

**HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES**  
**Center for Teaching and Learning**  
**Geneva, NY 14456**

**Guidelines for Documenting a Physical Disability or a Physical  
Condition Requiring Accommodation**

The students of Hobart and William Smith Colleges are protected from discrimination on the basis of disability by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and other applicable law. By such legislation, individuals with disabilities are guaranteed certain protections and rights of equal access to programs and services. Eligibility is based on the existence of an identified physical, mental, or health impairment and/or a disability that substantially limits a major life activity.

Not every impairment qualifies as a disability protected by the ADA, because not every impairment is substantially life limiting. This is why a determination of disability must be made on an individual, case-by-case basis. Whether a substantial limitation to a major life activity exists depends upon an analysis of: (1) the nature and severity of the impairment, (2) the duration of the impairment, and (3) the permanent or long-term impact of impairment. Thus, the key factor in answering the question of whether there is a substantial limitation is the actual effect on the individual's life.

**Documentation of Physical Disability or Condition Requiring Accommodation**

Physical disability is a term that can be used to describe a variety of temporary or permanent conditions which, relative to an average person in the population, substantially limit or restrict the condition, manner, or duration under which a person can perform a major life activity. Examples of major life activities include, but are not limited to, walking, sitting, standing, hearing, seeing, talking, breathing, learning, caring for oneself, and performing manual tasks. In order for a physical condition to be classified as a disability, the condition must be diagnosable, generally according to the ICD-10, and must substantially impair one or more major life activities.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges recognize that some students with physical disabilities or conditions require accommodations. HWS students, either incoming or enrolled, who believe that they may be eligible for accommodations for physical disability, must first establish eligibility by voluntarily disclosing their disability and providing suitable evidence of the disabling condition to the Colleges. This is accomplished by registering with The Office of Disability Services in the Center for Teaching and Learning, and submitting appropriate documentation of disability to that office. In order to receive accommodations, the registration and documentation processes must be completed.

Reasonable accommodation of physical disability or potentially disabling physical condition is an effort on the part of the Colleges to provide access to its programs and services, while maintaining the Colleges' academic standards and the essential nature of its traditions and practices as a residential, liberal arts college.

Accommodations are determined on an individual basis as substantiated by diagnosis, and are based upon the impact to major life activities. Documentation review, accommodations, and student support are provided through the various offices of the Colleges and are coordinated through the Office of Disability Services in The Center for Teaching and Learning.

## **Guidelines for Documentation of Disability or Physical Condition Requiring Accommodation**

The following guidelines are intended to help define the type of information needed to substantiate eligibility and support requests for reasonable accommodations of physical disability.

Documentation should be original copies of relevant comprehensive clinical/diagnostic evaluations on the letterhead of the professionals who conducted the assessments. The name, title, and professional credentials of each professional as well as information about his or her licenses or certifications, area of specialization, and location of employment or practice should be included in the documentation. Faxed or emailed documentation is not acceptable.

Comprehensive disability documentation should include the following six components: 1) evidence of existing impairment; 2) background information (e.g., interview, review of records); 3) relevant testing; 4) specific diagnosis; 5) rule-out of alternative diagnoses or explanations; 6) integrated summary.

In making a specific diagnosis, a clinician should use direct, definitive language. Clinicians should avoid speculative language such as “suggests,” “has problems with,” or “is indicative of,” etc. in making diagnostic statements.

Comprehensive documentation should contain a description of the current levels of performance as they relate to functional limitations in the residential college environment. The degree to which these limitations affect major life activities should be clearly articulated.

A diagnosis of physical disability in and of itself does not automatically warrant accommodation. Further, prior history of accommodation without evidence of current need does not warrant accommodation. It is important that the documentation submitted contains a rationale for each requested accommodation. A diagnostic link between the functional limitations to major life activities due to the physical disability and the related reasonable accommodations in the residential college environment must be established. HWS encourages clinicians to be very specific in establishing the disability/accommodation link.

In order for services or accommodations to be provided, a student must request each specific accommodation.

### **Evaluator Qualifications**

The professionals conducting assessments, rendering diagnoses of specific disabilities, and recommending reasonable and appropriate accommodations should be qualified to do so. Comprehensive training with regard to the specific disability being addressed and/or direct experience with adolescent and/or adult populations are essential. An evaluator should not be related by blood or marriage, nor be a personal friend of the student being evaluated. Most often, a licensed physician in an appropriate specialty makes the diagnosis of a physical disability. Diagnostic reports must include the names, titles, and professional credentials of the evaluators as well as the dates of testing and/or evaluation.

## **Timeliness of Evaluations**

Evaluations should be current. One purpose for clinical diagnosis is to determine a student's current level of functioning and need for accommodation. Some students with physical disabilities have diagnoses that are long standing or permanent. Even in such cases, the characteristics and manifestations of a disability can change over time or due to factors such as variability of symptoms, living situation, course load, etc. Since reasonable accommodations at HWS are based on current levels of functioning, there is a substantial need for current, relevant documentation that addresses such issues and informs the documentation and accommodation processes.

The principle documentation should be no more than three years old. Moreover, to insure that such documentation addresses the specific environment of the HWS community, an updated letter, no more than six months old, from the original evaluator or an appropriate, qualified professional is generally required. Such documentation should include the current level of functioning including any relevant updated diagnostic information and a related rationale for each requested accommodation.

## **Confidentiality**

Hobart and William Smith Colleges will not release any information regarding an individual's diagnosis or medical information without his or her informed written consent. Information will be released only on a "need to know" basis, except where otherwise required by law. Furthermore, to safeguard the confidentiality of individuals with disabilities, evaluators may withhold any portion of the documentation that is not directly relevant to HWS's criteria for establishing disability and rationale for requested accommodations as defined by the ADA.

## **Additional information**

For additional information, please consult the HWS Catalog for sections addressing disability policy and disabled student services. If you need further clarification, or have questions in regard to these guidelines, please contact:

Coordinator of Disability Services  
The Center for Teaching and Learning:  
Hobart and William Smith Colleges  
Geneva, NY 14456

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