



Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC)

Student Disability Accommodations Registration Process Improvement Project

The Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) plays a pivotal role in ensuring equal access to education for students with disabilities. In recent years, there has been a significant uptick in the demand for reasonable accommodations in classrooms, thereby highlighting the growing importance of promptly delivering these accommodations. To better serve students, faculty, and staff, the SDRC and Office of Civil Rights & Title IX recognize this opportunity to identify efficiencies to:

- Provide clarity about the student disability accommodations process
- Reduce student disability accommodations process time
- Develop seamless coordination with HR for graduate students who need classroom and workplace accommodations

Registering with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) aims to provide all students with disabilities an equal opportunity for success in their college experience. Students who wish to request academic accommodations must self-identify with the SDRC office, complete an application within AIM (an online accommodations management system), and submit required disability documentation. SDRC staff are trained to evaluate disability documentation in combination with the student's self-report to determine eligibility for accommodations on a case-by-case basis. Accommodations can be requested at any time of the year.

Project Team Includes

- Sponsors:** Rex Tolliver, *VP for Student Affairs & Academic Support*
Donna Arnett, *Executive VP for Academic Affairs & Provost*
Julian Williams, *VP for Access, Civil Rights, and Community Engagement*
- Project Leads:** Sonia Badesha, *Director of Student Disabilities Resource Center (SDRC)*
Molly Peirano, *Asst. VP for Civil Rights & Title IX*
- Project Team:** Chris Keck, *Asst. Director of Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC)*
Kate Dominguez, *Disability Coordinator for SDRC*
Ernestine Surls, *Administrative Coordinator for SDRC*
- Facilitators:** Office of Organizational Excellence

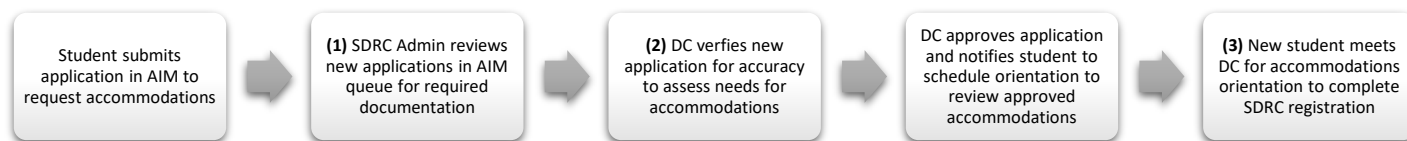
Project Phase 1: Discovery

A comprehensive analysis was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of current practices, collect data, identify inefficiencies, and pinpoint areas for improvement or modification in both the registration process for academic/classroom accommodations and the hand-off for graduate student workplace accommodations. Below are key data points that reflect the **Current State as of 1/11/2024**.

Academic/Classroom Accommodations

- SDRC office consists of a team of nine employees, with three vacant positions to be filled for a total of twelve once fully staffed
 - Five staff members take part in the student classroom accommodation management process
 - Two of the vacant positions (Disability Coordinators) are primary resources for the accommodations process
- Once a student submits an application in AIM (start of the process), the total start-to-finish processing time for SDRC staff to review completed applications through hosting registration meeting with student to review approved accommodations (finish) **averages between 2-3 weeks**

High-Level Start to Finish of Accommodations Request Process



Follow-ups are where interactions, exchanges, or hand-offs take place between different roles of a workflow/process. For the academic/classroom accommodations process, the Administrative Coordinator and Disability Coordinator (DC) are the primary SDRC roles that move an application through the registration workflow.

(Areas are shown as (1) (2) and (3) within respective boxed action steps where the SDRC roles follow up with the student)

Hand-off for Graduate Student Workplace Accommodations

There is not a clearly defined process for graduate student workers to request workplace accommodations. Currently, the director of the SDRC serves in an informal, consultative role, but is only able to do so if the student has completed the application process for academic accommodations. There is currently no hand-off to Employee Relations for graduate student workplace accommodations.

The facilitation methods used to inform the project team of current state and impacts to end users are as follows:

- **Process mapping** the current workflow for students requesting accommodations from START (*student submits an application in AIM*) to END (*student meets with Disability Coordinator for accommodation approval review meeting, i.e. "orientation meeting"*), covering all major steps within that scope. (See Appendix for Process Map - Red dots are shown in the map to reflect areas where a considerable amount of staff time is spent processing and waiting daily and weekly.)

