Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Special Needs Procedures

Preamble

In December of 1996, the University of Regina approved "A Policy Regarding Students with Special Needs." Part of this policy states that "(f)aculties are expected to develop procedures for implementing this policy which are consistent with their internal goals and needs." The current procedures described below were adapted from the procedures developed and approved in the Faculty of Arts. The procedures described herein deal with the practical implementation of the University's Policy within the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and as such are an extension and refinement of the Policy, not a replacement of it.

The University Policy states that "(t)he intent of the accommodation is to allow students with special needs to be evaluated fairly without compromising academic standards." One of the guiding principles of these procedures is that while the Disability Resource Centre can assist in identifying and evaluating a student's special needs, and provide a list of suggested accommodations based on the medical and psychological literature, only the instructor (in consultation with the department and Faculty) can decide if these requests can be reasonably met without compromising the academic standards of the course or degree program. These procedures are designed to set out what some of these academic standards are, in order to guide instructors in responding to accommodation requests.

The Course Syllabus and Special Needs Announcements

It is important that Faculty members encourage special needs students to seek assistance in accommodating their disabilities, but must do so in a manner that preserves the privacy of the student. Instructors should include the following statement in the information handout for all courses: “Any student with a disability who may need accommodation should discuss this with the course instructor, and contact the Coordinator of the Disability Resource Office at 585-4631.”

Communications between Students, Instructors and Advisors

Students must make requests for special needs accommodation through Disability Resource Office, and not directly through instructors. If a student approaches an instructor with a special needs request and has not registered with the Disability Resource Office, the instructor is to direct the student to the Office. Instructors are under no obligation to consider a special needs request until the student has registered with the Disability Resource Office (who will evaluate the student’s medical documentations and prepare a list of suggested accommodations, based on the medical literature).

Students are expected to approach the Disability Resource Office with their special needs requests in a timely manner, i.e., students will normally contact the Office before the beginning of class when making special needs requests. If a student has already done some of the work in the class before seeking special needs accommodation, the grades pertaining to the completed material will not be changed except in situation where it can be demonstrated that extenuating
delays occurred due to problems in getting the documentation prepared or evaluated. Instructors should contact the Disability Resource Office to ensure that the requests are being considered, and then should proceed as if the request has been approved, or until informed otherwise.

Note: It is important that students keep their instructors and supervisors informed as to their special needs status.

Upon receiving a request from the University’s Disability Resource Office for accommodation to provide to a student, the instructor is to write the student, copying the Disability Resource Office and the Dean of FGSR, and noting the following:

a) the date that the special needs request was received by the instructor.
b) verifying that matters have been discussed with the student.
c) identifying what accommodations have or have not been agreed to by the instructor, what accommodations will be made, and as may apply, how these might diverge from those suggested in the letter requesting accommodation.

The instructor may request assistance from the Dean of FGSR at any time, but must discuss the special needs requests with the Dean in the following circumstances:

a) the instructor feels compelled to refuse to meet the special needs request of the student, and is unable to suggest an acceptable alternative to the student;
b) meeting the special needs request will require an additional financial commitment from the academic for equipment, staffing or other purposes;
c) the instructor and the student are unable to agree on whether or how the student's special needs are being met.

If the Dean, instructor and student cannot arrive at an acceptable accommodation, the University Policy states that the student may seek mediation through the Student Affairs Office in the first instance. If this mediation does not lead to agreement, the matter is referred to the Vice-President (Academic) for a decision.

_Taping of Lectures and Seminars_

Special needs students frequently require help with taking notes. Students may request access to lecture material; but it is the instructor’s discretion to decide whether or not to provide copies of lecture notes. If taping of lectures or seminars is the only viable option, then this request will be met. The instructor will advise the class that taping is occurring. In addition, the student who is requesting the taping must agree _in writing_ not to use the tapes except for the purpose of studying the class, and to erase the tapes after the course ends. The instructor will convey this requirement to the student in writing. Students who tape lectures are expected to attend them as well.

_Accommodations in Evaluating Special Needs Students_

The University's Special Needs Policy is designed to give special needs students an equal opportunity to demonstrate their academic ability without compromising academic standards. In some instances, meeting the required academic standards will mean that all students must complete a required component of a class (potentially with the help of tutors, etc.), but this may
impose a situation where the class is precluded for a student with special needs. That said, at times instructors will need to design alternative methods for assessing whether or not students meet the academic standards required to pass the class or achieve a specific standing. These alternatives might include substituting different types of written exams, or substituting exams for essays, or essays for exams, depending on the student's disability.

A possible approach to appreciating the differences in the two situations above is to consider what the evaluation is testing. If the evaluation is to test the students’ knowledge of the course subject matter, then a variety of methods are available for such testing, and requests for substitution are reasonable. If the evaluation is to test (in whole or in part) the students’ expository skills (written or oral), then there might be only limited options of how to do this, and requests for alternative forms of evaluation cannot be accommodated.

To summarize, if alternative evaluation methods are available and do not compromise academic standards, instructors are to provide them in response to special needs requests. Often, the special needs request involves relatively minor accommodation such as extra time for exams or in-class assignments, or a separate room to write in, or special typeface or coloured paper. The instructor is expected to meet such minor accommodations, and students are expected to confirm these accommodations at least a week before any examinations.

Some requests will involve extra work for specific instructors or departments. The instructor's department (with the aid of the Head and administrative staff) and the Dean’s office will work with the instructor to ensure that the accommodations do not impose an unreasonable demand on the instructor.

Requests for Exemptions from Degree Requirements

Occasionally students with special needs request exemption from specific degree requirements. Requests for exemptions will be considered by the relevant committee of FGSR, namely, the Admissions & Studies Committee for master’s students and the Ph.D. Committee for doctoral students. The following conditions apply:

a) The committee will generally expect the student to attempt the course (with appropriate accommodations) at least once before considering the request. While enrolled in the course, the student and his/her supervisor will monitor the student's progress, and the student will be encouraged to drop the course before the final drop date should failure seem likely.

b) The committee will require documented medical evidence of the student's disability and how this would relate to the specifics of the course.

c) If satisfied that the request is reasonable and that academic standards for the degree program are not unduly compromised, the committee may approve a substitute course in the student's program.

Prepared by the Dean’s office of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, December 30, 2002