



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>  
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
INSTITUTIONAL OFFICE

## Policy on Students with Disabilities

<b>Reference number</b>	7P/7.3.4
<b>Accountable executive manager</b>	Executive Director: Human Capital
<b>Policy owner</b>	Director: Human Capital Development
<b>Responsible division</b>	Human Capital Development
<b>Status</b>	Approved
<b>Approved by</b>	Council
<b>Date of approval</b>	15 June 2012
<b>Amendments</b>	
<b>Date of amendments</b>	
<b>Review date</b>	2014
<b>Procedures in terms of this policy</b>	None
<b>Web address of this policy</b>	<a href="http://www.nwu.ac.za/content/policy_rules">http://www.nwu.ac.za/content/policy_rules</a>
<b>Address on the policy data base</b>	RMA SHARE /NWU Home/User Homes/AMANDA VAN DER MERWE (10935746)/RMA/2. Management/2.1.3 Policy development and review/2.1.3.2 Review/Policy documents

## Policy on Students with Disabilities

### 1 Preamble

As a pre-eminent University in Africa, driven by its pursuit of knowledge and innovation, with a unique Institutional culture based upon the values the University espouses, the North-West University has adopted this Policy on Students with Disabilities on 15 June 2012.

In keeping with the spirit and contents of the Constitution, the North-West University aims to enable students with disabilities to acquire a culture of learning and full integration into the University, so that they can develop and extend their potential, and participate as equal members of the learning community.

In keeping with legislation and its own ethos, the University acknowledges the importance of and is committed to the diversification of its student population. The admission of students with disabilities is regarded as an integral part of the diversification process. This will not only add value to the education process but will also enrich the student population.

### 2 Principles

As an institution of higher education and learning, the University accepts the principles and values contained in the Constitution of the RSA and relevant Acts of Parliament, White Papers, Policies, Codes, guidelines and international best practice.

The University therefore makes known its intent to the following specific principles where at all feasible:

- 2.1 Students with disabilities have the right to equal education.
- 2.2 Students with disabilities have the right to be treated with respect and dignity.
- 2.3 The University will give students with disabilities the opportunity to participate fully within the University in an inclusive manner.
- 2.4 The University will provide an enabling University environment to students with disabilities with regard to all spheres of academic and campus life, including but not restricted to academic instruction, physical access, recruitment, selection, counselling, assessment, admission, housing, orientation, registration, sports and recreation, preparation for employment, health care, etc.
- 2.5 The University will, where reasonably possible and without discrimination, seeks to strategically meet the needs of students with disabilities in co-operation and collaboration with other tertiary and other relevant institutions.
- 2.6 This policy is subject to the statutes and the resolutions of the Council of the University and is informed by the availability of resources in the context of all current and future priorities and commitments of the University.
- 2.7 The University recognizes that people with disabilities are best placed to understand their disability and capacities therefore students with disabilities seeking reasonable services or assistance with their studies share the responsibility for identifying appropriate solutions to difficulties they experience in the University environment.

### 3 Definitions

The University aligns itself with the position adopted by the Disabled People of South Africa (DPSA), which states that it is primarily the society that disables people. Consequently the University's definition of disability aligns with the one in the Code of Good Practice which focuses on the effect of a disability on (in the University's context) the student in relation to the study environment, and not on the diagnosis of the impairment.

In terms of the above, people with (1) long-term or recurring (2) physical or mental impairment(s) which

(3) substantially limits ability and (4) who satisfy all these criteria, are defined to be persons with disabilities.

### 3.1 Long-term or recurring

**Long-term** refers to an impairment that has lasted or is likely to persist for at least twelve months. A short-term or temporary illness or injury is in terms of this definition not an impairment that gives rise to a disability.

A **recurring** impairment is one that is likely to re-occur from time to time. It includes constant underlying conditions, even if its effects on a person fluctuate.

**Progressive conditions** are those that are likely to develop or change or recur. People living with progressive conditions or illnesses are considered as people with disabilities once the impairment starts to be substantially limiting. Progressive or recurring conditions which have no overt symptoms or which do not substantially limit a person are not disabilities.

### 3.2 Impairment

Impairment may be physical and/or mental.

- **Physical** impairment refers to partial or total loss of a bodily function or part of the body. It includes but is not limited to sensory impairments such as varying degrees of hearing and visual impairments, reading and/or writing impairments and/or any other combination of physical impairments.
- **Mental** impairment refers to clinically recognized conditions that affect a person's thought processes, judgment or emotions.