Current State Application Processing		
Administrative Coordinator		
Daily (M-F) monitoring of AIM queue for new applications	Avg 1 hour to flag new applications for missing documentation	5 hours
Disability Coordinator		
7 new applications to review per week	Avg 2 hours to review (1) application	14 hours
15 new orientations weekly	Avg 1 hour to host (1) orientation	15 hours
3 follow-up appointments weekly	Avg 30 minutes per (1) appointment	1.5 hours
Avg Total Hours in Application Follow-Ups		
		35.5 hours per week

- **Surveying** to gather feedback regarding accommodation effectiveness, communication, challenges, and overall satisfaction from a sample of registered SDRC students, faculty, and staff that currently partner with the SDRC office.

End User Group	Number	Percentage
Undergraduate Student	103	48%
Graduate Student	27	13%
Faculty	79	37%
Staff	4	2%
Total	213	Respondents

Project Phase 2: Possibility

The project team explored and evaluated potential solutions to address inefficiencies in the current state for both accommodation processes noted below. Key considerations were defined to align with the intended outcomes for the future state and to inform improvement actions.

Managing Academic/Classroom Accommodations

1. **Proactive planning & empowerment.** Students informed of available services can plan ahead and prepare necessary documentation in advance of the registration process. They will feel empowered to advocate for their needs and not delay in completing any steps in continuing the application process, i.e., scheduling the accommodations orientation meeting. Having early access to support minimizes last-minute requests, making the processing time more efficient.
2. **Effective communications about the SDRC office across all end user groups.** Circulate clear information about the SDRC office and student accessibility needs through coordinated collaborations with faculty and academic support units.
3. **Enhancements to SDRC internal processes and roles within the office.** Implementing workload management strategies of time blocking and efficient allocating of resources to optimize productivity with new applications. Also having a more appropriate number of employees to help support application processing can result in faster turnaround times, decreased stress on staff, increased service quality, and overall student satisfaction in receiving academic/classroom accommodations.

Managing a Hand-Off for Graduate Student Accommodations

The clear hand-off of workplace accommodation responsibilities to HR Employee Relations, while maintaining management of academic/classroom accommodations with the SDRC, ensures legal compliance, consistency, and tailored support for graduate students in both their work and academic environments. The key considerations for the hand-off are:

1. **Expertise alignment.** HR Employee Relations specializes in employment-related matters, making it suitable for handling workplace accommodations. SDRC maintains expertise in academic accommodations which align with the specific academic needs of graduate students.
2. **Communication and collaboration.** Graduate students, their supervisors, and faculty can collaborate with the respective HR and SDRC departments, ensuring effective coordination in both work and academic environments.
3. **Privacy and confidentiality.** Human Resources is well-equipped to manage sensitive employee information, maintaining privacy in workplace accommodations. Simultaneously the resources of the SDRC can uphold confidentiality in academic accommodations.

Project Phase 3: Action Planning

The SDRC is set to launch its improvement plan to students and partners during the 2024-2025 academic year. In preparation for this rollout, the SDRC team designated **Spring & Summer 2024** to address the outlined improvement areas and implement the specific actions listed below. These improvement areas and specific actions reflect a commitment to enhancing the end-user experience for accommodations registrations, refining internal workflows, and developing better collaborative partnerships within the USC community.

In the plans charted below, the specific action steps, the impacted groups (Students, Faculty, Staff, SDRC, Parents), and responsible task leads are included in each improvement area.

