

GAP TOOLKIT

Inherent requirements



Inherent requirements when done correctly are a tool for inclusion – not exclusion of students with a disability. The purpose of stating inherent requirements is to assist students with their choice of subjects and to flag issues that they may choose to discuss with their institution prior to enrollment.

The following passage has been taken from a book chapter written by Sharon Kerr and Michaela Baker and provides a solid background to this subject.

Global Access Project would encourage all interested in this subject to access the entire document from:

[Kerr, S., & Baker, M. \(2013\). Six Practical Principles for Inclusive Curriculum Design. In B. Tynan, J. Willems, & R. James \(Eds.\) Outlooks and Opportunities in Blended and Distance Learning \(pp. 74-88\). Hershey, PA:](#)

What are inherent requirements?

The term “inherent requirements” is not defined in the Disability Discrimination Act, but derives from the United Nations Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (Acting Against Disability Discrimination manual, 1994) (cited in Watts, Stickels, Fraser, Carroll, Stewart, & Radloff, 2000, p. 12). In an employment context, the term refers to “the essential activities of the job: the core duties that must be carried out in order to fulfill the purpose of a position” (Western Sydney National Disability Coordination Program (2008, p. 1). Importantly, this means that supplementary or optional aspects of a position are not inherent requirements and that a person cannot be refused appointment on the basis of an inability to fulfill them.

In a higher education context, this translates to the following:

The inherent requirements of a course “are the areas of the course or curriculum in which all students are expected to develop skills or competencies and to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency”(Pliner, 2001, cited in Ouellett, 2004, p. 138). In other words, the inherent requirements of a course are those aspects of the curriculum that must be fulfilled in order for the course to be completed. The identification of the inherent requirements of a particular course may be up to an individual lecturer or department, but may also be defined externally by professional bodies via their requirements for certification or registration. Inherent requirements need to be fair and core to the program of study. It may not be fair or lawful, for example, to have as a requirement that all students enrolling in an education unit need to be able to stand and lift a weight of twenty kilograms. However for a chiropractic unit this may be both fair and essential.

When we state inherent requirements, it is important that we also provide the reason that they are inherent requirements, so that all students gain a broader understanding of what they are enrolling for. When inherent requirements are clearly thought out and communicated, all students can evaluate when choosing a course whether they will be able to participate fully, or if some elements may need to be negotiated with the course convenor prior to enrolment.

Making inherent requirements explicit is clearly beneficial to all students. However, for students studying online, especially those studying in distance mode, this is even more important for two main reasons. Firstly, students studying in distance mode have less immediate contact with support services, and are thus less likely to access them in the same way the on-campus students do. Secondly, for students studying in distance mode, knowledge of the inherent requirements of a course may make a huge difference in course selection, especially in the absence of easy access to academic advisers. Both of these are even more pertinent for students with disabilities studying in online or distance mode.

Upfront declaration of inherent requirements also provides the opportunity for students to disclose to the institution that they have a disability and work through solutions for potential barriers to inclusion and successful participation. An example of this may be a student who suffers from anxiety and is enrolled in a course in which there is an inherent requirement to demonstrate the acquisition of particular skills that are normally tested through a written examination. The option for this student to negotiate an alternative assessment prior to enrolment without the additional stress, humiliation and uncertainty of trying to seek assistance and advocacy from student support units at the height of semester may be a crucial solution in overcoming barriers. This also removes the problem of trying to make just in time accommodations at exam time, when support services and academic staff are already overstretched.

Excerpt from : [Kerr, S., & Baker, M. \(2013\). Six Practical Principles for Inclusive Curriculum Design. In B. Tynan, J. Willems, & R. James \(Eds.\) Outlooks and Opportunities in Blended and Distance Learning \(pp. 74-88\). Hershey, PA:](#)

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