Welcome back!

DSS welcomes you to the beginning of a new semester! We are excited to share some important updates with you, including improvements to the newsletter. The DSS Faculty & Staff Newsletter is issued each Fall and Spring semester. We have typically distributed the newsletter via email, but in an effort to increase the visibility of the newsletter, we will also be including an announcement in the e-Reporter, downloading the newsletter to our Faculty site (www.uab.edu/faculty/teaching/dss), and including a link to the newsletter through our social media sites. We have also considered ways to make it easier for you to locate the information you are looking for, so the newsletter now contains the following sections: Announcements, Accessibility Considerations, Disability Awareness, Legal Round-up, and Faculty / Staff Recognition. You can easily locate each section by referring to the Table of Contents on this page. We welcome any suggestions you have about topics you would like to see covered in the newsletter, or requests for additional resources. You may contact our newsletter Editor, Brittany Gregg, at bmgregg@uab.edu with any comments, suggestions, or requests. We wish you a wonderful semester. Go Blazers!

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DSS ANNOUNCES ONLINE FACULTY & STAFF TRAINING

DSS Faculty and Staff Training is now available online through the UAB Faculty & Staff Learning System (www.uab.edu/learningsystem/, search “DSS”). The purpose of the training course is to provide education on working with students with disabilities and promote a more accessible, inclusive campus for UAB’s students with disabilities. This 30 minute course is composed of five modules which focus on confidentiality, the DSS process, technology in the learning environment, and resources. Please contact DSS if you have any questions regarding this training.
While Student Response Systems (SRS), also known as “clickers,” certainly have their advantages in the classroom, they also pose several accessibility challenges. The University of Minnesota provides some considerations and guidance for faculty using clickers, which we have summarized here. Accessibility barriers posed by clickers can include: PowerPoints that do not adhere to principles of universal design, multimedia content that is not captioned (may be inaccessible for students with hearing impairments,) clickers with indicator lights (may pose accessibility barriers for students with visual impairments), clicker size and configuration (may pose barriers for students with mobility impairments,) and finally, short response intervals (may pose barriers for students with visual impairments or learning disabilities and students who utilize extended time as an accommodation).

Best practices and accessibility considerations when using SRS include: have students work in small groups with one clicker per group in order to improve access for students with visual or mobility impairments; in addition to the projector, read the question and answer choices aloud to the class in order to improve access for students with visual impairments or learning disabilities; choose a SRS that includes accessible software alternatives such as vibration in addition to blinking lights (iClicker and TurningPoint are SRS manufacturers working to improve the accessibility of clickers); incorporate principles of universal design by creating accessible PowerPoints and captioning any multimedia content; when a timed response interval conflicts with a student’s accommodation, work with the student to reach a solution that upholds the purpose of the clicker activity while also providing the accommodation.

For more information, please contact DSS or visit: http://accessibility.umn.edu/clickers.html.
Focus on Service and Assistance Animals

UAB welcomes students who utilize service and assistance animals. More information on this topic is covered in the DSS Faculty and Staff Training (see “Announcements” on page 1) and the UAB Guidelines for Students Utilizing Service and Assistance Animals can be found on the DSS website (www.uab.edu/dss). In an effort to provide faculty and staff with some additional resources for working with students who may be utilizing service and assistance animals in the classroom or on campus, we have included the following tips regarding service and assistance animal etiquette.

A service animal is any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. Students should be allowed to have their service animal accompany them at all times and in all places on campus, except for rare cases where animals may be prohibited. An assistance animal is any animal that has been recommended by a healthcare or mental health professional to provide emotional support to an individual with a disability. Unlike a service animal, an assistance animal does not assist its handler with activities of daily living or accompany its handler at all times. Assistance animals are permitted to reside with their handler in university housing, and may be permitted in the classroom as an approved accommodation.

Please remember the following when working with students utilizing service or assistance animals:

- Do not inquire for details about the student’s disability or diagnosis; this is a private matter and students are entitled to confidentiality of their disability
- Do not pet or feed a service or assistance animal
- Do not deliberately startle, tease, or taunt a service or assistance animal
- Do not separate or attempt to separate a person from their service or assistance animal
- If you have questions about the presence of an animal on campus, please contact DSS.

Did You Know………………

The ADA / 504 Compliance Officer for UAB is Assistant Vice President for Student Life, Mr. Andy Marsch. The role of the compliance officer is to ensure that student complaints or concerns regarding disability discrimination are received and investigated. Mr. Marsch works closely with students, faculty, staff, and DSS to resolve disability-related complaints.