Academic/Classroom Accommodations Action Plan		
Increasing accurate first-time AIM application completions by new student registrants		
ACTION	IMPACT	LEAD
<p>Update AIM application to better aid the new registrant in accurately completing the application on the first attempt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that instructions and form line items are clear, concise, and easily understandable to the applicant 	Students	SDRC Team
<p>Create video tutorials to support instructional content for SDRC services and programs for both students and faculty. Examples of content include AIM registration process for both students and faculty; review of alternative testing options for faculty; how to request updates to current accommodations for registered students, etc.</p>	Students	SDRC Team
<p>Explore integration/data feed capabilities between AIM system and Banner to allow for application autofill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students will not have to enter basic information - Makes coordination of services for students easier 	Students	Sonia Badesha
<p>Test of the SMS messaging feature within AIM to provide a notification option to communicate to registered students alongside voice, email, and in-person options</p>	Students	Kate Dominguez
OUTCOME – Improved user experience, reduced errors, and quicker processing times		

Improving the efficiency of internal SDRC processes for timely academic/classroom accommodations		
ACTION	IMPACT	LEAD
Fill open positions (Disability Coordinators) to help decrease the workload on current SDRC staff and application processing time	SDRC Students	Sonia Badesha
Designate an allotted time slot weekly to review new applications where disability coordinators can thoroughly review applications and required documentation to help reduce current processing time - <i>Dependent on the addition of newly hired SDRC staff</i>	SDRC Students	SDRC Team
Create SDRC office interactive phone directory to route incoming calls directly to the appropriate area or SDRC team member line	SDRC Students	Ernestine Surls
Research appointment scheduling platforms for integration with AIM to enable students to seamlessly schedule their orientation meetings with disability coordinators via an embedded email link from AIM	SDRC Students	Sonia Badesha
Conduct a post-engagement survey with new and original survey participants to evaluate the impact of the accommodations registration process improvements listed within 2024-2025 action plan	SDRC	SDRC Team
OUTCOME – Recalibrated workload, improved application review quality, and reduced processing time		

Fostering stronger partnerships with faculty & staff to enhance support for students with disabilities		
ACTION	IMPACT	LEAD
Share information about accessibility services with student-led organizations to increase awareness, visibility, and accessibility across campus - Programming with Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society, USC Student Government, “Active Minds” club - University Housing with Resident Mentors	Students	SDRC Team
Design and develop SDRC introductory information session material for New Student Orientation that explains the registration process, an overview of the SDRC office and accommodations request process, how to best support students with disabilities - <i>Coordination with Student Affairs & Academic Support Communications (point of contact - Maegan Gudridge)</i>	Students	Sonia Badesha
Present information about SDRC services at new faculty orientation and select faculty meetings to increase faculty awareness of students' rights & responsibilities and encourage use of universal design - Inclusive of supportive content and materials for universal classroom design; faculty, and staff rights & procedures; etc. - <i>Coordination with USC Faculty Affairs (point of contact – Mary Anne Fitzpatrick)</i>	Faculty Staff	Sonia Badesha Molly Peirano
OUTCOME – Increased understanding of the registration and accommodations request process		

Expand communication channels to increase awareness of SDRC academic services and accessibility		
ACTION	IMPACT	LEAD
<p>Create a central landing page as a navigational guide for students and parents to properly identify the university's departments, contacts, ADA-associated policies, and general information for accessibility services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Coordination by the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX and USC Central Communications</i> 	<p>Students Parents Faculty Staff</p>	<p>Molly Peirano</p>
<p>Create policy to provide the framework needed to provide more inclusive policies and procedures in collaboration with other USC departments that support students with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Assistance provided by USC Office of Civil Rights & Title IX with updated ADA university-wide policy</i> 	<p>Students Faculty Staff</p>	<p>Molly Peirano</p>
<p>OUTCOME – Increased accessibility and understanding of SDRC services for all persons of the USC community</p>		

Workplace Accommodation Action Plan	
Provide a seamless hand-off to HR for graduate student workers with disabilities who request workplace accommodations to ensure a clear, legally compliant, documented process	
ACTION	LEAD
<p>Update current operating procedure of "Release of Information" process and form with USC Employee Relations (HR), eliminating the need for the current SDRC registered student to submit medical documentation twice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Employee Relations (HR) to designate a list of requirements for requested documentation</i> 	<p>USC Employee Relations team</p>
<p>Transfer of existing SDRC student information via electronic consent and document transfer to USC Employee Relations (HR), eliminating any manual handling by the student and submitting medical documentation twice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Employee Relations (HR) to designate a list of requirements for shared data transfer</i> 	<p>USC Employee Relations team</p>
<p>OUTCOME - A clear, documented process between the SDRC and USC Employee Relations for hand-off of graduate student workplace accommodations</p>	

Summary of Projected Savings

Academic/Classroom Accommodations

For the academic/classroom accommodations process, the Student Disability Resource Center is dedicated to implementing the outlined strategies to reduce the amount of staff time spent processing new student accommodation applications by spring 2025.

