



Accessibility Resource Center

MoWEST Disability Services Faculty Handbook

Introduction to the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC)

The Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) at Missouri Western State University (MWSU) supports about 90-100 students with disabilities annually. Students who require academic accommodations due to a disability are to contact ARC, located in Eder Hall, Room 201, or call (816) 271-4330.

ARC provides services designed to increase access to instructional programs for students with a wide range of disabilities, including:

The goal of ARC is to ensure that students with disabilities can fully participate in all academic and vocational programs for which they are otherwise qualified.

Purpose of This Handbook

This handbook provides faculty and staff with essential information about the services offered by ARC and the legal and institutional reasons why these services are required. Faculty and staff are encouraged to contact ARC for additional information, support, or to request disability-related training or workshops.

ARC Mission Statement

The Accessibility Resource Center leads the campus community in its commitment to:

- Recognizing disability as a valued aspect of diversity
 - Embracing access as a matter of social justice
 - Designing more welcoming and inclusive environments
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Legal Foundations & Relevant Laws

Students with disabilities are protected by federal and state laws that ensure equal access to higher education. These include:

Federal Laws

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Missouri State Laws & Policies

- Missouri Human Rights Act (MHRA)
Enforced by the Missouri Commission on Human Rights (MCHR), the law prohibits discrimination based on disability in education, employment, housing, and public accommodations.
- Missouri Revised Statutes – Chapter 213
Codifies the MHRA, specifically §§213.010–213.137.
- Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development (MDHEWD)
Provides policy guidance for accommodating students with disabilities in higher education.

What the Law Requires: Equal, Not Preferential Treatment

- Equal access to instruction, services, activities, and facilities.
- Evaluation based on ability, not disability.
- Provision of accommodations when educational limitations affect a student's ability to acquire or demonstrate knowledge.

What the Law Does Not Require

- Changing academic standards or grading policies.
- Providing accommodations without proper documentation.
- Supplying personal devices (e.g., wheelchairs, hearing aids).
- Offering personal services (e.g., dressing, eating assistance).
- Making accommodations that fundamentally alter a course or program.

Student Rights to Confidentiality

Under FERPA and related privacy laws, students with disabilities have the right to confidentiality. Disability-related information must not be disclosed without the student's written consent.

Key Guidelines:

- Do not announce or discuss a student's disability or accommodations in public.
- Treat all disability-related information professionally and confidentially.
- ARC counselors cannot share student-specific information with faculty, staff, or family members without written permission.
- ARC may disclose limited information under an "educational need-to-know" clause or when required by law (e.g., risk of harm, abuse).

University Responsibilities

Missouri Western State University is required to:

- Provide reasonable accommodations (e.g., extended test time, interpreters, note takers).
- Maintain accessible facilities and instructional materials, including digital content.
- Protect the confidentiality of disability documentation.
- Ensure equal opportunity in academic and extracurricular programs.

Disability Etiquette

A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Ask the Student

While students are encouraged to discuss their accommodation needs, some may hesitate. If you have questions about whether a student requires accommodations, respectfully ask the student directly.

Ask Before Assisting

Don't assume a student with a disability needs help. Always ask first: "Would you like assistance?" Respect their response.

Use Person-First Language

Use terms like “student with a disability” rather than “disabled student” to emphasize the individual, not the condition.

Relax and Be Respectful

Approach students with disabilities as you would any other student—with respect and consideration. Don’t worry about using everyday language like “walk” with someone who uses a wheelchair.

Speak Directly to the Student

Even if an interpreter or aide is present, maintain eye contact and speak directly to the student—not through the companion.

Give Your Full Attention

Allow extra time for students who may need it to communicate or complete tasks. Be patient and encouraging, not corrective.

Speak Clearly

For students who are hard of hearing or have processing challenges:

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Avoid exaggerated lip movements.
- Face the student and use gestures.
- Write notes if needed to aid understanding.
- **Focus on Abilities**




All students have strengths and challenges. Highlight what students can do to build confidence and foster inclusion.

Use Common Sense

Most accommodations are simple. Flexibility, clear communication, and thoughtful planning go a long way in supporting access

How to Refer a Student to the ARC

If a student discloses a disability or requests accommodations, refer them to the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC):

 Location: Eder Hall, Room 201
 Phone: (816) 271-4330
 Website: <https://www.missouriwestern.edu/arc/>

Tips for Sensitive Conversations:

- Share specific observations (e.g., missed assignments, difficulty with exams).
- Ask about their educational history (mention of IEPs or special education may be a cue).
- Encourage them to explore support options through ARC.
- Offer to walk with them to the ARC office if appropriate.
- Avoid assumptions or labels—approach with empathy and openness.

Suggested Syllabus Statement:

“Students who believe they may need accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) at (816) 271-4330 or visit Eder Hall, Room 201.”

Teaching Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities bring unique strengths, perspectives, and experiences to the classroom. While they may learn differently, these differences do not reflect lesser abilities. Faculty are not expected to lower academic standards or reduce course rigor. However, reasonable accommodations and flexible instructional methods may be necessary to ensure equitable access to learning.

