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The Successful Student Accommodations Letter

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The Successful Student Accommodations Letter

Abstract

Academic accommodations at Gettysburg College are substantial, but fall short in some areas. The Successful Student Accommodations Letter (SSAL) is designed to address these shortcomings so disabled students can perform their best in the classroom.

Keywords

Academic accommodations, accommodations, letter, disability

Disciplines

Accessibility | Disability and Equity in Education | Higher Education

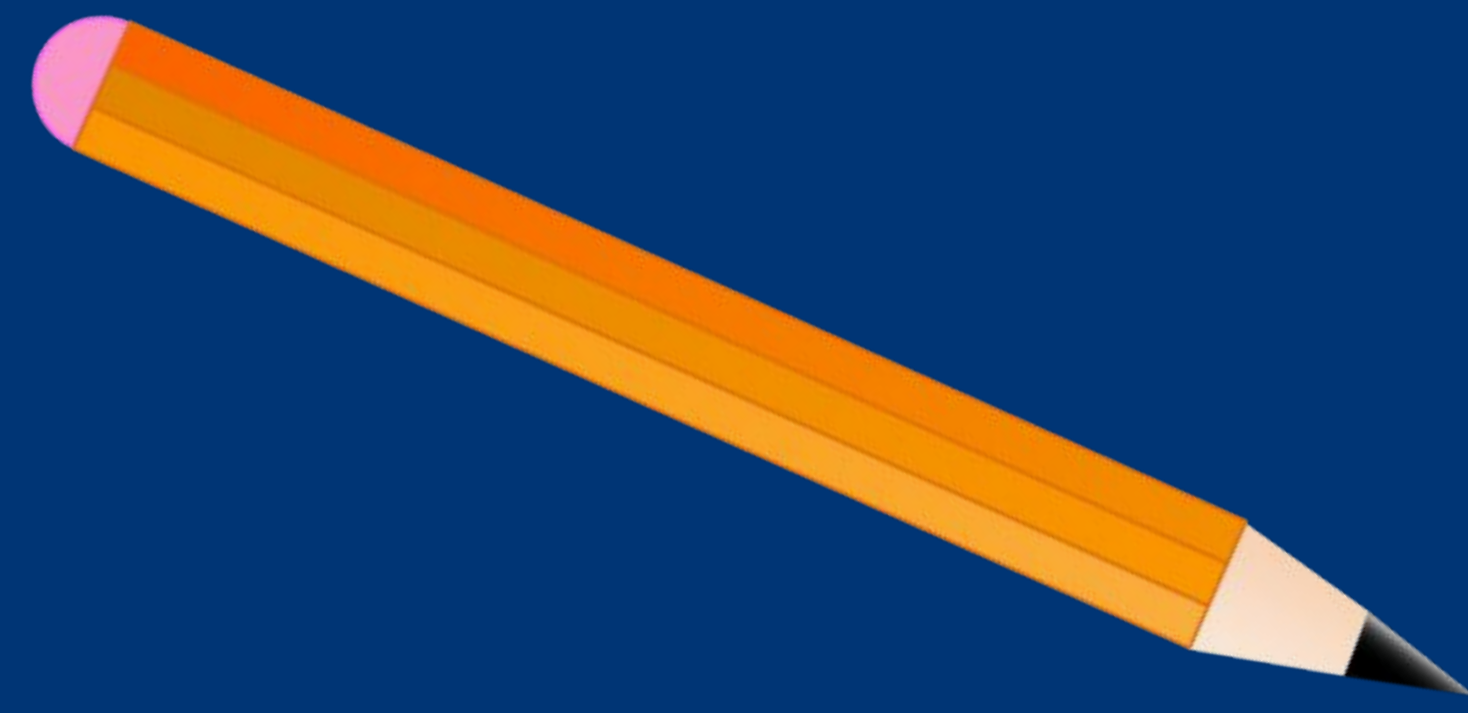
Comments

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The Successful Student Accommodations Letter

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Overview

- Disabled students at Gettysburg College, particularly those with **learning disabilities**, have more difficulties with learning than their abled peers.
- The current accommodations plan, the Verification of Accommodations Letter (VAL), provides **insufficient classroom tools** for students.
- Students are **assigned predetermined sets of accommodations** and are often saddled with extraneous accommodations that **do not reflect their needs**, wasting students' and professors' time and energy when meeting to address them.
- Students are **unable to disclose their condition or disability** within their accommodations letter, even though it would benefit some students to do so.
- This is an ongoing project intended to **determine disabled Gettysburg students' needs** and **replace the VAL** with an improved plan based on student and professor feedback.

