MANCOSA Disability Policy

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1. Introduction

MANCOSA is committed to fostering an **inclusive, equitable and accessible** learning environment for all students and staff with disabilities. This policy aims to eliminate discrimination and ensure that students and staff with disabilities have equal opportunities and receive the necessary support to succeed within MANCOSA's online and distance education framework. MANCOSA addresses a **human rights** and **social justice** issue and upholds the principles of:

- **Human rights**
- **Social justice**
- **Universal access**
- **Reasonable accommodation**

This policy aligns with the following documents:

- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).
- Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998.
- Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 2000 No. 4 of 2000.
- Education White Paper 3: Transformation of Higher Education (1997); and
- other relevant national and international disability inclusion frameworks.

2. Policy Context and Principles

This policy is informed by the following principles and is aligned to the MANCOSA vision "Education for a better world for all"

- **Human Rights and Dignity:** Recognising that all persons with disabilities enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- **Inclusivity:** Creating a disability-inclusive institution where all individuals feel welcomed, respected and supported.
- **Equity and Fairness:** Ensuring equal and equitable access to opportunities and resources and fair treatment for persons with disabilities.
- **Universal Access:** Striving towards environments, services and resources that are accessible to individuals with disabilities. This includes physical, epistemological and social aspects.
- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Employing an educational framework that accommodates diverse learning needs.

- **Reasonable Accommodation:** Providing necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments, as well as assistive devices and technology to accommodate the unique individual needs of a person with a disability, without imposing an unjustifiable hardship on MANCOSA.
- **Progressive Realisation:** Acknowledging that achieving full universal access and inclusion is a continuous process that will be realized over time, taking into account available resources.
- **Self-Representation:** Recognizing the right of persons with disabilities to be consulted and involved in the development and implementation of policies and practices that affect them.
- **Confidentiality:** Ensuring that information regarding a person's disability is treated as private and confidential and shared only on a need-to-know basis to facilitate support and accommodation.

3. Definitions

- **Accessibility:** The design of environments, services, information and resources that can be independently used by individuals with disabilities.
- **Assistive Technology:** Devices and software used by individuals with disabilities to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible.
- **Disability:** Encompasses persons who have long-term physical, sensory, cognitive or mental impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006). This includes substantially limiting impairments that in the absence of reasonable accommodation would significantly limit a person's study or work process.
- **Discrimination based on disability:** Refers to 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. It includes the denial of reasonable accommodation.
- **Inclusivity:** Practices and policies ensuring that all students and staff, including those from marginalized groups, feel welcomed, respected and supported.
- **Reasonable Accommodation:** Refers to the necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, as well as assistive devices and technology, to

accommodate the unique individual needs of a person with a disability who has disclosed their disability. Such provisions should be made available when specific circumstances require them, rather than being applied universally. MANCOSA need not accommodate if it would impose an unjustifiable hardship on its operations.

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** An educational framework that accommodates diverse learning needs by providing flexibility in the ways learners engage with the material, represent the information and demonstrate their learning.
- **Universal Access (UA):** The ability of all people, including those with disabilities, to access and use environments, facilities, services and information independently and equitably.

4. Policy Objectives

This policy aims to:

- Establish equitable systems, processes and practices to support all students, staff and visitors who may experience functional limitations, thus enabling them to enter into and participate fully in all or most aspects of MANCOSA.
- Ensure that students with disabilities receive the support they need to succeed in their academic pursuits within an online distance education framework.
- Provide inclusive and universally accessible learning and working environments that foster the full participation of all students and staff.
- Promote development, retention and increased graduation numbers for both undergraduate and postgraduate students with disabilities.
- Guide the provision of reasonable accommodation to ensure equal access to academic programmes, assessments, work-integrated learning opportunities and employment.
- Increase awareness of disability-related issues and promote inclusive teaching and working practices among academics and staff.
- Establish a structured and transparent process for disability disclosure and the implementation of accommodations.
- Ensure confidentiality of disability-related information.
- Provide access to alternative formats for course materials if possible and ensure platform compatibility with assistive technologies.

- Facilitate access to specialized disability support services for academic and student well-being.
- Promote capacity building for staff and students on disability inclusion.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of this policy and MANCOSA's disability support services.

5. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- All MANCOSA regional learning centres, facilities and online platforms.
- All MANCOSA students (undergraduate and postgraduate).
- All MANCOSA staff members (including academic and administrative staff).
- All visitors to MANCOSA.
- All academic, co-curricular and community spaces, both physical and virtual.
- All information and communication, including learning and teaching materials, websites and other digital content; and
- Work-integrated learning opportunities and placements.

6. Reasonable Accommodation

- MANCOSA is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to students and staff with disabilities to ensure their full and equal participation in all aspects of university life, within available resources.
- Reasonable accommodation may include, but are not limited to:
    - Alternative formats for learning materials (e.g., audio, captioned videos, electronic text)
    - Ensuring platform compatibility with assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers, voice recognition software)
    - Flexibility in assessment methods and deadlines.
    - Provision of specialised technological software and optical devices where feasible.
    - Accessible computer LANs.
    - Adjustments to online learning environments and activities.
    - Reasonable adjustments to work arrangements and duties for staff.
- A **structured and transparent process** will be in place to facilitate the provision of reasonable accommodation:

- Students and staff are responsible for **disclosing their disability** and providing necessary documentation from a registered medical or mental health practitioner to the Administration and Admissions Office.
- The Admission's Office will assess the request and engage in a **collaborative consultation** with the individual, relevant faculty/department and other stakeholders to determine appropriate accommodations.
- MANCOSA reserves the right to request further information or verification of the disability and the need for accommodation.
- Approved accommodations will be documented and communicated to relevant parties.
- Reasonable accommodations will be reviewed periodically to ensure their continued effectiveness.

- MANCOSA is not required to provide accommodations that would impose an **unjustifiable hardship** on the operations of the institution, considering the effectiveness of the accommodation and the extent to which it would seriously disrupt operations.

7. Accessibility

MANCOSA is committed to **progressively realizing** accessibility across all spheres of campus life:

- **Information and Communication Accessibility:**
  - Ensuring that all information, including course materials, websites and digital platforms, is available in **accessible formats** that can be used by individuals with diverse abilities. This includes adhering to universal design principles for digital content.
  - Striving to maximize opportunities for staff and students with disabilities to participate in all institution-wide consultations, debates, grievance mechanisms and decision-making processes through appropriate dissemination of information.
  - Promoting the use of appropriate and respectful language regarding disability within the MANCOSA community.
- **Digital Accessibility:**
  - Progressively providing up-to-date adaptive and assistive technology for students and staff with disabilities where possible.

- Adhering to relevant accessibility standards in the design and development of online platforms and digital resources.
- Providing guidance and support to academic practitioners on creating accessible teaching and learning environments and materials.

- **Physical Accessibility:** (While MANCOSA primarily operates in a distance learning environment, physical accessibility is relevant for any on-site events, examinations or MANCOSA premises)
  - Considering principles of **universal design** in the planning and development of any physical infrastructure to promote independence and barrier-free access for persons with disabilities.
  - Taking reasonable steps to address physical and infrastructural barriers for persons with disabilities.

8. Support Services and Reasonable Accommodations Process

- MANCOSA will, through its Admissions and Selections Directorate and Academic Support Services (or assign responsibility to an existing structure) to coordinate disability support services and the implementation of this policy. Contact information for this office will be readily available.
- The Admissions and Selections Directorate will:
  - Provide a central point of contact for students and staff with disabilities.
  - Manage the disability disclosure and reasonable accommodation process.
  - Offer consultations and guidance to students and staff with disabilities regarding available support and accommodation.
  - Liaise with academics, departments and other relevant institution entities to facilitate the implementation of approved accommodations.
  - Provide training and resources to faculty and staff on disability awareness and inclusive practices.
  - Facilitate access to specialized academic and student support services, such as disability counseling, assistive technology training and guidance on accessible learning strategies.
  - Explore internal and external sources of funding for specialist equipment and workplace modifications where necessary.

- Collaborate with external mental health practitioners to support students with mental health concerns and assess applications for mental health concessions.
- Maintain records of disability disclosures and accommodations in a confidential manner.

