

**Introduction**

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary serves the church as a learning community with an Anabaptist vision, educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world. It is our vision to make theological education accessible to diverse Christian traditions, ethnicities, races and abilities to reflect more fully God's purposes of justice and reconciliation.

AMBS's mission is to prepare its students for the vocation of ministry in the world that God loves. AMBS aims to provide equal access to all programs, through reasonable accommodations for all qualified students with visible and invisible disabilities. This policy provides a framework for ensuring access and participation by those who experience barriers related to disability.

The policy addresses sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (revised in 1998 and updated in 2015), which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in public and private organizations that receive U.S. federal funding and makes provisions for reasonable and appropriate accommodations to fulfill academic requirements for AMBS programs. This policy is consonant with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

This policy addresses

1. the definition of disability,
2. admissions procedures for students who are disabled,
3. requirements for documenting the disability,
4. AMBS's responsibility for addressing the educational barriers presented by the disability,
5. the nature of reasonable accommodations,
6. the student's responsibility for disclosure and negotiated accommodations, and
7. complaint procedures.

**1. Definition of Disability**

AMBS follows the Americans with Disabilities Act in describing an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment."

<https://adata.org/faq/what-definition-disability-under-ada>

**2. Admission to AMBS**

Applicants to AMBS, who meet the identified academic and character standards as qualified students, will be admitted regardless of any disability. AMBS strongly encourages these applicants or admitted students to disclose voluntarily any visible or invisible disability that might require accommodation for successful pursuit of a graduate-level degree or certificate and/or impede their access to community activities. Open discussion about needed accommodations during the admissions process allows the applicant to consider AMBS's suitability for serving their educational and physical needs.

Members of the admissions team and/or the academic dean will review the contents of this document with admitted students and review their rights and responsibilities. Students should complete the Student Disability Disclosure Form as soon as possible. With this information, AMBS can plan for any academic or environmental accommodations that the student may require. (See section 2).

Admitted students, who have an undocumented disability or who experience a life-altering event that creates a temporary or permanent disability, should contact their advisors or the academic dean as soon as possible. They will review the rights and responsibilities of students with a disability and start the documentation process to plan for needed academic and/or environmental accommodations.

### **3. Documentation**

Prospective and admitted students with a disability that may require accommodations for successful academic performance in specific courses or in aspects of their chosen degree program should complete the Student Disability Disclosure Form. The form requires description of the disability, the impact of the disability on academic performance, any specifically requested accommodations with a description of how and why they address academic needs and additional information voluntarily offered that would be helpful to the AMBS academic dean.

Students who benefitted from support services or accommodations in other academic programs should attempt to provide documentation from their schools and to forward it to the academic dean.

Students will be required to have a professional health care provider, who is qualified to make diagnoses and assessments, complete the Disability Verification form. This form is submitted to the academic dean. (A summary letter describing the nature of the current disability and possible recommendations for living and academic accommodations written by the health care provider may be submitted in lieu of the Disability Verification form with permission from the academic dean.) It can take four weeks or more to implement accommodation plans. Students are urged to submit documentation as soon as possible, and to be aware that if it is not completed well in advance of the start of the term in which accommodations are requested, they may not have the necessary support to begin their classes.

Students requiring accommodations as the result of a short-term disability due to accident or illness will secure a letter documenting the nature of the disability from their primary care provider and submit it to the academic dean. (See AMBS Responsibilities for details on confidentiality.)

Admitted AMBS students who discover latent or undiagnosed disabilities should contact the academic dean to discuss strategies for seeking diagnosis and assessment of the presenting condition. Any needed academic accommodations will not be negotiated until the diagnostic and assessment process is completed. AMBS is not required to cover the costs for examinations or services required to determine a diagnosis. (See AMBS Responsibilities for more detail on diagnostic responsibilities.)

### **4. AMBS Responsibilities**

AMBS will receive and hold in confidentiality in the academic dean's office all information from disabled students along with documentation of services from other schools and from qualified health care providers. This documentation will not become part of the students' permanent records. Students may have access to this material upon request. All submitted documents will be destroyed five years after a student's graduation or permanent withdrawal from AMBS. In order for the academic dean and students to negotiate appropriate accommodations, some information will be shared with students' advisors, professors, and administrators who are implementing support services and or accommodations. As part of the Student Rights and

Responsibilities form, students provide consent for the academic dean, the students' advisors, and professors to share needed but limited information to negotiate appropriate accommodations.

AMBS will keep all documentation, including the Student Rights and Responsibility form, in good order so that students will not need to repeat documentation steps needlessly. AMBS may ask for updated information from the authorized professional working with students whose conditions may change as the result of new medical or technical interventions.

AMBS ensures that its programs and activities are accessible to students with disabilities. By law, it must provide reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities. AMBS is required to identify appropriate alternate means for disabled students to demonstrate their knowledge, skill, and competence in the requirements set out in students' academic programs. It is required to address a student's environmental requirements for attending a campus class or participating in an online course.

AMBS is not required by law to change its academic program requirements to accommodate students with disabilities. It is not required to provide state of the art tools, technology, services or any accommodation that would represent an undue financial or administrative hardship for the school. It is not required to make accommodations that would pose a health or safety threat to others or significantly disadvantage other students. AMBS is not required to provide personal aides, services or devices such as wheelchairs, readers, or technological devices or tools for personal use.

AMBS has upgraded its campus over the last decade to ensure that students with disabilities have access to classrooms, offices, restrooms, worship and meeting spaces, lounges, the lunch room, and apartments.

AMBS will provide appropriate education and support to professors working with students with disabilities in their courses. Students can be assured that their professors are committed to servicing students with disabilities, will provide academic and environmental accommodations that are appropriate and reasonable for their courses, and will not evaluate their work based on a known disability. AMBS will engage external specialists to educate faculty when appropriate and when reasonable accommodations require interpretation or instruction.

