

Comments submitted to chair of Academic Affairs concerning the Disability

My input is below:

Diversity and Disability Statement: Our institution values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. **If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible.** Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office at 541-383-7583, **early in the term** to discuss **a range of options to removing barriers in the course, including formal accommodations.** Please visit <http://www.cocc.edu/disability-services/> for more information.

I have concerns about language highlighted above in the Diversity and Disability Statement proposed for COCC syllabi. These parts of the statement suggest that

- any student can request accommodations, regardless of disability status, directly from the instructor. This could result in
 - students negotiating individualized course experiences (assignments, etc.),
 - undue burden on an instructor who must manage a separate course plan for multiple students
- instructors are capable of and empowered to provide accommodations without consultation with Disability Services Office. This is not something for which most faculty are not trained.
- instructors who are not willing to make individual accommodations (even if the reason is related to lack of expertise in disabilities) can themselves be a barrier to student learning.

While I have not been a party to the conversations about the need for new syllabus language regarding disabilities, I trust that there is a genuine need for change. I would like to be more fully informed of this need, and I would like to see the language shared with a broader scope of faculty before a decision is made. Bringing this language to Chairmoot would be a start, sharing it with Faculty Forum would also be useful. Clearly these groups may not need to vote on the matter, but they can offer valuable perspective and conversation.

Finally, I think that some clarity should be provided about syllabus statements in general. Are instructors bound to use the language provided by the College, or is this language recommended? The language in question is as follows, "If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible."

I find this language to be poorly worded and ultimately unwise for the following reasons:

1. This wording appears open to all students—not just those who disclose a disability. Typically, said disclosure is made through a Disability Services representative. If all students have the right to or *appear to have the right* to ask for a more “accurate assessment of achievement,” any modification would constitute *capricious grading*, as defined by the College’s Academic Procedures (see A-20-1) because said modification might mean that
 - a. A student was graded “on some demonstrable basis other than performance in the course” (A-20-1.1.A).
 - b. A student was graded by “more exacting or demanding standards than were applied to other students in that section” (A-20-1.1.B).
 - c. A student’s grade reflects “substantial departure from the instructor’s announced standards and requirements (normally announced in the course syllabus)” (A-20-1.1.C).
2. While postsecondary institutions are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) to provide reasonable accommodations for students who disclose a disability and request accommodation, neither the student nor the faculty member has any reasonable expectation for determining the appropriate accommodation and should not be put in the capacity to evaluate, ask about, or verify said disability.
 - a. Thus, one might justifiably counter, “Once a student has described an assessment an inaccurate ‘assessment of achievement,’ how is the faculty member to decide what an ‘accurate assessment of achievement’ is for this student without finding themselves guilty of the capricious practices detailed above?”
 - b. One might also ask what criteria a student might use in order to accurately adjudge an assessment to be one that is inaccurate or that excludes them.
 - c. Finally, what constitutes a barrier to inclusion or accurate assessment? Some students might find the assessment itself as being a barrier to achievement.