- **Students** are responsible for:
  - **Self-identifying** as having a disability and providing relevant documentation to the Admissions Office.
  - Actively participating in the accommodation planning process.
  - Communicating any challenges or needs related to their accommodation to the Disability Rights Office.
- **Academics staff** are responsible for:
  - Creating an **inclusive learning environment** that is responsive to the needs of all students.
  - Implementing **approved reasonable accommodations** in a timely and effective manner.
  - Liaising with the Admissions Office for guidance and support.
  - Making course materials as accessible as possible, utilizing universal design principles.
- **Administrative and Support Staff** are responsible for:
  - Being aware of this policy and their role in promoting disability inclusion.
  - Providing accessible services and information to students, staff and visitors with disabilities.
  - Cooperating with the Admissions Office to facilitate reasonable accommodations and address accessibility barriers.
  - Line managers will have conversations with new staff members who have disabilities to determine necessary accommodations.

9. Disclosure and Confidentiality

- **Disclosure of disability is voluntary**. However, students and staff are encouraged to disclose their disability to the Admissions Office to access support services and reasonable accommodations.
- MANCOSA is committed to creating an institutional culture in which disclosure of disability is viewed positively and provides an opportunity to access relevant services.

- All disclosed information will be treated as **private and confidential** in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).
- Information about an individual's disability will only be shared with persons tasked with facilitating or providing specific reasonable accommodations and only to the extent that this information is necessary to facilitate the accommodation.
- Disclosed information may be used for monitoring progress in equity, complying with reporting requirements, strategic planning and maximizing levels of service provision, while maintaining individual confidentiality.

10. Complaints Procedure

- Students or staff who believe they have experienced **discrimination on the grounds of disability** or have concerns regarding the provision of reasonable accommodation or accessibility should lodge a complaint with the Registrar's Office (or designated office).
- MANCOSA will institute a fair and transparent procedure for addressing complaints related to disability discrimination. This may involve informal and formal procedures aimed at resolving the issue.
- Informal procedures may include mediation and restorative justice programmes, subject to the consent of all parties.
- Formal procedures will be guided by MANCOSA's relevant policies and may involve investigation by the designated office.
- Complainants have the right to be supported during the complaints process.
- MANCOSA is committed to addressing all complaints promptly and effectively and taking appropriate action to prevent future occurrences of discrimination.

11. Monitoring, Evaluation and Policy Review

- MANCOSA will regularly **monitor and evaluate** the implementation and effectiveness of this Disability Policy and its related practices.
- This will include gathering data on disability support services, enrolments, success outcomes of students with disabilities and feedback from students and staff.
- **Regular audits** will be conducted to assess compliance with disability inclusion frameworks and the provisions of this policy.

- The Registrar's Office (or designated structure) will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and reporting on its progress.
- This policy will be reviewed **annually** or as required to align with evolving best practices, regulatory requirements and the experiences of students and staff. Feedback from stakeholders, including students and staff with disabilities, will inform the review process.

12. Roles and Responsibilities

- **MANCOSA Management** is responsible for overseeing the execution of this policy, allocating necessary resources and ensuring accountability for its implementation.
- The **Registrar's Office (or designated structure)** is responsible for the overall coordination, implementation, monitoring and review of this policy, as outlined in the "Support Services and Reasonable Accommodations Process" and "Monitoring, Evaluation and Policy Review" sections.
- **Students with Disabilities** are responsible for self-identifying, providing necessary documentation and engaging with the admission, selection and Enrolment Department to request reasonable accommodation.
- **Faculty Members** are responsible for creating inclusive learning environments and implementing approved reasonable accommodations.
- **Administrative and Support Staff** are responsible for ensuring the provision of accessible services and are expected to collaborate with the Admissions and Selections Department and the Disability Committee to determine and implement appropriate accommodation.
- **All members of the MANCOSA community** are responsible for fostering a culture of respect, understanding and inclusivity towards persons with disabilities.

13. Contact Information for Support Services

Students with disabilities are encouraged to disclose their disability on the application form. Once submitted, the Admissions and Selections Department will reach out to assess the nature and severity of the disability. Alternatively, students

may contact the institution directly by phone at 0861 800 000 or via email at studentservices@mancosa.co.za