

PARENTS' GUIDE TO DISABILITY SERVICES

Parent's Guide

Introduction:

We watch our kids go through enormous changes and look forward to new changes. Those first steps, their first words, reading, learning to drive, and dating, everything seems to change almost overnight.

Soon a major life change is about to take place. Your young adult is starting college.

Everything may seem completely unfamiliar, both terrifying and wonderful all at once.

Once your child turns 18 years old, he is legally an adult, responsible for his own actions and decisions--and free to make them.

As he leaves secondary school to enter a career in higher education, fundamental changes occur with respect to his education as a person with a disability. Any child who attends public schools has, for the most part, a legal entitlement to an education, regardless of a disability. But they are children, and as such warrant care and guidance and sometimes are separated from their peers for special attention if needed.

In higher education, your student has a civil right to have access to his education. The fundamental principle at work is the assumption of integration and that the individual student is responsible for herself and is not the responsibility of the institution.

It's a distinction that can make all the difference.

We hope this handbook will help you to better understand some of these distinctions and provide tips on how best to support your new college student on this exciting new road.

Interpreting Federal Law

How has my role as a parent changed?

At the post-secondary level, your student continues to transition into adulthood. You give your support in a slightly different fashion. Your role shifts to the subtle hand of guidance when it comes to the process involved in your student's education.

Encourage her to take responsibility for academic concerns and limitations. Both of you should acknowledge the disability and the challenges that stem from it. This will allow her to identify areas in which she should consider accommodations to level the playing field. It will also make it easier to convey her requests for accommodations to instructors, other students, and anyone from whom they may seek assistance.

Encourage your student to register with Disability Services Office (DSO) where she will be coached on how to obtain reasonable accommodations.

College can be the first testing ground where your new student will and must be her own advocate. Expect her to develop her independence further through making the suitable arrangements to ensure success in her classes.

What is the difference between *entitled to education* and *right to equal access to education*?

Unlike elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary education offers access rather than entitlement to academic programs. Most parents of a child with a disability at some time learn something about the laws that govern their child's education in the public schools. In 1975, Congress passed the

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Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This act, commonly known as Public Law 94-142, provided that any child with a disability was "entitled to a free and appropriate education" in public school systems.

That law, along with its numerous re-authorizations, reflects the nation's commitment to educating all its children, whether they have disabilities or not.

Fundamentally, 94-142 and its successors (including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and IDEA Improvement Act of 1997) said that public schools, with your input and appropriate assessments, would determine what was most appropriate for your child's education. Then they were required to provide that education.

As a parent, you may wish it had been that easy all along, and perhaps it was. Now, however, your child has reached his majority under the law, and the rules of the game have changed. The principles of 94-142 and IDEA, including the required IEP (Individualized Education Program), no longer apply. Note: 504 Plans, under which many students are now served in high schools, are no longer valid either.

In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. Modeled on section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, ADA is a civil rights law. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability as long as the person is **otherwise qualified**. In the case of publicly funded colleges and universities, ADA affirms the right of a student with a disability to a level playing field.

That means that a college or a university must ensure access to all students who are

otherwise qualified. Access means much more than ramps and elevators and wide parking spaces. It also means access to information and to technology. Therefore, colleges and universities must make reasonable accommodations for your student's disability, in order that he may be able to demonstrate his ability.

However, civil rights laws and the reasonable accommodations they call for are in no way intended nor are they able to guarantee success. At most, a student can expect an equal chance to do the same work as his peers.

In higher education the individual with a disability bears the burden of proof. Unlike public schools, there are no requirements for providing evaluation of individuals with disabilities. The person with a disability must provide the evidence himself. In public schools, whether under IDEA or Section 504, the school is responsible for adequate and regular assessments. This is no longer the case once a student leaves high school and attends a college or university.

A 504 Plan from a high school -- or for that matter, an IEP -- is in no way binding upon any institution or entity outside of the school in which it was developed. There are no requirements for any plan under Section 504 or the ADA with respect to higher education, employment, or other areas of public life. Thus there are no more meetings each year with counselors, teachers, etc. There is nothing to sign.

"Free and Appropriate Education" (FAPE), first put forth in law under special education legislation in 1975, no longer applies. Though

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it is still referenced as a requirement for high school under regulations governing Section 504, there are no such references with respect to higher education in any federal regulations for either Section 504 or the ADA. Rather, higher education carries with it necessary costs, and students with disabilities must pay the same as their non-disabled peers. In higher education then, FAPE is not regarded as a part of 504's nondiscrimination prohibitions. In all areas outside of public schools, nondiscrimination is accomplished by means of barrier removal, including "reasonable accommodations."

