Universität Bremen

Academic Adjustments

to Coursework and Examinations

for Students with Special Needs

KIS

Dear students,
Welcome prospective students,

Studying with a physical or mental impairment is particularly challenging. It often requires a great deal of strength from those affected. As a university, we are committed to creating an inclusive environment for students with special needs, so they can pursue their studies independently and with equal opportunities. For students with special needs to participate freely in courses and examinations, they are entitled to individual academic adjustments.
This brochure provides answers to many of the questions you may have about academic adjustment: What types of academic adjustment exist? How do I apply for an academic adjustment? Which information centers and networks are available for me at the University of Bremen? This brochure will answer these and many other questions.
Staying in touch with you, dear students, is close to our hearts, especially because it gives us the chance to gain new perspectives on our university. That is why I'm asking you: Get in touch with us and talk to teaching staff members and the relevant counseling offices at the University of Bremen.

We welcome you to the University of Bremen!

Dr. Mandy Boehnke
Vice President for International Affairs,
Academic Qualification, and Diversity

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or Chronic Diseases

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01

01. What is Academic Adjustment?

Academic adjustment is a measure that ensures that disadvantages due to a student's special need are counterbalanced in coursework and examinations. Students with a disability or chronic illness, no matter if physical or mental, are often directly disadvantaged during their studies. Academic adjustments intend to counterbalance those disadvantages. Academic adjustments to coursework and examinations have an impact on the format of the required work, the quality standards are not affected by this. It is not, therefore, a matter of simplifying examinations, but of changing the general conditions. Affected students are legally entitled to corresponding provisions.

Legal Provisions for Academic Adjustment According to the Higher Education Act of the State of Bremen:

BremHG section 31 (1)
"Disabled and chronically ill students [...] should be able to complete their studies and examinations under the same conditions as any other student. To this end, as far as possible, all study and examination-related services offered by universities are designed to be barrier-free. Disabled and chronically ill students are entitled to academic adjustments, especially in the organization and design

of their studies and during examinations. In particular, consideration must be given to study and examination-related effects, for example, the need for special aids or personal assistance, and the provision of study and examination conditions in a form other than the intended organization."((Bremisches Hochschulgesetz – BremHG (Higher Education Act of the State of Bremen)), section 31 (1)).

BremHG section 31 (2)
"The subject-specific requirements for coursework and examinations are not affected by this"

The general part of University of Bremen's bachelor's and master's degree examination regulations (ATBPO and MPO) takes up these provisions:

AT BPO and MPO section 14
"In the examination process, consideration shall be given to the nature and severity of any disability. If the student can document that they are not able to take an examination wholly or partially in the intended form because of continued or chronic illness or disability, this can be compensated by extending the examination time accordingly or by organising the examination process differently. A medical certificate may be required for this purpose." (AT BPO and MPO, section 14)

The English translation is for information purposes only. Only the German version is legally binding.

02

02. Who Is Entitled to Academic Adjustment?

All students who are affected by impairments in their studies can claim this adjustment. It does not matter whether it is a visible or non-visible impairment, a physical or mental illness, or whether or not the impairment is officially recognized (disability ID card). Students with specific learning disorders (dyslexia/ dyscalculia) or attention deficit syndrome (such as AD(H)S) are also entitled to academic adjustments. A medical certificate is required.

03

03. How Can Disadvantages Due to a Special Need be Counterbalanced?

Academic adjustments can relate to all coursework and examinations. They can be granted once or permanently. They are always to be tailored according to individual needs; there are no standard solutions. Here are some examples of academic adjustments, which have proven themselves in practice.

Examples of Academic Adjustments to Examinations:

- replacement of written exams with oral examinations or vice versa
- extra time for the completion of homework, transcripts, exercises, the bachelor's thesis, etc.
- extra time for timed examinations
- permission to use a special examination room
- replacement of a presentation with written homework
- taking individual breaks during an examination
- permission to use technical aids
- prompt make-up exam after withdrawal from examinations due to illness
- spreading examination phases over a wider period of time

Examples of Academic Adjustments to Coursework:

- replacement of compulsory attendance times (e.g. laboratory work or excursions) with other coursework
- modification of internship periods
- provision of sound and video recordings of lectures
- provision of lecture scripts and handouts for preparation and follow-up
- individual instead of group work or vice versa

This list is indicative only and serves as a source of ideas. Which academic adjustment is appropriate in individual cases depends on the specific special need.

