

A Parent's Guide to Disability Services



Disability Services

Office of Student Development
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Welcome to the University of South Carolina Upstate! As a parent of a student with a disability, you probably have many questions and concerns about your son's or daughter's future college experience. This guide was written with you in mind—to answer your questions, address your concerns, describe the new roles your son or daughter and yourself will play in the accommodation process, and explain how post-secondary disability services differ from high school services and supports.

Legal Background

Disability Services (DS) works to ensure that educational programming and services are accessible to students with disabilities. Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. According to these laws, no "otherwise" qualified individual shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination" in any program or activity. Individuals who are protected under these statutes include those with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities or other disabilities, such as health impairments or psychological impairments.

As a parent, it is important to understand that the laws that protect students with disabilities are different at the high school and post-secondary levels. High schools are governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Post-secondary institutions are governed by the ADA and by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The table on page 4 of this guide further details the differences between high school and post-secondary services.

Transitioning to Higher Education

Preparation is essential for a successful transition to college for all students and even more so for students with disabilities, as these students are less likely than their peers without disabilities to persist and earn a post-secondary degree. Contrary to what many students and parents may believe, this preparation should begin long before college campus tours, interviews, and applications enter the picture. Your son or daughter should begin preparing for life after high school by learning about his/her disability, how the disability affects him/her academically, what coping skills have proven to be effective in the past, and what his/her strengths and weaknesses are. An awareness of how academic needs can be met, especially for a student with involved needs, can help ensure a successful transition.

Self-advocacy skills are also crucial to a successful post-secondary experience. These skills are not learned overnight. Rather, students need time and practice to develop and fine-tune these abilities. Many college freshmen are unprepared for the amount of responsibility that they will face in the post-secondary environment. Your son or daughter can begin developing these abilities gradually by taking increased responsibility for his/her education while still in high school. Encourage his/her participation in the transition planning process, as appropriate. If an academic, accommodation, or teacher-related problem arises, encourage your son or daughter to problem-solve and address the situation independently, while you offer support and additional help, only if needed. Several critical responsibilities that require self-advocacy skills are covered in the "Student Responsibilities" section on the following page.

Finally, an awareness of the impact of the post-secondary environment on academic success is also important. College students are expected to meet deadlines, be prepared for class and tests, and make wise use of their time. Making sure your son or daughter has developed good time management, organizational, and study skills will go a long way in preparing him/her to be a successful college student.

The Accommodation Process

Post-secondary institutions provide academic accommodations to students who provide documented evidence of a disability that substantially limits a major life activity (e.g. learning, hearing, seeing, etc.). Accommodations are designed to ensure equal access to academic programming and services. Accommodations must be reasonable and cannot alter the essential requirements of a course or program that a student is expected to meet.

In order to register with Disability Services and receive academic accommodations, your son or daughter must self-identify as a student with a disability by completing an intake form, providing documentation, and completing a collaborative interview. As a parent, your role throughout this process is one that is primarily supportive rather than directive. Your son or daughter will be expected to lead the collaborative interview with a Disability Services staff member, as well as meetings with his/her instructors. Following is additional information about the initial intake process:

Documentation:

Disability Services requires current documentation from a qualified physician or other licensed professional in a field related to the disability. Since each disability is unique, guidelines for what constitutes appropriate documentation for a particular disability are available. Please note that a copy of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan alone is not sufficient documentation.

Collaborative Interview:

A student will meet with a Disability Services staff member during the intake process and should be prepared to discuss the impact of his/her disability in the academic environment, his/her history of accommodations and the accommodations being requested. This information, together with the results of the documentation review, will help our staff determine reasonable accommodations for the student.

Accommodation:

When a decision has been made regarding accommodations, Disability Services will prepare accommodation letters. It is the student's responsibility to provide these letters to his/her instructors. The student should be prepared to discuss with his/her instructors the impact of his/her disability and how the requested accommodations will support him/her in the classroom.

Student Responsibilities

- The entire accommodation process must be student-initiated. It is not the post-secondary institution's responsibility to initiate the accommodation process for the student. While you as a parent may want to advocate for your son or daughter and assist in the accommodation process, confidentiality laws prohibit college/university personnel from discussing your son's or daughter's information with anyone, including parents, without written consent from the student.
- Your son or daughter is responsible for ensuring that appropriate documentation is obtained and forwarded to Disability Services. Our office does not conduct psycho-educational evaluations.
- Your son or daughter must distribute the accommodation letters to his/her instructors and discuss with them any relevant information related to his/her disability and its impact on academics.
- Accommodations such as note-taking services and alternative test administration require the student to follow certain procedures. If these procedures are not followed, your son or daughter could risk losing the support of these accommodations.
- If your son or daughter experiences any difficulties with his/her accommodations or if the status of his/her disability changes, it is his/her responsibility to inform Disability Services. If our office does not hear from your son or daughter, it will be assumed that all is well.
- It is your son's or daughter's responsibility to return to our office every semester to request accommodations for that semester. Accommodations will not be put in place until requested by the student.

