

Disability Documentation For Students Transitioning from High School to College

Questions and Answers:

This handout is intended to answer questions that frequently come up about disability documentation requirements in college. Students who think they may need to use accommodations and services related to their disability will need to go through an eligibility process with the college's Disability Services office. That eligibility process involves providing appropriate documentation of their disability in order to access accommodations that are specific to the disability and courses they will be taking. Documentation is essential for all students with any kind of disability. The documentation needed in college for some disabilities (such as learning disabilities and mental and/or emotional disabilities) may be very different from what was needed in high school.

What documentation is needed to qualify for disability services in postsecondary education?

- The disability documentation needed by college Disability Services staff usually involves an assessment or report completed by the professional (medical doctor, mental health specialist, psychologist, etc.) who diagnosed the condition or is treating the student for the disability. The type of report or assessment required may vary depending on the disability and on the college's requirements. Many colleges have their own form to be completed by the diagnostician. Be sure to contact the college's Disability Services office to find out what they need to determine eligibility for a specific condition.
- For detailed information about the documentation requirements for Learning Disabilities, you can review the documentation standards on the college's Disability Services website or the AHEAD National Guidelines at <http://www.ahead.org/>. This information outlines details related to appropriate assessment tools, LD testing criteria, points to be discussed in the narrative report, and the credentials expected of those who administer/complete the assessments. **What types of professionals can provide documentation?** Documentation should be provided by a person who has either diagnosed or is treating the student for that condition. This person should be qualified to work in the medical or psychiatric field related to that disability. Here a few examples:
 - A psychiatrist will be the source of information for Mild Mental Retardation, and Borderline Cognitive Ability.
 - A neuropsychologist will be the source of information for a brain injury.
 - A medical doctor/specialist (specializing in an appropriate field) will be the source of information for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Epilepsy, Cerebral Palsy, hearing or vision loss, spinal cord injuries, fibromyalgia, and other medical/health conditions.
 - A psychologist or medical doctor/specialist will be the source of information for Attention Deficit Disorder, Aspergers or Autism (and the documentation can be supplemented with a checklist provided by an Autism Specialist). Earning for a Lifetime 1235 University of Oregon

- A psychiatrist, mental health specialist or psychologist will be the source to provide documentation for qualifying psychiatric disorders (found in the DSM- IV) such as Schizophrenia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Mood Disorders, Anxiety, Depression, Dissociative Disorders, etc.

- A high school psychologist would test and document a learning disability. **Can an IEP or 504 documentation be used to demonstrate eligibility a student for college disability services?** A high school student's IEP or 504 Plan will not serve as disability documentation in college. However, it can provide the Disability Services staff with helpful background information about the disability and the accommodations the student received in high school. Students may be encouraged to provide this information along with the required documentation. **What type of assessments might be necessary for documenting a disability?** It is recommended that students talk to the Disability Services staff at the specific college to determine if the assessments they will be providing are sufficient and current. Most **medical** diagnosis (such as hearing, spinal cord injuries, or vision assessments) are accepted assuming it comes from the medical provider who accurately diagnoses the condition and describes the current symptoms. If the student's symptoms and needs have changed, then updated documentation will be needed. It is preferable for **educational** assessment for learning disabilities to be completed during the last year or two in high school (using the "Adult" version of the assessment tool if the student is over 16 years). When an individual has been tested at 18 years of age using adult measures and then requests services and accommodations five years later, the testing could be sufficient. However, if the individual is 18 years old and has not been tested in 4 or 5 years (especially if the test used grade equivalency measures), then new testing will probably be recommended to determine eligibility for college accommodations. **Why wouldn't the college Disability Services office accept the documentation for Learning Disability provided by the high school?** In many instances, students who are still in high school are tested based on **grade** equivalent scores and since there are no grade levels in college (e.g. eleventh grade, twelfth grade), the testing required for a potential college student is usually based on **age** equivalent scores. As a result, it very important that students meet with Disability Services staff as soon as possible to determine if they qualify for services or need additional testing. **What if recent testing for a learning disability results in a diagnosis of Mild Mental Retardation or Low Cognitive Ability? Would the student still be eligible for Disability Services?** Yes, appropriate accommodations would be provided if the student is determined to be "otherwise qualified" for the program or course. To be "otherwise qualified" the student would have to meet any specific entry requirements the college has identified

such as prerequisite course requirements and placement test scores. What type of accommodations available to the student maybe different as they are based on the implications of the disability. Accommodations will not modify the requirements of a course.

When should students meet with the Disability Services staff at the college?

It is recommended that students meet with Disability Service staff at the college of interest as early as one year before they plan to attend. This allows time to gather necessary documentation, complete additional assessments if needed, and to plan for an effective transition from high school to college.

High school staff could help students develop a portfolio of their documentation (medical, educational, diagnostics) as well as evidence of their work with and without certain accommodations. This provides students with an organized way to share the information with others and helps students to clearly understand and articulate their disability and its impact on their learning.

Each term, once the class schedule has been determined and course selections have been made, the student should return to Disability Service Staff to discuss accommodations that might be necessary in the

next term classes. At some colleges a letter describing the accommodation must be picked up by the student and delivered to the instructors prior to the beginning of classes.

What if students need accommodation to take the placement tests?

Depending on the student's documented disability, some accommodations (such as separate testing space) could be provided for taking these tests even before being accepted for disability services from the college. It is best for students to meet with the Disability Services staff prior to scheduling the placement test to share their disability documentation.

How can students be better prepared to use accommodations in college settings?

It is very important for high school students to practice using specific college accommodations during their junior and senior years or sooner. Those might include using a note-taker during lectures, extended test time (1.5 times is a typical accommodation), text on audiotape, tape recording lectures, and certain software programs that can be used for access or as a study strategy. Practicing accommodations while still in high school will allow students to gain skills and confidence while working in a supportive and familiar environment.

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