

FINAL REPORT ASSA Committee 2019-2020

AS/SA Committee membership (listed alphabetically)

- Anika Aftab (SG)
- Jenna Albrecht (SG)
- Sara Armengot (COLA)
- Sandra Connelly (COS)
- Matthew Fluet (GCCIS)
- Wendy Gelbard (SA Delegate appointed by Student Affairs)
- Neil Hair (Provost Appointee)
- Sunny Shan (SG)
- Kate Leipold (KGC OE)
- Stephen Luxmore (SCB)
- Tracy Magin (NTID)
- Christina Nguyen (SG)
- Elizabeth Ruder, chair (CHST)
- Vanessa Sweet (CAD)
- Gretchen Wainwright (CET)

Charges for AY2019 -

1. Propose a policy that clarifies representatives' responsibilities for engaging and reporting to their respective college constituencies.
2. Assess the need to develop an Early Alert system for graduate students. This charge should be undertaken jointly with Grad Council (GC).
3. Review and assess the adequacy of support structures for faculty responsible for teaching students with Disability Service Agreements and all students receiving support from the Disability Services Office.

ASSA Charge #1: Propose a policy that clarifies representatives' responsibilities for engaging and reporting to their respective college constituencies.

ASSA Charge 1 Subcommittee members: Liz Ruder (chair), Tracy Magin, Sara Armengot, Michael Radin, Christina Nguyen, Anika Aftab

Recommendation:

Following the Academic Senate's assignment of charges to specific standing committees, ASSA members will communicate their committee's assigned charges and elicit initial feedback from constituents. At minimum, ASSA members will communicate with their constituents a second time to communicate key points of the committee's draft response to the charge. This latter communication is to occur prior to an ASSA committee-wide vote on whether to support the recommendation and bring it to Academic Senate. In committee-wide meetings, representatives must present the views of their constituents in addition to their own. ASSA committee members' communication with their constituents can occur in any number of modalities, such as, but not limited to: constituent-wide email, presentation at faculty or student government meeting, constituent-wide survey, etc.

ASSA committee members will not share any confidential information given to them during their work. The ASSA committee will share their work and final recommendation through the Academic Senate's website listing of final committee reports.

Charge #2: Assess the need to develop an Early Alert system for graduate students. This charge should be undertaken jointly with Grad Council (GC).

ASSA Recommendation: No action required.

ASSA Charge 2 Sub-committee: Matthew Fluet (chair), Kate Leipold, Vanessa Sweet, Sandi Connelly

Rationale:

Members of the ASSA-2 sub-committee solicited feedback from their constituents (faculty, program directors, and advisors), met with members of the Graduate Student Advisory Council (GSAC), met with Twyla Cummings (Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Education) and Rauncie Ryan (Assistant Dean of Graduate Student Success), communicated with Lynn Mazadoorian (Assistant Vice President for Student Success & Director of the University Advising Office), and communicated with Bruce Smith (Chair, Graduate Council). Graduate Council was not able to consider the charge this year.

The general consensus is that graduate students do not (or should not) need the same "hand holding" as undergraduate students. There is not significant evidence (DFW rates, academic probations and suspensions) that graduate students are in need of Early Alerts. Some noted that an Early Alert can serve as supplemental information when evaluating students dealing with non-academic issues (e.g., mental health).

The Early Alert system for undergraduate students relies heavily on professional academic advisors for undergraduate students. However, most graduate programs do not have professional academic advisors for their graduate students, although there are some large graduate programs with professional academic advisors and all graduate programs have a program director. Graduate student support needs are different from undergraduate students; e.g., undergraduate graduation requirements are much more complicated than graduate. Some professional advisors for graduate programs noted that Starfish's feature that allows a student to schedule a meeting with an advisor would be convenient.

T. Cummings and L. Mazadoorian are preparing a report on graduate advising. They have met with stakeholders (assistant/associate deans, advisors, etc.) at each college. There are a wide variety of graduate student support needs, depending on the college and program. Enabling Starfish for graduate students for scheduling purposes did arise as a need.

Certainly, the committee sees no need to *develop a distinct* Early Alert system for graduate students. The committee acknowledges that there are advantages to enabling Starfish for graduate students beyond just providing Early Alerts and, if Early Alerts are enabled along with it, then there seems to be little harm in making that feature available and recommended to faculty. It simply becomes another available tool, for the rare times that it might be necessary.

Nonetheless, a faculty member is always encouraged to reach out to a student (graduate or undergraduate) when she has concerns about his academic progress in a class. The absence of a formal reporting mechanism should not discourage this engagement in student success. Faculty are urged to use the reminders about the (undergraduate) Academic Progress Report periods as an opportunity to check on the progress of their graduate students.

Charge #3: Review and assess the adequacy of support structures for faculty responsible for teaching students with Disability Service Agreements and all students receiving support from the Disability Services Office.

ASSA Recommendation:

No action required.

ASSA Sub-committee: Gretchen Wainwright (chair), Neil Hair, Steve Luxmore, Michael Radin, Wendy Gelbard, Austin Gehret, Jenna Albrecht, Sunny Khan

Rationale:

Members of the ASSA-3 sub-committee solicited input from their constituents and met with Catherine Lewis (Director, Disability Services Office), Shelley Zoeke (Assistant Director, DSO) and Wendy Gelbard (Associate Vice President, Wellness, Student Affairs), in addition to seeking potential clarification on the charge from the Senate Chair, Heidi Nickisher.