Background

- As compared to other colleges with similar demographics, Gettysburg College is doing very well with regards to desirable traits in accommodations plans; however, this does not imply that Gettysburg accommodations should not continue to improve.
- Historically, accommodations have been relegated to a vague, "one size fits all" approach so that students can use the same plan for every course—the more vague a plan is, the easier it is to customize to different environments.
- Additionally, the VAL does not disclose students' conditions or disabilities, meaning that they are automatically kept private, and students who wish to inform their professors of their condition must explain it during a meeting or via email.
- For some students, whose condition or disability is stigmatized, this policy protects them from any bias they may face from their professor due to their disability. However, for students with more obscure or nuanced conditions, this policy presents a conundrum that forces them to expend additional time and energy.
- Overall, students face issues with implementing their VALs due to issues within the document itself, including lack of customization and lack of information.

Focus Groups

- Recruit students and faculty members to join separate groups via poster advertising, Student Digests, department emails, and social media.
- Present participants with the opportunity to raise concerns with the current accommodations plan format (VAL).
- Allow participants to vet the Successful Student Action Plan and raise concerns to be fixed during document revisions, particularly regarding the optional disclosure of students' disabilities or conditions.
- Learn about struggles that participants are currently facing that are not addressed by the VAL or SSAL.
- Participants will be asked to keep any topics discussed within the focus groups confidential.

Faculty Focus Groups

- Faculty members volunteer to meet in a focus group to discuss their current concerns with the VAL and how they would envision a more effective accommodations plan to inform the development of the SSAL.
- What parts of the VAL work well for you? Do you struggle to understand or implement some elements, and if so, which ones?
- Based on the elements of the VAL that hinder your ability to help students, how could they be improved?
- How would your ability to understand and provide accommodations be impacted if the accommodations plan stated the student's disability or condition?
- How would your ability to understand and provide accommodations be impacted if the accommodations plan also included a brief personal statement about the student's disability/condition and how it affects them in the classroom?
- How might the SSAL be easier to implement than the VAL?
- What challenges do you foresee in implementing the SSAL instead of the VAL?

Student Focus Groups

- Students volunteer to meet in a focus group with their peers to discuss their current concerns with the VAL and how they would envision a more effective accommodations plan to inform the development of the SSAL.
- What parts of the VAL work well for you? What parts are not serving your needs?
- Based on the elements of the VAL that do not serve your needs, how could they be improved?
- Are there elements that you would like to add to your accommodations plan? If so, what are they?
- Are there any accommodations that were not offered in the VAL that you would want to request in the SSAL?
- If you were given the opportunity to disclose your disability or condition on your accommodations plan, would you take that opportunity, or leave your disability/condition confidential?
- If you would disclose your condition/disability, would you also want to include a brief personal statement about your disability/condition and how it affects you in the classroom?
- After reviewing the SSAL, what concerns do you have?
- How might the SSAL serve your needs better than the VAL?

VAL

VERIFICATION OF ACCOMMODATION LETTER (VAL) GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

NAME: CONNERS, Marisa (2026) DATE: July 25, 2022
PREPARED BY: The Center for Student Success

This Verification of Accommodation Letter (VAL), formerly known as the Individual Educational Accommodation Plan (IEAP) was developed on the basis of confidential documentation which met Gettysburg College's standards for implementing the student's request for program accommodations. More specifically, this confidential documentation provided substantial evidence of disability-related impairment that impedes the student's ability to make academic progress without accommodations. Any questions regarding this report or the supporting materials should be directed to the Center for Student Success. Please respect the student's privacy regarding this information.

Establishing reasonable accommodations regarding teaching and evaluative methods in a particular course relies on an interactive process including the student, the instructor, and the Center for Student Success and may require adaptation on the part of the student and the instructor. Reasonable accommodation may involve some curricular modifications only if they do not substantially alter course content or requirements essential to the academic program. The Dean of Student Success is responsible for making final decisions about accommodations and the Provost is responsible for addressing any grievances from students or instructors arising from those decisions.

The following academic accommodations are approved on the basis of the student's disability and the related effects on the student's academic functioning. It is the responsibility of the student in consultation with each instructor to elaborate the specific ways in which these accommodations could be implemented and to initiate contact with the Center for Student Success if questions or concerns arise.

