

# Disabilities Policies and Procedures at Western Seminary

## Introduction

Western Seminary is committed to responding to the needs of qualified students with disabilities as outlined in both the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Disability Services at Western Seminary is committed to providing qualified students with disabilities equal access to programs and services to reach their full academic and ministry potential. We work to create an environment where qualified students with disabilities are welcomed, valued, and respected by all members of our community.

Any student who has a documented disability that may require an accommodation to participate in seminary courses must contact the Disabilities Coordinator ([accommodations@westernseminary.edu](mailto:accommodations@westernseminary.edu)) no less than 30 days prior to the beginning of the semester in which you are seeking accommodations. Accommodations will not be provided retroactively to the request and may take an extended amount of time to implement. More information related to requesting accommodations may be found on our [Disabilities Accommodation Information](#) webpage.

It is the intent of this document to outline policies and procedures that ensure the access of individuals with disabilities to seminary programs and activities. Appropriate sections of this document will be integrated into other seminary publications (e.g., student handbook, academic catalog) as necessary to ensure implementation.

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarification, the following terms are defined below:

- Equal access – equal opportunity of a qualified person with a disability to participate in or benefit from educational aid, benefits, or services.



- Qualified student with a disability – a student with a disability who meets the academic and technical standards requisite for admission or participation in the institution’s educational program or activity.
- Modifications – includes but is not limited to the use of auxiliary aids in the Seminary’s learning environments; allowances for additional time, physical modification such as seating arrangements, more comfortable seating, and the like; additional time for taking exams; substitutions of other acceptable assignments, courses, tests or test formats when necessary to reasonably accommodate equal access for individuals with disabilities.
- Reasonable accommodation – is an adjustment or modification to the learning environment and/or tasks based on the nature of the disability that enables the student to have an equal opportunity to participate in the academic program. The nature of the accommodation is established so as to allow the student to enjoy equal access to benefits and privileges of the course or program without altering the nature or academic rigor of the program.
- Reasonable modifications – under a regulatory provision implementing Title II of the ADA, public entities are required to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the public entity can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.

## **Rights and Responsibilities of Western Seminary**

Western Seminary recognizes that its responsibility is to identify and maintain the academic and technical standards that are fundamental to providing quality academic programs while ensuring the rights of individuals with disabilities. To meet this obligation, Western Seminary:

1. has the right to identify and establish the abilities, skills, and knowledge necessary to meet the standards in its programs and to evaluate applicants based upon these standards;
2. has the right to evaluate applicants based solely on their academic abilities for admission into programs. If any evaluation method or criterion unfairly discriminates against an applicant with a disability, the Seminary will seek reasonable alternatives;
3. has the right to request documentation be provided from a licensed professional on behalf of the student regarding their disability;



4. has the responsibility to ensure that its information and academic programs are available in accessible formats and facilities;
5. has the responsibility to ensure that all of its programs, viewed in their entirety, including but not limited to academic offerings, student organizations, events, counseling resources, and placement are accessible and usable;
6. has the responsibility to make reasonable modifications for a student with a disability in the delivery, instructional method, and evaluation system of a course.

## **Responsibilities of Western Seminary's Faculty**

Western Seminary's faculty are committed to upholding the approved accommodations plan of student's in their classroom. To provide assistance for qualified students with disabilities in order for students to perform on par with their peers in class, faculty of Western Seminary agree to:

1. clarify any accommodations questions and seek further details with the student receiving the accommodation in their class;
2. meet with the student to map out a plan for the semester (if applicable);
3. direct students who disclose a disability to the Disabilities Coordinator;
4. use discretion and never ask a student what their specific disability is;
5. never deny a student's accommodation plan that has been set up with the Disabilities Coordinator;
6. never initiate a conversation about accommodations in front a student's peers.

## **Rights and Responsibilities of Qualified Students with Disabilities**

A qualified student with a disability has the right to an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs offered at Western Seminary. To ensure this right, students with disabilities at Western Seminary have:



1. the same responsibilities as any other student to meet and maintain the Seminary's academic and technical standards, with reasonable accommodations;
2. the right to an equal opportunity to work or learn. Qualified individuals with a disability have a right to reasonable modifications in aspects of their educational access;
3. the right to an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the academic community. This includes access to services, programs, and events that are comparable to those provided to any student;
4. the right to information regarding the availability of possible modifications and accommodations as well as procedures for making requests;
5. the right to advocate for their own individual needs and to seek information and assistance as necessary to be effective self-advocates;
6. the right to be informed of procedures for initiating further appeal of an institutional decision through external channels.
7. the responsibility to follow the published procedures for making accommodation requests and to do so in a timely manner with the understanding that some accommodations may take longer to facilitate;

## **Requesting Accommodations**

Students wanting academic accommodations as a result of having a disability will need to contact the Disabilities Coordinator to request an accommodation plan. Instructors at Western Seminary are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation plan through the Disabilities Office.

