

GUIDELINES FOR DOCUMENTATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISABILITIES

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Individuals with psychological disabilities are guaranteed certain protections and rights to reasonable academic adjustments based upon documentation. The documentation must indicate the disability substantially limits some major life activity. The following guidelines were developed by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), and are provided in the interest of assuring that documentation is appropriate to verify eligibility and to support requests for accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids.

Evaluator's Qualifications

Professionals conducting assessments, rendering the diagnosis of psychiatric/psychological, behavioral, and emotional disorders and syndromes, and making recommendations for appropriate academic adjustments, must be qualified to do so. These are licensed professionals with comprehensive training and expertise in the field of mental health, skilled in differential diagnosis of psychological disorders. The name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator, including license or certification number, must be clearly stated on submitted documentation. All documentation must be presented on the professional's letterhead, typed, dated, signed, and legible. It is not considered appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their families. Documentation from a family member will not be accepted.

Documentation

Psychological disorders and syndromes refer to many different conditions. In addition, psychological disorders are changeable in nature and often difficult to categorize. Documentation of psychological disorders must therefore be thorough, giving a full picture of the individual, not simply a diagnosis.

Diagnosis: A **clear** diagnosis of psychological disorder based on *DSM-IV* or *DSM-IV-TR* criteria must be rendered. The diagnosis must **clearly state** the disorder and the subtype if applicable, along with the appropriate *DSM-IV* or *DSM-IV-TR* diagnostic code. Psychological disabilities include but are not limited to:

- Schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders
- Anxiety Disorders: ex. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Dissociate Disorders
- Chronic Eating Disorders
- Major Affective Disorders: ex. Depression or Bipolar Disorder
- Personality Disorders
- Substance Abuse or Alcoholism

A diagnosis alone is not a basis for providing an academic adjustment. Documentation should also have the history of symptoms, the duration and severity of the disorder, substantial medical and medication history, substantial developmental and familial information and how the

individual's condition has an impact on the student's ability to meet the demands of the postsecondary environment.

Psychological Instruments

Though not explicitly required, psychological instruments may be useful in helping the evaluator render a more accurate diagnosis and, therefore, better recommendations for academic adjustment. If such tests are used, they should be submitted with the evaluation. All tests should be current (documentation that is older than one-year old will not be accepted) with an explanation of validity, reliability, and the purpose for which they are being employed. Scores must be reported in raw, standardized, and/or percentile ranks, if applicable. No single test or subtest should form the basis of a diagnosis.

Supporting Documentation

The qualified evaluator's report, while necessary, is by no means the only documentation we can use to better understand and accommodate the student with a psychological disability. Other helpful documents include: records of previous academic adjustment, high school 504 plans or IEP's, previous psychological and psycho-educational evaluations, report cards, transcripts, and parent, teacher, tutor, or employer reports, where appropriate.