

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

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 accommodating students with disabilities and creating 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 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 errors, freezing, and difficult navigation. In order for one student to schedule a single exam, approximately 3-7 emails are generated for Instructors, which can result 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, the process for accommodating students is a significant time demand for faculty and 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 limited to Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and DEI leadership 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 accommodate student needs
 - Software and technology support to automate processes and reduce the burden on students and faculty when seeking services, especially for 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 of universal design within academic units (e.g, consideration in tenure and promotion).
- Integration of disability-related needs across the university
 - The development of institutional processes and procedures (e.g., with IT, Procurement, etc.) to systematically comply with accessibility requirements (e.g., [WCAG 2.1](#), [DOJ Guidance](#)), when purchasing software, electronic/virtual trainings, and other products, 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 for accommodating qualified JMU constituents and visitors.
- 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).