

POLICY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

[Approved by Executive Council 12 April 2011]

I. POLICY

Bethlehem University based on and arising naturally from its mission “to provide quality higher education to the people of Palestine and to serve them in its role as a center for the advancement, sharing, and use of knowledge,” is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all students including those with disabilities. BU strives to provide and maintain a fair and supportive learning environment that enables all students to participate fully in the mainstream of university life. The aim of this policy is to ensure that students with disabilities have access to programs and facilities as well as the assurance of reasonable assistance in coping with their needs. Academics is the basis for this policy and academic success is its objective.

II. DEFINITION OF DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities are those who experience limitations in participating in learning activities and applying knowledge as a result of any body function or structural problems either personal or environmental. This definition is based on the International Classification of Functioning and Disability (ICF) adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The main disabilities faced at BU are physical, visual, and auditory. Other disabilities will be assessed and evaluated when the need arises and as far as reasonably possible.

The percentage of the disability or the limitations of the student will be assessed by an Occupational Therapist (OT) according to the ICF manual.

III. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Responsibilities of the University

1. The University will provide an accessible, supportive, and safe learning environment for all its students. Among other things, the University will provide physical access to classrooms, computer centers, laboratories, and so on, and also access to communications and to information. In a supportive role, the University will make efforts to educate the entire University community to accept and support the disabled.
2. The University will establish a Committee entitled “The Committee for Students with Disabilities” under the umbrella of the Dean of Students office.

3. The University will establish a budget designated to cover running costs, so that educational equipment such as assistive devices, recorders for lending, printing and enlarging materials, training courses, and Braille paper for exams and Instructors' notes can be purchased.
4. The University will make provision, in so far as resources reasonably allow, for the purchase of equipment and other reasonable services needed by these students. As with all other areas of the University, this service will be a formal part of the University's budgetary planning.
5. The University will encourage and assist all Instructors to develop skills to help meet the learning needs of students with disabilities.
6. Academic Advisors for the disabled will be assigned by the Department as with and for any student. The Advisors and Instructors will be informed of the disability of their students and are expected to teach them as any other student and to seek advice, if necessary, in the teaching process.
7. The University will provide, in so far as resources reasonably allow, the proper professional services needed to assist the students, Advisors, and Instructors in solving problems that arise during the year.
8. The University will provide a resource unit spacious enough, and properly and efficiently equipped, for assistance and private study for students with disabilities as well as for the storage of specialized equipment.

The majority of students with disabilities can use the same facilities as other students provided they are accessible. However, some students with visual disabilities need special equipment, such as Brailers (which can be quite noisy), talking computers, and assistance from sighted students in a quiet and private environment.

An important feature of this room is that it is maintained consistently in exactly the same way in order to allow visually impaired students to use it independently.

9. The University will be flexible, when appropriate, to offer substitute courses in compliance with Departmental requirements for students with disabilities, based on the need of each student.
10. If needed, an *Ad hoc* Committee will be formed each academic year to study the placement of students with disabilities in a specific major. Suggested Committee members are: the Dean of the Faculty, the Chairperson of the Department, a University Counselor, a University Occupational Therapist, and the applicant.

B. Responsibilities of Instructors

1. Instructors should provide course outlines, handouts and other printed material, as soon as possible during the opening days of the semester, to the secretary in order to have time to translate the material into Braille or to enlarge it for students with visual disabilities without their losing precious study time.
2. Reference material in the Library: Instructors should be aware that students with visual disabilities may have difficulty using reference material and should make sure that the necessary assistance is available, such as finding the books on the shelves, reading aloud selected portions of them, preparing the Zoom Text Magnifier, and the like.
3. Knowledge and assistance: It is the responsibility of each Instructor:
 - a. To know those of his/her students who are disabled.
 - b. To know the personal information guide provided by the Occupational Therapist who works with these students.
 - c. To take all reasonable means to ensure that these students have the necessary aids and assistance necessary to assure equality of learning comparable to, with, and for other students.
4. Final exams and other tests: Instructors must tell their secretaries the number of needed enlargements and Braille copies.
5. Confidentiality: Information regarding a student's disability is confidential. Faculty and staff need only know the accommodations that are necessary to guarantee equal opportunity for these students.

C. Responsibilities of Students with Disabilities

1. The academic standards established by the administration of Bethlehem University apply to students with disabilities without exception.
2. Community Service is a University requirement for all students including students with disabilities.
3. Students are expected to abide by all rules and regulations of the University.
4. Students are expected to seek personal help independently by consulting with their Advisers, Instructors, and other resources provided by the University.
5. Students are expected to appreciate their right to equal education by their industrious work and not by seeking special privileges.

D. Responsibilities of the Committee for Students with Disabilities

This is a voluntary Committee composed of members of the University faculty and staff who work directly or indirectly with students with disabilities. A student with a disability will also be selected/elected by his or her peers to be a member of this Committee. The Committee is chaired by a professional involved directly with students with disabilities and is elected for a term of three years. Members are elected every two years from the various Faculties and/or Departments.