The AMBS library strives to provide equal access to library resources to all AMBS students and faculty, regardless of ability. The library's goal is to allow self-service for persons with disability where possible. Special services may be necessary to make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Some services may require advance notice to ensure the availability of staff. Persons should identify their disability when requesting assistance in case the disability is not obvious to staff. Complete library accessibility guidelines are online at [libraryguides.ambs.edu/accessibility](http://libraryguides.ambs.edu/accessibility).

AMBS provides writing services through the AMBS library during the academic year for all students. Students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to use this service if it is deemed necessary. Should the students' needs for writing support begin to take a disproportionate amount of time, they may need to draw on other funding sources for continued support.

Students with disabilities are eligible for need-based AMBS financial aid for tuition. These students may need to draw other financial resources like Federal Student Financial Aid, Vocational Rehabilitation Services or Social Security Disability for supplemental services (e.g., signers, braille coders, proofreaders, etc.)

### **5. Reasonable Academic or Physical Accommodations**

A reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a task or assignment that will enable a qualified student with a disability to participate in a course, program, activity or service. Reasonable accommodations assure that students with disabilities have accessibility rights and privileges equal to students without disabilities. It should not present an undue financial burden or administrative hardship to AMBS or its employees or students.

Working to negotiate and approve needed accommodations takes time since individual students require individualized accommodations. For this reason, new students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to disclose their disability and complete the documentation process before they begin coursework. Early communication about accommodations is especially important for students taking online courses that use video lectures or schedule real-time video meetings between the professor and students. AMBS cannot guarantee that negotiations for accommodations will be completed prior to the start of the course if the admitted student has not begun the documentation process in a timely manner.

Accommodations are not retroactive; they do not apply to past assignments or completed courses. Requests for particular accommodations can be denied if they provide students with disabilities an unfair advantage in assignments or in testing situations. An accommodation cannot provide academic resources that are not available to other students.

Reasonable accommodations may include academic adjustments, auxiliary aids or adaptive technology, services, or modifications for facilities. A few examples of reasonable accommodations include:

1. Extra time to complete tests and assignments negotiated before the due date.
2. A course extension for up to two weeks following the completion of the course.
3. Video or audio recording of lectures and discussions.
4. Using web-based closed captioning for course videos.
5. Course materials posted in the learning management system in advance of real-time classes.
6. Photocopying class notes taken by other students.
7. Oral and written forms of directions provided by professors
8. Oral exams in place of written exams.
9. Diagrams or rubrics that outline assignment requirements.
10. Changing meeting rooms for accessibility and/or eliminating distractions.
11. Using an amplification system.
12. Assignment of a student assistant to student with a disability in a shared course.
13. Using headphones for online discussions.
14. Use of short lectures formats, especially in online courses.
15. Providing space for a signer in face-to-face classrooms.

## **6. Students' with Disabilities Responsibilities**

Students, who will seek accommodations to succeed in their academic programs or participate in community activities, should voluntarily disclose their disability as soon as possible.

Disclosure is the students' responsibility. AMBS can do its best work to ensure their success if communications start early in the relationship.

Students will take responsibility for securing the documentation required from the health care provider familiar with their disabilities and schools or employers who have recently provided accommodations.

Students will take responsibility for completing the Student's Rights and Responsibilities Agreement in consultation with the academic dean.

Students will take responsibility for themselves and be agents on their own behalf. They will communicate directly, respectfully, and in a timely way with AMBS professors and administrators to secure what they need to function well in AMBS programs and community life.

Students will contribute actively, respectfully, and appropriately in the AMBS learning community, whether on campus or through online courses.

Students will take responsibility for addressing conflicts and frustrations resulting from misunderstandings or failures to provide needed assistance with their advisor, their professor(s), the academic dean, or students.

## **7. Complaint Procedures**

In cases where students can demonstrate that they were denied reasonable accommodations or that they experienced discrimination based on their disability, they will follow the AMBS Grievance Policy for seeking justice. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate directly with the professor or administrator with whom they feel aggrieved. If this first step does not yield a satisfactory outcome for the student or the professor or administrator, the aggrieved student may contact the AMBS grievance team, who will initiate the process outlined in the AMBS Grievance Policy.

If students can demonstrate that they have been treated in a discriminatory way based on disability by AMBS, they may file a complaint with the Indiana Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) (<http://www.in.gov/che/2744.htm>) or (800) 628-2909 or to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>)

Retaliation against students or against AMBS is prohibited by law, regardless of whoever has brought a complaint to the AMBS grievance team, the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, or the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education.

## **8. Disability and Accommodation(s) Checklist**

- a) Read AMBS Students with Disabilities policy
- b) Submit Student Disability Disclosure Form
- c) Submit Student's Rights and Responsibilities Agreement

- d) Submit the Disability Verification Form completed by a qualified professional who has worked with student
- e) Complete Accommodations Agreement Understanding with the student, academic dean and student's advisor
- f) Report accommodation agreements to professors in which the student is registered.

## 9. Resources

Job Accommodation Network <https://askjan.org/soar/LD.html>

INDATA project –assistive technology services for residents of the state of Indiana  
<http://www.eastersealstech.com/about/the-indiana-assistive-technology-indata-project/>

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology)  
<http://www.washington.edu/doi/>

Learning Disabilities Association of America <https://ldaamerica.org/>

General news and information from the perspective of people with disabilities (includes definitions, information about assistive technology, and lots of other content)  
<https://www.disabled-world.com/>

Anabaptist Disabilities Network <http://www.adnetonline.org>

American Association of People with Disabilities <http://www.aapd.com/our-focus/>

International Disability Alliance: <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/>