

C. Frequently Asked Questions

Question: I have a student with diabetes who seems to be absent more often than other students with disabilities. Is this related to her diabetes?

Answer: It could be. People with diabetes are likely to experience more illnesses than their peers and often have a worse prognosis when they get sick. For example, more people with diabetes die from pneumonia or influenza than those without diabetes.

Question: A student with asthma told me that because of her sensitivity to perfumes she would like the accommodation of a fragrance-free classroom. Can I grant this accommodation?

Answer: There is no way that a college or an instructor can guarantee a classroom free of all chemicals and odors. However, you can tell the student you'll make attempts to limit classroom fragrances. You can make an announcement at the start of class, requesting that students refrain from using cologne or perfume.

Question: Is it an appropriate accommodation to allow a student to take a course from home?

Answer: It depends on the course. For some classes, it's absolutely required that a student be in attendance. However, if that's not absolutely necessary, you can consider having a student who is hospitalized, or for some other legitimate reason cannot attend class, to do some course work from home. (See more on this subject below.)

Question: Must I grant a student's request for "excused absences" as accommodations for his impairment?

Answer: It depends on whether attendance is an essential course element of the class in question. If it is, and you can clearly prove why, the Office for Civil Rights will most likely give you deference. In determining whether attendance is essential, ask the following questions:

- Is there classroom interaction between the instructor and the students?
- Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process?

Question: A student seeking accommodations claims she has fibromyalgia? What is that? And is it true that there is no way to test for it?

Answer: Individuals with fibromyalgia have widespread pain along at least 18 tender points that occur in precise, localized areas, especially the neck, spine, shoulder and hips. The basic problem is an abnormal processing of sensory information in which nonpainful stimuli are perceived as painful, while painful stimuli are more painful than in individuals without the condition. Diagnosis of this condition has been controversial because there are no specific laboratory tests to identify it.

Question: May I require that a student with a health impairment take his medication as prescribed?

Answer: No. Medication monitoring is not a reasonable accommodation.

Faculty Training Tips

Question: I hear that a student with a health impairment is explaining his condition to classmates. I thought the situation was supposed to remain private. Is that allowed?

Answer: Yes, an individual can voluntarily disclose his own medical information to others as long as it's really voluntary. A faculty member cannot request, persuade, coerce or otherwise pressure the person to get him to disclose his medical condition to others.