

# Westfield State University - Disability Support Services

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**Document Number:** SS004 **Effective Date:** October 15, 2023

## Mission and Purpose

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The mission of Disability Support Services (DSS) at Westfield State University is to foster an inclusive and accessible learning environment where students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from all university programs and activities. We are committed to working with students, faculty, and staff to ensure that reasonable and appropriate accommodations are provided, promoting student independence, and encouraging self-advocacy. Our purpose is to empower students with disabilities to achieve their academic and personal goals by providing comprehensive support services, resources, and guidance in a respectful and confidential manner.

## Services Offered

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Disability Support Services (DSS) offers a wide range of services to support students with disabilities. Our services are designed to be flexible and are tailored to the individual needs of each student. The primary services offered include, but are not limited to, the following:

### Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodations are modifications to the learning environment that provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to access and participate in their academic courses. These accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis through an interactive process between the student and a DSS coordinator. Examples of academic accommodations include:

- **Note-Taking Assistance:** This may include access to a volunteer note-taker, permission to audio-record lectures, or use of smartpen technology.
- **Extended Time on Assignments:** In some cases, students may be granted additional time to complete assignments. This is arranged in consultation with the course instructor.
- **Alternative Format for Course Materials:** Textbooks and other course materials can be converted into accessible formats such as audio, Braille, or large print.
- **Preferential Seating:** Students may be granted preferential seating in the classroom to minimize distractions or to accommodate a physical or sensory disability.
- **Sign Language Interpreters and Real-Time Captioning:** For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, DSS can arrange for qualified sign language interpreters or real-time captioning services (CART).

## Testing Accommodations

Testing accommodations are designed to provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge on exams and quizzes. These accommodations are arranged through DSS and are administered in a distraction-reduced environment. Examples of testing accommodations include:

- **Extended Time:** Students may be eligible for additional time (e.g., time and a half, double time) on all timed assessments.
- **Distraction-Reduced Testing Environment:** Students can take their exams in a quiet setting to minimize auditory and visual distractions.
- **Use of a Reader or Scribe:** For students with visual impairments or certain learning disabilities, a reader or scribe may be provided to assist with reading exam questions and writing down answers.
- **Use of a Computer for Exams:** Students may be permitted to use a computer with or without spell check and grammar check for essay exams.

## Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) refers to any item, piece of equipment, or software program that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals

with disabilities. DSS provides access to and training on a variety of assistive technologies, including:

- **Screen Reading Software:** Software that reads aloud the content on a computer screen for students with visual impairments (e.g., JAWS, NVDA).
- **Speech-to-Text Software:** Software that converts spoken words into written text for students with physical disabilities or learning disabilities that affect writing (e.g., Dragon NaturallySpeaking).
- **Text-to-Speech Software:** Software that reads digital text aloud, which can be beneficial for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia (e.g., Kurzweil 3000, Read&Write).
- **Smartpens:** Pens that record audio and link it to what a student writes, allowing them to review lectures more effectively.
- **Magnification Software:** Software that enlarges the content on a computer screen for students with low vision (e.g., ZoomText).

## Eligibility and Access

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To be eligible for services, students must have a documented disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This includes, but is not limited to, students with physical, sensory, learning, psychological, and chronic health conditions. Students must provide current and comprehensive documentation of their disability from a qualified professional. The documentation should include a clear statement of the disability, the diagnostic criteria and/or tests used, and a description of the current functional limitations. DSS will review the documentation to determine eligibility and appropriate accommodations.

## How to Access Services

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Students who wish to request accommodations are encouraged to contact DSS as early as possible in their academic career. The process for accessing services is as follows:

1. **Submit an Application and Documentation:** Students must complete the online application form and submit their disability documentation through our

secure online portal.

2. **Schedule an Intake Appointment:** Once the application and documentation have been reviewed, students will be contacted to schedule an intake appointment with a DSS coordinator. During this meeting, the student's needs will be discussed, and an individualized accommodation plan will be developed.
3. **Request Accommodations Each Semester:** Students must request their approved accommodations each semester through the DSS online portal. This allows students to select which accommodations they would like to use for each of their courses.

**Location:** Student Services Building, Room 210 **Hours:** Monday - Friday, 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM **Contact Information:**

- **Phone:** (555) 123-4567
- **Email:** [disability.services@westfieldstate.edu](mailto:disability.services@westfieldstate.edu)

## Appointment Scheduling

Appointments with DSS coordinators can be scheduled by calling our office or by using our online scheduling system, which is available to registered students through the university portal.

## Confidentiality

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All information and documentation submitted to Disability Support Services is kept confidential and is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Disability-related information is not shared with other university departments or external parties without the student's written consent, except where required by law. Accommodation letters sent to faculty do not disclose the nature of the student's disability.

## Related Resources and Referrals

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In addition to the services provided by DSS, students may find the following university resources helpful:

- **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):** Provides confidential counseling and mental health services to all Westfield State University students.
- **Academic Success Center:** Offers tutoring, writing support, and academic coaching to help students succeed in their courses.
- **University Health Services:** Provides medical care and health education to the student community.
- **Career Services:** Assists students with career exploration, resume building, and job search strategies.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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### **Q: Will my disability be noted on my academic transcript?**

A: No. Your disability status is confidential and will not appear on your academic transcript or any other permanent university record.

### **Q: Do I have to disclose my disability to my instructors?**

A: You are not required to disclose the nature of your disability to your instructors. DSS will provide your instructors with a letter of accommodation that lists the approved accommodations for their class. We encourage you to have a conversation with your instructors about how your accommodations will be implemented in their course.

### **Q: Are accommodations retroactive?**

A: No. Accommodations are not retroactive. They begin on the date the letter of accommodation is sent to your instructor. It is your responsibility to request accommodations in a timely manner each semester.

### **Q: What if I disagree with a decision about my accommodations?**

A: If you disagree with a decision regarding your accommodations, you should first discuss your concerns with your DSS coordinator. If a resolution cannot be reached, you may file a formal grievance with the university's ADA/504 Coordinator.

# Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Summary of Changes
1.0	Oct 15, 2023	Manus AI	Initial document creation.
1.1	Dec 28, 2025	Manus AI	Added FAQs and updated contact information.