

APPROVED
by Decision No. SEN-N-36
of June 23, 2021,
of Vytautas Magnus University Senate



**DISABILITY POLICY
OF VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY:
“UNIVERSITY OF INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES”**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Being a community-based institution of science and studies, Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter referred to as the University or VMU) continues the mission of the University of Lithuania founded in 1922 in Kaunas to provide liberal educational conditions for human beings, to develop partnerships, to actively participate in the life of Kaunas, to shape the future of Lithuania and to contribute to the world's cultural and scientific development. While fostering a humanistic culture, the University is not confined to narrow, highly specialized studies, but strives to be an intellectual and civic focal point of society, actively participating in the life of the universities worldwide, and shaping the society of the present and future. In pursuit of these goals, the University community has identified the following core values that guide its daily activities: *individual and academic freedom, democracy, openness, responsibility, creativity, sense of community, sustainability, academic excellence*. These values are deeply rooted in the University's institutional memory and organizational culture. The University strives to promote sustainability and synergy within the community by fostering them, thus cherishing each member's uniqueness and personal autonomy.

Since its re-establishment in 1989, in order to reflect its values, VMU has been known as one of the friendliest educational institutions for persons with disabilities in Lithuania (a status officially awarded to the University by *the Lithuanian Association of Persons with Disabilities* in 2015), which aims to take into account the individual support requirements of a person, to increase the accessibility of studies, and to provide reasonable accommodation for all members of the community to study and/or work; therefore, disability has never been a barrier to becoming a member of the University community. The experience gained over the years, initially in integrating persons with disabilities into higher education, creating reasonable conditions for them to enter, study or work, as well as the infrastructure, support, assistance and services, and then responding to their interests, thus becoming a disability-friendly University, has helped its community to create a diverse study and work environment for persons with disabilities, which has been continuously improved in collaboration with the best experts in the field, organizations, and the University community members with disabilities. Today, VMU is guided by a human rights-based model of disability and its concept derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter referred to as the Convention), which aims to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, as well as to foster respect for the inherent dignity of such persons. Thus, the implementation of VMU Disability Policy will be guided by the principle of inclusive opportunities, making reasonable accommodations to the study and working conditions for students and staff with disabilities and ensuring the accessibility of studies.

The aim of VMU Disability Policy, entitled "University of Inclusive Opportunities" (hereinafter referred to as the "Disability Policy"), is to ensure a culture of equality and non-discrimination at the University by providing reasonable accommodations and by increasing accessibility of studies and work environment for persons with disabilities.

The Disability Policy has been developed in implementation of the provisions of VMU Strategy 2021–2027 following the analysis of the current situation at the University in 2020 concerning the situation of persons with disabilities and the evaluation of the results obtained. Further, the Policy is in line with the Convention (ratified by Lithuania in 2010), the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Education and Science, the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, and the other internal legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania and of the University regulating the legal status of persons with disabilities. Finally, the Disability Policy is in compliance with the values of the University and the fostered organizational culture.

2. DEFINITIONS

The concepts that guide and underpin the implementation of this Disability Policy:

Inclusive opportunities mean human rights-based conditions and measures to promote inclusion and opportunity within the organization. This includes the organization's commitment to ensuring a culture of equality and non-discrimination through documents and standards, removing barriers to equality and participation of persons with disabilities in the study and work environments, and fostering the individual's free and varied choices, based on his/her own individual support requirements and aspirations and on what is meaningful to the individual. Furthermore, where necessary, reasonable accommodations are provided to ensure that the individual has the opportunity to pursue meaningful and successful study and work at the University.

Members of the University community are the academic community, the staff of the administrative and non-academic units, alumni, the communities of the institutions established by the University, and others who are actively involved in the activities of the University.

