Working with Students with Disabilities During COVID-19

1) Students with disabilities do best with structure, systems, and routines.
   a. With limited structure, systems, and routines students with disabilities are going to struggle significantly more with online instruction than their peers.

2) Students with disabilities struggle with transitioning and navigating unexpected situations.
   a. It oftentimes takes students with disabilities more time to process and understand new experiences and find effective ways to cope with these changes.

3) Students with chronic health and psychiatric disabilities, may have very limited access to their necessary health care at this time.
   a. Limited access to medical care increases stress and exacerbates symptoms. Students may fall behind as a result, and stress more about the status in their courses.

4) Students with disabilities are reshaping and readjusting the way they learn on the fly.
   a. Students with disabilities, usually require more time to complete certain tasks and develop their own systems to meet their learning needs. These learned systems take years to establish. Thus, asking someone to completely adjust their learned process in matter of weeks is extremely challenging and sometimes unrealistic.

5) Symptoms of disability are unpredictable.
   a. Students registered with the Ability Services do all they can to manage their symptoms as they are seeking out the necessary medication, services, and support, they need. However, even with all the proactive measures in place, there will still be days where symptoms become pervasive and impact daily functioning.

Recommendations

1) Be flexible and understanding. If a student tells you that they are falling behind in a course because of symptoms of their disability, please allow them the ability to turn in the work that they missed and work with them to develop a plan for the semester.

2) If a student requests an accommodation that is not on their Faculty Notification Letter, please contact Ability Services Staff. We are providing much more flexibility this semester than what would typically be offered. We are willing to add new temporary accommodations for a student this semester to best support them during these unprecedented and unprecedented times.

3) If there are more readings, coursework, etc. assigned to address the lack of in-person class time, understand that for many students with disabilities, it is going to be nearly impossible for some students to keep up with the elevated pace and new required expectations of the course.

4) If a student is struggling, be receptive to suggesting the Pass/Fail option in your course.

5) Perspective Taking- If you had a diagnosed condition that substantially impacts your daily functioning pre-COVID-19, and you are now asked to manage your already pre-existing condition on top of a global pandemic how would you respond?

Final Thoughts

1) Students with disabilities have a legal right to equal access and opportunity to everything the university has to offer. This does not change, during alternative instruction.

2) Inclusiveness is a core value at UWRF. It is vital to provide an inclusive and accepting environment to all students.

3) Collaboration, creativity, flexibility, and encouragement is key to supporting the needs of students with disabilities during COVID-19.

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