



Foreign Language Module **Inclusive Teaching FAQ**

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In our work with faculty over the last several years, we have found that there are certain questions that come up time and again as instructors grapple with questions of how to provide foreign language classrooms that are inclusive of a wide range of learners, including students with disabilities. In this module, we provide you with a list of these frequent questions and our replies as well as other suggested sources for additional reading.

Q: What is an inclusive classroom?

A: An inclusive classroom is one in which all students feel welcome and have the opportunity to achieve success with the fewest amount of barriers to learning as possible. Inclusive instructors frequently reflect on the course materials to explore the possibility that barriers may exist in some activities. For example, they may ask themselves questions like, “Is my course syllabus straight-forward, delivering clear and exact expectations to students?” or “Am I offering text materials or visuals to reinforce what I am saying verbally so that learners with auditory processing difficulty can benefit?”

For more information see our [Context Module: What is Universal Design for Instruction?](#) and [Context Module: Universal Design for Instruction and the 5 C's](#)

Q: Is there a foreign language learning disability?

A: Over the years, this question has been a hot point of debate. Most recently, however, scholars have published case study and other research-based evidence that there is no learning disability connected solely to foreign language learning. When students have a disability that has a significant impact in their native language, such as difficulty with phonological processing

needed for decoding words or spelling, it is very likely they will also experience similar difficulty in the second language. Here are some readings of interest in this area:

Sparks, R. (2009). If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Wind up Somewhere Else: The Case of "Foreign Language Learning Disability". *Foreign Language Annals*, 42(1), 7-26.

Arries, J. F. (1999). Learning Disabilities and Foreign Languages: A Curriculum Approach to the Design of Inclusive Courses. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(1), 98-110.

Q: How much support is appropriate when working with a student with a disability or assisting students who struggle?

A: The answer to this question will depend on the student and the circumstance. Instructors are required by law to make appropriate accommodations as set forth by the campus Office of Disability Resources (also referred to as Disability Services on some campuses). See the [Project LINC FL Curriculum Module: Working with Disability Services on your Campus](#) for information on typical campus procedures in this area. Beyond these required accommodations, however, faculty members are encouraged to talk with students about barriers they are experiencing and strategies that may assist many students in the classroom. The following article, while somewhat dated, provides a series of questions that are still relevant for faculty interested in examining the limits of classroom accommodation:

Scott, S. (1997). Accommodating college students with learning disabilities: How much is enough? *Innovative Higher Education*, 22(2), 85-99.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights has a wealth of information about what is required for accommodating students. This link discusses what other information that may help instructors <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html>.

Q: What is the goal of an inclusive classroom?

A: The goal of an inclusive classroom is to proactively design and deliver instruction in a manner that maximizes the learning opportunity for all students. For example, many individuals can benefit from having visuals to reinforce verbal or textual presentations of material. For group work, offering students more time to complete in-class group work assignments benefits many students by allowing more time to discuss the assignments, but it may especially assist a student with slower than average information processing speeds such as some students with LD. In both

of these cases, the information or assignment is structured in a way that is inclusive to students with disabilities, yet benefits the class as a whole.

Q: When is a foreign language waiver or course substitution considered an appropriate accommodation?

A: Waivers or course substitutions for a campus foreign language requirement are a matter of institutional policy. Most colleges and universities with a foreign language requirement have a procedure in place for considering this accommodation that typically involves input from the campus Disability Services professionals, language faculty, and administrators or committees charged with reviewing student requests for exceptions to general education requirements. Here are some readings that may be of interest:

Shaw, R. (1999). The case for course substitutions as a reasonable accommodation for students with foreign language learning difficulties. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 320-328.

Faust, J. (2007). Unreasonable accommodations? Waiving formal logic requirements for students with (relevant) disabilities. *Teaching Philosophy*, 30, 357-381.

Q: How do you approach a student who needs assistance but hasn't disclosed a disability?

A: Sometimes instructors observe discrepancies in a student's performance such as strong participation in class, but extremely low performance on written tests, or perhaps a student who appears to be working diligently, but is not learning the material. At the college level, students have the option to disclose a disability or not, making this discrepancy in performance sometimes hard to understand. Does the student have a disability and they are choosing not to tell the faculty member? Does the student possibly have a disability that has not been previously diagnosed? What should an instructor do in this type of situation?

If you are concerned about a student's performance in your class, it is appropriate to ask to speak to the student in a private setting, such as during your office hours. Since the source of the student's difficulties is unknown, we recommend that instructors focus on the behavior that has been observed and talk with the student about how they learn best. In the course of this conversation, students may disclose a disability. They may also mention an IEP or a 504 Plan in high school. These two documents are individualized plans that are provided in K-12 education to accommodate students with disabilities. If these topics arise, the student should be referred to the campus Disability Resource office so the student can learn about how this process works at

the college level. If the student does not mention a diagnosed disability, the instructor may wish to refer the student to a variety of campus resources such as tutoring services and language labs as well as the Disability Resources office.

Q: I sometimes view the work of a student and wonder, “How did s/he get into college?” Does a disability mean there are intellectual issues present?

A: No. There is no special admissions process for students with disabilities. They submit college applications, and are reviewed and considered under the same criteria as any other student on your campus. In fact, colleges are not allowed to ask students about the presence of a disability as part of the college application process to help assure that these applicants are reviewed using the same standards as any other student.

Q: Why do student accommodation letters fail to disclose the student’s specific diagnosed disability? Wouldn’t I be able to help more if I knew the specific diagnosis?

A: While the instructor’s intent behind this question is often a desire to help the student, this information is considered confidential and is not typically disclosed. The purpose of the accommodation letter is to assure the instructor that the student has followed institutional procedures for requesting disability-based accommodation. When discussing the arrangements for providing approved accommodations, the student may or may not find it relevant to disclose the disability to the instructor.