Discrimination on the basis of disability means any distinction, exclusion, or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation. (*Convention, Art. 2*)

Accessibility is a prerequisite and a means to achieve *de facto* equality for all persons with disabilities so that they can participate effectively in the community. Accessibility of the built environment, public transport, and information and communication technologies and services, which must be accessible to persons with disabilities to use equally with others, shall be considered. Accessibility in the context of communication technologies and services includes the provision of social and communication support (*Convention, General Comment of Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, No. 6, Art. 9*).

Reasonable accommodation means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (*Convention, Art. 2*). Reasonable accommodation is an integral part of the directly applicable obligation not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Examples of reasonable accommodation include making existing facilities and information accessible to an individual with a disability; modifying equipment; reorganizing activities; rescheduling work; adjusting curricula learning materials and teaching strategies; adjusting medical procedures; or enabling access to support personnel without disproportionate or undue burden (*Convention, General Comment of Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 6, Art.5*).

Universal design means the design of products, environments, programs, and services to be usable by all persons, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for accommodation or specialized design. The universal design shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed (*Convention, Art. 2*).

Assistance means individual support for a person, which may take various forms, such as counselling, advice, information, support, accompaniment, individualization of study and work processes, or any other assistance that enhances the inclusion of persons with disabilities and ensures equal opportunities and non-discrimination at the University.

Services mean services that contribute to equal opportunities and non-discrimination on the basis of disability and increase accessibility of studies or work at the University. Services for persons with disabilities may be provided through both internal University resources and external resources that are outside the University. These services also include note taking, sign language interpretation, personal assistance, psychological counselling, paper layout, passenger land transport, etc.

Support means a range of support measures, including financial support (targeted grants, scholarships, benefits, etc.), which help to reduce exclusion from studying at the University.

Types of disability: physical disability (mobility impairments, etc.), sensory disability (visual, hearing impairments, etc.), psychosocial disability (depression, etc.), intellectual disability/cognitive impairment (dementia, as well as learning difficulties like dyslexia, etc.), autism, autoimmune and neurological diseases (disabilities related to chronic diseases (diabetes, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis)), complex disabilities (multiple disabilities at the same time, etc.). Disabilities can be visible or invisible to others.

3. THE UNIVERSITY'S GENERAL POLICY ON INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

In line with the University's Policy on Inclusive Opportunities, VMU shall:

- enable the University community members with disabilities to receive reasonable accommodations in order to ensure accessibility, equality of opportunity, and non-discrimination in their studies and work at the University;
- inform and raise awareness among academic and non-academic staff and students of their rights, duties, and responsibilities in relation to this Policy on Inclusive Opportunities and its implementation;
- provide information to future and/or current members of the University community or other interested parties about what assistance, services and support measures are available to the University community members with disabilities;
- encourage members of the community to disclose existing health conditions, disabilities and/or individual support requirements, so that appropriate services, support and/or assistance measures could be put in place to make reasonable accommodation to the conditions of study and/or work, and to ensure the accessibility of studies and/or work in accordance with support requirements;
- provide services, support, and assistance to the University community members with disabilities in order to promote and appropriately accommodate the conditions for their inclusion in studies and work;
- ensure that all University buildings and facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities. To achieve this goal, the principles of universal design shall be applied in the development and/or reconstruction of the physical facilities of the University, thus increasing the accessibility of the University to members of the community with various disabilities.

4. STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

Stakeholders involved in the implementation of the University's Policy on Inclusive Opportunities, with the aim of mainstreaming disability issues into the University's work and study process.

4.1. Responsibilities of the University Management:

- to ensure that all members of the University community are aware of the provisions of this Policy on Inclusive Opportunities and understand their personal and community rights and responsibilities arising thereof;
- to develop and maintain the University's structure and processes for the sustainable implementation of this Policy on Inclusive Opportunities, with a view to the appropriate coordination and provision of services, support, and assistance to the University community members with disabilities;
- to facilitate the organization and delivery of training and awareness raising of disability and equality to the University's staff in order to provide them with the necessary knowledge about disability and inclusion; knowledge and skills enabling them to recognize the difficulties that arise when individual support requirements for the reasonable accommodation of studies and/or work are not met; and the appropriate provision of services and assistance to the community members with disabilities;
- to ensure that the University's Policy on Inclusive Opportunities is regularly monitored and updated.