(Note: Accommodations may not carry with them an additional charge of any kind, however.)

The term "otherwise qualified individual with a disability" carries a different connotation and subsequently greater weight and responsibility on the part of the individual than may have been the case in high school and certainly elementary school. It means that students must meet academic standards. In public schools, this refers only to the age of the individual as being appropriate for elementary or high school. In higher education, it ultimately refers to a student's academic proficiency and ability to demonstrate learning.

Integration is the order of the day. Terms such as "placement" and "least restrictive environment" are no longer valid. Placement in an environment which is restrictive or protective in any way would be a violation of an individual's civil rights and counter to the spirit of Section 504 and the ADA.

Some services provided to high school students under Section 504 may not be

provided in higher education because they in fact reduce the academic standards.

Shortening assignments, for example, is viewed as compromising academic standards and therefore is not "reasonable" to request in college.

In higher education, therefore, students with disabilities must possess higher-level skills in all aspects of learning -- skills and strategies commensurate with the academic expectations in higher education and, later, professional careers. These necessitate more sophisticated strategies in many cases. Reasonable accommodations can create a level playing field, but once achieved, the student must then demonstrate her skills and knowledge adequately.

What is meant by *reasonable accommodation*?

Reasonable accommodations are made in order to level the playing field for qualified individuals with disabilities. As much as possible, accommodations are designed to minimize the functional limitations of an individual in a given task.

These adjustments permit students with disabilities the opportunity to learn by removing barriers that do not compromise academic standards. Thus, wherever possible, the disability is minimized as a measure of performance in the academic environment.

This is typically accomplished with services or strategies focused on the end result rather than the means by which that result is customarily achieved.

The ADA assumes that people with disabilities have contributions to make and that they have every right to attend colleges

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and universities -- regardless of whether they have a disability. Thus, access means empowering students with disabilities to take better control of their academic environment, permitting them to demonstrate their skill and knowledge. It also expects, however, that they can meet the academic standards with appropriate accommodations

What is meant by *otherwise qualified*?

When your student applies to a college or university he is required to demonstrate to admissions staff that he indeed met the admission standards for this institution. He provided his high school transcripts, college entrance scores (ACT or SAT) and any other important information about himself having a bearing on his potential to succeed and contribute to the college's diverse campus community. Community colleges generally have "open door" policies and do not require ACT or SAT testing for admission. Placement tests are required at community colleges for appropriate course registration.

If he has already been accepted to a college or university, then he has demonstrated that he is, in fact, a qualified individual, despite having a disability.

This is different, of course, from the way things were when your student entered public school. Whether or not you knew of his disability at that time, or whether he acquired a disability later didn't matter. There was only one qualification for entry into public school: as a child of the appropriate age, he was entitled to learn to the best of his ability.

None of us would argue that every person should be encouraged to attend college. We believe that any individual who meets

admission standards should have an *opportunity* to earn a degree. For the most part, disability is not part of the process of determining qualifications. Following admission, we would expect that each individual would continue to demonstrate that he is otherwise qualified by meeting or exceeding the academic standards set by the institution, and he must do so whether or not he requests accommodations.

What is meant by the phrase *with or without reasonable accommodations*?

Understanding this phrase is critical to understanding the distinction between a civil right and an entitlement. Put bluntly, it's legal for a student with a disability to flunk out of college. There is no guarantee of success. Civil rights laws do not mandate a safety net. Students with disabilities must perform at the level that their academic and professional programs expect of all students. The college or university will strive to level the playing field, but ultimately the student's work must be her own and be of a satisfactory quality.

In addition to guaranteeing civil rights to reasonable accommodations, the ADA also guarantees any individual with a disability the absolute right to refuse any accommodation. That means that DSO doesn't make sure that a student requests accommodations.

While coordinators rely heavily on documentation of the disability when determining accommodations, they also draw the student into a discussion of functional limitations and possible strategies. If a student doesn't request an accommodation, however, the consequences of that action belong to the student.

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Who will manage my son or daughter's educational services?

The student is ultimately responsible for managing her own education, understanding her functional limitations, and requesting necessary accommodations for a disability.

As adults, all students go through a process of learning about themselves. They develop the skills to self-advocate for things they may need.

It is in the development of these skills that DSO can best guide the student with a disability in her educational growth. These skills are critical, because it is the student, not DSO, who will approach instructors, other staff, and even other students to request the accommodations that are reasonable for her to receive. Clearly, these are the skills all students need to have when they leave college and move successfully into their chosen careers.

How do students advocate for themselves in order to ensure they receive appropriate accommodations?

