

Handbook for Students with Special Needs at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar

Vukovar, February 2022

INTRODUCTION

Students with special needs require various forms of support—from information to daily assistance—which necessitates the involvement of different systems at the national level: education, social care, healthcare, and employment. The educational system uses the term "students with special needs" to refer to individuals with permanent impairments in intellectual, sensory, and motor functioning. Disability encompasses a wide range of impairments, including physical disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, mental disabilities, multiple disabilities, chronic illnesses, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dysgraphia, and other health conditions or challenges that may affect the course of study.

The causes of disability can be congenital, resulting from illness, or injuries. Despite appropriate legal prerequisites ensuring the adaptation of the educational system to the individual needs of persons with special needs, high school students with special needs are less likely to pursue higher education. Reasons for this may include architectural barriers, personal beliefs, societal attitudes towards the capabilities of individuals with special needs, and often inadequate support systems within higher education.

This handbook aims to inform students with special needs about the conditions and opportunities for studying at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar, to familiarize university staff with the challenges faced by these students, and to provide guidance on adapting their work, while also encouraging new perspectives on ensuring quality educational conditions.

WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES "LAVOSLAV RUŽIČKA" IN VUKOVAR

Although the number of students with special needs at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar is small relative to the total number of enrolled students, the University is making significant strides in providing support to students with special needs to help them integrate into the academic community.

There is a broad spectrum of rights for students with special needs related to higher education, which the University implements. These include:

- Students with a disability of 60% or more are granted the right to direct enrollment in undergraduate professional studies and specialist graduate professional studies, outside the regular enrollment quota, provided they meet the required enrollment threshold.
- The right to direct accommodation in student housing for students with a disability of 60% or more.
- The opportunity to apply for scholarships designated for students with special needs.

Experience has revealed various problems encountered by students with special needs at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar. Access to the building and movement within nearly all areas (except for the attic, which cannot be architecturally adapted) is ensured for people with special needs. All facilities at the University are accessible: from the library and student services to lecture halls and restrooms.

All staff at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar have an exceptionally high level of awareness and understanding.

Coordinator for Students with Special Needs

The University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" has a designated coordinator for students with special needs. The coordinator acts as a liaison between students with special needs and the faculty, as well as technical and administrative staff at the University. The appointment of a coordinator for students with special needs follows the model of best practices from established European universities.

The coordinator provides information, direct support, assistance, and accommodations to students with special needs in resolving issues. To ensure the necessary conditions for successful and quality study for students with special needs, the coordinator focuses on:

- Providing support in adapting classes and exams according to the type of disability.
- Assisting in addressing the specific needs of students with special needs.
- Informing and sensitizing the academic community about the particularities of studying for students with special needs.
- Informing current and prospective students with special needs about available support at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar.
- Monitoring and improving the quality of study for students with special needs.

The coordinator is intended to assist students with visual and hearing impairments, physical disabilities, multiple disabilities, chronic illnesses, as well as other health conditions or challenges that may affect their studies. The primary aim of the coordinator is to ensure the necessary conditions for successful and quality studying for students with special needs. Accordingly, the main activities conducted by the coordinator primarily target current and prospective students with special needs, lecturers, and the broader academic community. Students with special needs can confidently and openly contact the coordinator regarding their rights related to the adaptation of classes and exams, as well as other issues concerning the rights of students with special needs. Communication between students with special needs and the coordinator is established via email, phone, or in person.

GUIDELINES FOR ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The guidelines for ensuring quality educational conditions for students with special needs at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar include:

Development of an information system for students with special needs and University staff:

- Providing prompt and accurate responses from the coordinator for students with special needs to whom students can reach out.
- Ensuring the most effective methods of informing students with special needs about the benefits of University services.
- Timely informing University services about the needs of students with special needs.
- Defining policies regarding the confidentiality and disclosure of personal information related to student disabilities, and informing staff and students about these policies.

Physical environment, accessibility of facilities and equipment:

- The University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" has an accessible entrance for students who move with difficulty or require wheelchairs.
- Access to lecture halls and support services is ensured through specially constructed ramps and pathways.
- Flexibility is provided in organizing lectures.
- Rooms are optimally lit and shielded from glare.
- Hallway widths are appropriate to allow wheelchair passage.
- The restroom is located in a place accessible to students with special needs—the University has one restroom adapted to the needs of students with special needs.
- An elevator adapted for students with special needs connects all floors of the building.

Adaptation of the teaching process:

- Students with special needs have the right to a customized teaching program in agreement with the course holder.
- Lecturers are required to make instructional materials understandable and accessible, regardless of the diverse capabilities, physical, and social skills of students.
- Lecturers at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" will develop and apply appropriate teaching methods while ensuring that established academic standards are not compromised.

CONCLUSION

Overcoming the described challenges faced by students with special needs represents a key challenge and direction for the activities of the coordinator for students with special needs at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar in the future. Therefore, the coordinator's activities in the upcoming academic years will focus on continuously improving the quality of work and expanding existing activities, while collaborating with students with special needs and other stakeholders to identify and implement support measures that contribute to the development of students with special needs at the University of Applied Sciences "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar.

Through this handbook, we aim to encourage former, current, and future students with special needs to highlight their needs and possible challenges they face with perseverance, courage, patience, and strong motivation, as well as to indicate potential solutions to these problems and needs. Together with our academic community, they can build the much-needed support system for students with special needs in higher education institutions.

Dean

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