04

04. What Is the Application Process for Academic Adjustment?

In the interest of all parties involved, a lean procedure should be chosen with little bureaucratic effort.

The following procedure has proven effective:

1. The student describes in an informal letter how the concrete impairment hinders their studies. This requires information on the symptoms, but not information on the diagnosis. The application should clearly indicate in a way that is comprehensible to a medical layperson which restrictions – related to the course of study – exist. In addition, proposals for solutions should be made regarding what academic adjustments might look like in the specific case.
2. A medical certificate must be attached and, if necessary, other supporting evidence, such as a disability ID card (see Chapter 06).
3. The application is to be submitted to the responsible examination office.
4. The examination office forwards the application to the examination board.
5. The examination board decides on the application in a timely manner and notifies the examination office of its decision.
6. The examination office will send a written decision to the applicant.
7. The applicant contacts the lecturer in good time with the notice of approval.

05

05. Notes on the Application for Academic Adjustment

5.1 General Information

Think about how your impairment specifically affects your studies: For which coursework or examination do you need academic adjustment and what might it look like?

- Do you need academic adjustments to coursework (in courses, internships, work groups, lectures, etc.)? In these cases, please contact the responsible teaching staff directly. Visit them during their office hours or at a time when there is an opportunity for a confidential conversation.

  You do not have to justify your special need or describe details of your illness. Describe clearly how your impairment hinders you in your studies and make your own suggestions as to how this disadvantage could be compensated. Ask that the conversation be kept confidential.

- Do you need academic adjustments to your examinations? Then you must submit your request directly to the responsible examinations office – not to individual teaching staff.

- An application for academic adjustment must always be made in good time before an examination, preferably at the beginning of the semester, at the latest when registering for the examination.

- In the case of permanent special needs, an application for several examinations at once may be submitted in order to minimize the administrative burden.

- As a rule, students with disabilities or chronic illnesses themselves know best what their special needs are and how these can be offset. Sometimes, however, it can also be useful to discuss the situation with a representative specialized in the subject or a neutral advice center (e.g. the Office for Students with Disabilities or Chronic Diseases – KIS) to find a solution.

5.2 Requirements on Medical Certificates

- If possible, the certificate should be issued by the treating doctor or therapist (with license to practice). This can be a specialist, but also a general practitioner.
- The medical certificate must clearly explain to medical laypersons which study-related impairments exist. It is not necessary to mention the exact diagnosis or medical history. However, the symptoms that lead to a special need in the study situation should be described as precisely as possible. The report may also contain suggestions for academic adjustments.
- Diagnostic tests, e.g. for dyslexia, should not be older than 5 years. The PBS Psychological Counselling Centre of the Bremen Students Services Organization conducts tests for dyslexia. These are free of charge for students at Bremen universities.

5.3 Privacy

- The application for academic adjustment will be treated confidentially by the examination office and the examination board.
- The decision on an application shall be communicated to the applicant in writing.
- The academic adjustment will not be mentioned on the degree certificate.

5.4 Where Else Might Academic Adjustment Take Effect?

Additionally, academic adjustment might take effect:
- when applying for a place at university
- in regards to child benefit
- in regards to BAföG student loan

06

06. Advice and Information

KIS – Office for Students with Disabilities or Chronic Diseases

The Office for Students with Disabilities or Chronic Diseases (KIS) is aimed in particular at students of the University of Bremen whose studies are impaired by a disability or disease, be it a physical or mental impairment. Our service extends to prospective students as well.

KIS provides advice on all issues related to studying with special needs:
- academic adjustments during your studies
- study organization
- financial support
- support services
- hardship provisions and academic adjustments when applying to university

The advice of KIS advice is confidential, independent, and free of charge.

Contact:

Dr. Ingrid Zondervan
KIS – Office for Students with Disabilities or Chronic Diseases

Phone: +49 (0)421 218-61050
Email: kis@uni-bremen.de
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Postal address:
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Consultation: Only with pre-arranged appointments

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