

DOCUMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES **

Policy

Federal law (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) established the rights of individuals with disabilities. Syracuse University is committed to compliance with all applicable federal laws and regulations regarding the reasonable accommodations needed to provide equal opportunity to qualified individuals with disabilities. Final determination as to the appropriateness of an accommodation to the University setting is evaluated on a case by case basis. In accordance with federal and state regulations disability related information will be treated in a confidential manner.

Procedure:

A student is responsible for providing documentation that supports his/her request for accommodation. It is important that the documentation clearly establish that the student has a disability as defined by federal regulations and that the documentation clearly supports the individual's request for accommodation. The following documentation guidelines are provided in the interest of ensuring that documentation of a Learning Disability demonstrates a significant impact on a major life activity and supports the individual's request for accommodation.

Documentation Guidelines

1. A qualified professional must conduct the evaluation

It is important that the evaluator have comprehensive training and direct experience with adolescents and adults with learning disabilities. The name, title and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification, employment, and state/province should be clearly stated in the documentation. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated, signed and otherwise legible.

2. Documentation should be current

The provision of accommodations is based upon assessment of the current impact of the student's disabilities on his or her academic performance. Documentation that is outdated or inadequate in scope or content; does not address the student's current level of functioning; or does not address changes in the student's performance since the previous assessment was conducted may not support requested accommodations. When appropriate additional supportive documentation will be requested.

3. Diagnosis of a Learning Disability

An IEP or 504 Plan in and of itself *may be insufficient* documentation but can be included as part of a comprehensive evaluation. A comprehensive assessment battery and report typically includes:

a. Diagnostic Interview

Presenting problems, medical, developmental, psychosocial, etc. and a discussion of dual diagnosis where indicated.

b. Assessment of Aptitude

A complete intellectual assessment with all sub-tests and standard scores reported.

c. **Academic Achievement**

A comprehensive academic achievement battery should include current levels of functioning in relevant areas such as reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics, and oral and written language.

d. **Information Processing**

Specific areas of information processing (e.g., short and long term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/processing, processing speed, executive function, and motor ability) should be evaluated and diagnosed as appropriate.

e. **Specific diagnosis**

It is important to rule out alternative explanations for problems in learning such as emotional, attentional or motivational problems that may be interfering with learning but do not constitute a learning disability. The diagnostician is encouraged to use direct language in the diagnosis and documentation of a learning disability, avoiding the use of terms such as “suggests” or “is indicative of” a learning disability.

f. **Test Scores**

The test findings should document the nature and severity of the learning disability and data should logically reflect a substantial limitation to learning. Standard scores and/or percentiles should be included and are expected to correlate with identified functional limitations and recommendations for accommodation.

4. Interpretative summary based on a comprehensive evaluative process should include:

- a. demonstration of evaluator’s having ruled out alternative explanations for academic problems (e.g., poor education, poor motivation, emotional problems, attentional problems and cultural/language differences);
- b. indication of how patterns in the student’s cognitive ability, achievement, and and/or information processing reflect the presence of a learning disability;
- c. indication of the substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity presented by the learning disability and the degree to which it impacts the individual in the learning context;
- d. indication as to why specific accommodations are needed and how the effects of the specific disability may be accommodated;
- e. any record of prior accommodation or auxiliary aids and specific conditions under which accommodations were used;
- f. medical information, as appropriate, should include the impact of medication on the student’s ability to meet the demands in a post-secondary environment.

5. Recommendations for Accommodations

- a. Include specific recommendations and rationale for accommodations.
- b. Include a description of the impact of diagnosed LD on specific major life activity.
- c. Recommendations should be supported by specific test results and/or clinical observations.

****** *These guidelines were adapted from the Association on Higher Education And Disability, Guidelines for Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults, July 1997, Columbus, OH. These guidelines are not meant to be used exclusively or as a replacement for direct communication with the Office of Disability Services regarding the individual nature of a disability. While submitted documentation meeting the above guidelines may be acceptable to Syracuse University it is important to be mindful that they may/may not meet the documentation guidelines required in other academic or testing organizations (e.g., special certifications, Board examinations, standardized tests for admission to graduate schools, law schools, etc.).*