
Listserv Summary: International Student Accommodations

June 30, 2016

An inquiry was made to the AIEA Listserv asking for insight into whether institutions offer accommodations for testing/exams, for example, extending the time for taking tests/exams when international students need it. The rationale is due to language, international students may need more time to process the terminology/context/question.

Summary of responses:

There were 13 responses to this inquiry, which fall under the following categories:

- Accommodations are left to faculty discretion (6)
- Accommodations are not provided (other than through disability offices if applicable): (4)
- Accommodations are embedded in ESL education or based on test scores (2)
- Accommodations provided by ISSS office (1)

This topic was also addressed in 2014; responses available at [this link](#).

Accommodations are left to faculty discretion:

1. Our faculty is very understanding and supportive of our international students. If one requests extended time for exams they allow it and usually handle it themselves. If they cannot handle it personally, our office will provide a proctor. Also, if an international student asks to take an exam alone, we will proctor it in our office. In working with international students in general, at any time they feel it necessary (which is rare) our office will provide them with an interpreter.

This kind of accommodation is often left up to the faculty. If the ESL Office is contacted, then I've given the advice that you mentioned in your email.

Through our faculty development center, we have brown bags and faculty ask questions about how to address issues--right now, they want to know how to pronounce names (I'm doing the workshop), as well as how to get students to participate. I am adding in, of course, other issues like the ones you mentioned.

It's piecemeal, and driven by faculty wants and needs.

2. We have wrestled with this as well on our campus. While we are still considering the development of a formal policy that would be administered through our accommodation office, many faculty members and departments allow extended time for international students that request and can demonstrate need. However, it is currently determined at the departmental and instructor discretion.
3. [...] leaves it up to the professor. Some professors are sympathetic and will allow extra time. Some are basically opposed to it and say that all students must be held to the same academic standard, language barrier or not.

For those who are willing to make accommodations, they sometimes have space constraints. In other words, the room is not available for extended time. The other constraint is willingness or staffing to proctor the longer period so there can be logistical constraints that get in the way. There is no office that provides these proctors.

However, the Resources for Disabled Students sometimes provides support for their students. That has meant that professors sometimes send international students over there hoping that they can receive proctoring services but this is not possible due to resource constraints. And language is not considered a disability of course.

So it's a mixed picture here but the general policy is that it is not required but it is permitted upon the discretion of the professor.

4. Here at [...] extra time for taking exams is allowed for international students but only with permission from the course instructor. Again, this is at the discretion of the instructor so some can be quite flexible with international students but others are not at all. I hope this helps with your research.
5. At [...] we have approached this issue by teaching instructors about Universal Design in an attempt to create equitable working conditions for all students, including international or multilingual students. Using this pedagogical approach is up to the discretion of the individual professor - we do not have an institutional policy. Being multilingual is not a disability (obviously) and should not be referred as such.
6. It has been my experience that some international students do benefit from additional time on exams and tests due to language processing. It has been given to students at [...] at the discretion of the instructor. Instructors have contacted me to ask for guidance and I would always reply that international students who do not have formalized ADA required testing and reports from neuro- psychiatrist/ psychologists but may need to have additional time on in class exams. Over my years here I have referred 3-4 students for

testing and the results did indicate learning issues that were not language based. Those students were given accommodations under ADA.

Some instructors require the students to use a dictionary that is kept on the desk of the instructor to look up unfamiliar words during a test. Students were trying to use their cell phones which led to some other issues.

Accommodations are not provided (other than through disability offices if applicable):

1. This looks like an “accommodation” such as those provided by disability services – the way you frame/message this would have to be done to avoid stigma and/or disrespect to students with disability needs.

Is it correct to assume these students were fully admitted to your institution? You might want to address admissions criteria for international students rather than separate them after the fact for different treatment

You would need to make the provision available based on language skills not country of origin – some international students will speak better English than US students. How will you measure language competence for this accommodation?