The responsibilities of the Committee are:

1. To ensure that the University provides the facilities and services to support students with disabilities.
2. To deal with all matters related to access and participation.
3. To moderate procedures that facilitate the process of integration into the University community as well as the learning experience of students with disabilities.
4. To meet regularly to ensure the above, as well as to discuss the progress of students, to plan activities for Instructors and students, to be a resource for students' needs, and to discuss problems as they arise.

Members

The members of the Committee are chosen by position/title:

Dean of Students or delegate
A Student Counselor
An Occupational Therapist
A student with a disability chosen by the students with disabilities
Special Consultant: by appointment
Ad hoc member as needed

IV. PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Application

Students with disabilities must complete the disabilities section of the BU Application which includes type of disability and specific needs.

The Registrar's Office will provide the Committee (usually by way of University Counselor or BU Occupational Therapist) with the names of students with disabilities and each student's detailed information sheet, as soon as possible after receiving the completed Application. Also, the date, time, and place of each entrance exam will be provided in order to allow the responsible OT time to prepare for the entrance exam and other matters.

If necessary, an *Ad hoc* Committee will meet to discuss an applicant's ability to be admitted to his or her choice of major because of and in light of his/her disability.

Entrance Exam

The responsible OT will be available during the entrance exam to ensure that all necessary arrangements and reasonable accommodations are available to facilitate the exam procedures based on each student's need such as:

1. The totally blind students: copies should be available in Braille
2. Students with low vision: Enlargement and adjustable text size and appropriate font type of the exam.
3. Students in wheelchairs: Allow easy access to computer room and enough space for the wheelchair.

After Acceptance

During the first week after registration, each student with a disability will meet with the responsible OT for an assessment. Students must bring with them the doctor's medical report.

The responsible OT, in conjunction with a Counselor, will prepare a personal guide sheet about each student and send it to each of the student's Instructors as soon as it is completed.

Participation in the University's official orientation program for all new students, including those with disabilities, is compulsory for the entire length of the program.

During the orientation program, students who are totally blind will be given mobility training while other students participate in another activity.

The Committee for Students with Disabilities will organize information meetings and/or "training" sessions for all new Instructors of students with disabilities, grouped according to the disability, within the first three weeks of the start of the semester.

When students with disabilities face problems associated with access to University facilities, they are expected on their own to seek assistance from a knowledgeable person such as their Academic Advisor, a Counselor, an OT, and the like. Self-initiative is developed in such cases.

Fees and Financial Aid

1. Students with disabilities identified by a professional assessor pay 50% of tuition.

2. All other financial obligations, such as semester registration fees, graduation deposit, financial problems, scholarship eligibility, and so on are to be fulfilled as is the case with all other students.
3. Work study options are also available to students with disabilities, within the limits of the specific work depending upon the student's disability. Efforts are made by both the Academic Advisor and the Supervisor of the Department/Unit in which the student with a disability works to adapt the work to the capability of the student without invalidating the work.

Testing

1. Students with disabilities must be tested by the same standards as any other student. The same tests and the same restrictions apply, although extended time may be needed and offered in some cases.
2. Instructors are responsible for the administration and integrity of all tests and exams.
3. Instructors are expected to administer all tests and quizzes personally in order to better understand the physical and mental ability of the student. Special occasions may require a replacement. Students are not eligible to serve as such replacements or exam proctors.
4. Students with physical disabilities for the most part will take exams in the assigned rooms with the other students. In some cases a table adjusted to the height of the wheelchair may be needed.

In some cases students with physical disabilities may need additional time because of writing difficulties, e.g., slow writing speed and/or poor hand writing. It may be necessary for the Instructor to write the answers for the student in which case a private room is needed.

5. Concerning students with visual disabilities:
 - a. For partially sighted students large print may be provided and the test can be taken in the usual exam room. Extended time ($\frac{1}{2}$ the allocated time) may be needed according to the evaluation of the OT.
 - b. For the totally blind or functionally blind students:
 - i. Exams will be held in a private room administered by the Instructor or, if necessary, by someone of that status, not a student.
 - ii. Extended time ($\frac{1}{2}$ the allocated time) may be needed. Students should be informed of the time extension and the concluding time of the exam.
 - c. Options as to how the test could be administered:

- i. Orally: The Instructor or his/her replacement reads the questions and writes the responses for the students, using a special copy of the exam.
If an oral test is requested, a replacement proctor will be assigned who will begin ten minutes after the exam starts in order to relieve the Instructor so that he/she can administer the test orally. Early notice to the Registrar's Office is essential.
- ii. Computer: Using Jaws or other available programs for which the students reply on the computer.
- iii. Braille: The student answers the questions using the Braille and then reads the answers to the Instructor who writes the answers in English.

6. Concerning students with severe to profound hearing loss:

- a. Many students with hearing loss will take the exam in the assigned room.
- b. If an oral exam is requested, the Instructor/Proctor must be in front of the student so that the student can read his/her lips. A decision between the Instructor/Proctor and the student indicates who will write the answers.
Extra time may be needed.

The policy is to be reviewed one year after its formal approval by the Executive Council. Hence, April 2012 the policy should be reviewed.