4.2. Responsibilities of each University employee:

- to foster the University's organizational culture and values to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination for all the community members with disabilities;
- if necessary, to inform the University of one's individual support requirements in order to ensure reasonable accommodation to studies and working conditions and receive related services, support, or assistance from the University;
- to respect the right to confidentiality and make sure the person does not object to his/her disability being discussed with others;
- to assess responsibly any disclosure of information about a person's disability and, on the basis of the information received, refer the person to the University's Disability Coordinator and/or to any other member of staff or unit who can provide appropriate information about the University's provision of assistance, services, and support to meet the individual's support requirements for reasonable accommodation of their study or work conditions;
- if necessary, to inform the Disability Coordinator and other responsible units of the University about changes in one's health status and/or disability related to the support, assistance and services provided by the University;
- in case of concern about the psychological and/or physical health status of a member of the University community, while maintaining the confidentiality of personal data, to seek advice from VMU Psychology Clinic (on psychological health) and/or the Disability Coordinator, or from any other staff member or any other unit, in order to obtain information about options for assistance;

- to ensure the security and confidentiality of written and/or electronic data when processing personal information about a person’s disability, health status, etc.;
- to be familiar with and aware of the procedures, provisions, and opportunities available at the University to assist the community members with disabilities;
- to maintain a sustainable relationship with the University community members with disabilities who have applied for support, services, or assistance individually and who have agreed to be identified as having a disability for the duration of their stay at the University.

4.3. Responsibilities of each student/enrollee:

- if necessary, to inform the University of one’s disability and/or individual support requirements in order to obtain reasonable accommodation to their studies and to receive necessary/required assistance, services, and support from the University;
- if possible, to voice and discuss with the Disability Coordinator and other representatives of the University one’s individual support requirements in relation to one’s disability and/or existing health status before starting one’s studies or employment;
- to notify the University (the Head of the Study Program, administration of the academic unit), in particular the Disability Coordinator, if an existing health status and/or disability results in difficulties that prevent full participation in the study process;
- to inform the University, in particular the Disability Coordinator, if one has faced a situation where one’s written and oral assignment and/or assignment results have been affected by an existing health status and/or disability;
- to inform the University of any changes in one’s health status and/or disability in relation to the support, services, and assistance one receives from the University.

4.4. Responsibilities of academic units:

- to ensure that enrollees with disabilities are provided with accurate information about accommodations, assistance, services and support available at the University to ensure accessibility of studies;
- to provide students with information on the availability of assistance, services, and support for the community members with disabilities in the study process in order to ensure accessibility of studies;
- to provide reasonable accommodation to study conditions, providing support and services to the community members with disabilities in order to ensure accessibility of studies;
- to make the descriptions of study programs and individual courses, their content, the assessment methods used and the assessment process accessible and clear to students with disabilities;
- to establish internal procedures to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability in its units;
- to advise and mediate in providing information to students with disabilities on the availability and accessibility of traineeships.

4.5. Responsibilities of non-academic units:

- to seek to provide a suitable study/work environment and process that takes into account the individual support requirements of persons with disabilities, trying to meet them as far as possible;
- to inform and advise persons with disabilities and all other members of the community about existing study/working conditions and this Policy on Inclusive Opportunities in accordance with their areas of responsibility;
- to ensure the creation of appropriate infrastructure providing accessibility and accommodation to persons with disabilities in response to their individual support requirements.

4.6. Responsibilities of the Disability Coordinator:

- to carry out the planning, implementation, monitoring and publicity of the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities, to implement the inclusion programs for persons with disabilities;
- to advise enrollees and/or students with disabilities and their parents/guardians on issues related to studies, accessibility of studies and reasonable accommodation of the study process;
- to advise and organize the University's academic and non-academic units, individual staff members and/or students on reasonable accommodation of the study process to the support requirements of persons with disabilities, and provide expert assistance;
- to mediate, to facilitate in order to solve academic, social and other problems related to the community members with disabilities in the academic and non-academic units of the University;
- to organize and carry out trainings, disability education activities aimed at raising competence, disability awareness and increase access to studies.

