

WHAT IS THE RFLA?

The Ready for Life Academy (RFLA) is an inclusive college certificate program for students with intellectual or developmental disability. The RFLA began operating on Calvin University's campus in 2007. Historically, the RFLA has been a guest partnership between the Ready for Life organization and Calvin University. In October 2020, Calvin University received a Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) grant from the United States Department of Education, which allowed for the RFLA to become an academic program. This transition brought about many exciting changes. RFLA students now live in the residence halls, take college courses for audit credit, hold jobs on campus, and graduate from Calvin with a certificate in Life and Career Studies or Comprehensive Postsecondary Education.

MEET THE PROGRAM STAFF

As a professor with an RFLA student enrolled in your class, it will be helpful for you to become acquainted with the RFLA program staff. Most communication will come directly from the instructional staff. Please feel free to reach out to them at any time regarding all student and coursework-specific suggestions, questions, or concerns. Program coordination staff are also available to answer questions, discuss concerns regarding the RFLA program, and provide one-on-one training and support.

Instructional Staff:

Amber Schafer is the lead instructor for the RFLA. She helped to re-launch the program in January 2017 after graduating from Calvin in 2016. She is responsible for managing communication with parents, peer partners, professors, and offices and organizations across campus. Amber primarily teaches courses in finance, employability skills, and transition from college to post-school life, and she supports students with managing their schedules and course load. Amber can best be reached by email at amg35@calvin.edu.

Kae Groenleer is another instructor for the RFLA. She joined the Calvin RFLA team in 2020. Kae has a bachelor's degree in Special Education and a master's degree in Educational Leadership. Kae has worked as a classroom teacher and held various roles in the community health field for the past 15 years. Kae teaches courses in relationships, independent living, and transition to college, along with supporting the development of student academic course plans. Kae can best be reached by email at kg53@calvin.edu.

Jamie Smits joined the RFLA team in Fall 2018 as an assistant instructor and Community Living Support coordinator. Prior to joining the Ready for Life team, she worked as a

paraprofessional for 16 years at a public school in the greater Grand Rapids area in a transition program as well as at a local group home caring for adults with disabilities. She is happy to be a part of this program and am excited to watch the students grow.

Program Coordination Staff:

Dr. Kate Strater is an assistant professor in the School of Education and program director for the RFLA. She coordinates all TPSID grant activities, partnership activities between Ready for Life and Calvin, and program evaluation. She also regularly enjoys having students from the RFLA enroll in her courses. Kate can be reached at ks84@calvin.edu.

Michelle Terrill is the RFLA Community Partnership Coordinator at Calvin University. She joined the RFLA team in January 2021. She is responsible for maintaining relationships between the larger Calvin University community, external partners and stakeholders, and RFLA. Michelle is the main point of contact for program-related questions or concerns and will also email inviting student feedback, regarding classroom engagement, during midterm and finals week. Michelle is best reached by email at mt47@calvin.edu.

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

RFLA student coursework may need to be modified to ensure meaningful participation (see *RFLA Student Expectations*). Meaningful participation is determined individually with support from RFLA instructional staff and articulated in the Academic Course Plan (see *Academic Course Plans*).

The RFLA does not expect professors to change their course format or materials to support an individual student; however, if you are interested, the RFLA offers annual Universal Design for Learning (UDL) professional learning opportunities. You can receive reimbursement for redesigning a portion of your course utilizing the principles of UDL. Please reach out to Michelle at mt47@calvin.edu to learn more about current opportunities.

ACADEMIC COURSE PLANS

RFLA students earn audit credit for their courses, which count toward completion of a non-degree certificate from Calvin University. To assist you with determining how to award credit for meaningful participation, students have an Academic Course Plan that clearly outlines what successful engagement in a course looks like. Academic Course Plans are tailored to each student and course and address the following areas:

Attendance
Participation
Assignments (Quantity)
Assignments (Quality)

Individual student expectations will be clearly defined for each area of the Academic Course Plan. Student plans will be submitted directly to the professor at the beginning of the semester attached to the student's disability memo.

Academic Course Plans are the primary tool for determining whether RFLA students have earned credit for your course. Meeting the expectations in three of four areas within the Academic Course Plan results in a "CR" grade for the course.

RFLA STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Most RFLA students will complete modified coursework. Modifications to assignments will be suggested by the RFLA instructors using the syllabus from your course. However, the instructors welcome any input from you regarding course assignments and possible modifications. Please contact the instructor identified on the Academic Course Plan with any suggestions.

The primary expectation for meaningful participation is for students to demonstrate growing understanding of the concepts taught in the course. To demonstrate their growth, many RFLA students will submit a cumulative Google Slides project that will recap primary themes learned in the course and reflect on their own learning. The cumulative Google Slides project is designed to ensure meaningful participation and may replace a written final for the course. Still, some RFLA students may take a standard final examination. The RFLA hopes to build upon final examination options and encourages students and professors to explore other modified final options. Please reach out to the RFLA instructor identified on the Academic Course Plan if interested in offering a modified final in a different format.

GRADING

RFLA students should receive a grade of either "CR" or "NC" at the midterm, if applicable, and for the final grade of the term. Grades will be submitted electronically through Calvin's student grading system. In addition, because RFLA students benefit from feedback regarding their strengths and areas for improvement, an additional request will be made at the midterm and during finals week for a supplemental grading form to be completed. It will be sent to you from Michelle Terrill via Google Forms and requests brief narrative feedback in all four areas of the Academic Course Plan. Students receive an exact copy of your comments. We hope that this is a place to provide encouragement and share any concerns regarding the student's performance in the course.