Time Savings

The chart below shows the hours spent weekly by SDRC staff to move applications through the accommodations registration process.

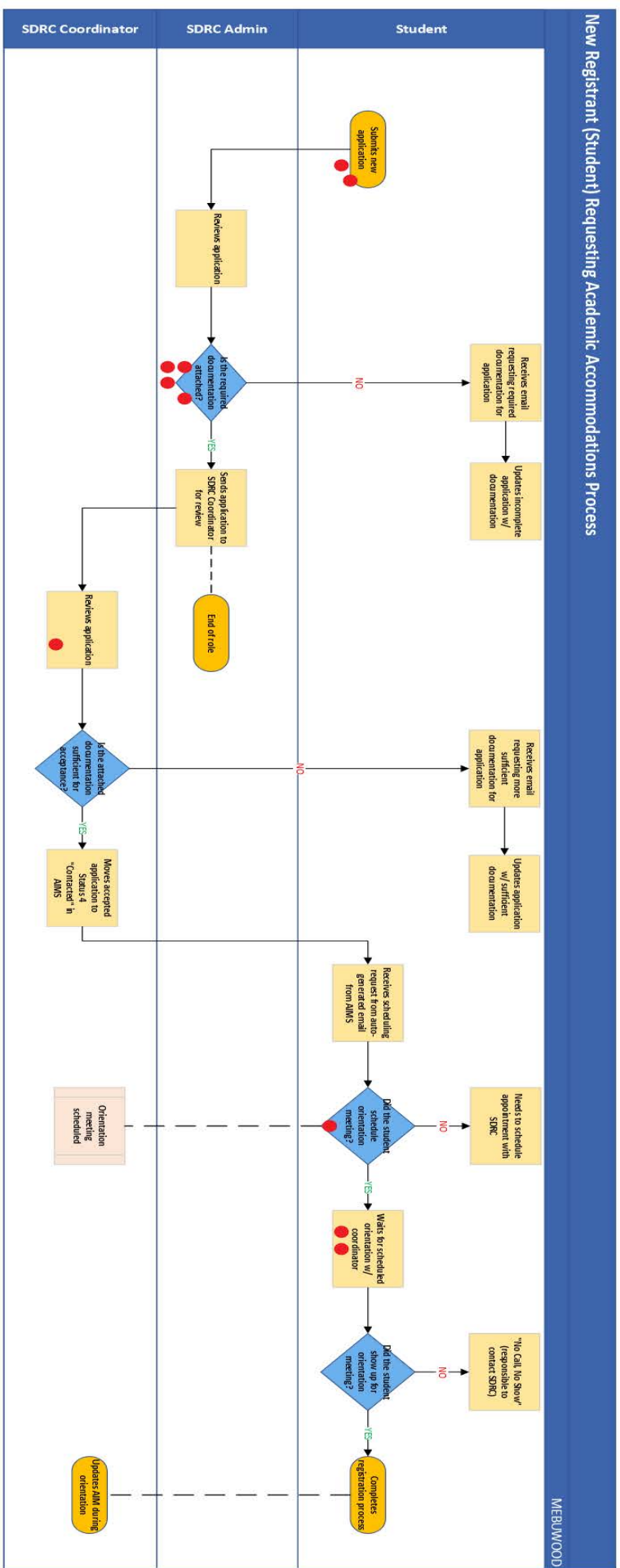
SDRC Application Processing Times				
It currently takes....			In the future with action plan improvements...	
Administrative Coordinator				
Daily (M-F) monitoring of AIM queue for new applications	Avg 1 hour to flag new applications for missing documentation	5 hours	Avg 30 minutes to flag new applications for missing documentation	2.5 hours
Disability Coordinator				
7 new applications to review per week	Avg 2 hours to review 1 application	14 hours	Avg 1.5 hours per 1 application	10.5 hours
15 new orientations per week	Avg 1 hour to host 1 orientation	15 hours	Avg 1 hour per 1 orientation	15 hours
3 follow-up appointments per week	Avg 30 minutes per 1 appointment	1.5 hours	Avg 30 minutes per 1 appointment	1.5 hours