4.7. Responsibilities of VMU Student Representative Council:

- to enable students with disabilities to participate in and represent activities of Student Representative Council;
- to provide equal conditions and opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, to participate in the study process;
- to ensure the academic, social, and cultural well-being of students, including students with disabilities;
- to educate students and the academic community about the rights of persons with disability.

4.8. Responsibilities of other stakeholders:

Non-governmental organizations that organize, represent, or defend the rights of persons with disabilities or other social partners of the University may contribute to the University's Policy on Inclusive Opportunities and its individual components. The University appreciates this opportunity and, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, may consult on individual support requirements, services, support and assistance measures to make reasonable accommodations to the needs of all members of the University's community and/or to provide other services necessary to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

5. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF WITH DISABILITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY

5.1. Admission to the University

The University shall ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination on the basis of disability for enrollees or for recruitees with disabilities. The information to be obtained about the disability of the enrollee or the recruitee shall not be communicated to other academic and non-academic units without the consent of the enrollee or the recruitee. Information about the fact that the enrollee or the recruitee has health problems, disability shall not affect the decision of the University on the admission of the student or the employee.

Enrollees with disabilities shall be eligible for tax advantages related to admission to the University. Recruitees shall be subject to conditions related to norms of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania and the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania.

Once a student or employee has been admitted to VMU, the University shall encourage individuals to disclose their existing health problems, disabilities and/or individual support requirements for the adjustment of study or working conditions that they believe may affect the study process or the performance of work functions. The aim is to inform individuals about the opportunities available and to ensure that appropriate assistance, services, and support measures are put in place in order to provide reasonable accommodation and accessibility of studies or work in accordance with their support requirements. Students and staff who have disclosed their existing health problems or disabilities and/or individual support requirements for the adjustment of study and working conditions shall be informed in all units about the possibility to contact VMU Disability Coordinator. The Disability Coordinator shall cooperate with academic and non-academic units to ensure reasonable accommodation to study and working conditions and accessibility of studies and work, taking into account support requirements and providing appropriate assistance measures.

5.2. Getting to know the University

When raising general awareness of the University, its values, attitudes and principles of operation, the University community and/or its new members shall be provided with information on the principle of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the University, the University's Policy on Inclusive Opportunities and the possibilities of assistance available to all University community members with disabilities in order to make reasonable accommodation to study and/or working conditions and to ensure the accessibility of studies and/or work in accordance with their support requirements.

5.3. Assistance during studies and employment at the University

The University is aware that problems related to a health status and/or disability may arise after the start of studies or work at the University. In this case, the University shall encourage members of its community to contact the heads of its academic and/or non-academic units or the University's Disability Coordinator and inform them about it. After informing the University about problems related to a health status and/or disability, the University community members shall be consulted, informed about the possibilities of assistance, services and support which may be and/or are provided to them in order to make reasonable accommodation to study and/or working conditions and to ensure the accessibility of studies and/or work in accordance with their support requirements.

The University shall also take care of the career design and planning of students and employees with disabilities during work and studies or after graduation with the aim to provide wider career opportunities at the University or during further studies, in the labor market and/or in employment.

5.4. Peer support for students with disabilities

To ensure equal opportunities for studies and learning at the University, students shall be encouraged to assist and support their fellow students with disabilities. If students are not sure how to do this properly when communicating, studying with, or assisting and supporting their fellow students with disabilities, they can contact the Disability Coordinator. The Disability Coordinator shall provide students with practical advice on disability etiquette and shall help to better understand the support requirements arising from disability.