The impetus for this charge is thought to be a perception held by some faculty that support resources are lacking for faculty who are providing accommodations for students that have DSO agreements. It is assumed that the difficulties faculty are having go beyond having to accommodate extra time on tests and note-takers, which are two of the most common accommodations.

It should be noted that there are differences between the services and accommodations that are provided by DSO and those provided through the Department of Access Services (DAS). DAS ([DAS Website](#)) provides interpreting, notetaking, and real-time captioning services to the RIT community. Their goal is to provide the highest possible quality of access to communication for deaf and hard of hearing students. DSO's mission ([DSO Website](#)) is to provide equal access to programs, services and physical facilities to students with disabilities. For faculty, this manifests primarily as modifications and adjustments to assignments and assessments, though many other types of accommodations exist. Students may be supported by either or both of these departments working collaboratively.

Given that the charge specifically refers to DSO, the comments below will be limited to DSO.

A number of faculty that provided input to the committee can recall instances where the DSO services and accommodations supporting a student in their class were believed by them to be insufficient. In these situations, faculty were unsure of what additional support measures or accommodations might be appropriate or available, and how they would go about implementing them. In other cases, faculty recalled instances where a student did not have DSO accommodations but appeared to need them to be successful, and they were unsure of how to recommend the student for services. Lastly, sometimes faculty take it upon themselves to go beyond the accommodations given in the DSO agreement and provide additional support or accommodations for a student.

The Director of DSO, Catherine Lewis, states that the overall goal of DSO is to understand the disabilities impacting individual students and mitigate any barriers to their education. First

and foremost, faculty need to trust the decisions that DSO makes with respect to access and accommodations for students.

Accommodations for students are well thought out and developed taking many factors into consideration. Accommodations are only provided for students who are qualified to receive them, and they must be reasonable, not place any undue burden on RIT, and can't fundamentally alter the objectives of the course being taught.

Faculty **do** have a voice in the implementation of accommodations. They should feel free to communicate with DSO at any time for any reason, particularly if they are uncomfortable with the accommodations, don't understand how to implement them in their course, or feel they are insufficient.

Some of the common mistakes that faculty make working with students that have DSO agreements include:

- Providing modifications or accommodations beyond those included in the DSO agreement. This well intentioned support can set a bad precedent for future courses the student takes. Instead, start a conversation with DSO and the student about what can be done differently. Faculty don't need to reinvent the wheel – DSO has worked with a countless number of students and different disabilities and is best positioned to propose and document any additional support necessary.
- Asking a student to reveal their disability. A student's disability is protected by privacy laws. A student may feel pressured to reveal to a faculty member if asked because they may feel it is a condition for doing well in the course.
- Making assumptions about a student – what they can and can't do.
- Not reading the DSO agreement completely. It contains important information about how each accommodation should be implemented, and encourages faculty to contact DSO with any questions.
- Not including DSO in discussions. Again, DSO are the experts so faculty need to include them when talking with students about their DSO agreements.
- Not discussing individual accommodations with the student. Many students are uncomfortable starting a conversation with faculty about their accommodations. Instead of waiting for the student to come to you, set up a time to talk with them in private.
- Not providing accommodations or downplaying the need for accommodations for short duration, low-stakes assessments, like a pop quiz or a 5-minute quiz. It is required that all accommodations be provided whenever they are applicable. DSO has worked with many faculty to find unique and easy ways to solve problems like how to accommodate pop quizzes.

One of the most proactive steps faculty can take to support all types of students is to incorporate Universal Design into their course materials. Training, resources, and assistance for course design and delivery are available through Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) ([TLS Website](#)). Designing courses with access and inclusion in mind helps level the playing field for

everyone and minimizes the re-working of course materials for students with accommodations. And finally, we all should be striving to help students to advocate for themselves and not rely on faculty to do it for them. C. Lewis sees TLS as a strong ally and partner of the DSO, especially with respect to faculty education and support around accessibility. DSO and TLS are in conversation about ways to work together on faculty-facing programming and resources in the months ahead.

During our discussion, C. Lewis also mentioned some of her aspirations for DSO. She wants to better understand the role of the DSO liaisons in each College and find better ways to work with them. Long term, improved outreach is strategically important for everyone involved. Since this charge originated in the Academic Senate, C. Lewis is happy to answer any questions the Senate may have about DSO or its services. The DSO website will be formally updated over the summer, and complete before fall semester begins. In the meantime, there will be some smaller scale content updates. C. Lewis anticipates an improved designated area for Faculty and Staff. The topics under this heading so far will include:

- a. Confidentiality and Student Meetings
- b. Referring students to the DSO
- c. DSO Syllabus Statement
- d. Facilitating Accommodations
 - i. Acknowledging Disability Service Agreements (DSAs)
- e. Request a Workshop, Training, or Meeting with the DSO
- f. Inclusive Design
- g. Faculty FAQs

In addition to gathering input directly from faculty for the FAQ section, C. Lewis has begun reaching out to DSO affiliated students and asking “What do you want faculty to know about disability and accommodations?” She is hoping to include a portion of the FAQs created in partnership with DSO students. If faculty input for FAQ content can be collected sooner, then C. Lewis will work to develop and upload this content even before the new website is officially launched.

Summary:

Given the work that is planned and on-going by DSO to improve the faculty-related content on the DSO website to enhance faculty interactions, No Action is recommended at this time.