

Documentation Guidelines for the Assessment of Students with Psychological Disabilities

Federal and State law [\[2\]](#) and University of California policies [\[3\]](#) require the University to provide reasonable accommodation in its academic programs to qualified [\[4\]](#) students with disabilities, including students with psychological disabilities.

In defining a disability as primarily psychological in nature, these Guidelines employ the definition of mental disorders as described in the most current edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*. [\[5\]](#)

In the DSM-IV, each of the mental disorders is conceptualized as a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress (e.g., a painful symptom) or disability (i.e., impairment in one or more important areas of functioning)...

In addition, this syndrome or pattern must not be merely an expectable and culturally sanctioned response to a particular event, for example, the death of a loved one... Whatever its original cause, it must currently be considered a manifestation of a behavioral, psychological, or biological dysfunction in the individual. Neither deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) nor conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict is a symptom of a dysfunction in the individual, as described above. (p. xxi-xxii) [\[6\]](#)

For the purpose of these Guidelines, a mental disorder constitutes a verifiable disability only when there is a substantial limitation in a major life activity, such as functioning in an academic setting; when there is a record of such an impairment; or when there is a record of an individual regarded as having such an impairment. While mental disorders may be a source of discomfort, distress, or disability, it should be emphasized that a student who has a mental disorder may not necessarily require accommodation. Eligibility for such services is made by the campus disabled student services professional staff, consistent with State and Federal law and University policy. [\[7\]](#)

I. Documentation Requirements

Professionals conducting assessments and rendering diagnoses of psychological disabilities must be qualified to do so. Comprehensive training in the differential diagnosis of psychological disabilities and direct experience in diagnosis and treatment of adults is necessary. Qualified diagnosing professionals would include licensed psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists and, in some instances, general practice physicians. The diagnosing professional should have expertise in diagnosing the

documented mental disorder and follow established practices in the field. Such documentation should be on letterhead and contain the professional's signature and license number. Documentation must be current. Campus disabled student services staff reserve the right to request updated or supplemental documentation on a case-by-case basis, and may consult with other professionals, as appropriate, regarding the adequacy of a student's documentation.

The documentation should provide responses to the following questions:

1. Does the student have a diagnosable mental disorder? If so, what is the specific Multi-Axis DSM IV classification? Please code in 5 axes.
2. What were the assessment or evaluation procedures used to make the diagnosis?
3. What is the pertinent developmental, psychological and medical history?
4. What are the major symptoms of the disorder currently manifested by the student, including level of severity?
5. If medications are currently prescribed, are there any substantial side effects for this individual?
6. What are the current functional limitations imposed by this disorder?
7. What is the current prognosis? When did you last see this individual?

II. **Accommodations and Services**

Each student with a psychological disability should be provided with accommodations and services that are appropriate to the student's disability-related academic needs. It is the responsibility of the campus disabled student services office to determine appropriate accommodations and services based on the documentation provided and in consultation with the student and other professionals, as appropriate. [8](#)

University accommodations and support services for a student with a psychological disability should be designed to minimize the limitations imposed by the student's disability, thus providing an equal opportunity to learn, and to demonstrate what the student has learned in an academic setting. Academic accommodations should be provided in the most integrated setting possible and designed to meet the disability-related needs of qualified individuals without fundamentally altering the nature of the instructional programs or any licensing requirements specified by the student's intended profession.

Campuses should stipulate procedures for resolving disputes regarding the provision of academic accommodations and services.

1. This document was reviewed and approved at the April 30, 1999 meeting of the UC campus Directors of Services to Students with Disabilities.
2. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 are the pertinent Federal laws. For pertinent State law, see Chapter 14.2, Section 67310 of the California State Education Code.

3. University of California *Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations and Students*, Section 140 (*Guidelines Applying to Non-discrimination on the Basis of Disability*).
4. "Qualified" with respect to post-secondary educational services, means "a person who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the education program or activity, with or without reasonable modifications to rules, policies, or practices."
5. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (4th Edition), Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994.
6. According to Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, current or future interpretation of psychological disabilities excludes common personality traits such as poor judgment or a quick temper.
7. Section 141.10 of the University's *Guidelines Applying to Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability* defines an individual with a disability as "...any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, who has a record of such an impairment, or who is regarded as having such an impairment."
8. Section 143.34 of the University's *Guidelines Applying to Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability* specifies that: "... in attempting to provide any type of academic adjustment, faculty, disability-management staff, and students with disabilities should work in concert to formulate accommodations that meet the individual educational needs of qualified students with disabilities while maintaining the academic integrity of the program, service or activity to be modified."