Students shall be encouraged, by complying with confidentiality and personal data protection requirements, to inform the staff of their academic unit and/or the Disability Coordinator and/or VMU Student Representative Council about instances when they notice or recognize the difficulties of their fellow student with disabilities arising from existing obstacles or a lack of reasonable accommodation at the University, so that appropriate assistance could be provided to the student encountering difficulties.

If a student with disabilities or his/her fellow students feel that a break in the student's study process is necessary due to deterioration in his/her health status, disability or other reasons, the student with disabilities himself/herself or his/her fellow students shall consult with the administration of their academic unit and/or the Study Department.

Students shall be advised to contact VMU Psychology Clinic and consult about possible ways of providing assistance, if they notice, find out or suspect that their fellow student is experiencing emotional difficulties or a psychological crisis. Well-targeted and effective assistance that can be provided due to ignorance of the situation, its misinterpretation or actions shall create appropriate and inclusive conditions to ensure the sustainability and continuity of studies.

5.5. Assistance for persons with disabilities provided by colleagues and University staff

The University staff shall be encouraged to responsibly assess any disclosure of a person's information about his/her health state, his/her disability and, after assessing the information received, to refer the person to the Disability Coordinator and/or to contact another employee/unit that can provide appropriate assistance and/or services related to reasonable accommodation.

Employees shall be encouraged to contact the Disability Coordinator if, when working with a colleague with disabilities or providing services to all University community members with disabilities, they feel that they do not know something, that they have questions about ensuring equal opportunities and providing reasonable accommodation or that they have no experience of properly removing barriers to accessibility. The Disability Coordinator shall provide the staff with practical advice on disability etiquette, shall help them better understand the support requirements of persons with disabilities and shall provide information on the possibilities, processes, and procedures of providing assistance, services, and support measures for persons with disabilities. Employees shall be advised to contact VMU Psychology Clinic if they notice, find out or suspect that their colleague is experiencing emotional difficulties or a psychological crisis. The Psychology Clinic can provide consultations to the University staff on possible ways to provide assistance to persons encountering psychological difficulties.

6. AVAILABLE SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY

The following University bodies and units shall provide appropriate assistance and advice on issues relating to persons with disabilities and/or their individual support requirements:

6.1. Academic units

The University academic unit shall be a unit of the University whose main activities include the implementation of studies and/or research, arts, experimental, social, and cultural development. The University academic units shall include academies that base their activities on *sui iuris rights*, other academies, faculties, branches, institutes, the Botanical Garden, and other units treated as equivalent thereto. The University academic units shall organize their activities in their structural units (departments, study, science, art and consulting centers, laboratories, etc.) and/or in other forms (research clusters, study programs (or groups thereof) implementation committees, etc.). Students and/or staff who need reasonable accommodation to ensure accessibility of the study process or the workplace shall contact the administration of their academic unit (the Head of the Study Program, the Administrative Assistant of the Department, the Head of the Department, or the Dean's Office). Each academic unit shall have a designated person responsible for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the areas of activities of the unit. If the administration of an academic unit has uncertainties about providing services to students with disabilities, they may contact VMU Disability Coordinator. It is the head of a unit that shall be responsible for the Policy on Equality and Non-discrimination, the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities in an academic unit.

6.2. Non-academic units

The University non-academic units shall be units, representative offices, consulting centers, necessary for the performance of administrative functions and for the implementation of goals of economic activities; other units essential for studies, research, art, and student activities. If the administration of a non-academic unit faces problems in providing services to students with disabilities or appropriately adapting the workplace to the employee, they may contact VMU Disability Coordinator and/or the employee of the Human Resources Department responsible for the Policy on Equal Opportunities and Diversity at the University. It is the head of a unit that shall be responsible for the Policy on Equality and Non-discrimination, the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities in a non-academic unit.

