Disclaimer: This document was written by student members of the Caltech Disability Coalition as a helpful guide for navigating the accommodation procedures at our institution. It takes much of the information from their official website and streamlines it for easy access. This is NOT an official document of the Caltech Accessibility Services for Students or any other Caltech-affiliated office.

Caltech Accommodation FAQ

In line with Caltech’s commitment to maintaining a diverse academic community, the Caltech Accessibility Services for Students (CASS) aims to support students with disabilities and provide them equal access to all aspects of Caltech campus life. CASS will make every effort to provide reasonable accommodations to students with both temporary and permanent disabilities in compliance with applicable laws, including the American’s with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The following letter is meant to briefly outline the accommodation procedure here at Caltech. This information is also available on the CASS website at cass.caltech.edu. Caltech’s current Section 504 coordinators are Dr. Lesley Nye (undergraduates) and Dr. Kate McAnulty (graduate students). If you have any questions, you may contact the office at any time by emailing cass@caltech.edu or calling (626) 395-6352 (undergraduates) or (626) 395-6346 (graduate students). The institution is also currently in the process of hiring a full-time accessibility coordinator. Please check the CASS website for updates.

Am I eligible to receive accommodations?

Any student with a documented disability is eligible to receive accommodations. A disability is defined by the ADA as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” A disability may be physical or mental, visible or invisible, or temporary or permanent. Examples of disabilities include, but are not limited to:

- Blindness or visual impairments
- Deafness or hearing impairments
- Learning disabilities and/or attention deficit disorders
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Mobility impairments and/or physical disabilities
- Speech impairments
- Acquired brain injuries
- Chronic illness or long-term health conditions
- Mental illness or other mental health conditions

If you are unsure whether you are eligible to receive accommodations, please contact CASS at cass@caltech.edu.
What types of services and accommodations can CASS provide?

CASS will assess requests on an individualized basis to determine what best fits the student’s needs. The following is a non-exhaustive list of accommodations that can be provided:

- priority registration;
- course load reduction;
- providing note takers,
- permitting recording devices in classes,
- sign language interpreters,
- captioning,
- extended time for testing,
- requesting alternative formats for course materials,
- equipping school computers with adaptive software such as screen readers and voice recognition.

How do I request accommodations with CASS?

It is the student’s responsibility to initiate a request for accommodation before said accommodation is needed, typically before the beginning of each term. To request accommodations, students must complete the CASS registration form which is available online at cass.caltech.edu. Additional documentation filled out by a qualified licensed medical or mental health care professional, as well as a Medical Consent form, may be required for learning disabilities, chronic health conditions, allergies, dietary-based disabilities, and emotional support animals. Please visit the CASS website or contact the CASS office to determine which documentation is required for based on your individual situation.

Once completed, students can submit their forms to CASS via email at cass@caltech.edu and set up an appointment with a CASS staff member to facilitate an interactive process for evaluating reasonable accommodations. If a student’s accommodation request is approved, the student will receive an official Accommodation Letter from CASS which the student can choose to send to relevant faculty and TAs themselves, or have CASS send the letter on their behalf. Students may also choose to customize the letter for each of their classes by only including the accommodations that are most relevant for a specific course.

If a student’s accommodation request is denied, the student may appeal the decision by filing a grievance. Procedures for filing a disability-related grievance are outlined below. It is important to remember that CASS is the only office that can approve or deny an accommodation request. If approved, faculty and TAs are obligated by law to provide the outlined accommodations in a timely manner. The official Accommodation Letter provided by CASS serves as proof of a student’s eligibility for the requested accommodations. Therefore, a student should never be required to show additional proof of their disability status or provide confidential medical information to anyone except CASS staff members.
What should I do if I am denied accommodations that were approved by CASS or face disability-related discrimination on campus?

Caltech provides mechanisms for both undergraduates and graduate students to file a grievance if they are not receiving approved accommodations or are facing other forms of disability discrimination. A brief summary is provided below. More information is available at cass.caltech.edu/grievance-procedure.