COURSE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Allow quizzes and exams to be completed in a separate location with minimal distraction (when needed).
- Allow student to wear headphones/ear buds during testing.
- Allow student to take a short break in class to address their condition.
- Modifications to classroom participation (please see attachment).



Modifications to Classroom Participation

The student has a diagnosis that significantly impedes their ability to be involved in spontaneous classroom participation. Below is a list of options for modifying classroom participation. The student and their professor should come to a mutually agreed upon decision about the modification that is appropriate and yet does not significantly compromise the objectives of the course. If the course is designed so that class participation is heavily weighted in the final grade, then the student, after consultation with the instructor and Center for Student Success, should consider an alternative course.

- Provide an advanced signal in class that the student will be called upon
- Provide advanced notice (at least the day before) the student will be called upon
- Give the student pre-assigned question(s) prior to the class
- Allow student to submit written responses to oral questions at the start of class, thus demonstrating that the student has read the material
- The student and professor may consult with Center for Student Success if some other option seems more appropriate given the objectives of a particular course.

Disclaimer: this VAL is my personal accommodations plan based on my condition and my personal needs. Other VALs may look different and will include different accommodations.

SSAL

Successful Student Accommodations Letter

Students submit this form along with their accommodations request and medical provider documentation to demonstrate their desires for their academic accommodations request to the Center for Student Success.

marisa.conners@gmail.com (not shared) Switch account

Student name

Marisa Conners

Student email address (@gettysburg.edu)

connma04@gettysburg.edu

Disability/condition(s) for which you are requesting accommodations:

Misophonia

Do you want your disability or condition to be stated in the Successful Student Accommodations Letter, along with information about the disability or condition?

- Yes
- No

Clear selection

Please select all course accommodations you are requesting.

- Allow student extended time to complete quizzes and exams, when needed
- Allow quizzes and exams to be completed in a separate location with minimal distraction, when needed
- Allow student to take a short break in class to address their condition
- Accommodate student's preference when creating seating charts or reserve a specific seat for the student
- Allow use of laptop for note taking, audio recording of lectures, and/or access to professor or classmate's notes for study purposes
- Provide accessible reading materials (electronic versions of textbooks and reading assignments for magnification or use with text-to-speech technology)
- Give the student pre-assigned question(s) prior to the class
- Allow student to submit written responses to oral questions at the start of class
- Provide advanced signal in class that the student will be called upon
- Provide advanced notice (at least the day before) the student will be called upon
- Consult with Center for Student Success if an alternate assignment is appropriate to the needs of the student and objectives of the original assignment and course
- Other: Allow student to wear earbuds while working independently/testing

Please enter a personal statement describing how your disability or condition manifests itself and impacts your learning. Share as much or as little as you are comfortable with. Optional.

My trigger sounds include snapping and whistling. When I hear these sounds, I enter a fight or flight dichotomy where it creates intense discomfort to stay in the situation without taking action. My accommodations will help me regroup from hearing trigger sounds or avoid them as much as possible, so I can put my best foot forward in the classroom.

Submit

Clear form

Please note that while the VAL shown on this poster is a finalized document, the SSAL is a mockup intended to showcase the information that would be entered into a final document with a format similar to the VAL.

Outside References

- Susquehanna University and The College of William & Mary both had promising methods of approaching academic accommodations based on preliminary searches on their websites.
- Susquehanna has an impressive and accessible method for amending academic accommodations that do not serve students' needs.
- William & Mary staff meet with each student before preparing their accommodations letter to get a better idea of how their needs should be met, and prepare a new letter each semester or as needed.
- If necessary, I will reach out to these two colleges to learn more about their accommodations processes and potentially incorporate them into the SSAL.

Summary

- Academic accommodations (characterized by the VAL) at Gettysburg College are somewhat advanced, and have evolved somewhat over the past years, but this is an ongoing revision process that should continue with student and faculty input, as they are most affected.
- By changing the format of the academic accommodations plan, students will be able to customize their plan (like a choose-your-own-adventure) to fit their individual needs, instead of being given extraneous accommodations via an additional form "tacked on" at the end.
- Additionally, students will be given the option to control how much information faculty receives regarding their condition/disability, based on how they think it will be perceived.
- The SSAL aims to address common issues that students face when attempting to utilize their academic accommodations plans, and it cannot be complete without revisions based on student and faculty perspectives.

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