Again, in order to ensure a level playing field, students must advocate effectively for the accommodations they require at college. This necessitates that the student understands her disability and the ways in which it limits her functioning at the college. The limitations of the disability, not the disability itself, are the reason accommodations are recommended and provided.

In order for our office to provide the most appropriate, most reasonable accommodation, we would prefer to receive documentation that follows the guidelines listed below. Once

the documentation is provided, an intake will follow to discuss the impact of the disability within the academic environment. Please contact our office if you have any additional questions or comments.

I understand the philosophy, but what is the process, or how does DSO work?

The following process generally applies to most students who register with DSO. Specifics vary depending on the student's disability, functional limitations, and accommodations that will be requested and provided.

Registering with the
Disability Services Office:
On Campus Students

Note: Distance Learners should visit <http://www.uc.edu/aess/disability/distance.html> for information about accommodations.

Step 1 Gather documentation

○ Please check documentation to ensure that it provides your intake coordinator with substantial evidence. The major points are listed in the “General Guidelines for Documentation” below.

General Guidelines for Documentation

Documentation from a qualified professional should be recent (3 years old or newer is preferred). The best quality documentation is from a licensed or credentialed professional with expertise in the diagnosed area of the disability (e.g., a

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psychologist should not diagnose an orthopedic disability). The professional making the diagnosis must not be related to the student. Documentation should include the following:

- A clear diagnostic statement that describes when and how the condition was diagnosed and provides information on the impact of the disability.
- A description of the diagnostic methods (if applicable)
- A description of how the conditions will impact the student within the academic or collegiate environment
- Recommendations for reasonable accommodations

Step 2 Schedule an Intake Meeting

- Please call the Disability Services Office at 513-556-6823 to set up an intake meeting at your earliest convenience. We have limited availability before the first academic term, so please plan in advance.

Step 3 Meet with an Intake Coordinator

- The student must be present and can invite parents, guardians, or other individuals to the meeting. If the student does not want parents or guardians in the meeting, it is his or her choice.
- At the intake meeting, a staff member records general information, looks over the student's documentation, and suggests accommodations.
- At the meeting, we strongly encourage the student to speak up and voice any concerns.
- Through talking with the student, we have a better understanding of his academic

needs.

Input Information

- After the intake meeting, a staff member will input the student's information into the DSO system. This may take a few days, so please plan in advance.

Step 4 Pick Up Accommodation Form

- The accommodation form is a letter from Disability Services Office that verifies that the student is enrolled with the office and informs professors of the student's specific accommodations. Following these 3 simple steps each term ensures accommodations and services:
 - 1. Pick up your new accommodation form in the DSO on the first day of each term.
 - 2. Have each of your new professors sign the form. Office hours are the appropriate time to discuss your accommodations with your professor and have them sign your accommodation form.
 - 3. Return the form to DSO after all professors have signed. Copies can be made for the student or at the professor's request.

Step 6 Use Accommodations

- This may include: registering for tests online, filing request forms for note-takers, books on tape, or other accommodations granted to the student. Students should also meet with staff members for more specific accommodations (i.e. interpreters, readers, scribe, etc.).
- Remember that it is at the student's discretion which accommodations she would like to use.

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Why doesn't DSO provide assessments?

Neither the Americans with Disabilities Act nor Section 504 make it incumbent upon institutions of higher learning to evaluate and assess students with disabilities or suspected disabilities. This is in contrast with the student's entitlement to assessment and services in public schools.

In the logic of civil rights (as opposed to educational entitlement), the individual must assert and claim her right to equal access. As such, she cannot then put the burden of proof on the institution, employer, or business. One must identify oneself as a qualified person with a disability and be prepared to provide the documents that verify that claim.

Disability Services Office can direct you to appropriate qualified professionals when information is too old to accurately reflect the student's functioning, if the student has not been previously diagnosed with a disability or if the professional who did the assessment would not be otherwise qualified in that area.

For example, a speech pathologist would not likely be qualified to assess for learning disabilities. Nor would a teacher for blind and low vision students be qualified to assess communication disorders in most cases. (Note: DSO will not accept documentation if the professional making the assessment is related to the student.)

My son or daughter had some subjects waived in high school. Why aren't they automatically waived in college?

There are no "automatic" waivers in higher education. In fact, there are no waivers at all. Rather, under certain circumstances, students may be granted substitutions for some

courses. But substitutions will be considered only when the student demonstrates both that she is both otherwise qualified and that the substitution removes a disability-related barrier to her academic program.