If a student chooses, they can first handle the grievance informally by discussing the matter with a CASS staff member or directly with the individuals involved (e.g. a faculty member). If this discussion does not yield an acceptable result, a student should reach out to their Section 504 coordinator (Dr. Lesley Nye or Dr. Kate McAnulty), who will attempt to resolve the situation. If the Section 504 coordinator is not successful (typically within ten (10) working days), the student will be informed that they have a right to file a formal grievance. If required, the Section 504 coordinator will recommend measures necessary to protect the student while their grievance is pending.

If the Section 504 coordinator is unsuccessful in resolving the situation or a student chooses to bypass the informal procedure outlined above, they may file a formal grievance with the Dean of Undergraduate Students (Dr. Lesley Nye, undergraduates) or Dean of Graduate Studies (Dr. David Chan, graduate students) no later than ten (10) days after the end of the term in which the issue arose. A formal grievance must be in provided in writing and include the following information:

- The grievant’s name, address, email address and phone number
- A full description of the situation
- A description of the efforts which have been made to resolve the issue informally
- Statement of requested accommodation or solution to remedy the situation.

Any personal medical information contained in the grievance report will remain confidential unless student permission is received. Upon receiving the grievance the Dean will designate an individual familiar with disability issues to initiate an investigation which will be completed within thirty (30) working days of filing the written grievance. Following the findings of the investigator, the Dean will determine the appropriate actions to take. If the student is still unsatisfied with the decision, they may file a written appeal to the Vice President of Student Affairs (Dr. Kevin Gilmartin). It is within the student’s right to also file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights at any point before, during, or after undergoing Caltech’s formal grievance process.

What if I need to go on medical leave at any time during my studies?

If a student needs to take time away from the Institute for medical reasons, they may petition to take a medical leave of absence from the institute. For more information on taking a leave of absence as an undergraduate student, please visit deans.caltech.edu/leaves-absence.
information on taking a leave of absence as a graduate student, please visit gradoffice.caltech.edu/admissions/policies/LeavePolicy.

What other resources are available on campus?

**Student Emergency Fund:**
The Caltech Student Emergency fund provides financial assistance to students faced with an emergency that impacts their ability to continue their ability to continue their studies. An example of situations in which a student may need to use the include, but are not limited to:

- Medical bills not covered by insurance
- Travel to a funeral or other important family matter
- Loss from theft or fire
- Loss of income or housing
- Recovery from illness or accident.

To apply for the Student Emergency fund, they must submit an online application which will allow the student to explain their situation. For undergraduates, the application is available at deans.caltech.edu/Grants_Funding/short-term-and-emergency-resources. For grad students, the application is available at gradoffice.caltech.edu/financialsupport/emergency-funding.

**Student Wellness Services:**
All registered students are eligible to use the Student Wellness Services, which include the Student Health Center, Counseling Center, and Occupational Therapy Services. Additional information and resources can be found at wellness.caltech.edu.

**Caltech CARE:**
The Caltech CARE Team is a group of staff from key areas of the Institute that helps connect students with resources and support and work with them to create individualized plans to help mitigate crises and promote success. The CARE Team also offers training on suicide prevention, classroom management, and mental health first aid. Students can make a CARE referral if they are concerned about an individual on campus. For more information, visit caltechcares.caltech.edu or email careteam@caltech.edu.

**Caltech Health Education Advisory League (HEAL):**
Caltech HEAL is a group of undergraduate and graduate students who work to improve awareness of mental and physical health, and wellness on campus. For more information on how to get involved, contact the Director of Student Wellness Services, Jennifer Howes (jhowes@caltech.edu)

**Caltech Disability Coalition:**
The Caltech Disability Coalition is a community-led organization that aims to provide a safe space where disabled* Caltech community members and their allies can explore disability
culture and advocate for Caltech to be a more accessible and inclusive institution. For more information on how to get involved, email DisabilityCo@caltech.edu

*Note: The Caltech Disability Coalition uses an inclusive definition of disability which refers to a broad range of conditions including, but not limited to, physical, cognitive, developmental, and learning disabilities, chronic illness, mental illness, and those who are Deaf or hard of hearing.