

Limited English Proficiency Q&A

Who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) students?

The U.S. Department of Justice defines LEP persons as: "Persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English." According to the Census 2000 Brief by the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 47 million people in the US spoke a language other than English at home.

What obligations do faculty, staff, administrators, and the University as a whole have for LEP persons?

As a recipient of federal financial assistance, The University of Memphis is required to provide meaningful access to all programs and benefits to LEP persons. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on national origin. Various regulations, policy guidance, and Executive Order 13166 clarify the responsibilities of recipients of federal financial assistance to take adequate measures to ensure that people who are not proficient in English can effectively participate in and benefit from the recipient's programs and activities.

How do we determine if we are providing meaningful access?

Whether particular barriers need to be removed for an LEP student is determined on a case-by-case basis. Removal of barriers should not unreasonably diminish academic standards.

What is the best practice for faculty?

Instructors should be accepting of requests from students to remove language barriers. Instructors might want to include a statement in their syllabi to notify students that options are available to ensure meaningful access for LEP students. Once a student makes a request, the instructor should be open to working with the student to find a reasonable way to remove a language barrier that does not unreasonably interfere with academic standards.

What is an example of course syllabus statement?

"Students from cultures which utilize different means of examination or learning methods other than those used in this course should contact me within the first few days of class to discuss more culturally appropriate testing approaches. Students for whom English is not their native language may discuss with me potential ways in which language barriers can be removed without unreasonably interfering with the academic standards."

What may LEP persons do if they believe they have been denied meaningful access to University programs and benefits?

LEP persons should be referred to the Office for Institutional Equity for filing a complaint:

156 Administration Building
The University of Memphis
Memphis, TN 38152-3370
Tel: (901) 678-2713
Fax: (901) 678-4800
oiem@memphis.edu
