



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Society continues to meet students' special needs

by Judy Bluder

For several years, the Society of Actuaries has been making special arrangements for exam students with disabilities. It created written guidelines a few years ago and recently reviewed them in light of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title III provisions, enacted January 26, 1992.

"We don't believe in putting people at a disadvantage," said Neville Henderson, general chairperson of the SOA Education & Examination Committee. "We try to make the exam process as fair as possible."

The regulations issued recently by the U.S. Department of Justice interpret the "public accommodations" provisions in Title III of the Act. The rules set specific requirements for private entities that conduct examinations and courses related to applications, licensing and certification, or credentialing for educational, professional, or trade purposes.

The Act provides wide protection for disabled individuals against discrimination by public or private organizations in areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local government services, and telecommunications, regardless of whether the organizations receive any federal funds.

The Society's guidelines offer special arrangements for exam candidates in the following categories:

- blind or visually impaired
- deaf or hearing impaired
- physically impaired — paraplegic, quadriplegic, cerebral palsy, multiple-sclerosis, or writing disability
- physically injured — broken limbs, sprains, or arthritis
- learning disability

Exam applications now instruct disabled students to contact the Society if they need special examination arrangements. Anyone interested in obtaining information about the Society's guidelines can call Martha Quattrocchi, supervisor of Examination Services, at 708-706-3589.

July 18, 1992

John E. O'Connor, Jr.
Executive Director
Society of Actuaries
475 N. Martingale Road
Schaumburg, IL 60173-2226

Dear Mr. O'Connor:

I am a pension actuary with a visual impairment. Through word of mouth, I became aware of the disabled candidate program sponsored by the Society of Actuaries and special provisions were made to attempt to put me on equal footing with the general body of students.

If it were not for this program, I could have never completed the examinations for enrollment as a pension actuary, a milestone in my career. I would like to specifically thank Martha Quattrocchi, Debbie Jay, Pierce Lee-Williams, Jerry Lynch and Jim Murlough for accommodating my special needs and continuously coordinating and reassessing my arrangements.

A job well done!!!

Sincerely,



Michael S. Eisenberg

One student took the time to write a letter of appreciation for the special provisions in the Society's program.

The University of Illinois Committee on Accountancy follows similar guidelines, which were developed last year for CPA exams. About 10 out of 10,000 individuals taking the exams each year need special accommodations, said Linda Sergent, secretary to the committee. The committee provides disabled candidates accommodations like extra time on exams, private rooms, enlarged type, and reader/writers. The committee requires candidates to provide a doctor's letter explaining the disability and two letters from professors or teachers with the history of accommodations granted in the classroom.

The Illinois Admissions to the Bar currently is developing a policy for disabled individuals taking the Bar examinations, according to Donald Funk, secretary of the Illinois Admissions to the Bar. "We're going to determine what their needs are from past experiences and cases," he said. This organization has been providing services for disabled candidates for many years but, unlike the Society, hadn't developed a formal policy. It provides accommodations like sign language interpreters for the hearing impaired, scribes for individuals who can't write, and extra time on exams for dyslexics.

Special testing arrangements for SOA disabled candidates are reviewed

individually to determine what accommodations are appropriate. For example, blind candidates require braille exam books, talking calculators, and braillewriters. "Most of these students need more time on exams, auxiliary aids, separate rooms, or assistance by a proctor," said Quattrocchi.

Candidates must provide documentation of the disability and the need for special arrangements. Usually, this documentation comes from the candidate's physician. The Society also considers if a candidate has had previous accommodations in an educational program or work setting and any diagnostic test results.

After a disabled candidate uses the Society's program, someone from SOA Examination Services follows up with a letter and a telephone call. "We continually review arrangements to make sure they're consistent and fair," Quattrocchi said.

One of the 16 candidates who requested special arrangements for the May 1992 exams didn't find out about his learning disability until after he became an ASA in 1985 and began taking the Fellowship exams. After he struggled through his first FSA exam, he thought something might be wrong. He was tested and discovered he had a learning disability that required him to spend more time on essay exams. When he found out he could request extra time to take an exam, he decided to try it again. "I still got discouraged even with the extra time, so I took a break from exams," he said. After a two-year break, he took another FSA exam this May.

Getting the word out about this program is essential, according to one candidate who has been using the Society's services for disabled candidates for many years. The candidate, blind since birth, said, "The Society makes an effort and is open to suggestions. That's what counts." He hopes to become a Fellow soon and urges anyone with a disability to take advantage of the Society's program. "If you have a disability, but have good mathematical skills," he said, "think seriously about taking the exams."