

Subject: Ensuring Equivalent Access to Educational Materials and Programming (i.e., E-Learning, Course Materials, Information Technology) for Students with Disabilities

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From: Office of the Provost (sent by Office of the Provost <PROVOSTOFFICE-L@metis3.gmu.edu>)

To: PROVOSTOFFICE-L@metis3.gmu.edu

Dear Colleagues,

Mason continues to witness significant increases in the implementation and use of e-learning and information technology in our classrooms. While faculty members are encouraged to avail themselves of the tools necessary to more effectively teach their courses, it is imperative that equitable access to course materials for students with disabilities remains a top priority. Mason is committed to maintaining a diverse and inclusive academic community, where all students are afforded the opportunity for a transformational learning experience. This commitment must and does include students with disabilities. This is a core value.

Mason's ethical commitment to ensuring equivalent access is reinforced by our legal responsibility to do so. The Americans with Disabilities Act ([ADA](#)); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; and the Virginia Information Technology Accessibility Standard ([GOV 103-00](#)), which is based on [Section 508](#) of the Rehabilitation Act, taken together require that our programs and services be accessible to all students. Several institutions (i.e., [Louisiana Tech University](#), [South Carolina Technical College System](#)) have already been subjected to settlement agreements that include fines and specific action plans for failing to provide equivalent access to e-learning and information technology resources for students with sensory impairments.

Faculty members, with assistance, are responsible for ensuring that students have equivalent access to their course materials. As more and more web-based resources (e.g., supplemental materials, articles, video, etc.) are incorporated into the classroom environment, we must be unremitting in our efforts to ensure that all individuals are able to fully participate in our academic programs and services. To that end, the following offices are available to support faculty members in meeting the standard for compliance and accessibility:

- **The Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI)** collaborates with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), the Office of Equity and Diversity Services (OEDS), the Information Technology Unit (ITU), and faculty to ensure equivalent access to Mason's e-learning and information technology resources (i.e., Bb, websites, videos, textbooks, etc.). Faculty and academic units can submit requests to the ATI for [captioning videos](#) and to have any [web-based media and/or on websites tested for accessibility](#). The ATI also provides training and support to academic units and faculty on how to develop accessible course materials (e.g., adding ALT tags to images/charts/graphs in PPT presentations, tagged/readable PDF files, accessible textbooks). A [document and web accessibility](#) checklist has been developed for faculty aid in these practices as well. For questions or to schedule training, please contact the ATI by calling 703-993-4329 or by emailing ati@gmu.edu.
- **DoIT's Instructional Design Team** assists faculty in designing effective e-learning. They provide training and support for Bb courses, Bb Collaborate, and many other software applications including the MS Office Suite and Adobe. In consultation with the ATI and the Office of Distance Education, they provide faculty development workshops and support for making DE courses accessible. DE faculty members should work directly with their assigned instructional designer or contact the Collaborative Learning Hub, or CLUB, by calling 703-993-3141 or by emailing idteam@gmu.edu.
- **The Office of Disability Services (ODS)** collaborates with students with documented disabilities and faculty to provide reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids, and support services that are individualized and based upon medical documentation, functional limitations, and a collaborative assessment of needs. When professors are identified as having a registered student with a sensory impairment (i.e., vision and/or hearing loss), ODS and ATI coordinate information sessions prior to each semester for faculty members, that will address how to prepare a learning environment that will best meet the student's needs. Additionally there is a [faculty handbook](#) on the ODS website that will list best practices when working with students with sensory impairments. Should you have questions, please contact the ODS by calling 703-993-

2474 or by emailing ods@gmu.edu.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Peter N Stearns Provost, Executive Vice President