Faculty can support students by drawing on their own teaching experience, collaborating with the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC), and engaging directly with students.

1. Identifying Students with Disabilities

Disabilities may be:

- Visible (e.g., use of a wheelchair, cane, or service animal)
- Hidden (e.g., hearing loss, learning disabilities, mental health conditions, chronic illnesses)

- Multiple or complex (e.g., cerebral palsy with speech and mobility impairments)

Some students will self-identify early in the semester by presenting an accommodation letter from ARC. Others may delay disclosure due to stigma, fear of disbelief, or uncertainty. Faculty should:

- Include a syllabus statement inviting students to discuss accommodations.
- Make a general announcement at the start of the semester.
- Approach students privately and respectfully if you suspect a disability may be affecting performance.

2. Dividing Responsibilities

- Students are responsible for registering with ARC and requesting accommodations.
- Faculty members are responsible for implementing accommodations and collaborating with the ARC when necessary.
- ARC provides documentation, guidance, and support for both students and faculty.

3. Faculty–Student Communication

Early and ongoing communication is key. Faculty should:

- Meet with students privately to discuss how accommodations will be implemented.
- Use respectful, inclusive language (e.g., it’s okay to say “see” or “walk”).
- Avoid making assumptions about a student’s abilities based on their disability.
- Value the student’s input—many are experts in managing their own learning needs.

4. Attendance and Punctuality

Students with disabilities may face barriers that affect attendance or promptness, such as:

- Mobility challenges
- Medical appointments
- Medication side effects

Faculty are encouraged to apply attendance policies with reasonable flexibility when accommodations are in place.

5. Classroom Adjustments

Simple adjustments can make a big difference:

- Share reading lists before the semester begins.
- Choose accessible classroom locations and seating arrangements.
- Face the class when speaking and write key points on the board.
- Provide materials in advance when possible.

6. Functional Challenges

Some students may experience:

- Fatigue or drowsiness (due to medical conditions or medications)
- Slower processing speed or memory issues

These symptoms may resemble disengagement but are often disability-related. Faculty should respond with understanding and flexibility.

7. Note-Taking Support

Students who cannot take notes effectively may benefit from:

- Permission to audio record lectures
- Access to peer note-takers
- Lecture outlines or slides
- Free or low-cost note-taking apps

Encourage students to explore tools that support their learning.

Accommodations may include:

- Extended time
- Alternative formats (e.g., oral exams, screen readers)
- Reduced-distraction environments
- Make-up or take-home exams

These adjustments ensure equal opportunity, not reduced expectations. Grading standards should remain consistent for all students.

Student Rights & Confidentiality

1. Privacy of Disability Information

- Protected under FERPA.
- Faculty must not share disability-related information without written consent.

2. Handling Accommodation Requests

- Treat accommodation letters confidentially.
- Discuss accommodations privately, not in front of others.

3. Limits to Confidentiality

- ARC may share limited information with faculty on a need-to-know basis.
- Exceptions apply in cases of danger to self/others or suspected abuse.

Teaching Tips by Disability Type

Visually Impaired Students

- Describe visual content aloud.
- Provide accessible formats (e.g., large print, screen-reader compatible).
- Allow assistive tech (e.g., magnifiers, screen readers).
- Orient students to the classroom layout.
- Share materials early for conversion.

Students with Learning Disabilities

- Use clear, structured instructions.
- Break tasks into smaller steps.
- Offer extended time when appropriate.
- Incorporate multiple learning modes (visual, auditory, hands-on).
- Be flexible with deadlines when justified

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Maintain consistent routines and expectations.
- Provide clear, literal instructions; avoid idioms or figurative language.
- Allow for sensory breaks or access to quiet spaces when needed.
- Be patient and supportive during social interactions and group work.

- Use visual schedules, checklists, or written instructions to support organization and transitions.

Students with Mental Health Challenges

- Foster a supportive and respectful classroom environment.
- Be flexible with attendance and deadlines when accommodations are in place.
- Encourage self-care and academic balance without stigma.
- Refer students to campus mental health resources when appropriate.
- Avoid assumptions—mental health needs and experiences vary widely.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

- Face the student when speaking and ensure your face is well-lit for lip-reading.
- Use visual aids such as slides, written instructions, and captions.
- Speak clearly (not louder) and avoid covering your mouth.
- Repeat or summarize questions and comments from other students.
- Ensure all videos and multimedia include accurate captions.
- Coordinate with ASL interpreters or CART providers for lectures and discussions.

Best Practices for Working with ASL Interpreters

- Speak directly to the student, not the interpreter.
- Maintain a natural speaking pace and pause periodically to allow for interpretation.
- Provide lecture materials and vocabulary in advance to help interpreters prepare.
- Ensure the interpreter is visible to the student and not obstructed.
- Avoid side conversations or speaking while writing on the board.
- Clarify technical terms or jargon that may require interpretation.
- Include interpreters in planning for field trips, labs, or group activities.

Testing Accommodations

The Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) collaborates with instructors to ensure students with disabilities have equitable access to exams. While in-class testing is preferred when appropriate, some students may require an alternative setting due to disability-related needs.

