

Resolution for Expanded Capacity and Strategic Planning for the Office of Disability Services

2-F22

Whereas, the Faculty Senate and the Office of Disability Services (ODS) have independently examined the issue of equitable access for testing and other types of accommodations for students with disabilities;

Whereas, James Madison University (JMU) is committed to the use of institutional resources to fulfill our “strategic priorities” as part of our [Strategic Plan for 2020-2026](#), and Priority #2 is “Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI);”

Whereas, JMU has committed to “expand access and build bridges to cross existing socioeconomic, geographic, learning and/or other barriers to participation in academic pursuits and campus activities” in [Strategic Plan Goal 2C](#);

Whereas, effective DEI efforts to reduce systemic barriers require institutional, as opposed to separate departmental, solutions;

Whereas, JMU faculty are committed to and responsible for providing accessible and inclusive learning experiences for all students;

Whereas, JMU and higher education institutions across the country are experiencing tremendous growth in the number of students with documented disabilities who need services and learning accommodations;

Whereas, the number of students with accommodation plans at JMU has reached >1700, which is 12% of the student population and is expected to soon climb to 20% based on current high school trends;

Whereas, faculty struggle to provide appropriate testing accommodations to large numbers of students due to a lack of strategic and proactive institutional support and resources for faculty and ODS, as illustrated by the following observations:

- Under the current system of handling common testing accommodations, faculty are often unable to secure classroom space or find available proctors for students who need extended testing time and/or reduced distraction testing environments when ODS is not able to meet the demand in their testing facilities.
- Failure of adequate staffing and physical space to meet testing accommodations puts faculty and the University at risk for violating the state and federal law concerning the rights of students with disabilities.
- The risk of failing to meet testing accommodation needs grows significantly for large-section courses, where currently 30+ students in a single course section may require testing accommodations.
- The current software used to facilitate testing room reservations, Accommodate, is insufficient at streamlining the reservation process. The user-interface of Accommodate is prone to error and freezing and is difficult to navigate. In order for one student to schedule a single exam, approximately 3-7 emails are generated for Instructors, which can result in dozens or hundreds of communications per exam.

Whereas, under the current system for captioning and materials accommodations, faculty are often required to submit material weeks in advance due to the long turn-around time. The long turn-around time for

captioning and materials accommodations is due to the severe under-staffing of people qualified to conduct such services at the University;

Whereas, ODS is under-staffed and under-resourced to provide the necessary support to students and faculty at current capacity, not to mention the projected growth of students who will need accommodations in the future;

Whereas, under the current system, there are significant barriers to providing access for students in a timely manner, which is especially burdensome for Adjunct faculty who are not compensated for the additional time and labor required to deliver accommodations;

Whereas, no central JMU office is officially tasked with the responsibility to spearhead the provision of university-wide accommodations for communication (e.g., ASL interpretation, website accessibility, etc.), physical access to buildings/sites, nor pro-active accessibility design for university-wide events and for visitors (e.g., prospective parents);

Be it resolved that the faculty of JMU strongly advocate for the University to undertake strategic planning initiatives with ODS, in conversation with leadership across divisions, to include but not be limited to Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, DEI leadership, and CFI to expand and plan for future growth in the following areas:

- Testing site capacity
 - The number and size of ODS spaces to be used to support staff, programming needs, and testing facilities.
 - The integration of disability and accessibility needs with the planning of other academic and student spaces on campus (e.g., reduced-distraction testing spaces in academic buildings).
- Support for faculty to create accessible and inclusive learning environments
 - Software and technology support to automate processes and reduce the systemic barriers when faculty and students seek services, especially testing room reservations.
 - Provision of systematic and on-going professional development for the integration of universal design resources and support within current academic and university programs (e.g., online course creation workshops) and the encouragement to use universal design within academic units (e.g, small monetary grants and consideration in tenure and promotion).
 - Increase efforts to expand full time faculty lines toward reduction of class sizes, where needed, to facilitate universal design implementation (e.g. managing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression).
- Integration of disability-related needs across the university
 - The development of institutional processes and procedures (e.g., with IT, Procurement, Facilities & Events, etc.) to systematically comply with accessibility requirements (e.g., [WCAG 2.1](#), [DOJ Guidance](#)), when purchasing software, electronic/virtual trainings, event scheduling and orchestration, and other products and services, to ensure they are screened and readily-accessible for all constituents upon deployment.
 - Support for a full-time, dedicated campus ADA coordinator position to serve in a proactive role, ensuring institutional capacity building and funding to reduce the need for accommodation in favor of providing access for campus constituents and affiliates.
- Financial program support
 - Creation of additional ODS positions, including ODS Faculty Affiliate positions.
 - Competitive wages, program support budgets, and student support funds (e.g., for screening and evaluations).