

## Section

# 4

## Verification of Disabilities

Students with disabilities who are seeking services from Wallace Community College must submit documentation to the Disability Support Services office in order to verify their eligibility for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and/or the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The documentation must specify a major life activity (such as walking, eating, writing, or learning) that has been substantially limited by a disability.

The following guidelines for documentation correspond with federal guidelines and Wallace Community College policies and have been extracted from the Association on Higher Education and Disability's (AHEAD) website.

These guidelines are designed to ensure that documentation of disabilities verifies eligibility and to support requests for accommodations.

## Comprehensive Documentation

In sum, comprehensive documentation must verify the nature and extent of the disability and clearly address the need for the student's specific accommodation requests. Students requesting accommodations for the manifestations of multiple disabilities should provide evidence of all such conditions. All reports should be on the medical professional's letterhead, typed, dated, signed, and legible.

Specific accommodations are required when *necessary* to enable the student to access his or her education. (*Cf. PGA Tour v. Martin*, 532 U.S. 661 (2001)). It is not uncommon for evaluators to recommend a range of accommodations and services for a particular student. The postsecondary provider will need to sort through these recommendations with the student to determine what accommodations are indeed necessary and permitted at the postsecondary level, to avoid issuing accommodations that could substantially alter a program's standards.

Per the Office of Civil Rights, school plans such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a Summary of Performance (SOP), or a Section 504 Plan are generally not sufficient documentation to establish the rationale for accommodations. Such plans may be included as part of a more comprehensive assessment battery and should be on clearly distinguishable district forms.

A postsecondary institution has the discretion to require additional documentation if it is

determined that the submitted documentation is incomplete or inadequate to ascertain the existence of a disability or the need for accommodations. Any cost incurred in obtaining documentation is borne by the student.

## **Disability Documentation Guidelines**

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) state that qualified students with disabilities who meet the technical and academic standards at Alabama Community College System institutions are entitled to reasonable accommodations.

Under these laws a disability is defined as any physical or mental impairment which substantially limits a major life activity, a history of such impairment, or the perception of such impairment. Alabama Community College System institutions do NOT provide disability documentation for students. It is the student's responsibility to provide appropriate documentation to the college office responsible for handling the request and to request accommodations.

Appropriate documentation is defined as that which meets the following criteria:

### **Health Condition, Mobility, Hearing, Speech, or Visual Impairment**

A letter or report from treating physician, orthopedic specialist, audiologist, speech pathologist, or ophthalmologist (as appropriate), including (but may not be limited to):

- Clearly stated diagnosis
- Defined levels of functioning and any limitations
- Current treatment and medication
- Current letter/report dated and signed

### **Psychological Disorder**

A letter or report from a mental health professional (psychologist, neuropsychologist, psychiatrist, licensed professional counselor) including (but may not be limited to):

- Clearly stated diagnosis (DSM-V criteria)
- Defined levels of functioning and any limitations
- Supporting documentation (i.e. test data, history, observation, etc.)
- Current treatment and medication
- Current letter/report dated and signed

### **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

A comprehensive evaluation report by a rehabilitation counselor, speech-language pathologist, orthopedic specialist, and/or neuropsychologist (or other specialist as appropriate), including (but may not be limited to):

- Assessment of cognitive abilities, including processing speed and memory
- Analysis of educational achievement skills and limitations (reading comprehension, written language, spelling, and mathematical abilities)
- Defined levels of functioning and limitations in all affected areas (communication, vision, hearing, mobility, psychological, seizures, etc.)
- Current treatment and medication
- Current letter/report (post-rehabilitation and preferably within 1 year), dated and signed

## **Learning Disability (LD)**

A comprehensive psychological evaluation report from a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, neuropsychologist, school psychologist, learning disability specialist, or diagnostician that should include (but may not be limited to):

- Clear statement of presenting problem; diagnostic interview
- Educational history documenting the impact of the learning disability
- Alternative explanations and diagnoses are ruled out
- Relevant test data with standard scores are provided to support conclusion, preferably including at least:
  - WAIS- IV (b) WIAT-III or the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery- III, including Written Language; and (c) Woodcock-Johnson Cognitive Processing Battery normed on adults to substantiate any processing problems
- Clearly stated diagnosis of a learning disability based upon DSM-V criteria
- Defined levels of functioning and any limitations, supported by evaluation data
- Current report (preferably within 5 years of enrollment date), dated and signed

Note: High School IEP, 504 Plan, and/or a letter from a physician or other professional are usually not sufficient to document a learning disability.

## **Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

A comprehensive psychological evaluation report from a physician, psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, neurologist, or neuropsychologist that should include (but may not be limited to):

- Clear statement of presenting problem; diagnostic interview
- Evidence of early and current impairment in at least two different environments (comprehensive history)
- Alternative explanations and diagnoses are ruled out
- Relevant test data with standard scores are provided to support conclusions, preferably including at least:
  - WAIS- IV; (b) WIAT —III or the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-III, including Written Language; and (c) Behavioral Assessment Instruments for ADD/ADHD normed on adults
- Clearly stated diagnosis of ADD or ADHD based upon DSM-V criteria
- Defined levels of functioning and any limitations, supported by evaluation data
- Current report (preferably within 3 years of enrollment date), dated and signed

Note: High School IEP, 504 Plan, and/or letter from a physician or other professional are usually not sufficient to document ADD or ADHD. Medication cannot be used to imply a diagnosis.

## **Rationale for Recommended Accommodations**

Accommodation needs can change over time and are not always identified through the initial diagnostic process. The evaluator(s) should describe the impact, if any, of the diagnosed impairment on a specific major life activity. The diagnostic report should include specific recommendations for accommodations that are reasonable, with the understanding that the postsecondary institution is vested with the sole authority for determining what is reasonable. When possible, a detailed explanation should be provided as to why each accommodation is recommended and should be correlated with specific functional limitations determined through interview, observation, and/or testing. Although prior documentation may have been useful in determining appropriate services in the past, to further facilitate the process of requesting accommodations at the postsecondary level, current documentation (recommended to be within past 5 years) should validate the need for services based on the individual's present level of functioning in the educational setting.

The documentation should include any record of prior accommodations or auxiliary aids, including information about specific conditions under which the accommodations were used (e.g., standardized testing, final exams, licensing or certification examinations) and whether these previous accommodations improved access to the targeted activity.

The determination for reasonable accommodation(s) rests with the Disability Support Services Coordinator working in collaboration with the student with the disability. If accommodations are not clearly identified in the provided documentation, DSS Coordinators may seek clarification and, if necessary, additional information.

It is the responsibility of a student who wishes to receive academic accommodations at the College to provide comprehensive and current documentation that meets the guidelines noted above.