Remember that ADA provides for reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Under ADA, however, it is not reasonable to lower the academic standard. Therefore, requests for substitutions must be accompanied by convincing documentation supporting the claim. Your student would need to meet with an accommodation coordinator to discuss her specific situation. Meeting with an accommodation coordinator regarding this *does not* mean the request will be granted.

If we sent his 504 plan or IEP to Admissions, is he automatically registered with DSO?

No. Please **do not** send documentation to the admissions department. All documentation should be sent to the Disability Services Office, 210 University Pavilion, where it will be placed in our prospective file. Upon being admitted to the University of Cincinnati, your student should call the DSO to set up an intake meeting. Please see the "Registering with the Disability Services Office" section above for more detailed instructions about registering with DSO.

Documentation can be scanned and emailed (dso@uc.edu), faxed (513-556-1383), mailed or dropped off in person. Information provided to our office will be saved in our prospective file and shredded according to university policy.

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What do you mean you cannot disclose any information to me about my son's or daughter's services?

Once your student enrolls in a post-secondary institution, whether he is 18 years old or not, he becomes the sole guardian of all records maintained by that institution. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1976 (FERPA), the student has the right to access his own records upon written request.

The parent or guardian does not share that right. This means that parents do not have legal access to their student's grades, transcripts, or any information concerning the services he is being provided through Disability Services. This information is confidential.

However, the student may sign a written release of information which gives the institution the right to disclose his records to his parents. The only time a student's record may be disclosed without written consent would be to comply with a subpoena or in an emergency situation where the health and safety of the student or another individual is threatened.

What services does DSO provide?

DSO coordinates and provides accommodations for academic programs and events. Services may be individualized to address a specific functional limitation.

DSO services are optional and students may select one or more services to best accommodate their functional limitations.

Experimentation with accommodations is encouraged. Some accommodations may have qualifying factors so that not all students may be eligible.

Some examples of DSO services include scribes, note-takers, assistive technology, interpreter services, relocation of classes to accessible facilities, and various other accommodations.

What does my student do when a faculty member or instructor doesn't make time for her?

First and foremost, the student should be persistent.

Face-to-face exchanges between students and instructors are the most fruitful. It is critical that communication between the student and instructor results in the provision of appropriate accommodations. For example, students are encouraged to hand the instructor the accommodation form that DSO provides. This is best accomplished either before classes begin, or at the latest during the first week of classes. This introduces the student and her requests for accommodations early. Students will likely need to talk with instructors more than once a semester, so the first face-to-face meeting is very important.

Communication is the key to successful implementation of services. Students have a number of options open to them in the event that communication with instructors does not result in receiving accommodations. Students should stay in touch with their Accommodation Coordinator to discuss all their options. The Accommodation Coordinator is a person inside the DSO office that student may meet with to discuss concerns.

My student needs tutoring in a specific subject. Where can free tutoring be obtained on campus?

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The Disability Services Office suggests the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) for tutoring needs. Tutoring is not an accommodation but can be easily accessed at the LAC.

Free Tutoring Provided by the Learning Assistance Center

The Learning Assistance Center supports UC students in becoming independent and successful learners. The LAC empowers students to take responsibility for their learning by offering a variety of free services. These services, which include tutoring, academic coaching, supplemental instruction, BEARchats conversation partners, and the Peer drop-in writing center, are geared towards helping students achieve academic success. Located in 2441 French Hall West, the LAC is a one-stop destination for all UC undergraduate students looking to maximize their academic experience.

All LAC services are free and open to all UC undergraduate students (both part-time and full-time). We encourage students to be proactive and seek academic support before problems arise. Students can contact the LAC directly at 513-556-3244 or online at <http://www.uc.edu/aess/lac.html>.

Students can register for services online (<http://www.uc.edu/aess/lac.html>), over the phone (513-556-3244), or in person at the LAC (2441 French Hall West). Appointments for Tutoring and Coaching can be made no less than 24 hours and no more than 7 days in advance. If a student needs to cancel an

upcoming appointment, cancellations can be made anytime up until 24 hours before the scheduled appointment. Cancellations made within 24 hours of the scheduled appointments will count as a “no-show.” Students are allowed 2 no-shows per quarter without penalty. After the 3rd no-show, the student will be blocked from signing up for more appointments. Appointments book up quickly, so we urge students to be proactive in scheduling.

Services Offered by the LAC

In-Person Tutoring – In-person Tutoring is appointment-based, one-on-one tutoring that takes place in our student-friendly Learning Assistance Center. Depending on the depth of material intended for review, tutees can schedule appointments from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Tutoring is offered in a wide variety of subjects (a complete list can be found on the LAC website).