[...] does not make accommodation of the type you propose but provide a broad range of support services in advance (including pre-admission) to prepare international students to participate fully and equally.

2. This question has been debated on the TESOL listserv (serving English language instructors etc.) to quite some extent recently. The broad consensus was not to grant extensions/accommodations based on two reasons. First, students were admitted on the premise of existing English language competency (in relation to a given institution’s academic rigor, etc.). Second, to accommodate students under a disability policy construct would make a mockery of students who have actual disabilities and require accommodations.

On a personal note, I have analyzed international student success for quite some time for universities from Australia to North America to Europe. A key component has been the analysis of linguistic competence, or the lack thereof. There’re a few conference presentations I have given that discuss the impact of English language capabilities on academic success. I’d strongly suggested to not grant any accommodation. Mostly because you will send a strong signal to future cohorts of international students from

certain countries (e.g. China, Vietnam, South Korea, Middle East) that ESU has abandoned any reasonable expectations of English language competence.

3. We do not have special accommodations for international students, unless they happen to be international students and qualify for special accommodations for other reasons. Instead, we address this through holding true to our admission requirements in terms of language proficiency, etc. I would be interested to learn what other institutions are doing and hope you can share that information with me.
4. These types of accommodations are determined by disability services here at [...], which I think is appropriate. There is no blanket policy to provide additional time to international students for tests or other assignments.

Personally, I think such a policy would be problematic and not even generally a good thing for international students. Many of our international students are among the best of our students, and need no accommodation of this type. The university is already being accused by some of having lower standards for out-of-state students who pay more tuition/fees, at the expense of [State] residents. This type of policy would only fuel that misperception.

It's a better policy to put more resources into services that can support international students (and others) who need to improve their English writing or comprehension, understand US academic culture, etc.

We also have a large population of first generation students who do not speak English at home. These are not international students, but sometimes benefit from ESL classes. And of course, even when English is a first language, there is a wide range of academic ability—even when the average ability is relatively high. Who gets extra time?

Accommodations are embedded in ESL education or based on test scores:

1. We do offer extended-time testing (ETT) to English language learners. The criteria are a combination of TOEFL or IELTS submitted for admission and results on our internal English placement exams given during orientation. All incoming students, domestic and international, are required to take an English writing placement exam at orientation. The English/ESL department evaluates the results on the exam and determines which writing class is most appropriate for each student: ESL090, ENG100 for ELLs, ENG100 for native speakers, ENG101 for ELLs, or ENG101 for native speakers. If a student places into ESL090 or either of the ENG courses for ELLs, then he/she is referred to our student support services (i.e., disability services) to register for extended-time testing. The

duration of eligibility is also determined by results on the placement exam. Students placed into the most basic writing class (ESL090) have five semesters of ETT eligibility. Student placed into ENG101 for ELLs are given two semesters of eligibility. Eligibility is coded into our student information system so that we can pull up a list of all eligible students for a given semester at any time. Of course, ETT is available to all ELLs, domestic and international.

2. We have ESOL courses for students who need additional language training. Students enrolled in the ESOL sequence (courses that are taken AT THE SAME TIME as other courses) are allowed time and a half on exams in other courses:

“While enrolled in ESOL [course numbers] students have the option of requesting extra time (time and a half) on tests in their other classes. Students wishing to receive this help must contact their professor and the Office of Academic Support at least three days before the test on which they would like extra time.”

Accommodations Provided by ISSS Office

1. At [...] we have experienced an increase in the number of requests for extended time on tests during the last three years, and have sought to accommodate those via our Office of Disability Support. As the number of requests has now pushed that office to their limit in terms of capacity, we will now be handling the accommodations in the Office of International Student Services by providing a proctor for extended test time.

The Office of Disability Support has also provided some students with copies of peer notes, and we will continue to collaborate with them in order to accommodate these requests on a case-by-case basis.