

GUILFORD COLLEGE

Accessibility Awareness: Empathy, Equality, Access

We all have differences of some degree, and we are all unique in our learning styles, mental and emotional processes, and physical abilities. We are all enriched by our differing ways of existing in the world. Guilford College is strengthened as a community when we appreciate neurodiversity and diversity among our staff, faculty, and students. By understanding, acknowledging, and supporting different ways of being, learning, processing information, perceiving the world, and relating to others, we are strengthened as an educational and social community. We strive for a culture of acceptance and support for differences and to develop attitudes that promote equality, comfort, inclusion, respect, and diversity.

In response to community input, best practices, the strategic long range plan, the Diversity Plan, a desire to improve the quality of the Guilford experience for our students and a national emphasis on working with students who have differences, the Diversity Action Committee (DAC) commissioned the Accessibility Subcommittee to work on how best to acknowledge and support the many differences of our students, faculty, and staff. The subcommittee engaged in a review of Disability Resources, the Learning Commons, and the Counseling Center/mental health services at Guilford College.

What emerged was Empathy, Equality, Access: Report, Vision, and Recommendations for Disability Resources, the Learning Commons, and the Counseling Center/Mental Health Services. This document is a living and evolving best practices “working manual,” presenting an ideal vision, and is a mini-operating plan. It is a framework with basic concepts that can guide our efforts to reengineer our work processes, improve the institution and community, increase retention and serve our faculty, staff, and students. The vision has been reviewed by all Guilford constituencies and has met strong support.

The report and recommendations are presented under the overarching common theme of respect, mindfulness, and access in the context of best practices. When we think of access, we think in terms of:

- Informational resources
- Physical accessibility
- Attitudes (the culture, climate, atmosphere, and comfort of inclusion) in the community
- Policies and procedures

Universal Access

The plan’s vision is based on the concept of universal access, an approach characterized by proactively thinking about and designing products, systems, services, and environments to be usable by all people (to the greatest extent possible), without the need for accommodation, adaptation, or specialized design. Through a universal access approach, the Accessibility Subcommittee wishes to ensure the effective delivery of reasonable accommodations with a minimum of effort required by the person and institution. In the long run, this approach can also provide access in a manner that saves institutional resources, time and energy.

Vision and Goals

Our vision for Guilford underpins our efforts and thinking and is based on the institution’s core values, Diversity Plan and strategic plan. Our ideal environment is characterized by empathy and respect for all members of the community. We are committed to inclusive, sustainable, and equal learning, living, and working opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and guests. The Accessibility Subcommittee’s analysis, discussion, and recommendations stress — and are built upon the philosophical foundation of — our concept of universal access.

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCE CENTER

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- Informed by the concept of universal access design, our vision is to have: an equitable and inclusive Guilford community culture that is free of physical, attitudinal, informational, and learning barriers.
- Inspired by our vision, our goals are to:
 - Strengthen a cultural and attitudinal foundation through institutional awareness, information dissemination, and professional development to embrace the spirit of inclusiveness and universal access.
 - Support consultation/collaboration and program administration/evaluation to embrace the spirit of inclusiveness and universal access.
 - Support self-advocacy, academic adjustments, and provision of services to embrace the spirit of inclusiveness and universal access.
 - Support, review, and improve policies and procedures to embrace the spirit of inclusiveness and universal access.

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