How to Support Students with Disabilities

When it comes to disability access, no one knows better than our students. Student Disability Resources (SDR) teamed up with TLT to discover what their students need to succeed. During the Spring 2021 semester, 272 students responded to our survey. Notably, the preferences of SDR students tend to align with those of all Penn State students, according to a university-wide survey.

Read the full SDR Survey Report
Check out the Community-wide Survey

TODAY

Make an Announcement

1-in-20 Penn State students have an official accommodation

Create a welcoming atmosphere by being up front about student advocacy. Start the conversation by letting your students know the best method to approach you about their accommodation.

Set up Communication Channels

“I’ve never been to an in-person office hour. Once things switched to online I’ve been going to several virtual office hours a week and have been performing much better in my classes.” - Student Quote

Students Voted

MOST Helpful
Email
Canvas messages
Virtual office hours

LEAST Helpful
Discussion boards
Instant messaging with instructors

Best Practice: use multiple modes of communication. Don’t want to send a million messages? Use Canvas!

Messages sent in Canvas can automatically be forwarded as email. Here’s how to quickly help students enable this feature.

THIS SEMESTER

Enable Flexible Attendance

SDR students rated flexible course attendance policies as 4.2 out of 5 for helpfulness.

Having things like flexible attendance and due dates is essential for students with disabilities because it helps us, on our own, to take responsibility for our schedules and assignments. Constantly having to ask instructors or professors for extensions brings on not only a sense of power imbalance, but also shame.” - Student Quote

Record Classes

SDR students rated recordings as 4.6 out of 5 for helpfulness.

In the community-wide survey, 74% of all respondents want access to class recordings and 36% want closed captioning.

Penn State Policy AD40 allows instructors to record their own classes. Recordings have the additional benefit of extending copyright protection by fixing the lecture within a tangible (and therefore copyrightable!) medium.

Best Practice: While AD40 does not require closed captions, PowerPoint provides an easy, accurate way to add captions while giving a presentation (even if it’s not recorded).

Here’s how to enable automatic captioning.

NEXT YEAR

Organize your Canvas

SDR students rated organization within a course as 4.4 out of 5 and uniform use between courses as 4.2 out of 5 for helpfulness.

“Honestly, just having professors that use Canvas to its fullest makes it easiest to be inclusive.” - Student Quote

Apply UDL Guidelines

Most of the requests from SDR students falls under Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines:

• Offer content and activities in formats that fit my needs as a learner. (4.4 out of 5)
• Offer a variety of ways to access course content. (4.1)
• Offer multiple options for completing assignments. (3.9)

These methods are designed to support ALL students. It’s a large framework, but it’s easily added into classes little-by-little.

Take a look at the UDL Guidelines.