Join us for a Disability Awareness Event!

DSS, in collaboration with Iota Nu Miss Black and Gold 2014, invites you to a Disability Awareness Event

Campus Green South (in front of Blazer Hall)

September 9
10am - 2pm
Balancing accommodation requests with essential requirements

The importance of protecting essential requirements/technical standards of a course or program is obvious, but the manner in which to protect these requirements while evaluating an accommodation request may not be obvious. Students with disabilities are expected to perform the essential functions or meet the technical standards of a course or program with or without accommodations. But what if a student requests an additional modification that is not indicated on their accommodation notice? Or what if an approved accommodation is believed to be in conflict with essential requirements or skills?

Accommodations are thought to be reasonable as long as they do not in conflict with an essential function or technical standard. For example, it would not be reasonable for a student with the approved accommodation of “extended time on exams” to be given extended time on a time-sensitive demonstration of a skill, such as performing CPR. However, the concept of reasonableness doesn’t just apply to the accommodation in question – it extends to all actions taken by the institution. For example, was the decision reached a reasonable one? Was the decision-making process reasonable?

The message conveyed by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is that institutions are not entitled to deference when an interactive and deliberative process has not been followed. Evaluating the reasonableness of a request requires balance between the student’s right to equal access without discrimination and the institution’s right to protect the integrity of the program, both of which are equally important.

Decisions regarding the reasonableness of a request must involve a complete review of all relevant information pertaining to the specific request. Rather than making a predetermined decision across the board, an individualized assessment should be conducted. If there are concerns that a student’s request for accommodations may be in conflict with essential functions or technical standards, administrators are responsible for engaging in an interactive and deliberative process that involves: 1) the appropriate administrators designated to make such decisions, a group of individuals trained in that particular field, and DSS staff, and 2) an individualized assessment regarding the student and his/her request. This individualized assessment should involve close collaboration with DSS to consider: the student’s functional limitations and impact on his or her ability to perform the essential functions, the program requirement in question and the ability to support why it is a requirement, the impact the requested modification would have on the program as well as on the student, and effective alternatives that would allow the student to participate and still meet the requirements.

If a determination is made that the requested accommodation or modification is unreasonable and therefore is denied, the denial should reflect that:
• an individualized assessment was conducted and the necessary experts were involved
• there was a timely and appropriate response to the request
• the student was afforded the opportunity to fully participate in the decision-making process
• a good faith effort was made to explore all other alternatives
• the decision reached was a reasonable professional judgment based on academic policies, requirements, or standards

If you have concerns regarding a student’s request for accommodations that may be in conflict with your course or program’s essential functions or technical standards, please contact DSS at 205.934.4205 or dss@uab.edu.
DSS Spring 2014 Outstanding Faculty and Staff Awards

Each semester, we ask students who are registered with DSS to nominate a faculty member who promotes an inclusive classroom, values diverse learning styles and abilities, and believes in supporting and challenging all students. The DSS Spring 2014 Outstanding Faculty Award is presented to Dr. Donald Burke, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering. Congratulations to Dr. Burke!

Each semester, DSS also recognizes a faculty or staff member who has exceeded all requirements and expectations in helping students remove any barriers which would prevent them from being successful at UAB. The DSS Summer 2014 Outstanding Staff Award is presented to Christopher Edmonds in the Department of Accounting and Finance. Congratulations, and thank you for all you do to make courses accessible for students!

Spring 2014 DSS Faculty Survey

DSS conducted a survey seeking the input of UAB faculty members’ impression of services and level of satisfaction regarding: experiences with DSS staff, coordinating/providing accommodations for students with disabilities, and guidance/training provided through DSS. The survey was available April 23rd through May 2nd. Of the 731 faculty who received the survey, 127 responded, for an overall response rate of 17%. To the right is a summary of results from the survey. DSS would like to thank the faculty who participated.

DSS also wanted to gauge faculty members’ level of understanding of their obligations toward working with students with disabilities. This section of the survey produced the most variance in responses, and results are shown to the left. These questions regarding faculty’s knowledge on such topics as confidentiality, legal obligations, and utilizing universal design have raised some concerns. DSS will take steps to provide further guidance/education on these topics during faculty trainings, in the faculty newsletter, and on the DSS faculty website. DSS has also created an anonymous survey that faculty and staff may access at any time via our website: www.uab.edu/dss