

Documentation Guidelines for Psychological Conditions (including Autism Spectrum Disorder)

Duke University is committed to providing educational opportunities to qualified students with disabilities for purposes of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. In order to establish that an individual is covered under these laws, students must submit current documentation (i.e., psychological/diagnostic reports, records and information) confirming the existence of a condition, and in most instances, evidence that the condition substantially limits one or more major life activity as compared to most people in the general population. However, there are some conditions, such as a diagnosis of major depression, where the SDAO does not require evidence as to the severity of the condition or what major life activity is impacted. Additionally, on a case-by-case basis, the SDAO will assess the currency of documentation.

The following guidelines are designed to provide students and professional diagnosticians with a common understanding and knowledge base of the components of documentation which may be necessary to confirm the existence of a psychological disorder, the functional limitations and impact on the student's educational performance, and information necessary to assist the university in making appropriate accommodations in a post-secondary setting. Documentation should be comprehensive in order to avoid or reduce time delays in decision-making related to eligibility and the provision of services. The SDAO carefully reviews documentation, makes eligibility decisions, and contacts the student as quickly as possible.

Documentation should include:

- I. Qualifications of the Evaluator/Diagnostician
- II. Current and Age Appropriate Evaluation Data & Clinical Summary/Report
- III. Rationale and Justification for Requested Accommodations
- IV. Confidentiality

I. Qualifications of the Evaluator/Diagnostician

The professional conducting the evaluation and making the diagnosis must be qualified to make the diagnosis and recommend appropriate accommodations. Professionals typically qualified to make this diagnosis include psychologists, neuro-psychologists, psychiatrists, and other doctors trained in psychology/psychiatry. A clinical team approach to diagnosis may also be appropriate. The documentation must include the name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about licensure and/or specialization.

Diagnoses documented by family members will not be accepted even when the family members are otherwise qualified by virtue of training and licensure/certification. All reports should be in English, typed or printed on professional letterhead, dated, signed, and otherwise legible. SDAO reserves the right to receive the documentation directly from the evaluator.

II. Current and Age Appropriate Evaluation Data & Clinical Summary/Report is Required

Due to the changing nature of psychiatric disorders, it is important that a student provide current and appropriate documentation from a qualified evaluator. Certain conditions may only require an update for accommodation purposes. In some cases, a student's functioning may change during University enrollment which may necessitate submission of additional documentation. Since reasonable accommodations are based upon the current impact of the condition, the documentation must address the individual's current level of functioning and the need for accommodations.

In most instances, the report or clinical summary should indicate what major life activity is impacted by the psychiatric condition and the severity of the condition. A description of how the condition impacts the student's academic performance should also be included. The documentation must include a coded diagnosis per the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV-TR* (DSM-IV-TR) or the DSM-V, a description of any evaluation methods, tests and procedures used, along with a clinical narrative based upon observations and history of presenting symptoms. Including current medication regimens and side effects in the summary is particularly important since psychotropic medications may have a substantial impact on concentration and cognitive functioning. If a condition is episodic, please provide details about frequency and severity.

SDAO assesses disability status without regard to the positive effects of mitigating measures (such as medication usage). If known, it would be useful to identify the severity of the condition without the use of medication as well as the effectiveness when treatment is followed.

If the documentation is inadequate in scope or content or fails to sufficiently address the student's current functional limitations and need for accommodations, SDAO may require the submission of additional information. School plans such as *Individual Educational Plans* (IEP) or *504 Accommodation Plans* are helpful in providing historical data, but may not be substituted in lieu of the above requested documentation.

III. Rationale & Justification for Each Requested Accommodation

Accommodation requests are not generally granted on the basis of a diagnostic label: they must be tied to history and current functional limitation(s), with consideration of any mitigating measures the student is using (such as medication and therapy). Nonetheless, in order to appropriately and effectively accommodate the student's functional limitations in a post-secondary setting, some degree of documentation is necessary to assist the SDAO in addressing the student's disability-related needs, be that in academic settings, housing and other environments.

To be considered, the requested accommodations must be necessary, reasonable and appropriate. When recommending accommodations, the evaluator should establish a clear link between the request and the student's functional limitations, again in the student's mitigated state. Please note that the provision of a past accommodation in another setting does not necessarily guarantee or assure the requested accommodation will be implemented at Duke University; however, having that information is helpful to SDAO and will be considered in making current decisions about necessary, reasonable, and appropriate accommodations and services. If a requested accommodation is not clearly stated and supported in the diagnostic report, SDAO reserves the right to seek additional clinical information pertaining to the determination of eligibility. **It is the student's responsibility to obtain the requested additional information when the request is made.**

Note: It is also important to include information regarding any prior accommodations or auxiliary aids; including the specific criteria used to grant prior accommodations/auxiliary aids, the conditions under which the accommodations/auxiliary aids were used and whether or not they were effective

IV. Confidentiality

All information obtained in diagnostic and medical reports will be maintained and used in accordance with applicable confidentiality requirements.

Submitting Documentation and Questions

Documentation should be mailed to the attention of the Student Disability Access Office, Box 90142, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708 or faxed to (919) 668-3977. Questions should be directed to (919) 668-1267 or sdao@duke.edu.