

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

Label: UB-57005

Date introduced: October 21st, 2020

Author(s): President Khademakbari, Vice President Rashid, Senator Chidester, Senator Sasser

Sponsor(s): Speaker Cheng

Committee: Student Life

Draft: Vote

Equity for Students with Disabilities and CSD Support Act

Whereas, the purpose of the Center for Students with Disabilities “equalizes our students’ learning, discovery, and engagement by fostering self-advocacy, inclusion, and success;¹”

Whereas, students with disabilities have advocated for themselves, requesting improvements and accommodations from the University of Houston and have been continuously disregarded or denied;

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of student life and created new barriers to academic success particularly for students with disabilities requesting accommodations;

Whereas, the mission of the University of Houston is, “to offer nationally competitive and internationally recognized opportunities for learning, discovery and engagement to a diverse population of students in a real-world setting;²”

Whereas, the mission of the University of Houston is unsatisfied when students with disabilities are disregarded and accommodation requests are not met;

¹ <https://uh.edu/csd/>

² <https://uh.edu/about/mission/#:~:text=The%20mission%20of%20the%20University,in%20a%20real%2Dworld%20setting>

Whereas, when accommodations such as online lectures, loose attendance policies, deadline extensions, use of technology and more are deemed reasonable by the Center for Students with DisABILITIES and are denied, the University of Houston is denying students with disabilities the basic human right of an education.

Whereas, the COVID-19 global pandemic has shifted academic learning primarily online, slowing the process of receiving accommodations and increasing the frequency of faculty denying accommodation requests unjustifiably due to a lack of understanding of the needs students with disabilities may have and the perceived leeway of an online learning environment.

Whereas, the “Disabled Students Demand Justice” petition has collected more than 700 signatures and mentions that, “In the eyes of many disabled students, none of the goals in the CSD’s mission statement are properly being achieved and acknowledged by the University.”³

Whereas, the CSD is an important department tasked with creating equity for students with disabilities and is severely underfunded and understaffed. In an article from The Cougar, CSD Director, Cheryl Spadaccia tells The Cougar that, “we run a bare-bones budget;⁴”

Whereas, the CSD website itself may be inaccessible for some students, as students are unable to adjust text size or color contrast;

Whereas, the CSD testing center is only open on weekdays, limiting flexibility for students whose peers may be able to take exams on weekends. Furthermore, the CSD’s sign-in options are unadvanced and considered inaccessible for some;

Whereas, the CSD is currently named the “Center for Students with DisABILITIES,” giving the word “disability” a negative connotation.

Whereas, the initial orientation for new students requesting accommodations is in a group setting with group advising which can lead to some students feeling less comfortable advocating for themselves;

³ <https://www.change.org/p/university-of-houston-disabled-students-demand-justice?signed=true>

⁴ <http://thedailycougar.com/2016/10/30/sfac-2018-center-for-disabilities/>

Whereas, some students feel they need more time to discuss their situation with their counselor and the proposed scheduled time of 30 minutes does not align with student need;

Whereas, some laboratory classes are currently inaccessible and there is no alternative format to perform labs;

Whereas, there are no automatic door buttons on the exterior of Cougar Village I, Cougar Village II, University Lofts, Cougar Place, or Bayou Oaks. Furthermore, campus facilities often have broken automatic door buttons;

Whereas, uneven and cobblestone sidewalks pose challenges for students using mobility devices, blind students, or students who use wheelchairs;

Therefore, be it enacted by the Student Government Association of the University of Houston:

The University of Houston must prioritize the voices of students with disabilities .

Be it further enacted, the Student Government Association calls on the Student Fees Advisory Committee, to grant the CSD's funding and staffing requests;

Be it further enacted, the Student Government Association calls on the Office of the Provost to create a mandatory disability inclusion training that includes the legality of granting accommodations, the different types of accommodations, how students with disabilities should be properly accommodated, the history of disability rights and how to have empathetic conversations with students with disabilities when they request accommodations;

Be it further enacted, a feature be added to the CSD website to adjust text size and color contrast, as the University of Texas Services for Students with Disabilities has done;⁵

Be it further enacted, the CSD testing center hours be expanded and include times on weekends to allow students more flexibility when scheduling exams;

⁵ <https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

Be it further enacted, the “Center for Students with DisABILITIES” be renamed with the input from students with disabilities;

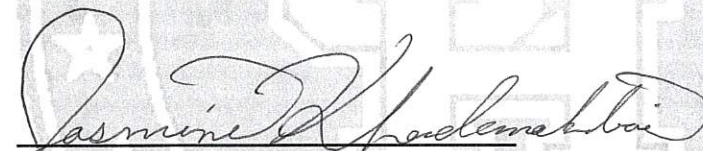
Be it further enacted, an option for a one-on one initial advising meeting be added to begin the accommodations process;

Be it further enacted, an option to request longer appointments be added and a method of reviewing average appointment lengths by the CSD be implemented;

Be it further enacted, an accessible alternative method for UH laboratory classes be added to accommodate students;

Be it further enacted, the University of Houston install new automatic door buttons on the exterior of residence halls that do not currently have them and activate all current exterior buttons.

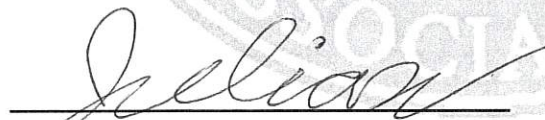
Be it further enacted, the University of Houston continue to replace aggregate concrete with solid concrete pavement.



Jasmine Khademakbari
Student Government President

Date of President's Approval: 11/6/2020

APPROVED



Julian Cheng
Speaker of the Senate

Date of Senate Approval: 11/6/2020