CUNY Introduces New Accessibility Policy for Students with Disabilities

Will Ensure More than 10,000 Students Can Fully Participate in the Classroom

University is Celebrating 'CUNY Disability Awareness Month', Affirming Commitment to Equal Access

The City University of New York today announced the adoption of a new accessibility policy for students with disabilities, which was passed by the Board of Trustees at its February meeting. The policy addresses the critical needs of more than 10,000 CUNY students with disabilities by ensuring that inclusion, equity and accessibility are factors in every decision involving academic policy and by creating procedures and strict deadlines to act on requests for academic accommodations across CUNY's 25 campuses.

The new policy announcement comes amid CUNY Disability Awareness Month. Each April the University seeks to recognize disability culture and share CUNY's continued commitment to equal access and

engagement of students with disabilities through events, conferences and [other programs](#) designed to foster understanding and inclusivity across campuses.

"This new accessibility policy is another demonstration of CUNY's commitment to provide a top-notch education to all students, regardless of background or means," **said Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez**. "By specifying the steps that are necessary to provide equal access to education for students with disabilities, along with clear procedures to govern their equitable provision, CUNY will ensure a learning environment that is fully inclusive, and one in which all students with disabilities can obtain the resources they need to thrive."

While the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) sets forth the general principle of non-discrimination and reasonable accommodations in employment, public accommodations and education, CUNY's policy addresses the academic adjustments necessary for equal access for students with disabilities in a university setting.

Academic adjustments can take many forms but include extended time to complete an exam; the ability to take an exam in an alternate location with a less distracting environment; and the use of assistive technology such as screen reading software, voice-to-text applications and audio versions of written materials. Accommodations can also include the provision of a qualified learning assistant (QLA) who can serve as an in-class note taker, tutor or scribe, among other roles, and they extend outside of the classroom to accessible transportation if required and to internships and externships.

These accommodations increase independence and allow many students to be full participants on campus and in classrooms and help ease the transition to successful employment.

The new policy spells out the steps that are required to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed:

- Mandate the availability of QLAs, accessible course materials and assistive technology or other aids.
- Establish an accessibility services web portal for students to report concerns about the process.
-
- Prevent potential delays by establishing a two-week timeframe for implementation by campus offices of disability services, beginning with the receipt of a student's request for academic accommodations.
- Embed accessibility in all course materials.

"As a student at CUNY, I am proud that the university has taken steps to put us ahead of the current ADA law," **said Lennyn Jacob, a disabilities studies major at CUNY SPS who is the former chairperson of the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities, who also works as an accommodation specialist at Hostos Community College.** "This policy ensures clarity for our disabled student community, who may not know their rights, and the faculty and staff supporting them. It provides clear guidelines to meet the needs of disabled students while supporting staff to ensure their success. Not only am I disabled and proud, but I am also disabled and supported here at CUNY."

Disability Awareness Month Events

CUNY's Disability Awareness Month continues throughout April. Among the events hosted was the sixth [CUNY Neurodiversity Conference](#), which wrapped up with Friday's in-person portion at LaGuardia Community College. This year's conference theme, "Neurodiversity and Mental Health: Navigating Wellness," provided a forum to share research, programming, stories and experiential opportunities and highlighted CUNY's leading role in the efforts to provide expanded access and services to neurodivergent students in higher education.

Next month, CUNY's annual Accessibility Conference provides a forum for participants from across the city, state and nation to discuss accessibility, disability services and disability activism in higher education. This year's conference, titled "Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: Creating a Culture of Accessibility and Inclusion," will be held at John Jay College of Criminal Justice on May 13 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The City University of New York is the nation's largest urban public university, a transformative engine of social mobility that is a critical component of the lifeblood of New York City. Founded in 1847 as the nation's first free public institution of higher education, CUNY today has seven community colleges, 11 senior colleges and seven graduate or professional institutions spread across New York City's five boroughs, serving more than 225,000 undergraduate and graduate students and awarding 50,000 degrees each year. CUNY's mix of quality and affordability propels almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all the Ivy League colleges combined. More than 80 percent of the University's graduates stay in New York, contributing to all aspects of the city's economic, civic and cultural life and diversifying the city's workforce in every sector. CUNY's graduates and faculty have received many prestigious honors, including 13 Nobel Prizes and 26 MacArthur "Genius" Grants. The University's historic mission continues to this day: provide a first-rate public education to all students, regardless of means or background.