The ARC Testing Center (ATC), located in Eder 208, is designed to reduce distractions and provide accessible testing environments. It includes:

- Noise-controlled spaces
- Accessible desks
- Assistive technology and software

8. The ARC Testing Center Process

Steps to request a course exam accommodations with the ARC Testing Center

- Students choosing to test in the ARC Testing Center must coordinate with their instructor.
- Once a student notify an instructor of their need for testing accommodations,
- The instructor should work with the student to decide on a time for testing
- Instructor should then complete a course exam accommodation request form via the ARC website and upload the exam question with the request or email it directly to the testing coordinator
- The student receives an email automatically after instructor submits the request
- The testing Coordinator will email the instructor with pick instructions after the exam has been completed by the student
- Instructors must complete a [Course Exam Accommodation Request Form](#)
- The ATC is open Monday–Thursday, 8:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
- Completed exams are securely stored in the Counseling Center (Eder 203).

For questions, contact Lindsey Smith, Testing Coordinator, at lsmith8@missouriwestern.edu or email arctestingcenter@missouriwestern.edu.

Faculty Rights & Responsibilities

Faculty Rights

1. Verification of Disability

- Faculty have the right to receive official documentation (e.g., accommodation letter) from ARC before implementing accommodations.
- Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without this documentation.

2. Academic Standards

- Faculty are not required to lower academic standards or fundamentally alter course content.
- Accommodations are intended to provide access—not to guarantee success.

3. Consultation

- Faculty have the right to consult with ARC staff regarding accommodation implementation or concerns.

4. Confidentiality

- Faculty have the right to expect students to initiate accommodation discussions privately.
- Disability-related information must be treated as confidential and shared only on a need-to-know basis.

Student Rights & Responsibilities

Responsibilities of Students with Disabilities

1. Self-Identification

- Students must voluntarily identify themselves to the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) to request accommodations.

2. Provide Documentation

- Students are responsible for submitting current and appropriate documentation of their disability from a qualified professional.

3. Request Accommodations in Advance

- Accommodations are not retroactive. Students must request them early each semester to ensure timely support.

4. Communicate with Instructors

- Students should meet with instructors to discuss how accommodations will be implemented in each course.

5. Follow Procedures

- Students must adhere to university policies for using accommodations (e.g., scheduling exams, requesting interpreters).

6. Meet Academic Standards

- Students are expected to meet the same academic standards as their peers, with the support of approved accommodations.

Resolving Accommodation Disputes

Steps for Resolution

1. Start with Open Communication

- Student: Clearly explain the concern to the instructor, referencing the official accommodation letter.
- Faculty: Listen actively and respectfully. Ask clarifying questions if needed.
- Aim to resolve misunderstandings informally and promptly.

2. Consult the Accessibility Resource Center

- If the issue isn't resolved through direct communication:
 - Students should contact ARC to report the concern.
 - Faculty may also reach out for guidance on implementing accommodations.
- ARC staff can mediate and clarify legal obligations and institutional policies.

3. Document the Issue

- Both parties should keep records of:
 - Emails or written communication
 - Dates and details of meetings or discussions
 - Copies of accommodation letters and course materials

4. Use Formal Grievance Procedures (if needed)

- If informal resolution fails, students may file a formal complaint through the university's grievance process, which may include:
 - A written complaint
 - Review by a committee or designated administrator
 - A formal decision and possible corrective action

5. Maintain Confidentiality

- All discussions and documentation must respect the student's privacy under FERPA.
- Disability-related information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

Best Practices for Preventing Accommodation Disputes

Faculty:

- Include a disability accommodation statement in your syllabus.
- Meet with students early in the semester to discuss accommodations.
- Contact ARC if unsure about how to implement an accommodation.

Students:

- Request accommodations early each semester.
- Communicate clearly and respectfully with instructors.
- Follow procedures for scheduling exams or using services.

Web & Video Accessibility

Web Accessibility Tips

1. Use Descriptive Headings and Structure
 - Organize content with clear headings to aid screen reader navigation.
2. Add Alt Text to Images
 - Provide meaningful alternative text for all images, charts, and graphics.
3. Ensure Keyboard Navigation
 - All interactive elements (menus, buttons, forms) should be usable with a keyboard alone.
4. Use Accessible Fonts and Colors
 - Choose high-contrast color combinations and readable fonts.
 - Avoid using color alone to convey meaning.
5. Provide Accessible Documents
 - Use accessible formats for PDFs, Word, and PowerPoint files (e.g., tagged PDFs, proper heading styles).
6. Use Descriptive Links

- Avoid vague phrases like “click here.” Use meaningful link text (e.g., “Download the syllabus”).

7. Caption and Transcribe Multimedia

- Ensure all videos have accurate captions and provide transcripts for audio content.

8. Avoid Auto-Playing Media

- Auto-play can be disruptive for screen reader users and those with sensory sensitivities.

9. Test with Accessibility Tools

- Use tools like WAVE, Axe, or screen readers (e.g., NVDA, VoiceOver) to check accessibility.