The student must be prepared to provide medical documentation of the disability with a diagnosis and limitations. The documentation should be current and within the past three to five years.

**NOTE:** An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is not medical documentation. Some IEP's do have recent medical documentation that supports the IEP. In this case, the IEP can be used for the accommodation request, however, it must include medical documentation of a student's disability within the past three to five years to be accepted.

## **Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals**

Qualified students with disabilities who use a service animal may bring the animal to the same areas on campus where the individual may go. Titles II and III of the ADA define a service animal as any dog individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability.

The service animal must be house-broken and socially trained to act appropriate on campus in a way that does not cause undue disruption to the classroom or other campus environments. The student will be held financially responsible for the repair of damage to campus property or other expenses that may arise as the result of the animal's presence on the campus.

NOTE: Emotional support animals are not service animals under the ADA.

Western Seminary has the right to ask a student with a service animal the two questions below:

1. Is the animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

## **Accommodation / Services**

After a student has submitted sufficient medical documentation to the Disabilities Office, they may be approved for accommodations that are appropriate for their disability and/or as recommended by their medical provider. Not all recommendations are approved or warranted based on the nature of the seminary's programs, practices, and protocols in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act, Section 504, along with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amended in 2008.

Below is a short list of potential accommodations:

- Accessible furniture and classrooms
- Alternate format textbooks (available through our library resources)
- Extra time on assignments and exams
- Seating at the front of the classroom
- Large font print materials (including large print scantrons, if applicable)



- Ability to take visual breaks during sustained visual assignments (computing, reading, and note-taking)
- Access to professor's notes (including any PowerPoint slides) from lectures
- Recording of classes as per the [Audio Recorded Lecture Policy Agreement](#)
- Distraction reduced environment for testing
- Ability to use programs (provided by the student) to convert tests into a text-to-speech format
- Repetition of questions that are asked in class
- Note taking assistance
  - Either done by a student who volunteers their notes to the instructor, or access to class notes from the professor prior to class

Accommodations are to be reasonable, not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the program, not fundamentally alter the nature of the academic standards, and be justified by the documentation.

Accommodations are determined on a case by case interactive process involving the student and the Disabilities Coordinator to assess the barriers that the student faces and how the accommodations may provide equal access to the academic environment for enhanced success. However, accommodations do not guarantee success in seminary.

## **Accommodation Application Process**

1. Complete the [questionnaire for ADA accommodation](#).
2. Request completion of [ADA documentation](#) from a licensed professional.
3. Submit both the questionnaire and documentation to [accommodations@westernseminary.edu](mailto:accommodations@westernseminary.edu).

4. The Disabilities Coordinator will contact the student in regards to accommodation options and additional documentation if needed.
5. If approved, a letter outlining the student's accommodations will be generated to the student's professors at the beginning of each term.
6. Ongoing support and communication from the Disabilities Coordinator with the student will take place each semester.

## **Accommodation Grievance Procedures**

If a student feels they are being treated inappropriately based on their disability by any department or employee and has been unable to resolve the issue, that student is encouraged to follow these steps:

1. Meet with the Disabilities Coordinator.
2. If a satisfactory solution cannot be reached with the coordinator, the student may initiate a formal complaint with the Dean of Faculty by putting the complaint in writing to the Dean of Faculty's office at the Portland campus. A written complaint should include information regarding the action being complained of, the date it occurred, details about the action, and the relief requested. The complaint must be sent to the Dean within 30 days of the time the action occurred.
3. The Dean will investigate the complaint or assign an appropriate person to investigate the complaint. The investigation will include an interview with the student, a review of any relevant written materials, and interviews with (or a written statement from) relevant persons. The investigation will be completed within 30 days of the time the student submitted the complaint to the Dean at which point the Dean will provide the student with a written decision on the complaint.

**NOTE:** Time frames may be extended for a reasonable cause with the agreement of the complainant.

\*Should a qualified student with a disability be dissatisfied with the outcome of the grievance procedure above or wish to pursue an alternative to using the procedure above, the student may file a



complaint against the Seminary with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) or in a court. You may learn more about the OCR complaint process through [THIS](#) link.

## **Accommodations Consultation and Advocacy**

The Disabilities Office can meet with registered students on a one-to-one basis to review academic accommodations. We can discuss your concerns with specific courses or instructors and work together to determine necessary alterations to the established accommodations plan on a semester to semester basis. We are available to help you find the resources necessary to assist with your academic needs as it relates to your accommodations plan and are available to coach students in self-advocacy and how to communicate effectively with faculty/staff.