Peer Academic Coaching (PAC)

Disability Services offers PAC to students with disabilities registered with our office. Participating students work one-on-one with a trained peer coach to increase academic success by improving time management and organizational proficiency, study skills, and goal-setting and planning abilities.

Additional Information

Accessibility Map: Copies of the USC Upstate *Accessibility Map* can be obtained from our office or online.

Accessible Parking: When parking in accessible parking spaces, a student must have a disabled license plate or display his/her state-issued disabled placard.

Assistive Technology: Various assistive technology, including FM amplification systems, a CCTV, and various software programs (e.g. JAWS, Kurzweil 1000/3000, OpenBook, ZoomText) is available on campus.

Housing: A student with a disability who needs on-campus housing accommodations must follow Housing and Residential Life's application procedures and must register with our office.

TTY Access: Please contact our office for the location of campus TTY's or use South Carolina Relay's TTY service (1-800-735-8583) when calling on-campus phone numbers.

On-Campus Support Services

Center for Student Success (Smith 103, 503-5070) is an academic resource center available to all students. Academic skill development, tutoring, and the University 101 course are offered.

Counseling Services (Campus Life Center 107, 503-5195) offers free and confidential personal and career counseling to enrolled students.

Health Services (Palmetto Villas, Building 1, 503-5191) provides outpatient services to enrolled students.

Opportunity Network (Smith 101, 503-5966) provides a variety of services, including academic counseling, tutoring and the University 101 course, to eligible students. Students with disabilities may be eligible for this office's services.

Tutoring is available through the following labs: the Foreign Language Lab (HPAC 234), the Math and Computer Science Tutoring Lab (Hodge 242), and the Writing Center (HPAC 136).

Resources

The following websites may be helpful to you as a parent of a student with a disability(ies):

<http://www.heath.gwu.edu/>

<http://www.LDonline.org/indepth>

http://www.washington.edu/doit/Resources/college_parent.html

Confidentiality

Disability Services is committed to ensuring all information regarding a student remains confidential as required by "The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act" (FERPA). Student files maintained by DS are accessed by authorized office staff only. Information will be shared only after a student has signed a consent form or if required by federal or state law.

Contact Information

If you would like to request this guide in an alternative format (Braille, large print, electronic file) or if you have any comments or questions about the contents of this guide or the services provided by Disability Services, please contact us at 864/503-5123 or visit us in Suite 107 of the Campus Life Center.

AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

AT THE COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY LEVEL

(Information is presented as it pertains first to IDEA, then to 504)

1. School will provide a free and appropriate education to all students; <i>under 504, no difference in access than for all other students</i>	1. College/University will provide access to programs and services for students with disabilities equal to those programs and services available to all students
2. School will identify students with potential disabilities; <i>under 504, parent/guardian must bring disability information to the attention of the school-based 504 Coordinator/Committee</i>	2. College/University will inform all students of the location of Disability Services (DS) and the procedures for accessing services; student will self-identify or disclose his/her disability to DS
3. School will provide assessment and evaluation; <i>under 504, no assessment/evaluation is provided</i>	3. Student will provide documentation of a disability to DS for review and verification; student will obtain evaluation, if necessary
4. Eligibility for services is diagnosis driven and disabilities are classified according to specified diagnostic criteria; <i>under 504, eligibility for accommodations is diagnosis driven</i>	4. Eligibility for reasonable accommodations is diagnosis driven by severity of impact of the disability on a major life activity(ies)
5. School will involve parent and/or guardian in placement decisions; <i>under 504, no separate placement issues are considered</i>	5. Student will act as an independent adult; DS will protect a student's right to privacy and confidentiality
6. School will involve students in programs where they can benefit in any way, as recommended by the placement committee and agreed to by the parents and/or guardian; <i>under 504, no separate academic programs are provided</i>	6. DS will prepare letters to instructors specifying accommodations that must be provided based on documentation; student will contact his/her instructors to activate accommodations for each of his/her classes
7. School will structure part or all of a student's daily schedule; <i>under 504, no separate academic programming is provided</i>	7. Student will arrange his/her own academic schedule with guidance from an academic advisor
8. School will develop Individual Education Plan (IEP) which teachers follow towards meeting established outcomes; <i>under 504, school-based 504 Coordinator/Committee develops 504 Plan</i>	8. No plan is developed specifying outcomes
9. School will modify educational programs/programming, as needed; <i>under 504, 504 Plan specifies modifications/accommodations to be provided in all programs, services, and activities</i>	9. DS will prepare letters to instructors specifying accommodations that must be provided based on documentation; college/university personnel will work to ensure programs and services are accessible
10. School will provide certain nonacademic services (school nurse, etc.); <i>under 504, no difference in access than for all other students</i>	10. Student will arrange for and obtain his/her own personal attendants, tutors, individually designed or fitted assistive technology, etc.