Completing the Google Form is not required, but it is strongly recommended. RFLA students value your feedback. Furthermore, your feedback becomes even more critical when a student is not successfully engaging in the course at midterm. Comments on course participation and engagement allow RFLA staff to identify appropriate supports needed for improvement toward earning a "CR" grade at the end of the semester.

PEER PARTNERS

The RFLA utilizes a research-based peer support model for student participation in inclusive courses. Each semester, Calvin students engage in over 1,000 hours of partnership with the RFLA. We actively recruit a peer partner, who is a degree-seeking student enrolled in your course, for each RFLA enrollee. The peer partner serves as the RFLA student's primary point of contact for the course. The RFLA instructional staff will send an email prior to the start of the semester with additional information and requesting assistance in identifying a peer partner for your course.

There are many advantages to both the RFLA student and the degree-seeking student in this peer arrangement. The selection of a peer partner gives the RFLA student a primary "go-to" person for the course, allows them to build connections with peers outside of the RFLA, and offers needed assistance in a less stigmatizing manner. In addition, acting as a peer partner allows the degree-seeking student to develop problem-solving skills and grow academically and socially.

RFLA staff welcome suggestions for modifications to our peer partnership model to best fit your course. Please contact the instructional staff identified in the Academic Course Plan with these suggestions.

For more information on peer supports, please visit:
<https://www.erikwcarter.com/peermediated-supports>

MOODLE REQUEST

It is helpful to the RFLA instructional staff, Amber Schafer (amg35@calvin.edu), Kae Groenleer (kg53@calvin.edu), and Jamie Smits (js229@calvin.edu), to be added to your Moodle course as students. Adding the instructional staff to Moodle allows them to better assist the RFLA students in understanding and completing their coursework.

SUPPORT FOR FACULTY AND STAFF

RFLA staff are available to provide support and assistance as needed. Feel free to contact one of us with suggestions, questions, or concerns. Moreover, the RFLA at Calvin University provides additional learning opportunities to faculty and staff throughout the academic year. These opportunities are advertised in Calvin News. The RFLA offers annual opportunity for additional training in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which meets the requirement for Cultural Competency Professional Development (CCPD). Contact Michelle Terrill if interested in learning more about current opportunities.

FAQs

Question: Who is a typical RFLA student?

Answer: RFLA students are Calvin students between the ages of 18-26 who have an intellectual or developmental disability. Students entering the Ready for Life Academy have academic, employment, and independent living goals like their degree-seeking peers.

Question: What does meaningful participation mean?

Answer: The RFLA expects students to be actively engaged in their college courses. Although participation may look different for each student, all students are expected to attend their college courses regularly, be on time and prepared for class, and contribute to the classroom setting.

Question: How do I know the specific expectations of the RFLA student in my classroom?

Answer: Each student will have an Academic Course Plan individually tailored to their strengths. Academic Course Plans outline classroom expectations in the following areas: Attendance, Participation, Assignments (Quantity), and Assignments (Quality). Students will share their Academic Course Plan along with their disability memo at the beginning of the semester. The Academic Course Plan is the primary tool for determining if the student has earned a "CR" grade for the course.

Question: What assignments will an RFLA student complete?

Answer: Assignment expectations are determined for each student individually. Some students complete modified course work, with modifications made by the RFLA instructional staff, while others complete traditional coursework as assigned. Assignment expectations are outlined in the Academic Course Plan.

Most RFLA students will complete a cumulative Google Slide project instead of a standard final examination. The cumulative Google Slide project will recap primary themes learned from the course and include personal reflection on learning.

Question: How should RFLA students be graded?

Answer: RFLA students earn audit credit in their courses and should be awarded a “CR” or “NC” grade at the midterm, if applicable, and the end of the semester. The grade assigned will depend on whether the student has met three of the four criteria on their Academic Course Plan. In addition, a Google Form requesting feedback is sent to all professors working with an RFLA student during midterm and finals week. The Google Form is not required but is strongly recommended, as it allows for additional feedback on the RFLA student’s performance in the course.

Grading on assignments throughout the semester is conducted at the discretion of the professor. Previously, professors have graded assignments using a traditional grading scale, a CR/NC scale, or by providing feedback only.

Question: What classroom modifications and supports will be helpful to an RFLA student?

Answer: It is never expected that a professor modifies their course for an RFLA student. However, one support that the RFLA practices and recommends is selecting a peer partner, who is a degree-seeking student, to work alongside the RFLA student. Identification of a peer partner allows the RFLA student to have a primary point of contact for the course and increases their social network. The RFLA instructional staff will send an email prior to the start of the semester with additional information and request assistance in identifying a peer partner.

Question: What are other ways to support the RFLA program and students?

Answer: An additional way to support the success of the RFLA student in the classroom is by extending access to Moodle course materials to the instructional staff: Amber Schafer, Kae Groenleer, and Jamie Smits.

Another way to support the program is by sharing your experience working with the RFLA with other professionals within Calvin University and the greater community! Sharing your story helps to spread awareness of the program on campus, in addition to spotlighting the need for and success of inclusive programs in higher education.

Question: What additional supports are available?



Answer: RFLA staff are always willing to provide one-on-one support when needed. In addition, RFLA provides an annual training opportunity in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) that is open to all faculty and staff. Other learning opportunities are available throughout the year and advertised in Calvin News. To learn more, contact Michelle Terrill at mt47@calvin.edu.