Incoming Students” in the advising folders to first learn if new advisees have special concerns or challenges (e.g., medical problems, physical impairment, learning disabilities, or attention deficit disorder). Advisors can also support advisees with disabilities by

- Referring students to the Accessibility Services Office, if they have already self-disclosed but not yet sought accommodations.
- Meeting with new advisees early in the fall semester to determine how their disabilities may impact academics and to recommend appropriate resources and support services.
- Learning about the challenges and barriers faced by students with disabilities, in general.
- Helping students to understand the value of talking about their disabilities and accommodation needs with advisors, instructors, and other member of the campus community.
- Developing a semester advising schedule and a structured plan for conducting advising sessions.
- Helping students to select courses and create schedules that will mitigate the impact of their disabilities.
- Encouraging students to be self-advocates by taking charge of their educational planning and meeting as necessary with the Coordinator of the Accessibility Services Office.

- Underscoring the importance of communication, responsibility, and accountability.
- Helping students to build self-advocacy skills—i.e., the ability to communicate and work effectively with others in order to meet personal and disability-related needs and academic and life goals.

### **What are Common Challenges and Barriers to Students with Disabilities?**

Some of the challenges and barriers faced by students with disabilities include

- Learning about the post-secondary accommodation process and how it differs from high school.
- Recognizing the importance of self-advocacy, executive functioning skills, and self-disclosure, including the ability to describe the disability and explain how it functionally limits one or more major life activities).
- Learning about the culture of disability on campus and having to face educational and institutional barriers (e.g., attitudes towards disability and access to campus resources and opportunities).
- Meeting quality-of-life needs (e.g. social inclusion, mental health counseling).
- Selecting appropriate courses and developing manageable schedules.
- Choosing a major and considering possible career options.
- Deciding whether to take medication
- Deciding whether to disclose an illness or a disability to friends, instructors, or advisors.

### **What Are the Advising Needs of Students with Disabilities?**

Understanding the nature and impact of a disability will help advisors determine the importance of certain advising practices and plan for and structure advising sessions to meet the needs of each advisee.

#### ***Reasonable Accommodations***

Advisors should meet with advisees to discuss disability-related advising needs and accommodations. Some of the accommodations students receive in the classroom might be applied to the advising process. These might include **a)** enlarged print (for students with a vision impairment; **b)** longer—time-and-a-half—advising sessions (for students who need extended time for testing; or **c)** morning advising sessions (for students who are less alert in the afternoon)

## ***The Advising Session***

Many students with differing disabilities may have executive functioning challenges and struggle with, among other things, staying on task, meeting deadlines, and creating and following schedules. These and other students with disabilities—as well as students without disabilities—might appreciate a more structured approach to advising sessions. A more structured approach to an advising session might include relationship-building greetings and discussion, a summary of the meeting agenda, a step-by-step discussion of agenda topics, completing paperwork, reviewing upcoming advisee responsibilities, and a brief concluding discussion about future advising sessions.

As part of this process, you might moderate the flow of information and give students time to write down key points and dates. Advisors may need to remind advisees about upcoming academic deadlines (e.g., registration dates and the last day to withdraw from full-semester courses).

## ***Scheduling Classes***

Students with disabilities may receive priority registration on a case by case and/or class by class individual basis, through the Accessibility Services Office. Students with disabilities will need to work collaboratively with the ASO Coordinator and the advisor to identify possible options. The student must provide a strong nexus between how the disability will significantly impact the need for a specific class day and/or time. A priority registration must be approved by both the advisor and the ASO Coordinator. The placing a student with a disability in a class must not impact another upperclassman's ability to complete their degree within the stated time frame. If approved, the Registrar's office will enter the student into the class/section no earlier than 24 hours prior to their established scheduling window based on current academic rank. Students may need additional advising assistance to select appropriate courses and create manageable schedules that will minimize the impact of their disabilities. Advisors can help students with this process by learning about their disabilities and accommodation needs, if they haven't already, and considering

- The appropriate number of credits/units and the amount of work required in each course.
- The teaching "style" (e.g., small-groups, discussion, or lecture) of a course and the exam format (e.g., T/F, multiple choice, short answer, or essay)

**Note:** Students with disabilities often do better in structured courses with fewer students and with instructors who provide detailed syllabi, use a variety of teaching methods, and present lectures, instructions, and other course information in outline form, bullet lists, and other structured formats.

- The number of similar courses that may be challenging because of students' disabilities (e.g., several reading-intensive courses for students with a reading disorder)

- The possibility of disability-related absences. Advise students with this accommodation to consult with professors about the attendance policy to determine if it is a fundamental aspect of the course and if attendance leniency is or is not appropriate.
- The length of courses and time of day of courses. For example, if the impact of medication results in reduced concentration or a shortened attention span, it might be preferable to schedule one-hour courses that meet three times a week rather than two-hour courses that meet twice a week. Morning classes should be avoided if medication results in morning drowsiness and reduced attention.
- Whether classes should be scheduled back-to-back for certain students (e.g., students with mobility impairments or students who need extended time for testing).
- Weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly medical appointments or procedures scheduled for the semester.
- Course requirements for potential majors.
- Course work in the summer at another institution.

**Note:** According to law, you may not advise students, based on the impact of their disabilities, to select or rule out a major course of study or career. If you are knowledgeable about a specific field, however, you may identify the necessary abilities and skills to be successful in that major or profession.