### 3.3 Substantially Limiting

An impairment is substantially limiting if, in the absence of reasonable accommodation by the NWU, a person would be either totally unable to study or pursue a career or would be significantly limited in his/her study process or in fulfilling the career. An assessment of whether the effects of impairment are substantially limiting must be considered if medical treatment or other devices would control or correct the impairment so that its adverse effects are diminished, prevented or removed.

### 3.4 Discrimination

Discrimination refers to an unequal treatment of students with disabilities and can occur either directly or indirectly. It is direct discrimination for a University official to treat people/students less favourably because of their disability. It is indirect discrimination when a practice appears (in the NWU) to treat everyone equally but in effect such practice disadvantages or excludes people with a disability.

## 4 Guidelines and Procedures

While the University accepts that one academic standard shall prevail for all students, the University will strive to make provision for flexibility in respect of access to study materials, execution of academic tasks and student assessment.

Further, in applying the statutes, University rules, and University Council decisions, the needs of students with disabilities will be recognized and where possible addressed.

In recognition of the principles adopted in this document the University intends to commit itself to the following within the limitations and provisions stipulated:

### 4.1 Recruitment

The University intends to commit itself to ensuring that its recruitment strategy includes outreach to students with disabilities in both institutions catering for learners with special needs and mainstream institutions. Such activities will be limited by the affordability of support needs associated within a given category of disability and the Institution's capacity to include such students.

### 4.2 Admissions

It is the outspoken intention of the University to welcome students with disabilities and to admit them using the criteria used for all students such as academic ability and suitability for course/degree. In the case of a student with disabilities being admitted, every effort will be made to ensure that the admission of such students is confirmed as early as possible, so that proper arrangements can be made to ensure that they have appropriate support throughout their years of study.

### **4.3 Orientation**

In the event of a disabled student being admitted in line with the sentiments in this policy, and recognising the need for specialised orientation, the Disabled Students Support Officer (DSSO) will arrange an appropriate and timeous programme which caters for both the needs of students with disabilities and their families. Such a programme will be additional to the general orientation programme for all new students.

### **4.4 Teaching and Examinations**

In the event of a disabled student being admitted in line with the sentiments in this policy, facilities appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities will be made available for teaching and examination purposes.

### **4.5 Financial Assistance**

Students with disabilities may apply for financial aid through the Financial Aid office.

### **4.6 Housing**

In the event of a disabled student being admitted in line with the sentiments of this policy and noting the needs of students with disabilities, within current and future financial constraints, housing which is appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities will be catered for.

### **4.7 Sports and Recreation**

In keeping with its goal of holistic development of all students, the University will co-operate with other tertiary institutions to meet the sporting and recreational needs of students with disabilities.

### **4.8 Library Services**

In the event of a disabled student being admitted in line with the sentiments in this policy and noting the centrality of efficient access to information to the goal of learning, the University will provide appropriate library resources that utilise media which is appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities wherever this is feasible both legally and financially.

### **4.9 Establishment of Partnerships**

The DSSO will strive to develop internal and external partnerships towards a strong support network for students with disabilities.

### **4.10 Research and Policy Development**

The University will encourage research and policy development in the area of disability towards informed interventions and sustainable service provision.

## **5 Confidentiality and Disclosure of Disability**

### **5.1 Confidentiality**

All the normal rules and policies with regard to confidentiality apply.

### **5.2 Disclosure**

All the normal rules and policies with regard to disclosure applies with the understanding that disclosure will only take place with the explicit written or other form of consent of the student with a disability and then only in his/her interest. Although a student is not obliged to disclose his/her disability during enrolment/registration, it is advisable that such a student elect to do so by giving a reasonable notice to the University at any time after registration. The University is not responsible for making individual adjustments for a student with a disability if he/she chooses not to disclose his condition.

## **6 Governance and management roles and accountabilities**

6.1 Council (through the HREE committee) is responsible for the existence and monitoring of implementation of this Policy on Student with Disabilities.

- 6.2 Institutional Management is responsible for the implementation of this policy in terms of the necessary processes, systems and procedures.
- 6.3 Line managers are responsible for adhering to the policy, as well as the process and procedures.
- 6.4 The Human Capital Development Department is charged with the responsibility of overseeing and managing the internship programme. This Department shall work closely with all role players to ensure effective and efficient management of the programme as well as ensuring adherence to key principles in the intake to interns.

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16 July 2012

File reference: 7P-7.3.4