

Resolution # 70-28

**The Graduate and Professional Student Association
(GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University**



Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

Disability Accommodations
(Decided: [Y / N / A])

Nature of the Situation:

- 1 It has come to the attention of the Graduate and Professional Student Association that
- 2 there are a number of issues currently affecting disabled students at Penn State
- 3 University. These issues are leading to these students needlessly struggling. First, while
- 4 the University's Student Disability Resources Office has a number of resources available,
- 5 disabled students are unaware of them. Furthermore, many disabled students are unable
- 6 to get accommodations in a timely manner due to the length of the accommodations
- 7 process. These issues inhibit students from seeking out help and accommodations in a
- 8 timely manner to make classroom and learning experiences more accessible to them.
- 9
- 10 It has also recently come to the attention of the Graduate and Professional Student
- 11 Association that there have been incidents of professors asking students about the nature
- 12 of their disabilities when being approached about accommodations. This is potentially
- 13 problematic, as there may be some students who do not wish to disclose the nature of
- 14 their disability. The information included in the accommodation request from the Student
- 15 Disability Resources Offices should be sufficient for instructors, and students should not
- 16 have to be expected to disclose the nature of their disability. While we understand that
- 17 some instructors ask this with the intent of making the classroom experience more
- 18 accessible for disabled students, questions pertaining to *what can be done* for the student
- 19 are more appropriate, rather than asking *what the nature of the student's disability* is.

1 Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent transition to remote learning has
2 exacerbated the challenges faced by disabled students.¹ While the Student Disability
3 Resources Offices has tools for instructors to make their classrooms more accessible,
4 the use of these tools is not mandatory. We have recently learnt that there are a number
5 of courses that do not provide simple accommodations that should be included as a
6 standard in remote instruction, such as closed captioning. We are calling on the University
7 to ensure that students get timely information on the accommodations process, and that
8 Zoom classrooms are as accessible as possible.

9

10 **Recommended Course of Action:**

11 The Penn State Graduate and Professional Student Association formally recommends
12 the University take the following actions:

- 13 ● We believe that the University should create a policy requiring all Zoom classes to
14 offer closed captioning. It will be easy to instate as the technology already exists.
15 Such a policy will greatly benefit our deaf and hard of hearing students.
- 16 ● To ensure students are informed of the disability accommodations process with
17 plenty of time to spare, we are calling on the University officials, specifically the
18 Graduate School, to work with the Student Disability Resources Office to include
19 information on the availability of accommodations in every acceptance and offer
20 letter sent out to graduate students. This would ideally be implemented with
21 undergraduate students as well.
- 22 ● We believe that instructors should be better trained on interacting with disabled
23 students. Specifically, instructors should be made aware that asking students for
24 the nature of their disability, despite having information on accommodations from
25 the Student Disability Resources Office, puts students in an uncomfortable
26 position. This specific training can be done through the annual compliance training
27 which is compulsory for all University employees, which already has a section on
28 working with disabled students. Furthermore, we call on the University to make a
29 blanket policy forbidding professors from enquiring about the nature of a student's
30 disability and to encourage all teaching personnel to provide all available
31 accessibility options as default policy rather than an exception.

Respectfully submitted

Eli Fields
Delegate, Penn State Law

Sandeep Krishnakumar
Delegate, College of Engineering

President _____ Affirm
Veto

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https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S193665742030145X?casa_token=hpbsiv7rY8kAAAAA:Wk1ggSC15JeH1uWYJnDIM6laSvzWWiCAvrLehS1JrcheOaE3wNkQS5gjYjeB46RGQpfERrY_Pig#!

The Graduate and Professional Student Association