6.3. Disability Coordinator

VMU Disability Coordinator shall be responsible for the preparation, planning, implementation, monitoring and publicity of the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities pursued by the University as well as for providing consultations to and coordinating all University community members with disabilities and for planning and organizing the inclusion program at the University. The Disability Coordinator shall cooperate with academic and non-academic units of the University and/or other institutions in order to provide reasonable accommodation of studies and working conditions and to ensure access to studies and work for the community members with disabilities. Students and employees who need to be provided with reasonable accommodation to ensure accessibility of studies or the workplace should contact the Disability Coordinator. Students shall also have the opportunity to independently fill in on the Student Portal a questionnaire—consent to disclose their disability information. The Disability Coordinator may also be contacted by staff from academic and non-academic units of the University who have questions regarding the reasonable accommodation of working conditions and their accessibility.

6.4. Student Affairs Department

The Student Affairs Department shall provide information, advice, and direct services to students on various social issues not directly related to the study process: shall provide consultations on questions relating to financial support, inclusion of persons with disabilities, granting of benefits, accommodation, issuance of certificates, settlement with the University; shall organize volunteer and mentoring programs at the University. The activities of the Department shall also be related to sports and the provision of health promotion services, career planning, cultural and artistic activities. Students may directly contact the Student Affairs Department about problems in these areas; they will be provided with information and/or will be referred to other academic and/or non-academic units of the University.

6.5. Human Resources Department

The Human Resources Department shall be responsible for the procedure for recruiting and dismissing staff from the University. The University staff can obtain information in the Department on current working conditions. Employees who disclose information and submit documents about their disability to the Department shall be subject to working terms and conditions provided for in the norms of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania and the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania. An employee who has individual support requirements in terms of the workplace, working conditions related to disability shall be encouraged to inform an employee of the Department responsible for equal opportunities and diversity at the University about his/her support requirements, so that every effort would be made to ensure equal and non-discriminatory working conditions for each employee of the University.

6.6. VMU Psychology Clinic

VMU Psychology Clinic shall offer assistance to students and employees experiencing various psychological difficulties. All members of the University community shall be encouraged to seek help immediately if, due to their inner state or life situation, they find it difficult to communicate, study or work, if they are overwhelmed by depressing thoughts, or if they feel that there is no other way out. The Psychology Clinic shall provide individual, free psychological consultations and shall ensure confidentiality. Counselling psychologists shall have theoretical and practical knowledge of how to provide appropriate psychological assistance. Psychological assistance can be provided through live or remote counselling, taking into account the individual support requirements of the student and the employee.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

The University staff shall take a responsible approach to confidentiality principles in the processing of personal information related to a person's health state, disability or other private information and shall comply with the general provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation, the Law on Legal Protection of Personal Data of the Republic of Lithuania, and rules on the processing of personal data of the University.

Academic and non-academic units of the University, their students and employees shall respect a person's right to confidentiality and shall understand that if they notice difficulties and/or issues that a person encounters as a result of a disability, they shall provide information or refer a person to the Disability Coordinator or to VMU Psychology Clinic in a proper and confidential manner.

8. ENSURING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION AT THE UNIVERSITY

University employees with disabilities shall be entitled to the provisions of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania related to disability; University students, to the provisions of the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania. The University aims to create an inclusive and motivating working and learning environment, meeting the needs of today's society, and creating the society of the future; therefore, the University community members with disabilities shall have the right to equal opportunities and non-discrimination as well as to reasonable accommodation of study and working conditions related to the individual support requirements of a particular person and the University's ability to meet such support requirements.

Reasonable accommodation to study conditions shall be only possible if there is a dialogue between a student or employee with disabilities, a lecturer, and the University administration, respectively. For the adjustment of study or working conditions, a student with disabilities shall contact the administration of his/her academic unit; an employee shall contact the head of the unit in which he/she works or the University's Disability Coordinator. Once the individual support requirements and/or problems experienced by a student or employee with disabilities as a result of unreasonable accommodation have been identified, the aim will be to remove obstacles, thereby increasing the accessibility of studies or the workplace.