Avg Total Hours in Application Review and Follow-Up	Current	Future	Savings Per Week
Administrative Coordinator	5 hours	2.5 hours	2.5 hours (50%)
Disability Coordinator (per person)	30.5 hours	27 hours	3.5 hours (11.5%)

The Administrative Coordinator will save 2.5 hours per week or approximately 120 hours per year (based on 48 weeks of work per year). Each of the four Disability Coordinators will save 3.5 hours per week or approximately 168 hours per person annually. As a result of this plan, the SDRC can repurpose 792 hours per year currently spent tracking down missing information, following up with students who missed appointments, and other non-value-added activity. This time can be repurposed to advising and guiding students, a truly value-added activity.

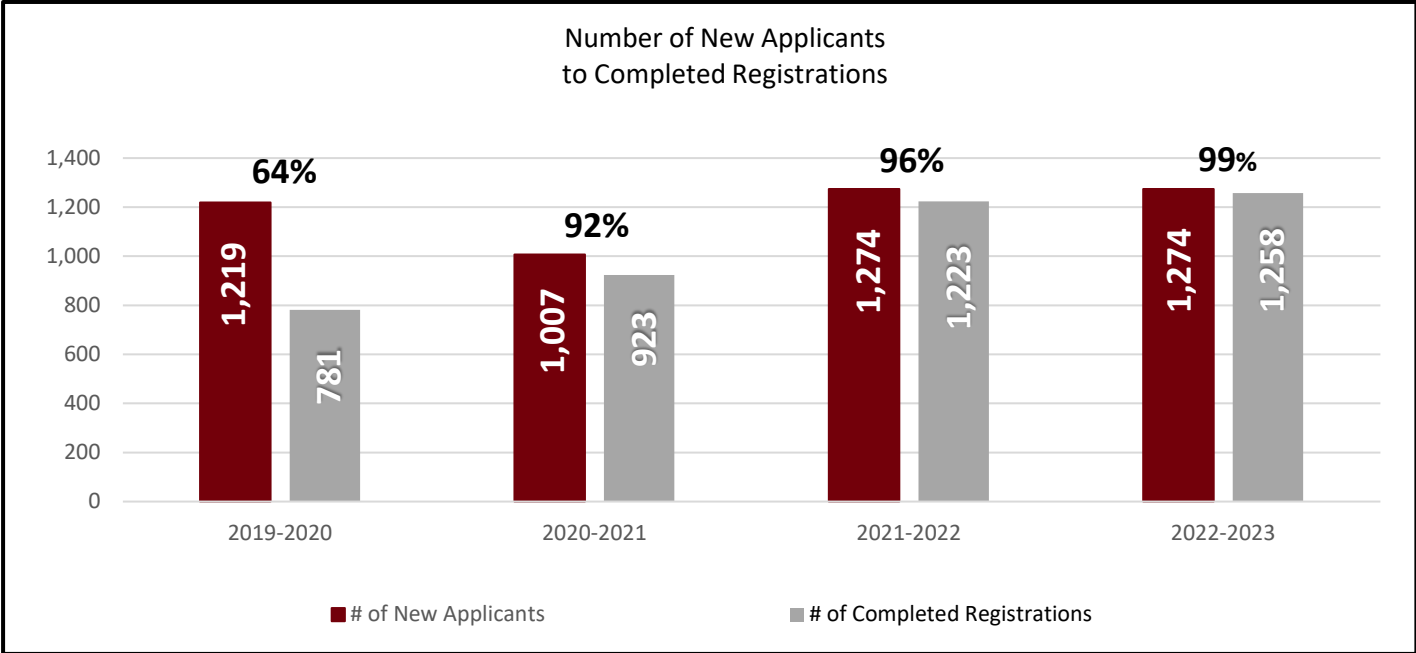
Appendix

Current State Process Map



Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) Current Facts & Figures

New application completion percentage as of 1/11/2024



**AIM was launched as the primary software management system for the SDRC in Spring 2020

SDRC Staff Total Workload – Staff to Student Distribution as of 1/11/2024

