



Disability Services for Students

Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management

1801 East Cotati Avenue
Rohnert Park, CA 94928

(707)664-2677 Fax: (707)664-3330 TDD: (707) 664-2958

www.sonoma.edu/saem

GUIDELINES FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF A LEARNING DISABILITY AT SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Any student who is seeking support services from Sonoma State University Disability Services for Students needs to provide a written evaluation of his/her learning disabilities. Once eligibility has been established and it is determined that a student is qualified in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504), and applicable state laws and regulations, a student may request accommodations at the beginning of each academic semester. An interactive process for developing reasonable accommodations is then explored. Student preferences will be included and requests will be evaluated for their appropriateness and reasonableness based on these factors: the University's obligation to provide equal access to educational opportunities, the student's current functional limitations, and the requirements of the specific courses in which the student is enrolled.

The following guidelines are provided in the interest of assuring that documentation is adequate to verify eligibility as well as to support requests for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids. These guidelines are based on the AHEAD* Guidelines issued in 1997 and on the Educational Testing Service** Policy Statement for *Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults, January 1998*.

I. Testing Must Be Conducted By A Qualified Professional

The professionals conducting the assessment and rendering diagnosis of specific learning disabilities must be qualified to do so. These professionals must have expertise in learning disabilities and be experienced in working with adults. Regular or special education teachers may *assist* in providing documentation, however, they are generally not considered "qualified" to render diagnoses of learning disabilities. (See below.) The diagnosing qualified professional will provide the student/family with a diagnostic report.

Qualified Professionals include:

- Licensed Educational Psychologists
- Licensed Clinical Psychologists
- Learning Disability Specialists
- Speech and Language Pathologists
- Neurologists
- Credentialed School Psychologist

* The Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) is an internationally recognized organization of professionals who advocate for equal education opportunities for students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions.

** Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey

Diagnostic reports must include the following information:

- A) Notation of Professional's License / Certification number
- B) Nature and extent of the disability, with DSM IV diagnostic codes
- C) Detailed list of the tests utilized to determine the diagnosis and include the relevant the percentiles and scaled scores
- D) The effect of the disability on the candidate's ability to perform under standard testing conditions
- E) Recommended educational accommodation(s) and how it relates to the candidate's disability, given the format of the examination

II. Features of a Comprehensive Assessment

A comprehensive assessment must include:

A) An educational history and behavioral observations

Because learning disabilities are most commonly manifested during childhood, historical information of learning difficulties in elementary, secondary and post secondary educational settings must be included.

B) Clearly specified and described intra-cognitive and/or cognitive/achievement discrepancies

Objective evidence of a *substantial limitation* to learning must be provided. The test findings should document both the nature and severity of the learning disability.

Individual "*learning styles,*" "*learning differences,*" "*academic problems,*" and "*test taking difficulty or anxiety*" in and of themselves do not constitute a learning disability. The cognitive deficit must represent a logical basis for the academic deficit. The nature and severity of the functional limitation(s) must be supported by the test data, academic history, anecdotal and clinical observations that may include the student's level of motivation, study skills, and other non-cognitive factors. Alternative explanations for problems in learning should not be due to emotional, attentional or motivational problems, nor to environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. Language such as "*suggests*" or "*is indicative of*" does **not** constitute a specific diagnosis. The diagnosis of the individual's learning disability must be clearly evident within the report. (See AHEAD guidelines.)

C) Recommendations for academic accommodations based on assessment findings

The diagnostic report should include recommendations for specific accommodations as well as detailed explanation as to why each accommodation is suggested.

Testing must be conducted in all areas of suspected delay and include more than one tool in order to be considered valid for purposes of Learning Disability

verification. The domains of assessment to be addressed must include, but are not limited to, the following areas: (At least one from each area, 1, 2, and 3)

1) Aptitude /Cognitive

The preferred instruments include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised or III Edition (with scaled scores and percentiles) (WAIS R or WAIS III)
- Woodcock-Johnson-Revised, Part1, Test of Cognitive Ability (with scaled scores and percentiles) (WJ-R)
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale- 4th Edition

NOTE: The Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), in any form, **is not** an acceptable assessment instrument for the **adult** population.

2) Achievement

The student's current levels of functioning in Reading, Mathematics and Written Language must be assessed under both timed and untimed conditions, as appropriate, to corroborate underachievement in specific academic areas.

The preferred instruments include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Woodcock-Johnson-Revised (WJ-R) Part II or III, Test of Achievement (Subtests to include 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31)
- Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) (only valid if the student is under 20 years of age)

Additional Instruments should be administered to clarify individual strengths and weaknesses (e.g. Nelson Denny Reading Test, Wide Range Achievement Test) but these test results alone cannot be used to determine eligibility for services at Sonoma State University. (WRAT-3 is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and should not be used as a sole measure.)

In the case of students requesting a substitution of GE Math courses due to a severe Mathematics Disorders, the students testing battery **must** include:

- Woodcock-Johnson-Revised, (WJ-R) subtests 7 and 14 (fluid reasoning)

Deficits identified by the following factor areas *may* also support the provision of a substitution in Mathematics or Language

- Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale –Revised: (WAIS-R) -or-

Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale III (WAIS III) factors: Perceptual Organization (including Block Design sub-test), Working Memory, Processing Speed

- Woodcock-Johnson-Revised: (WJ-R) Long-Term Memory (including Delayed Recall subtests), Short Term Memory, Processing Speed, Visual Processing

3. **Information Processing**

The preferred instruments include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R) factors: Perceptual Organization (including Block Design subtest), Working Memory, Processing Speed.
- Woodcock-Johnson Factors (WJ-R) Long-term Memory (including Delayed –Recall subtests) Short-term memory Processing speed, Visual Processing
- Test of Auditory Perceptual Skills -Upper Level (TAPS)
- Test of Visual Perceptual Skills -Upper Level (TVPS)
- Test of Memory and Learning (TOMAL)

III. Assessment Must Be Current

In most cases, “*current*” means testing that has been conducted within the **past three years**. Because the provision of reasonable accommodations and services is based upon assessment of the **current** impact of the student’s disability(ies) on his or her academic performance, it is in the student’s best interest to provide recent and appropriate documentation. In the case of adults tested after age 21, testing within a five-year period can be accepted.

Additional Information

In addition to the testing reports, the most current Individual Education Plans (IEP’s), 504 plans, recommendations, etc, may be helpful in determining a student’s educational needs and accommodations at the University and should be included with the testing reports. These additional items are **not a substitute** for the testing or diagnostic reports and **will not** be accepted as verification of disability nor do they guarantee that the student will receive identical services at the University level.

All Documentation Information is held in strict confidence and is used for Disability Services for Students’ purposes only.

If you have any questions please call us at (707) 664-2677.

12/2007 updated