

Policy for Addressing the Academic Needs of Students with Disabilities at WTS

Westminster Theological Seminary is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to otherwise qualified students with disabilities and formulated this policy for addressing the educational needs of students with disabilities.

The purpose of this policy is two-fold. First, we aim to provide assurance that all reasonable measures are being taken by the seminary to provide an equal opportunity for students with disabilities to study and thrive at Westminster in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act. Second, this document serves as a guide for faculty, administration and staff in reasonably accommodating and serving students with disabilities within the seminary community.

Federal and state law prohibit WTS from discriminating against otherwise qualified students with disabilities.

As defined by the law, “disability” is used to refer to a person who (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual (2) has a record of such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment.

Reasonable accommodation will refer to measures taken in the form of modification or adjustment to ensure that an otherwise qualified student has full and equal access to seminary-sponsored programs. This will vary depending on the class or activity and on the needs of the individual. The goal will be to accommodate the student and establish equity, but without giving unfair advantage. These measures must not alter the material or challenge the integrity of the course, the material it is designed to impart or the skills it wishes to evaluate. The measures are intended to be effective, and reasonable, but may not be exactly as the student wishes or requests.

Student Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the individual student to make any and all needs known to the seminary as well as to their individual professors. As stated in Acceptance Letter from the WTS Office of Admissions, students must submit written documentation, including evaluation of their disability, to the Dean of Students at least two months prior to matriculation.

After the documentation of the disability has been received and reviewed, measures for accommodation will be proposed by the Dean of Students in writing. The student must then provide permission for letters of notification to be sent to his or her instructors. Instructors should review the proposed accommodations. Concerns or objections regarding the proposed accommodations should be brought to the Dean of Students.

Faculty and Staff Responsibility

Faculty and staff are advised to only make accommodations for students who have taken the proper measures to bring their requests or concerns through the appropriate channels. Initiation of proposed accommodations will begin with the Dean of Students. After the student's documentation of the disability has been reviewed and accommodations proposed, at the student's agreement and request, a letter of notification will be sent to the student's professors for that term. Students will then be encouraged to introduce themselves to their professors and to discuss the practical application of the proposed measures. Concerns or objections regarding the proposed accommodations should be brought to the Dean of Students especially if the faculty or staff member has reservations about potential unfair advantage to the student or the alteration of course material or curriculum objectives.

Suggestions for Practical Application of This Policy

The following is taken from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations regarding examinations and courses (28 C.F.R. §36.309)

(a) General. Any private entity that offers examinations or courses related to applications, licensing, certification, or credentialing for secondary or postsecondary education, professional, or trade purposes shall offer such examinations or courses in a place and manner accessible to persons with disabilities or offer alternative accessible arrangements for such individuals.

(b) Examinations. (1) Any private entity offering an examination covered by this section must assure that --

(i) The examination is selected and administered so as to best ensure that, when the examination is administered to an individual with a disability that impairs sensory, manual, or speaking skills, the examination results accurately reflect the individual's aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factor the examination purports to measure, rather than reflecting the individual's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills (except where those skills are the factors that the examination purports to measure);

(ii) An examination that is designed for individuals with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills is offered at equally convenient locations, as often, and in as timely a manner as are other examinations; and

(iii) The examination is administered in facilities that are accessible to individuals with disabilities or alternative accessible arrangements are made.

(2) Required modifications to an examination may include changes in the length of time permitted for completion of the examination and adaptation of the manner in which the examination is given.

(3) A private entity offering an examination covered by this section shall provide appropriate auxiliary aids for persons with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, unless that private entity can demonstrate that offering a particular auxiliary aid would fundamentally alter the measurement of the skills or knowledge the examination is intended to test or would result in an undue burden. Auxiliary aids and services required by this section may include taped examinations, interpreters or other effective methods of making orally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments, Brailled or large print examinations and answer sheets or qualified readers for individuals with visual impairments or learning disabilities, transcribers for individuals with manual impairments, and other similar services and actions.

(4) Alternative accessible arrangements may include, for example, provision of an examination at an individual's home with a proctor if accessible facilities or equipment are unavailable. Alternative arrangements must provide comparable conditions to those provided for nondisabled individuals.

(c) Courses. (1) Any private entity that offers a course covered by this section must make such modifications to that course as are necessary to ensure that the place and manner in which the course is given are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

(2) Required modifications may include changes in the length of time permitted for the completion of the course, substitution of specific requirements, or adaptation of the manner in which the course is conducted or course materials are distributed.

(3) A private entity that offers a course covered by this section shall provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services for persons with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, unless the private entity can demonstrate that offering a particular auxiliary aid or service would fundamentally alter the course or would result in an undue burden. Auxiliary aids and services required by this section may include taped texts, interpreters or other effective methods of making orally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments, Brailled or large print texts or qualified readers for individuals with visual impairments and learning disabilities, classroom equipment adapted for use by individuals with manual impairments, and other similar services and actions.

(4) Courses must be administered in facilities that are accessible to individuals with disabilities or alternative accessible arrangements must be made.

(5) Alternative accessible arrangements may include, for example, provision of the course through videotape, cassettes, or prepared notes. Alternative arrangements must provide comparable conditions to those provided for nondisabled individuals.