

MEMORANDUM

TO: Law School Faculty and Staff
FROM: Professor Elizabeth Emens
DATE: Summer 2024
SUBJECT: Disability Access for our Students, Colleagues, and Guests

Dear Colleagues,

My participation in the University's project on "The Future of Disability Studies" several years ago made me aware of the many ways that our campus can create an unwelcoming environment for people with disabilities.

The Law School is more accessible to people with physical disabilities than are some of the older university buildings. Our students and guests may nonetheless encounter obstacles, particularly if they have disabilities unrelated to mobility, or if their experience with the Law School extends beyond the Law School buildings to, for instance, the local restaurants and hotels we arrange for guests.

A meaningful number of our students have disabilities, many of them invisible to us. The 2017 American College Health Association Report on Columbia Law School indicates that approximately 19.7% of our students report having one or more disabilities or medical conditions, such as hearing, visual, physical, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. My understanding is that these numbers have been rising since that time.

Lauren Levy is the Law School's Disability Liaison, and you should feel free to reach out to her with any questions or concerns:

Lauren Levy

Associate Director of Academic Counseling and Student Support

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accommodations@law.columbia.edu

This memorandum provides four simple ways that we can make the Law School community more welcoming and inclusive for people with disabilities, both for our students and for visitors. The memorandum builds on a template provided by a professor from another department in the University with input from Disability Services.

1. Include an accommodation statement on the syllabus for each course. The following sample statement builds on recommendations from Disability Services, and incorporates additional elements that were part of my most recent Contracts syllabus:

Accommodation

Columbia Law School is committed to the full inclusion of students with disabilities in the life of the University. In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), CLS provides accommodations and supports to students with documented disabilities on an individual, case-by-case basis.

To request disability accommodations for this course, students should first be registered with Disability Services (DS). Detailed information is available online (<https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>) regarding the registration process, drop-in hours schedule, documentation requirements and important deadlines. DS encourages students to allow at least three weeks to complete the DS registration process. If you have already registered with DS or have questions about registering with DS, please contact the CLS DS liaison, Lauren Levy, Associate Director of Academic Counseling and Student Support (l3686@columbia.edu). Please also copy accommodations@law.columbia.edu.

In addition, if you know that you will need to miss class for disability, religious, or other reasons, and do not already have a case worker at DS, please inform the Associate Dean of Student and Registration Services, Andrea Cristina Saavedra (acs2126@columbia.edu), and the Office of Student Services (studentservices@law.columbia.edu), in addition to Professor Emens' administrative assistant Brandon Sandoval (email above) and your cohort TA, so that arrangements (such as recordings) can be made to support your participation in the continuity of the class.

Note also that the general policies on disability accommodations are a floor not a ceiling. Moreover, this class aspires to incorporate universal design principles and to go beyond the minimum accommodation requirements. If you have ideas for how those goals could be better achieved, please let us know. _____ will be the TA point-person for any questions or concerns about accommodations, but you should also feel free to speak to Professor Emens or her assistant Brandon Sandoval (emails above). Know, however, that you are under no obligation to talk with professors or TAs about your accommodations, and exam accommodations should not be discussed with professors

prior to the completion of grading, in order to preserve the anonymity of the grading process.

2. Statement on accommodations for events (see also the info sheet at the end of this memo).

On all invitations to any Law School workshops, conferences, and other events, include a statement that offers accommodations (for instance, for people with hearing and visual disabilities). Even for small or informal invitations and events, it is best to include a statement of this sort. A list of accommodations is below. These accommodations can often be arranged and paid for through Disability Services: <https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>, (212) 854-2388, disability@columbia.edu.

Sample language:

Columbia University makes every effort to accommodate individuals with disabilities. If you require accommodations to participate fully in this event, please contact [name of event organizer]. Requests for accommodations should ideally be made at least 5 days before the event. Where such advance notice is not possible, however, please let us know about any last minute accommodation requests and we will try to fulfill them.

3. Accommodating guest speakers. When you invite guest speakers to workshops and other events, also invite them to indicate if they require any disability accommodations, and be sure that these needs are actually met.

Sample language:

If any disability accommodations would help to facilitate your visit, please let [name of event organizer] know.

