

Reasonable Accommodation Determination Process

What is the Purpose of the Disability Accommodation Process?

The purpose of the disability accommodation process is to ensure a student is not discriminated against solely on the basis of disability and has the same level of access to the University of Pittsburgh as their nondisabled peers. The goal is equal access and equal opportunity, not to facilitate a specific accommodation.

Of note, accommodations in K–12 environments may reduce standards and expectations to promote academic success because success is central to the K–12 accommodation process. In college, the process is substantially different. The fundamental baseline in college is equal access and opportunity relative to other students.

How are Reasonable Accommodation Decisions Made?

Disability Resources and Services (DRS) facilitates an interactive process to understand a student's academic, housing, and/or dining experiences and how any accommodations requested may be necessary to ensure nondiscrimination and equal access and opportunity. The goal is to remove an institutional barrier created by the college environment. Every request for accommodation is explored on an individualized, case-by-case basis in which facts and relevant information are gathered. The process may be brief or involve a series of communication exchanges, depending on the nature of the request.

DRS relies on the following information to make informed decisions:

- Student narrative/history
- Third-party documentation from a qualified medical/health/counseling provider
- Consultation with other members of the campus community, when necessary

What is the role of third-party documentation in determining reasonable accommodations?

Documentation serves two purposes:

1. To establish that a student has a disability.

2. To provide information to help DRS understand how and why a requested academic, housing, or dining accommodation may be reasonable, logical, and necessary to ensure nondiscrimination and equitable access relative to the disability.

While third-party documentation may confirm the existence of a disability, it does not solely determine the reasonableness of accommodations. Medical information is taken into account, but it is not the sole factor in our decision-making process. DRS considers multiple elements when evaluating accommodation requests.

Recommendations made by medical providers are not automatically approved, as they may exceed what is necessary for ensuring equal access. When suggested accommodations are aimed primarily at enhancing academic performance rather than addressing barriers to access, students may be referred to other campus resources or provided with alternative options to meet their needs.

For more information, please review DRS' [Documentation Guidelines](#).

What factors are considered when determining if an accommodation is reasonable?

DRS prioritizes equity and strives to facilitate accommodations that offer the most equitable experience without fundamentally altering an essential outcome or aspect of a course or campus experience. Students with disabilities meet the same academic standards and essential course objectives as every other student. Furthermore, the overall expectations of being a college student, as required of all students at the University of Pittsburgh, are not to be reduced.

The interactive process may include consultation with faculty and others to ensure reasonable access is facilitated, which may occur through accommodations or other measures, such as inclusive design.

DRS utilizes a structured review process for each accommodation request. A reconsideration process is available for students who do not agree with the initial determination. For more information, please see the [Accommodation Appeal Process and Procedures](#) page on the DRS website.

When necessary, reasonable accommodations are provided when they:

- Establish meaningful access or an equal opportunity to fully engage and participate in the same activities, campus services, benefits, and experiences; utilize the same information, and have the same opportunity to achieve as a person without a disability.
- Directly address how the student's disability interacts with barriers in the academic, housing, dining, or broader campus environment.
- Are thoughtfully designed to effectively remove institutional barriers to access.
- Ensure that academic requirements or technical standards do not discriminate against a student based on disability (for academic accommodation requests).

- Resolve disability-related needs that cannot be addressed through preparation, adjustment, counseling, or routine planning, or implementation of other strategies that any student who lives on or off campus must consider and incorporate to continue to be successful students (for housing accommodation requests).

When are academic accommodations potentially not reasonable?

Requested accommodations will not be supported for disability reasons or within the context of a specific academic experience if the accommodation would result in any of the following:

- Lower an academic standard, such that it becomes inappropriately easier for a student to fulfill the mandatory elements or learning objectives required of all other students for the course, program, or degree achievement.
- Remove or waive the acquisition of an essential skill such that it becomes impossible to accurately assess the individual student's learning, knowledge, and course work relative to the required course, program, or degree goals, and/or essential elements.
- Reduce expectations of what is generally expected of all college students (including but not limited to consistent in-class participation, managing time and deadlines, content memorization, and experiencing challenges with academic content).
- A significant alteration in the nature of the program.
- Remove or waive the acquisition of a skill that is directly related to the health and safety of others.
- Remove or waive requirements that are directly related to qualifying for a professional license.
- Enhance student success without removing an institutional barrier that impedes equitable access.
- Address something that the student could otherwise manage through various approaches, such as time management, reduced course load, different study strategies, etc.

At times, an accommodation may be deemed appropriate for disability reasons but is not reasonable within the context of a specific academic experience after further analysis due to one or more of the above-listed factors. In these situations, DRS will attempt to identify alternative reasonable accommodations, if possible.

When are housing accommodations potentially not reasonable?

A housing accommodation due to disability is generally not supported for any of the following reasons:

- Solely to ensure the student is successful at the University (accommodations in higher education are to provide access, not success).
- To ensure a quiet, solitary place for studying. The University library has spaces available for students to study.

- To increase comfort or alleviate discomfort in the housing arrangement, such as by having a specific roommate or having a roommate-free experience to avoid addressing typical roommate conflicts.
- To ensure a private space for virtual appointments.
- To serve as an alternative to the student developing the skills, abilities, and practices necessary to effectively live **on-campus**.
- To serve as an alternative to the student developing the skills, abilities, and practices necessary to effectively live **off-campus**, should space no longer be guaranteed.
- When a request is meant for the housing space to serve as part of a student's treatment plan for their diagnosis or for the University to serve as a student's primary treatment or medical plan/resource.
- To increase comfort by making it easier to manage an academic schedule, such as by not having to plan for a shuttle ride or commute time.
- To alleviate discomfort with living off-campus, such as having to plan when to come to campus, where/when to eat, the number of daily trips needed to campus, etc.
- To minimize concerns about living independently for the first time away from on-campus housing.
- Due to limited transportation options.
- Due to financial concerns, whether related to disability or not.

At times, an accommodation may be deemed appropriate for disability reasons but is not reasonable within the context of a specific housing experience after further analysis and/or discussion with Housing. In these situations, DRS will attempt to identify alternative reasonable accommodations, if possible. A requested accommodation may be unreasonable if:

- Implementation would pose an undue financial or administrative burden.
- Implementation would fundamentally alter university housing policies.
- Facilitation poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others or to personal and University property.