

**DARN Friendly Syllabus Project**  
**August 18, 2022**

*[This is the message I have circulated to my department listservs for faculty and graduate students to encourage people to include more welcoming language about disability accommodations in their syllabi and opening-day lectures for both undergraduate and graduate classes. Please consider circulating this message to your home department and college-level EDI Committee with a request for them to circulate it to other departments and programs.]*

*Please share widely and annotate with any comments or suggestions you may have.  
Please let me know of any feedback you receive from students -- [lisa.aspinwall@psych.utah.edu](mailto:lisa.aspinwall@psych.utah.edu).*

DARN is the [Disability Advocacy & Research Network](#), a community for disabled psychology scholars and allies funded by a Community Catalyst Award from SPSP, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.]

Good morning:

I'm writing to share some language that I have developed to encourage students to use the accommodations for which they have qualified.

In my experience, students who have been through the arduous – and sometimes adversarial – process of being evaluated to qualify for an accommodation are reluctant to approach faculty due to a variety of issues, including stigma, anticipated discrimination, and prior bad experiences (having their seriousness as a student questioned, having the legitimacy of their needs for accommodation questioned, etc.). It's important to remember that the formal accommodation process is designed to have people with the relevant training determine the needs, which can then be implemented in a consistent and fair way.

The language in black is the typical required language regarding the ADA and our Center for Disability Services.

[The language in blue is my own addition – please let me know of any suggestions you may have to clarify or enrich.](#)

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

***The Americans with Disabilities Act.*** The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

[We are committed not only to the letter but also the spirit of the ADA. If you qualify for accommodations in any aspect of the course, we encourage you to use them, starting with the first class. Please see the professor as soon as possible so that we can work together to make arrangements.](#)

[Please help us identify any information on the class website that may not be of optimal quality for use with screen readers or other assistive technologies. We will do our best to find a higher-quality version.](#)

Please also let us know if you have suggestions for improving access to other class activities, such as small group discussions or class presentations.

I pair this language in my syllabus with a verbal presentation of the same information, along with my rationale for bringing it up – students often wait until they have had problems for several weeks before seeking to implement their accommodation. In a larger undergraduate class, this typically means waiting to see how they do on the first exam before even mentioning their accommodation.

(I also try to destigmatize this information by giving the true example from my early days of teaching when a student waited until the end-of-semester class evaluations to let me know that the type size I was using on my slides could not easily be read from the back of the 500-seat auditorium. This helps make the point to all students that when they have constructive suggestions for improving the learning experience for all, they should voice them as soon as possible. An anonymous option may help.)

For some students, accommodations in seating position (right at the front or at the far back, near exits and farther from other students) can be easily and discreetly implemented from day one, but only if we know about them. So far, this language has been successful in getting people to come forward in the first week.\*

Best,  
Lisa Aspinwall

\*I can say this because the University of Utah has implemented a new system that automatically sends a message to each instructor for each student who has an accommodation through our CDS. One clicks a link to get to a password-protected interface that then contains a letter describing the formal accommodation. However, this new process seems to leave the student out of the conversation. It also makes it easy to see how many students have formal accommodations but do not bring them up. This is why I recommend making it clear from day one that your class is DARN friendly and inclusive.

[Lisa G. Aspinwall, PhD](#)

Professor & [Honors Faculty Advisor for Psychology](#)

Department of Psychology

University of Utah

pronouns she/her

Co-Founder of DARN ([Disability Advocacy & Research Network](#))

Co-Founder of GASP (GLBT Alliance in Social and Personality Psychology)

#### **Other Notes:**

1. In the COVID-19 pandemic era, it may be especially important to know these accommodation-related seating preferences from day one. The University of Utah required us to generate a seating chart for each class to facilitate contact tracing if someone in the class reported exposure or illness. Of course, it would be cumbersome to collect a seating chart from students at each and every class, so most classes ended up with assigned seating. This would essentially trap a student with an accommodation in whatever seat they happened to get on the first day or two. Modifications would also call attention to their situation if not handled thoughtfully.