

## Distance learning – Extended time on exams

It is MVCC's responsibility to educate faculty about the purpose of accommodations to students with disabilities and faculty's legal obligations, and to assist faculty with the logistics of providing accommodations. Please contact the Disability Service Office with any questions you might have about accommodating students with disabilities.

The Rehabilitation Act - Section 504 Post Secondary/34 C.F.R. 104 Under § 104 44(c) states, institutions must provide alternative testing methods for students who have a disability that impairs sensory, manual or speaking skills to ensure that the test results reflect the students' achievement in the course, rather than their impaired skills.

In order to prevent discrimination, the individual must register with the disability services office and Disability Services Office staff determines based upon documented disabilities what reasonable accommodations are appropriate in the college settings. The student with a disability must be provided **equal access** to the programs and class settings of the college. Equal access requires provision of accommodations to attempt to alleviate the limits created by the documented impairment to the extent that the disabled individual has an equal opportunity to benefit from programs or activities. Equal results are not mandated; equal access and opportunities are required.

Online and Distance Learning testing alternatives is questioned by many faculty about students with disabilities. The purpose of providing testing accommodations is to enable individuals with disabilities to demonstrate their mastery of the subject matter being tested not to provide lesser academic or professional standards for people with disabilities. Accommodations may affect how a test is taken, but not what it measures.

Some examples of accommodations for testing alternatives for distance learning/online testing might include:

- using "power" tests that measure ability or level of achievement (rather than "speed") for people with visual or manual impairments;
- using aids such as brailers and assistive technology software by people with visual impairments;
- using open captioning or typed material to provide test instructions to people with hearing impairments;
- modifying certain features of a test, such as verbal portions for people with hearing impairments or in cases where test answers are based on elaborate tables or graphs for people with visual impairments;
- providing auxiliary aids for people who cannot take written tests or make the marks required for mechanically scored objective tests, or for those who are visually impaired. (auditory responses); and
- granting extended time for online testing within equal access -under the similar environments of all students.

These testing alternatives consider pre-planning and communication with the disability services office staff to discuss and work together to make decisions about modifications that will ensure equal access to the course or content materials.

In the past we have not encouraged professors to test a student differently because then students can state that their test was harder and therefore not the same as the other students and use this to state they were discriminated against based on the depth, structure and difficulty of the test. Whenever possible the same test is used for students with disabilities as the other students in the course.

Extended time as a testing accommodation for distance learning courses is often provided for on-line courses. Here is how the disability staff thinks of it...this is not a generalized entitlement; it is a reasonable accommodation intended to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability. Special education is an entitlement but academic adjustments are not.

We ask for documentation and determine these accommodations that a student requires such as extended time and consider reasonable need for extensions of time (and other accommodations as well) based upon their individualized documented disability needs. You might misjudge these students who need this service because they don't appear to need this orally or you might not notice their disability. However, they usually have a more difficult time concentrating, memory and locating material or interpreting material or processing speed of reading, etc. which is well-documented and requires accommodations that our campus is responsible to provide, even to distance learning.

Let me give you an example... When you think about the way a person with a processing disability reads a question and how their brain interprets the material, it takes that student much longer to read and understand the material (or question) – than you and I. Then they need to locate the material (if open book) which again takes longer than you and I (even if they are well-organized), then that person has to interpret and understand that material they look up – which is longer time. They then need to formulate an idea based on the information to answer the question.

Studies have shown that providing the extended time to a student with a documented disability does not provide them with an “edge” or privilege over other students. If they can't understand the material (extended time or not), they will fail the course.

Faculty should not give extended time to anyone that does not provide them with an accommodation plan from our office. We have a procedure that accommodation plans can be provided via email exchanges. Please always send the student to us once they disclose and we can make sure you receive an accommodation plan. If you require assistance in understanding how to extend the time in Blackboard, Norma and Jim Lynch can assist you; or I can assist you. This is done without providing additional time to all students, but individualized only to the student with a disability.

All are encouraged to discuss individualized student situations with our office staff to discuss legal consequences, and to come to an agreement that works both from the perspective of the student and the faculty prior to discussions with a student with a disability. Our main number is (315)792-5644.