### ***Writing Letters of Recommendation for Students with Disabilities***

When requested to write a letter of recommendation for students, and especially students with disabilities, it is best *not* to share their diagnosis, accommodations received, or potential symptoms or impact the disability has academically and otherwise. Letters of recommendation should be written using the same criteria you use when writing recommendation for all students. Contact the Coordinator of the Accessibility Services Office if you are not comfortable with writing the letter of recommendation.

### **Why is it Important for Students to Talk about their Disabilities and Accommodation Needs with Advisors?**

In K-12 education, public schools are responsible for identifying students with disabilities and providing this information to the member of the student's IEP support team. Some first-year students have limited experience with self-disclosing and may be reluctant to discuss their disabilities with others, particularly instructors, advisors, and other member of the campus community whom they have recently met. On occasions when it is appropriate to talk about their accommodation needs, they may have difficulty describing the disability and explaining how it impacts or functionally limits one or more major life activities.

Encouraging advisees to self-disclose and discuss their disability-related concerns and needs may be beneficial in several ways, including **a)** helping students to develop self-advocacy skills **b)** linking them with the appropriate resources and support services; and **c)** allowing advisors to provide more individualized and targeted advising support.

### **How Should Advisors Talk to Advisees about Their Disability?**

#### ***If advisees have self-disclosed and registered with Disability Services but are reluctant to discuss their disabilities***

Some students with disabilities may lack confidence and feel self-conscious about their disabilities, and they may be reluctant to disclose due to concerns of stigmatization and discrimination. Others may be unaware of why this information is important for advisors to know.

As a starting point with these students, conversations should focus on the person, not on the disability or accommodation. If your advisees seem reluctant to discuss their disabilities and accommodation needs, let them know that they do not have to reveal specific information about their disabilities, and whatever information they do disclose will remain confidential. Let your advisees also know that by informing you about the impact of their disabilities you can provide more effective advising support.

- “In one of the advising forms you completed at start, you indicated that \_\_\_\_\_. Do you want to talk about how this impacts your daily life and your academics?”
- “What are your academic interests? Potential or declared major?”
- “What kind of support would help you to succeed academically” (ask advisees if they are struggling in one or more courses)?
- “I’m not trained in understanding disability, so it would be helpful if you would explain how your disability impacts you academically.”
- “By learning more about the impact of your disability I can provide more effective advising support.”

#### ***If advisees have self-disclosed but not registered with the Accessibility Services Office***

Students with disabilities may be reluctant to register with the Accessibility Services Office for a number of reasons.

- Determine if students are aware of the Accessibility Services Office.
- Ask students why they have not registered or are reluctant to do so.
- Reassure students that OWU professor support students with disabilities and want to help these students to succeed.
- Mention the principal benefit of registering: Student may qualify for academic accommodations and advocacy, which will minimize the impact of their disabilities and likely help them to

improve their performance in the classroom.

- Recommend that students register with the Accessibility Services Office even if they have no immediate plans to use approved accommodations. If student change their minds because they are experiencing academic struggles that result in part from their disabilities, the accommodation process can then be implemented more quickly.
- Inform students about process for registering for accommodations:
  1. Students contact the Coordinator of the Accessibility Services Office (CASO) to gain information about the available support services. Students will likely be requested to provide documentation of their disability and how it impacts them academically.
  2. Students meet with the CASO to discuss the impact of their disability, complete a “Welcome Meeting”, and sign the ASO Student Responsibilities Checklist. Student will receive a Registration Confirmation Letter to be given every professor.
  3. Students schedule appointments to meet with their professors to a) discuss accommodation needs; b) discuss how to use and request approved accommodations; and c) provide the Registration Confirmation Letter.

### ***If advisees have not self-disclosed***

Some students may feel reluctant to disclose because of their concerns about stigmatization and discrimination. Others may feel uncomfortable because they have had so few opportunities in the past to talk about their accommodation needs. However, even though these students have not disclosed, it does not mean they are unwilling to disclose. Asking the questions below may be a starting point for this important conversation. Just remember that your student advisees do not have to disclose their disabilities, so do not ask direct questions (about possible disabilities) that may put them on the spot and breach their right to self-disclosure. Whether or not students have disclosed, advisors have the responsibility to try to help their advisees find the resources they need.

- “What were the classes you found most rewarding/challenging in high school?”
- “Did you use any of the academic support services or resources that were available at your high school?”
- “What classes this semester do you anticipate will be the least/most challenging and why?”
- Are you aware of the Academic Resource Center—a resource for all students who want to develop skills, improve study habits, build confidence, and earn higher grades?”
- “Is there anything else you would like me to know about you or your advising needs
- “Is there anything I need to know to help you become more successful at Ohio Wesleyan University?”

## **Advising Student Athletes with Disabilities**

As one of its core values, the NCAA believes in and is committed to an inclusive culture that fosters equitable participation for student-athletes and career opportunities for coaches and administrators from diverse backgrounds. In further recognizing and acting upon this value, the NCAA is increasing efforts to provide opportunities to student-athletes with education-impacting and physical disabilities. See the [NCAA Inclusion](#) portion of their website for more information.

### ***Remaining Eligible: Academics—Reminders for Students from the NCAA Website***

All Division III student-athletes must be enrolled in at least 12 semester or quarter hours, regardless of an institution's own definition of "full time."

Institutions in all divisions must determine and certify the academic eligibility of each student-athlete who represents the school on the field of play. Institutions are responsible for withholding academically ineligible student-athletes from competition.

Waivers are available for many of these rules, including progress-toward-degree standards.

Student-athletes who are declared academically ineligible must use the student-athlete reinstatement process to be restored to competition.