

## USA Essential Course/Program Elements Policy

Effective Date: January 30, 2018

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### Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to be used in determining whether an accommodation requested by a student for a particular class or program would fundamentally alter the essential requirements of the course or program. An accommodation will not be granted if it is determined that doing so would alter the fundamental requirements of the course or program. Faculty members are reminded that all student requests for accommodations based upon a disability should be immediately directed to the Office of Student Disability Services. No accommodations should be granted without consultation and participation of Student Disability Services.

### Definition

Essential course or program elements are learning outcomes which are fundamental to a course or program that must be demonstrated by all students, with or without accommodations. To exclude any of these outcomes would be to fundamentally change the nature of the course and/or academic program. Essential course or program elements directly align with the purpose of the course or program.

### Procedures Related to Essential Requirements

In the event that a student who is registered with Student Disability Services (SDS) requests an accommodation which may fundamentally alter the nature of the course or program, as determined by either the course teacher or SDS director, the SDS Director will convene a committee consisting of individuals who are deemed necessary depending upon the circumstances. These individuals may include the SDS Director, SDS staff member(s), the course teacher, the department chair, program director or dean. The SDS Director will set up a meeting, either in person or by telephone, to implement this policy. The committee will consider whether the requested accommodation will fundamentally alter an essential element of the course or program and whether there are any alternatives to the requested accommodation. The final decision will be made based upon a careful, thoughtful and rational review of the academic requirements of the course or program involved. Inquiries related to the expense, difficulty, and/or logistics of providing the requested accommodation are not considered in determining whether a requirement of the course or program is essential. The decision and rationale for the decision will be documented in writing, with a copy provided to the student in case of a denial based upon an essential requirement, together with a written copy of the appeal process found in the SDS Student Handbook.

### Guidelines for Determination

Learning outcomes are most commonly articulated in syllabi as SWBATs (Student Will Be Able To). SWBATs can include skills, knowledge, concepts, or experiences. SWBATs are typically phrased as action verbs such as *define*, *discriminate*, *explain*, *analyze*, or *defend*. These verbs specify the manner

in which the student must demonstrate their knowledge, skills, or aptitudes. Most importantly, SWBATs are measurable.

The following examples illustrate SWBATs and appropriate and inappropriate accommodations:

*Learning Outcome 1: Student in a basic speech class will be able to deliver an oral presentation using appropriate verbal and nonverbal techniques.*

A student with a registered disability of social anxiety disorder requests that she not be required to present a class project in front of the class. An accommodation of allowing the student to “deliver” her oral presentation as a recorded video is allowed. This does not alter the essential requirements of learning outcome because a video recording is an appropriate technique of demonstrating verbal and nonverbal skills in an oral presentation.

*Learning Outcome 2: Student in a doctoral program will be able to deliver a defense of his/her research and ideas by integrating and synthesizing the appropriate literature, findings, theories, and methodologies of the field.*

A student who is registered with Student Disability Services for a hearing disability which limits her ability to comprehend spoken questions requests that she not be required to defend her research and ideas before the honors research review committee, but rather defend her research asynchronously via a threaded discussion hosted on the University’s online learning management system. Granting this accommodation would alter the essential requirements of the learning outcome. A defense before the committee is required to demonstrate the ability to defend (not just present) an idea and integrate and synthesize appropriately.

SWBATs are an excellent way to identify and determine essential course elements. However, not all learning outcomes align directly with the purpose of the course. If they do not, they are not fundamental to the course and should not be considered essential course elements.

*Learning Outcome 3: Student will be able to provide a demonstration of the correct functioning of final class project.*

A student who is registered with Student Disability Services for a disability which severely limits the use of his hands requests in a Computer Game Development class that he not be required to provide a live demonstration of the correct functioning of his final project in front of the class. The student instead requests to be allowed to demonstrate the computer game as a gameplay video in which someone else is using the game. This does not alter the essential requirements of the learning outcome because gameplay video is a well-established technique in the industry for demonstrating functioning of computer games, and the ability of the student to use the game that he created for the class is not an essential course element.

Courses have pre-requisite abilities, skills and knowledge. These are often defined in terms of prerequisite coursework and can inform the process of identifying essential elements. However, the wording of the learning outcomes themselves may implicitly define required pre-existing abilities or skills. For example, the following examples highlight necessary skills and abilities to master an essential course element.

*Learning Outcome 4: Student will be able to demonstrate the ability to implement an individualized therapeutic recreation service in a supervised setting.*

A student in a leisure studies class who is registered with Student Disability Services for a disability related to a partially amputated arm requests that he not be required to demonstrate his ability to implement an individual therapeutic recreation service which requires manipulating the client with an adult individual because he is unable to lift more than 45 lbs. of weight unassisted. The student instead requests an accommodation of demonstrating mastery of the implementation with a child. This does not fundamentally alter the essential requirements of the learning outcome because the service is equally applicable to both children and adults.

*Learning Outcome 5: Student will be able to implement and modify physical therapy interventions as part of Point of Care in a supervised setting.*

A student in a Physical Therapy class who is registered with Student Disability Services for a back injury which limits her weight-bearing capabilities requests that she not be required to implement certain interventions because she is unable to lift more than 45 lbs. of weight unassisted. Granting this accommodation would alter the essential requirements of the learning outcome. In order to implement certain interventions, the student must be able to lift and manipulate patients unassisted involving weight exceeding 45lbs.