

Widener University

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Guidelines for Documentation of a Physical Disability

Confidentiality Statement

Widener University will not release any information to outside third parties regarding an individual's diagnosis or documentation without his or her informed consent or under compulsion of legal process. Information will be released only on a "need to know" basis to University employees, agents and representatives, except where otherwise required by law.

Introduction

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities are protected from discrimination and may be entitled to reasonable accommodations and equal access to programs and services. Generally, to establish that an individual is covered under the ADA, documentation must indicate that a specific disability exists and that the identified disability substantially limits one or more major life activities. A diagnosis of a disorder/condition/syndrome in and of itself does not automatically qualify an individual for accommodations under the ADA. The documentation must also support the request for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids.

This document provides guidelines necessary to establish the impact of physical disabilities on an individual's educational performance and to validate the need for accommodations. In instances where there may be multiple diagnoses, including psychiatric disabilities, learning disabilities and/or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), evaluators should consult the relevant Widener University guidelines. These Guidelines may be revised, amended or revoked at any time in the sole discretion of the University.

Information and documentation submitted by students to verify accommodation eligibility must be comprehensive in order to avoid unnecessary delays in decision making related to the provision of accommodations.

This document contains information regarding five important areas:

1. Evaluator qualifications
2. Recency of documentation
3. Comprehensiveness of the documentation to support the diagnosis of a physical disability

4. Evidence to establish the functional limitation of the physical condition supporting the need for accommodation(s) and
5. Multiple diagnoses

Terms

Physical disabilities: Comprise a range of physical and medical conditions causing physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Note that not all physical and medical conditions are disabilities, or even impairments for purposes of the ADA. Therefore, a diagnosis of a physical condition does not, in and of itself, meet the definition of a disability necessitating reasonable accommodations under the ADA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Major life activity: Examples of major life activities include walking, sitting, standing, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, caring for oneself, and other similar activities.

Functional limitation: A substantial impairment in the individual's ability to function in the condition, manner, or duration of a required major life activity.

Documentation Requirements

I. A Qualified Professional Must Conduct the Evaluation

Professionals conducting assessments, rendering diagnoses of physical disabilities, and making recommendations for accommodations must be qualified to do so. It is essential that professional qualifications include both (1) comprehensive training and relevant expertise in differential diagnosis of physical disorders and (2) appropriate licensure/certification.

Qualified evaluators are defined as those licensed individuals who are qualified to evaluate and diagnose physical and medical conditions. Examples of qualified individuals include relevantly trained physicians, nurse practitioners, otorhinolaryngologists, otologists, ophthalmologists, neurologists and other medical specialists. Documentation may be provided from more than one source when a clinical team approach consisting of a variety of medical professionals has been used.

Diagnoses of physical disabilities documented by family members will not be accepted due to professional and ethical considerations even when the family members are otherwise qualified by virtue of training and licensure/certification. It is not appropriate for professionals to evaluate others with whom they have personal or business relationships; various codes of professional ethics should be considered in determining whether a professional is in an appropriate position to provide the necessary documentation.

Finally, the name, title, and credentials of the qualified professional writing the report should be included. Information about license or certification, as well as the area of specialization, employment, and state or province in which the individual practices, should also be clearly stated

in the documentation. All reports should be in English, typed or printed on professional letterhead, dated, and signed.

II. Documentation Must Be Current

Due to the changing nature of many physical disabilities, it is essential that a student provide recent and appropriate documentation from a qualified evaluator. Since reasonable accommodations are based upon the current impact of the disability, the documentation must address the individual's current level of functioning and the need for accommodations (e.g., due to observed changes in performance or medication changes since previous assessment). The age of acceptable documentation is dependent upon the condition and the student's request for accommodations. Diagnostic reports that are no more than five years old are generally acceptable, unless the medical condition is of a progressive, remitting or variable nature. In such cases, if the diagnostic report is more than six months old the student must also submit a letter from a qualified professional that provides an update of the diagnosis, a description of the test taker's current level of functioning during the preceding six months, and a rationale for the requested accommodations.

III. Documentation Necessary to Support the Diagnosis Must Be Comprehensive

In most cases, documentation should be based on a comprehensive diagnostic/clinical evaluation that adheres to the guidelines outlined in this document. The diagnostic report should include the following components:

1. A specific diagnosis
2. A description of current functional limitations in the academic environment
3. Relevant information regarding medications expected to be in use and the anticipated impact on the student in this setting
4. Relevant information regarding current treatment
5. A specific request for accommodations with accompanying rationale

Documentation Must Include a Specific Diagnosis

The report must include a specific medical diagnosis, including a thorough history and the specific objective measures used to help substantiate the diagnosis. The information provided to substantiate the diagnosis should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- history of presenting symptoms
- relevant developmental and historical data
- a summary of diagnostic procedures and evaluation techniques, including relevant test results, clinical information and laboratory findings
- duration and severity of the disorder
- relevant medical and medication history, including the individual's current medication regimen compliance, side effects (if relevant), and response to medication

- a description of recommended remedial aids, devices and techniques, and their expected compensatory effect on the individual's performance in an academic setting
- a description of current functional limitations in the academic setting
- if relevant to academic performance, a description of the expected progression or stability of the impact of the condition over time
- if relevant to academic performance, information regarding kind, duration and frequency of treatment

Rationale for Requested Accommodations Must Be Provided

The evaluator must describe the degree of impact of the diagnosed physical disorder on a specific major life activity, as well as the degree of impact on the individual. A link must be established between the requested accommodations and the functional limitations of the individual that are pertinent to the anticipated academic task or test for which the accommodation is requested. Accommodations will be provided only when a clear and convincing rationale is made for the necessity of the accommodation. A diagnosis in and of itself does not automatically warrant approval of requested accommodations. Given that many individuals may perceive that they might benefit from extended time in testing situations, evaluators must provide specific rationales and justifications for the accommodation. A prior history of accommodations, without demonstration of current need, does not in and of itself warrant the provision of accommodations. If there is no prior history of accommodations, the evaluator and/or the student must include a detailed explanation of why accommodations were not needed in the past, and why they are now currently being requested. Psychoeducational, neuropsychological or behavioral assessments are often necessary to support the need for testing accommodations, to document the extent and severity of impact of the disorder.

IV. Multiple Diagnoses

Multiple diagnoses may require a variety of accommodations beyond those typically associated with only a single diagnosis, and therefore the documentation must adhere to applicable Widener University guidelines. For example, when accommodations are requested based on multiple diagnoses (e.g., a physical disability with an accompanying learning disability), documentation should also comply with the Widener University guidelines pertaining to the documentation of these specific disabilities. In such instances, an evaluator may want to consult with Widener University's guidelines for documentation. Guidelines for documentation of psychiatric disabilities as well as guidelines pertaining to LD and ADHD can be found at <http://www.widener.edu/disabilitiesserv/accommodations.asp>. They may also be obtained by contacting:

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