Online Tutoring – Online Tutoring provides the conveniences of working from any comfortable location with a web connection during extended evening and weekend hours. AESS tutors assist students through our new innovative and user-friendly tutoring platform, eTutoring. Current online subject availability includes math (through calculus), as well as 100-level courses in biology, chemistry, and physics. Students can also upload writing assignments for revision assistance. Online features include: chat and whiteboard communication, optional audio and visual components, and real-time

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document sharing/transferring. Tutees can choose different interaction options based on their needs.

Academic Coaching – Academic coaching consists of appointment-based, one-on-one sessions with a trained academic coach. Students will work with their coach to customize individual plans to achieve academic success. Topics can include time management, test anxiety, study skills, organization, stress management, and much more.

Peer Drop-In Writing Center - Peer Experts on Essays and Reports are available to meet one-on-one with students to work on essays, proposals, lab reports, or more general writing concerns. Writing assistance is available on a drop-in basis for undergraduate students who are looking for assistance but do not want to hassle with having to make an appointment. The Drop-in Writing Center is located at 2506 French Hall West and is open Monday – Friday from 10am – 2pm.

BEARchats Conversation Partners - UC's BEARchats Conversation Partner Program allows International and American students to create cross-cultural friendships and gain a new understanding of UC's diverse student body. International and domestic students will be matched based on preferred language and will meet weekly for hour-long conversation sessions.

Supplemental Instruction - Supplemental Instruction (SI) consists of a series of weekly

review sessions for students in historically difficult courses. The SI Leader, who has previously taken the course and excelled, facilitates the sessions, which assist in both collaborative and independent learning. A typical session might include some direct instruction, modeling of a learning strategy, and/or review of the concepts followed by an opportunity for students to practice and apply new knowledge. Students can transfer many of the techniques they have learned in an SI session to other courses. These cost-free sessions are voluntary and open to any student taking the course who wants to improve their grades and understanding of course materials.

Additional Questions

My son or daughter has broken his or her arm and is unable to write. What can DSO do for my student?

The Disability Services Office is able to provide some temporary academic accommodations for students with temporary injury or illness. The student still needs to provide documentation that shows the diagnosis, academic impact, and recommendations for accommodations. The student should contact DSO to set up a meeting to discuss his situation. Also, accommodations are not retroactive. For example, if a student missed eight weeks of class but did not contact professors or DSO to set up accommodations, DSO cannot grant accommodations for the previous weeks.

My son or daughter needs handicapped parking. Does DSO handle parking?

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No. The Disability Services Office does not have the authority to issue parking permits for any students; only Parking Services can fulfill this request. All parking questions and requests should go to (513) 556-2283.

Information can also be found on the Parking Services website:

<http://www.uc.edu/parking/rates/handicapped.html>.

My son or daughter has limited mobility needs. How can DSO help to meet my child's housing needs?

To set up housing accommodations the student must follow a process much like academic accommodations. The student must fill out a housing application, submit specific documentation to our office, and contact our office to request the specific housing accommodations. The DSO will work with Housing and Food Services to make reasonable and appropriate accommodations, based on documentation. Most housing accommodations are made out of concern for safety (e.g. placing a student with limited mobility on the first floor). Please contact the Disability Services Office for more specific information.

My son or daughter needs a special meal plan due to dietary needs. Can DSO meet this request?

For meal plan accommodations, please visit the Housing and Food Services website. The Housing and Food Services department has specific documentation needed and will have a

doctor review such requests. DSO is not needed in this process.

Transfer students

My son or daughter was registered with the Disability Office of another school. Does my student need to register with UC's Disability Services Office?

Yes, if he or she would like accommodations. Your student will need to follow the procedures mentioned earlier to register with our office. This includes providing documentation that explains the diagnosis, academic impact, and specific recommendations for the student. Sometimes a student's file may be faxed to our office from his or her previous institution. Please contact your child's previous university to see if this is possible.

My son or daughter has attended one of UC's branch campuses and had registered with DSO. Does he or she need to register with DSO on main campus?

No, your student does not need to register again, but your student does need to set up a meeting with our staff to discuss procedures on main campus. Many times the policies and procedures differ from campus to campus. To ensure your student knows what to expect and how to obtain his or her accommodations, please call our office to set up a meeting.

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Providing services under federal law presents many common questions that all college departments and college students will face. This resource has been provided courtesy of a partnership with Community College of Allegheny County and modified to provide information for University of Cincinnati students. The University of Cincinnati Disability Services Office would like to thank the DSO at CCAC for this structure and organization to our frequently asked questions section. A full copy of the CCAC document can be found at <http://www.ccac.edu/default.aspx?id=149712>.