

Policy - Accommodation of Graduate Students with Disabilities

Policy Statement

Queen's University is committed to providing accommodation for students with disabilities who are enrolled in any of its graduate programs. University administration, faculty, staff and other students are expected to support, to the point of undue hardship, all reasonable individualized and appropriate accommodation plans that preserve the program's academic standards and adhere to the principles of academic integrity.

Guiding Principles

1. Queen's University is committed to creating a community that respects the dignity and worth of all persons who seek to participate in the life, work and mission of the University and to maintaining a culture that is welcoming, accommodating and supportive of persons with disabilities.
2. The essence of accommodating graduate students with disabilities is individualization and there is no set formula to be applied in developing accommodation plans. Each student's needs are unique and must be considered afresh when an accommodation request is made. The University has an obligation to provide the most appropriate accommodation; that is, the accommodation that most respects the dignity of the individual with a disability, meets individual needs, and promotes integration and full participation.
3. The University, under the Ontario Human Rights Code, is required to accommodate graduate students with disabilities to the point of undue hardship. It is important to recognize that inconvenience, potential negative reaction from faculty or other students, third party preferences, collective agreements or contracts are not considered in the test of undue hardship.
4. Accommodations must preserve the academic standards and uphold the essential requirements of a program while adhering to the principles of academic integrity (<http://www.queensu.ca/sgs/forstudents/policiesprocedures/FINALSGSAcademicIntegritypolicyMay2010.pdf>). Essential requirements refer to the knowledge and skills that must be acquired and/or demonstrated in order for a student to successfully meet the learning objectives and the degree level expectations of a course or program of study.

Mediating individual accommodation requests takes into consideration a student's disability and program-specific requirements. There can be no legitimate claim that academic standards would be compromised by requested accommodations unless it can be demonstrated that the provision of the accommodation would alter the essential requirements of a degree program.

Roles and responsibilities

Student:

- Notify the University about the disability and need for accommodation. The student does so by contacting the Disability Services Office (DSO) about the need for accommodation as early as possible and by providing appropriate documentation (in confidence) that verifies the presence of a permanent disability and indicates the student's functional limitation in relation to the activities as a graduate student. Incoming students are advised to contact the DSO as early as possible at the start of the program, ideally in advance of arrival at Queen's.
- Actively engage with DSO staff, graduate supervisors, graduate coordinators, instructors, and others as necessary to develop and implement an appropriate accommodation plan.
- With support from the DSO, the student may confer, if necessary, with the graduate coordinator or supervisor about accommodation. The student retains the right to disclose or not to disclose disability-related information to the academic unit.
- Review his or her accommodations with the DSO on an annual basis or sooner if required.
- If the student requires an accommodation for reasons of a disability or health condition in the oral examination of the thesis, the graduate student is responsible for consulting with the Disability Services Office (DSO) to discuss their needs prior to submission of the thesis (approximately 8 weeks before the thesis defence) and communicating plans for accommodation to the supervisor. Please see [Appendix 1](#).

Graduate Coordinators/Department Heads/ Program Directors, Graduate Supervisors:

- Recognize the requirement to support the accommodation process.
- Be informed about the services available at Queen's for supporting students with disabilities, and refer students accordingly should the need arise.
- Respond to requests from graduate students for accommodations in a timely manner and assist with defining the essential academic requirements to be considered when developing an accommodation plan.

- Encourage graduate students with disabilities to discuss their academic progress and their accommodation needs as necessary.
- When required, actively engage the accommodation planning process by considering a range of possible approaches and suggesting reasonable solutions.
- The supervisor shares responsibility for ensuring that a student who requires an accommodation in the oral examination of the thesis is appropriately accommodated. Please see [Appendix 1](#).

School of Graduate Studies:

- Communicate with incoming graduate students about services for students with disabilities.
- Provide information to academic units pertaining to the roles and responsibilities associated with accommodating graduate students with disabilities.
- Support and facilitate the implementation of individualized accommodation plans developed between the student, the Disability Services Office (DSO), and the department or program.
- In cases where an accommodation plan requires extension beyond the funding eligible period to complete the program requirements, the unit will contact the appropriate SGS Associate Dean to develop an appropriate accommodation plan.

The SGS is responsible for assisting all parties in ensuring that accommodations for an oral examination of the thesis are in place for a student who requires an accommodation. Please see [Appendix 1](#).

APPENDIX 1. Procedure for the Accommodation of a Documented Disability or Health Condition in the Oral Examination of the Thesis.

If the student requires an accommodation for reasons of a disability or health condition in the oral examination of the thesis, the graduate student is responsible for consulting with the Disability Services Office (DSO) to discuss their needs prior to submission of the thesis (approximately 8 weeks before the thesis defence). The DSO and the student will consult with the supervisor as necessary in determining appropriate accommodations that take into account the student's functional limitations and the essential requirements of the oral examination.

The DSO will develop a written plan outlining the specific accommodations for which the student is approved. The student is responsible for communicating the accommodation plan to the supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for consulting with the department and/or SGS as necessary, communicating the accommodation to SGS, and working with SGS to ensure that it is implemented.

In most cases, the Chair of the oral examination committee and the examiners must be informed about any accommodations the student requires for the defense. Students are advised to consult about this with the DSO. In these cases, the supervisor/department must submit a copy of the accommodation plan to the SGS Thesis Coordinator when the thesis and the thesis examination form are submitted. The SGS then assumes responsibility for communicating the accommodation plan to the Chair and examiners as appropriate. In communicating about the accommodation plan, no information about the student's disability or health condition will be disclosed unless it is pertinent and directly related to implementing the accommodation plan.

If at any time during the examination of the thesis the accommodation is not being implemented as prescribed, the student, the chair, or the supervisor can ask to pause the exam. The Chair is responsible for assessing the situation and determining if the problem can be adequately addressed in order to proceed with the exam or, in rare circumstances, deciding if the exam should be stopped and rescheduled. Depending on the nature of the accommodation, the student, the supervisor or SGS may request the presence of an assistant whose role would be to monitor the accommodations.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor or his/her delegate to ensure that any required equipment is operating successfully by testing the equipment before the day of the defence and ensuring that everything is in place at least 30 minutes before the defence begins.

It is the responsibility of the School of Graduate Studies to assist all parties in ensuring that accommodations for an oral defence are in place, to ensure that

members of an oral examination committee are aware that accommodation arrangements have been made, to ensure, if appropriate that the chair of the examination committee understands their responsibilities for the fair and appropriate conduct of the examination, and to assist all parties in rescheduling the oral examination in a timely fashion if it is interrupted due to problems connected to the accommodation arrangements.

In keeping with the principles of the [Policy on Accommodating Graduate Students with Disabilities](#), academic accommodations in the oral examination of the thesis must preserve the academic standards and uphold the essential requirements of a program.