Finding accessible restaurants and hotels for guest speakers is not a simple task. A general question—such as “Is your [restaurant/hotel/etc.] accessible?”—almost invariably produces the answer “yes,” even if the location is in fact not accessible. The recommended question is “Are there steps to the entrance?” The person making the arrangements should read the following websites for suggestions about questions to ask and useful perspectives on finding accessible venues:

<https://www.nycgo.com/plan-your-trip/basic-information/accessibility>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/12/dining/12acce.html?pagewanted=all>.

https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowTopic-g1-i12336-k4150249-Accessibility_Checklist_for_Hotel_Accommodation-Traveling_With_Disabilities.html

4. Ensure digital resources are accessible. When using digital resources, such as websites, ensure that they are also accessible. Digital accessibility includes accommodations for disabilities that affect auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech, and visual abilities. For example, it is crucial to make these resources screen-reader compatible. Other steps that can promote more accessible digital resources include making websites navigable via keyboard, forgoing the use of CAPTCHA codes, or avoiding low contrast in digital resource development. You can find more resources for crafting accessible digital materials at:

[How do I create an accessible site? | Adobe Accessibility](#)

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/>

Columbia University offers training and support for the creation and maintenance of accessible digital materials and websites. Further details for web content accessibility, screen reader friendliness, screen magnification tools, and other resources can be found at <https://cuit.columbia.edu/web-accessibility>.

To learn more about training in web accessibility, you can contact Susan Feldman, Senior User Experience Specialist for Columbia University Information Technology. She can be reached at sf2330@columbia.edu or 212.851.0681.

Columbia University Information Technology works with Disability Services to support disability related needs. For further questions, you can reach these offices by phone at 212.954.1919 (CUIT)/212.854.2388 (Disability Services) or via email at askcuit@columbia.edu (CUIT)/disability@columbia.edu (Disability Services).

For additional help with creating accessible digital resources, such as course materials, event flyers, and the like, you may also contact Kiana Taghavi at 212.854.1528 or k.taghavi@columbia.edu.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

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Information on making an event at Columbia accessible

With advance notice, Disability Services will arrange and pay for most accommodations.

Contact Disability Services at disability@columbia.edu, (212) 854-2388, <https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>.

It isn't necessary to provide all of the accommodations listed below, but it is important to be educated about how to make accommodations when they are requested.

Include the following accommodation statement on all advertising:

Columbia University makes every effort to accommodate individuals with disabilities. If you require accommodations to participate in this event, please contact [name of event organizer]. (Requests for accommodations should ideally be made at least 5 days before the event. Where such advance notice is not possible, however, please let us know about any last-minute accommodation requests and we will try to fulfill them.)

Check out the venue, and any restaurants or hotels related to the event, well in advance of the event. How would a wheelchair user access the room? Where would a person in a wheelchair or a person needing an ASL interpreter sit? Are the bathrooms accessible?

When the venue is not entirely accessible, include information about a wheelchair route. Make sure you know whether the wheelchair accessible door is open to the public at the time your event is scheduled. Make sure that necessary security personnel are acquainted with the accessible route.

All speakers should use a microphone. Have a handheld microphone available for Q&A. (As one small example, this year one of my students with a hearing impairment was accommodated merely by everyone using their microphones in class). To underscore the importance of this practice, I encourage you to read:

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Note-From-Your-Colleagues/245916>.

Make your PDFs accessible to screen reading technology. (An easy test to determine whether they are is to see if you can highlight portions of the document, meaning it is compatible with a screen reader). To make accessible PDFs, scan using the OCR setting. All images should be tagged with a written description. Refer to Recommendation #4 above for resources regarding digital accessibility.

Ask speakers to provide verbal descriptions for PowerPoint presentations involving images.

Ask speakers who plan to poll the audience in any way ("how many of you...?") to provide a verbal description of what they see (for example, "about half of you").

To make video clips accessible, they must be captioned (video player needs to be equipped with a decoder that can provide DVD captioning or consult Disability Services for technical assistance), and the speaker should provide audio description.

Provide handouts electronically to the event organizer a week in advance. Large print copies

should be produced, and several electronic copies should be available on flash drives.

Sign interpreters can be arranged through Disability Services, as can CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation).