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# **POLICY ON INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT ASHOKA UNIVERSITY**

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## I. BACKGROUND

The Rights for Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 defines a person with disability as, “a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others”. In the case of students with disabilities, the opportunities for accessible higher education seems to be the biggest barrier. The Act propagates the idea of inclusive education, as “a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities”.

As a step towards enabling an inclusive and equitable higher education in India, the Office of Learning Support (OLS) was set up in 2016 at Ashoka University, as the first ever dedicated support center in a university in India to cater to the needs of students with specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and dyspraxia. To uphold the University’s commitment to providing equal and integrated access to all the academic, social, cultural, and recreational programs it offers to all learners, the office expanded and extended the support to students with visual, hearing, loco-motor disability, and autism spectrum too. The OLS touches upon various grounds to address issues surrounding identification and engagement of students with disabilities, along with the creation of an enabling and inclusive ecosystem.

The recent draft of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights the need for reformation of pedagogy across all the stages of the educational journey of students. Some of the important recommendations include recruitment of teachers with cross-disability training, usage of assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools to integrate students with disabilities into classrooms. It also emphasizes the need to create awareness and sensitization amongst all the stakeholders in the educational ecosystem. The NEP’20 also encourages extensive research to expand knowledge about the role of assistive technology in ensuring inclusive education. Innovations such as image recognition, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and chatbots benefit all individuals in accessing material.

The OLS has proactively embraced the elements of inclusive education right from its inception in 2016 and continues to implement the recommendations that have recently been highlighted in NEP’20.

## II. POLICY STATEMENT

Ashoka University has a vision to be an inclusive education institution which welcomes and nurtures students with disabilities as any other student while maintaining its standards of academic and non-academic performance. The University follows rigorous and rounded academic processes and it intends to continue the same while ensuring that students with disabilities are not disadvantaged at any stage - starting from the application and admissions processes, to their academic and residential life programs, until their placement opportunities.

### III. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Students with disability at Ashoka University will have equitable access to University programs and activities, including but not limited to:

- all academic and non-academic programs
- all common spaces including buildings and facilities
- campus services and events
- opportunity to share grievances and provide feedback
- opportunity for placements within and outside University

### IV. POLICY SUMMARY

This policy aims to eliminate systemic barriers to full participation of students with disabilities in the university programs and activities.

The document intends to guide students, faculty, and administration staff at Ashoka University to ensure that students with disabilities at the university receive appropriate accommodations in their respective programs and activities, including academic, social and daily living functions.

The Office of Learning Support (OLS) coordinates the entire process for students seeking support services related to their diagnosed disability.

### V. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

This policy applies to all Ashoka students with diagnosed disabilities enrolled in different academic programs offered by the University.

### VI. CONFIDENTIALITY

The University respects a student's choice to self-identify as having a disability. Any student seeking accommodations must register with the OLS. The office understands the sensitive nature of the disclosure and works to provide appropriate accommodations for students while maintaining the highest level of confidentiality possible.

### VII. PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

Ashoka University provides support services to students with disabilities under the following two categories:

- A. Academic Provisions
- B. Campus Life Provisions

## **A.1 ACADEMIC PROVISIONS FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS**

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A.1.1 Ashoka University welcomes students with disabilities to discuss their options of support during the admissions process and post admission at the university. Students may write to the office at [ols@ashoka.edu.in](mailto:ols@ashoka.edu.in) for detailed understanding of the support services at the campus.

A.1.2 The university ensures that the entire admissions process is disability-inclusive, and all students get an opportunity to present their best self despite any learning challenges.

A.1.3 Admission processes, wherein the Aptitude test, on-the-spot essay, interview (or any other process followed) are accessible and inclusive in nature.

A.1.4 Academic accommodations are available to the students during the admission process. These accommodations are not intended to dilute the academic or any other admission-related standards set by the university.

A.1.5 Should the students be interested in availing the academic accommodations during admission or afterwards, they may declare the learning condition along with the supporting documents in the application form. There's a dedicated section in the Application Form seeking information about the learning conditions.

A.1.6 Students should discuss the available options with the Outreach team and Office of Admissions at any stage of the application. They may also contact the Office of Learning Support for a detailed discussion.

## **A.2 ACADEMIC PROVISIONS FOR ASHOKA STUDENTS**

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During their study years at Ashoka, students are required to be registered with the Office of Learning Support to avail the academic provisions. The office should promptly address the request for academic provisions submitted by the student.

All stakeholders should cooperatively engage in the process, discuss the options and share required information to expedite the approval and implementation of academic provisions, that include the following:

1. Academic Accommodations
2. Reduced Course Load
3. Course Substitution
4. Priority Registration for Courses

### **1. Academic Accommodations**

1.1 Accommodations are adaptations to teaching and learning processes that allow a student to manage the learning difficulties faced by them due to a specific learning disability or a sensory impairment.

1.2 Accommodations may include auxiliary aids and services, as well as modifications to academic requirements as necessary to minimize the impact of the disability.

1.3 Students should submit all accommodation requests to the OLS. The office uses an interactive process of consulting with the student and other stakeholders (if needed) and conducts an individualized needs assessment of each student to understand and determine the kinds of accommodations to be accorded to the student.

1.4 All information shared by the students is treated in confidence, shared with faculty and staff only on an academic need-to-know basis and does not form a part of the student's academic record at the university.

1.5 There is no stipulation as to when a student must identify himself/herself as having a disability; however, adequate notice for the provision of accommodations is necessary. For the accommodations to come into effect, the respective faculty members should receive the information at least two weeks in advance. Thus, students need to plan ahead accordingly.

1.6 Accommodations are forward actions and are not granted in retrospect.

**NOTE: Not all academic programs at Ashoka University can comply with every accommodation mentioned in this policy. Students are required to discuss the program-specific approved accommodations with the Office of Learning Support or their respective academic offices.**

## **1.7 TYPES OF ACCOMMODATIONS**

Students may request for accommodations in the areas mentioned in this section. However, not all types mentioned below are applicable to every student with disability. The OLS, in consultation with the student, charts out the relevant and practical accommodations and conveys to the concerned faculty members.

### **1.7.1 Curriculum/Syllabus/Assessment Modifications**

1.7.1.1 Any deviation from the standardized curriculum is at the academic program team's discretion. The student may discuss the options with the Director, OLS and then submit the request with the respective academic offices.

1.7.1.2 Based on the accessibility of the content and resources, the OLS will recommend required changes in the syllabus and/or the evaluation process to the Professors.

### **1.7.2 Attendance Modifications:**

1.7.2.1 Students are expected to attend classes as per the attendance policy set by the faculty.

1.7.2.2 Students are responsible for conferring with the faculty and with the OLS team member regarding any extended and unexpected absences.

### **1.7.3 Extension in Assignment Submission:**

1.7.3.1 Based on the assessment of learning needs of students with disabilities, the OLS will convey the request for extra time to the respective faculty members

1.7.3.2 The nature of some academic courses may not allow for extended time in assignment submissions. In these situations, this accommodation is at the faculty's discretion.

1.7.4 Examination-related support:

1.7.4.1 Depending on the nature of the disability, the range of facilities at examination time may include:

- extra time allowance (25% to 50% depending on the recommendations in the diagnostic assessment report)
- rest periods
- separate room
- accessible rooms
- use of computer or assistive technology devices
- not penalized for spelling errors
- use of calculators
- Alternative formatting of exam papers
- Other arrangements that best meet the documented needs of students

1.7.4.2 Exams take place at the same time and day as all other students in the course. Exceptions are made only with permission of the respective faculty and under extenuating circumstances.

1.7.5 Note-takers and Scribes:

1.7.5.1 The OLS provides access to assistive technology tools such as transcribing and speech-to-text software to enable notetaking for students with disabilities.

1.7.5.2 While the OLS encourages students to make use of given assistive technology software, students with visual and hearing impairment are allowed to request for the support of note-takers in case they need extra note-taking support in their classrooms.

1.7.6 Lecture Recording:

1.7.6.1 The OLS will recommend audio/video recording of the lectures ONLY IF it specifically addresses a student's functional limitations.

1.7.6.2 The faculty members have the right to deny the request for audio and video recording of their lectures, if it fundamentally alters the classroom experience for students. In such a scenario, alternate means will be discussed.

1.7.6.3 The OLS will facilitate recording of class lectures once approved by the faculty.

1.7.7 Preferential Seating:

Students with disabilities are given access to preferred seating arrangements that would aid them in better class engagement. For example: students with hearing impairment may be seated ahead in class so that they can interpret what the faculty is saying through lip reading, in case that's their preferred mode of communication.

1.7.8 Accessible Content and Assistive Technology devices:

1.7.8.1 The OLS provides assistive technology support required by the student.

- 1.7.8.2 Any assistive technology device provided to the student by the OLS must be returned to the office immediately after the semester in which the device was provided.
- 1.7.8.3 The OLS facilitates conversion of inaccessible content into an accessible one.
- 1.7.8.4 The student must be registered for classes accessible content is requested for.
- 1.7.8.5 The student/teaching assistant/teaching fellow/Professor is required to fill the Accessible Content Request Form at least 3 weeks in advance to request for the course-specific content in accessible format. The OLS team will take full charge of this aspect in the first month of student's first semester at Ashoka.

### 1.7.9 Marking coursework and examination script

- 1.7.9.1 Students with disabilities (dyslexia and dysgraphia) should not be penalized for their spelling errors, when subject knowledge is being assessed.
- 1.7.9.2 Lexical errors should not be penalized unless it leads to ambiguity.

## 2 **Reduced Course Load**

- 2.1 The Office of Learning Support may recommend a reduced course load as an academic accommodation for a student with a disability enrolled in the Undergraduate Program. Medical documentation of the disabling condition which supports the accommodation of a reduced course load must be provided to the OLS.
- 2.2 Students who are approved for the accommodations of a reduced course load must understand the implications of this action related to the extended time in completing the Undergraduate degree program as well as financial implications, including any potential impacts on financial assistance, if applicable. More details on the impact on financial assistance can be sought from the OAA or the Financial Aid office.
- 2.3 The student is required to fill up the Reduced Course Load Application Form and submit with the Office of Learning Support. The office reviews the Form and sends out the request to the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The OAA holds a final authority to approve/deny the request.

## 3 **Course Substitution**

- 3.1 Course substitution is applicable only for exemption from Math-specific foundation courses for students with moderate to severe dyscalculia enrolled in the Undergraduate Program.
- 3.2 This specific deviation from mandatory academic requirements must be supported by a psycho-educational assessment report with details on the severity of the learning condition.
- 3.3 In lieu of the exempted Math-specific foundation course, the student is required to complete a course outside of their chosen major.
- 3.4 The student is required to fill up the Course Substitution Application Form and submit with the Office of Learning Support.
- 3.5 The office reviews the Form and sends out the request to the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The OAA holds a final authority to approve/deny the request.



## 4 Priority Registration for Courses

- 4.1 Priority registration allows a student to register for classes before other students each semester.
- 4.2 Students who **may** qualify for priority registration include:
  - 4.2.1 Students with a loco-mobility disability that hinders their swift movement from one class to the other.
  - 4.2.2 Students with Autism, for whom the uncertainty in confirmation of course registration engenders significant anxiety and daily functioning.
  - 4.2.3 Students following a strict medication or treatment regimen.
  - 4.2.4 Students who use captioning services.
  - 4.2.5 Students approved for alternate media for printed materials.
- 4.3 Priority registration does not guarantee the provision of classes at specific times.
- 4.4 The student is required to fill up the Priority Registration Application Form and submit with the Office of Learning Support.
- 4.5 The Director of the OLS will review and evaluate each request on a per semester and case-by-case basis. Supporting documentation may be required.
- 4.6 Priority registration does not override any institutional or department policy.

## B. CAMPUS LIFE PROVISIONS

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The Office of Student Affairs in collaboration with the Office of Learning Support offers on-campus support to the students with disabilities.

- 1.1. Assess housing accommodation-related specific needs of students with disability and match with the arrangements in residence halls.
- 1.2. Cater to students' specific room requirements (location, lights, washroom accessibility, etc.)
- 1.3. For all the student-centered programs such as Resident Assistants and Cohort Leaders, offered by the Office of Student Affairs (OSA), the training sessions are organized with the OLS to serve as information/awareness workshops. These brief training sessions are intended to equip them with a sufficient understanding of the support systems and facilities provided by OLS so they can effectively redirect students in need and also support them, as and when needed.
- 1.4. Facilitate appointment of part-time assistants for students who may need assistance related to daily living. More details on payment to the part time assistants are available with the OSA.

- 1.5. A student with a disability who may need full-time assisted living may discuss the options with the University and make an informed choice between being a residential student or a day scholar. The current Ashoka student may approach the Office of Student Affairs and the prospective students may approach the office of Admissions for further details.

The Ashoka Operations and Infrastructure team in collaboration with the Office of Learning Support offers the required infrastructural support to the students with disabilities.

- 1.6. Common Spaces, such as residence halls, washrooms, cafeteria/mess area, classrooms, auditoriums, transport facilities, and other common areas are made accessible to all students, staff, and faculty members with disabilities.
- 1.7. Specific infrastructural needs and requirements of students are identified on case-by-case basis, and implementations and modifications are made to the infrastructure to the best extent possible as per the approvals.
- 1.8. Accessibility audits of the campus are conducted at regular intervals and recommended changes are implemented as deemed appropriate.
- 1.9. All safety protocols needed for students with physical disabilities, including fire safety and for constructions/modification on campus are followed.

## VIII. STUDENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Students with disabilities are responsible for:

- a. **Informing the concerned Offices if requesting for accommodations-** Prospective students need to self-identify to the Office of Admissions and students studying at Ashoka are required to register with the Office of Learning Support to avail accommodations. Students are responsible to initiate the dialogue for services with respective offices.
- b. **Providing Required Documentation** - Students are required to provide comprehensive professional documentation of their disability to the Office of Learning Support. Details on the required documentation are available with the OLS.
- c. **Timely Action** – i) It's the student's responsibility to request for necessary accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services in a timely manner. ii) Students should alert the office immediately in case there are any concerns about their accommodations. iii) Inform the office immediately if any courses are changed or dropped.
- d. **Active participation** – i) Students are expected to be an active participant in their dialogues with the office for accommodations. ii) They should seek appointments with the office as and when needed. iii) They should respond to all communication from the office when requested to.
- e. **Following up** - Students are responsible to follow up with their faculty once the OLS has shared the information about accommodations with them.

- f. **Handling the assistive device** – It's the student's responsibility to request for any assistive device/tool/software from the office. Once allotted, the student is fully responsible for any damage or loss to it.
- g. **Meeting Academic Program Standards**- Students are required to meet the essential requirements of the academic program they are enrolled in.
- h. **Upholding the University Standards of Academic integrity** - Students are expected to follow the academic and conduct standards of the university.

## IX. OFFICE OF LEARNING SUPPORT RESPONSIBILITIES

The Office of Learning Support is responsible for:

- Ensuring development and updates to policy and processes for management of disabilities across all academic programs at Ashoka University
- Facilitating procedures for seamless navigation through the academic and campus provisions for students. The office acts as a case manager for students who request for support. After a preliminary discussion around the nature of concern(s), the office coordinates with concerned authorities and plans for the best possible intervention support for the student.
- Providing initial screening and (in)formal assessment to identify signs of any learning challenges which may need further detailed and formal evaluation.
- Managing student requests, determining the requirements for accommodations, and communicating to the faculty in a timely manner
- Facilitating development of required tools, infrastructure for accommodations (computing resources, multimedia content, administration of note taking resources etc.)
- Supporting training/disability awareness programs for Ashoka community
- Monitoring the efficacy of accommodations provided to students
- Making provisions for reasonably available accessible formats of university related information.
- Maintaining appropriate confidentiality of student records and share the information with the concerned offices and centers only with student's written consent.
- Working with Career Development Office at the university to facilitate alternative/ inclusive methods for placements (entrance tests/interviews/aptitude tests, etc)
- Working with the Office of Global Education and Strategic Programs to facilitate equal opportunity for summer/semester abroad for students with disabilities.

*For disability services requests not covered in this policy, the Office of Learning Support shall consider them on a case-by-case basis.*