The community members with disabilities seeking reasonable accommodation shall submit proof of disability to the Disability Coordinator or to the head of the academic or non-academic unit. Students can independently fill in on the Student Portal a questionnaire–consent to disclose their disability information. After assessing the submitted documents, other factors and conditions, the Disability Coordinator shall, upon the request of the student or employee, recommend specific ways of individualizing the study and work environment to the appropriate University unit. Each person's disability and the resulting support requirements are individual; therefore, in each case, the most appropriate ways to individualize the study and work process shall be sought. Ways of individualization shall be divided into three main areas: study and work environment, lectures or other contact activities, assessment of study achievements and employee's work task. In order to ensure reasonable accommodation to study and working conditions, the following alternatives to studies and work may be applied to students and employees with disabilities and/or individual support requirements at the University:

- adapting the physical environment or adjusting study timetables or work schedules to the availability of lecture rooms or workplaces;
- applying an alternative form of study and work assignments by taking into account the student's or employee's individual support requirements arising from the disability;
- increasing the time limit for the completion of study or work assignments;
- applying alternative measures that increase the accessibility of the study and work process;
- using materials for study and work purposes in accessible formats;
- using other alternative methods, tools, and techniques.

8.1. Extended time during study and work periods

If students and staff feel that a break in their studies or work is necessary due to deterioration in their health status, disability or other reasons, the University and its individual units shall undertake every effort to address the situation on a mutually beneficial basis. Students shall consult with the administration of their academic unit and/or the Study Department and follow the procedure for applying for additional time in the study process or academic leave which is regulated by VMU Study Regulations and other internal legal acts of the University. Employees shall consult with the head of the unit in which they work and/or the Human Resources Department, using opportunities provided for in the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania and the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania as well as the internal legal acts of the University.

The community members experiencing a temporary deterioration in their health status may apply for additional time, academic leave and/or change in the form of studies or work as well as request for the application of other alternative means or methods of studies or work under the circumstances (in case of deterioration in health status, hospital treatment, etc.). In such a case, the student or employee may be given the opportunity to be temporarily absent from the study process or work or to participate in the study process or work in the forms available to him/her, by completing assignments at another time, working remotely, etc. In cases where students or employees feel that a long break in their studies or work is necessary due to deterioration in their health status, disability or other reasons, they can take academic or work leave without losing their student or employee status.

The community members with disabilities who, after additional time or academic and work leave, return and continue their studies or work at the University may contact the Disability Coordinator for reasonable accommodation, discussing the current situation in order to anticipate and/or appropriately adjust assistance measures that increase the accessibility of studies or work and the possibility to successfully continue studies or work.

9. RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTS

Research and experiments in the field of disability shall be among the priority areas at the University. The University shall support, encourage, and promote the implementation of such research and experiments as well as their practical application and dissemination. Research in the field of disability must contribute to increasing knowledge, its applicability and expertise both at the University and in the general public. Research and experiments should ensure they are accessible to potential participants with disabilities.

10. THE UNIVERSITY RAPPOR WITH ENVIRONMENT

The aim shall be to create a fully sustainable and harmonious environment, its ecosystem which eliminates barriers to study or work for persons with disabilities, to provide reasonable accommodation and services for persons with disabilities at and outside the University. The University shall work together with other stakeholders: state and municipal institutions, private and business entities, and representatives of the non-governmental sector. Taking into account the support requirements of persons with disabilities, both the University and other bodies, institutions and organizations shall initiate changes to create a well-functioning and sustainable ecosystem of the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities for the University community members with disabilities at the University and in its surrounding environment, which influences studies and work.

11. EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

The University shall promote and develop knowledge and competencies of its community members about persons with disabilities and/or their individual support requirements by initiating, contributing to, organizing, and carrying out various educational activities on disability. Each member of the University community can contribute to these activities by initiating them, participating in trainings, seminars, conferences, campaigns, events or other activities that increase knowledge and experience in the field of disability. Specialized trainings or events for members of the University community shall be initiated and coordinated by the Disability Coordinator, and their implementation shall be assisted by relevant academic and non-academic units of the University, the Student Representative Council and/or individual members of the University community. Where appropriate, the University shall collaborate with other organizations in order to provide members of its community with high-quality training in disability by making use of experts in this field. The University shall seek to share the accumulated knowledge and long-term experience in the field of disability with the public; to this end, it shall engage in educating the public, expressing expert opinion, increasing social responsibility, and changing attitudes towards disability.

12. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Regular periodic monitoring and evaluation shall be carried out to ensure the sustainability of this Policy on Inclusive Opportunities. The Disability Policy at the University shall be an inseparable and integral part of the strategy pursued by the University; its implementation shall be monitored and evaluated by VMU Strategy Implementation Monitoring and Analysis Unit. The University community members shall be the most important monitors and evaluators, who shall be able to contribute to this process by participating in the University conducted surveys, other research, analyses, and activities related to the monitoring and evaluation of the disability situation. Regular meetings will be held at the University, during which all interested members of VMU community will be able to raise questions related to the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities, provide suggestions and expert opinions, thus contributing not only to the monitoring and evaluation of the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities at the University, but also to its active development, fostering and implementation. Non-governmental organizations representing and uniting persons with various disabilities or individual support requirements will also be invited to contribute to the implementation, development, monitoring and evaluation of the University's Policy on Inclusive Opportunities. The results of the monitoring and evaluation of the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities at the University will be published in the University's annual activity report as well as in other ways and means.

The document of the Disability Policy at the University level may be altered and amended to take account of the University's strategic and/or structural changes, the disability situation at the University itself, the results of its monitoring and evaluation, other changes and emerging issues, and the pursuit of global objectives in the field of disability and its regulation.

13. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

VMU Disability Policy, entitled “University of Inclusive Opportunities”, shall be implemented in accordance with the Tactical Implementation Plan, which shall be directly related to and complement this Disability Policy. This document shall describe in detail the action plan for the implementation of the Policy on Inclusive Opportunities, how and by what means the objectives are to be achieved, providing specific implementation steps, deadlines, and indicators for the implementation of the policy, thus addressing the problems identified in 2020 after the analysis of the current situation at the University in relation to the situation of persons with disabilities at the University and the evaluation of the results obtained. The implementation of the Tactical Implementation Plan for the Disability Policy shall aim at eliminating obstacles encountered in the fields of studies, employment, service provision, environmental adaptation, education, communication, and research in accordance with the following principles:

- **Coherence and synergy of the community.** Human rights, dignity, non-discrimination, equal opportunities, and diversity in terms of disability and individual support requirements are guaranteed.
- **Physical well-being of the community.** A healthy lifestyle is promoted and favorable conditions for physical activity are facilitated for the community members with disabilities.
- **Accessibility of internal communication.** An internal communication structure and system is developed to ensure the dissemination of clear and timely information through channels and tools accessible to the University community members with disabilities.
- **Adapted working environment.** Appropriate and flexible working conditions are created for the University community members with disabilities.
- **Accessibility of studies.** Accessibility of studies and reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities are ensured.
- **Development of employee competencies.** A system of competence development is created and established, in which the University academic and non-academic staff can participate in order to deepen their knowledge about the accessibility of studies and work and reasonable accommodation for the University community members with disabilities by meeting individual support requirements in the study or work process.
- **Adaptation of environment.** Access and mobility of the University community members with disabilities in all University buildings are ensured. The environment of science, studies, recreation, and leisure is improved by renovating the existing and opening new University spaces.
- **University document database.** The disability aspect is included in the University’s internal normative documents when creating new or amending existing documents.
- **Services for persons with disabilities.** A sustainable system of services provided by the University and public, private, and non-governmental sectors is established, as well as its synergy, ensuring the accessibility of studies and work according to the support requirements of the University community members with disabilities.
- **Organization of the study process.** Opportunities are created to individualize the study process according to the support requirements of persons with disabilities.
- **Student career planning and entry into the labor market.** Contribution is made to career planning and greater participation in the labor market of students and graduates with disabilities.