

## **Welcome to the Office of Academic Accessibility Services!**

The Office of Academic Accessibility Services (OAA), part of the division of Student Affairs of Mercy College (the “College”), is committed to enhancing students’ academic development and independence. Our goal is to create a supportive community that promotes awareness, sensitivity and understanding of students with disabilities. This will be done by providing reasonable and appropriate accommodations, assisting students with self-advocacy, providing academic support and ensuring adherence to state and federal disability laws, as well as working closely with faculty, staff, and administrators.

### **Responsibility for Equal Access**

It is the policy of the College that no otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall be denied access to the benefits of, or participation in, any program, service or activity offered by the College. As such, individuals with disabilities have a right to request reasonable accommodations. Specifically, the College does not discriminate on the basis of disability in its admission, recruitment, academics, research, financial aid, counseling, employment assistance, and/or any other service, facility, or privilege available to students or potential students. Further, the College does not screen out, exclude, expel, limit, or otherwise discriminate against an individual seeking admission as a student, or an individual enrolled as a student, based on disability. All College representatives, including faculty, staff, and students are responsible for the implementation of this policy and adherence to the principles of equal access.

#### **A. Mission**

The primary mission of the OAA is to provide equal access to all opportunities for Mercy students and to enhance academic and personal development through advocacy, education and accommodations.

#### **B. Core Values**

1. **Compassion** – The OAA will serve each student with care and compassion; they will display respect, have empathy and a willingness to listen. The Director is committed to serving all students, regardless of the scope of their disabilities.
2. **Excellence** – The primary responsibilities of the OAA are accommodations, promoting self-advocacy skills, providing academic support, faculty and staff training, and ensuring adherence to the United States Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and section 504 in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The office will demonstrate excellence in several ways. The director is a member of local, state and national college associations. The office will continue education in regards to ADA compliance, as well as develop policies and procedures within the OAA to ensure continuous improvement.
3. **Human Dignity** – The OAA will respect the significance and limitations of every individual, regardless of abilities, by demonstrating consideration, kindness, empathy, and trust.
4. **Justice** – The OAA will continuously perform in an ethical manner; staff will be fair, honest and truthful with every student.
5. **Sacredness of Life** – The OAA supports the Judeo-Christian tradition and the belief of the Catholic faith. This is demonstrated through the OAA support of the College’s programs, mission, and vision.

6. Service – The OAA encourages students to enrich their lives through professional and community services. This will be offered through opportunities at the College and in the community, with various service projects, involvement in registered student organizations specializing in disability awareness and campus wide events.

**C. Goals**

1. Support the mission, vision, and values of the College and all of its programs and services. Support the mission, vision, and values of the Division of Student Affairs and all of its programs and services.
2. Holistically promote personal and academic development of students.
  - a. Compel students to take personal responsibility and authority for their personal and academic experiences.
  - b. Foster self-awareness, self-esteem, self-motivation, and self-advocacy in students.
4. Serve as a resource and consultant for faculty and staff in their promotion of student success.
5. Network with other disabilities/accessibilities professionals to ensure excellent services for all students.

**D. Services**

1. Accommodations for students
  - a. Alternative Testing
    - i. Extended time for Quizzes/Tests – the student has extra time for testing, usually time and a half or double time.
    - ii. Distraction Reduced Space – the student can test alone or distraction reduced space
    - iii. Use of calculator – the student is allowed to use a calculator for tests/quizzes/in class assignments.
    - iv. Oral exam – the student will utilize software or a human reader to have tests read to them.
  - b. Alternative Format Text
    - i. Required text books/classroom material in alternate format for student.
  - c. Note taking
    - i. Peer note taker, student can ask someone in the class or the OAA can arrange this.
  - d. Enlarged material
    - i. Any class material can be enlarged or adjusted for student.
  - e. Interpreter
    - i. The OAA will provide a paid sign language interpreter to assist student while in class.
  - f. Transcription
    - i. Student has permission to tape the lecture portion of the course, provided it complies with the College's lecture recording policy.
  - g. Extension on assignments
    - i. Student may be able to request reasonable extensions on assignments, this extension is not automatic and must be requested BEFORE due date.



## **E. Initiating Consideration for Accommodation**

Students who are seeking assistance from the Office of Academic Accessibility (OAA), on the basis of a specific disability are responsible to:

1. Contact the Office of Academic Accessibility. Students bear the responsibility for disclosure of a disability and the request of services (see attached OAA disclosure form). Official notification usually must be done by the person requesting services, depending on the nature of the disability.
2. Provide complete, adequate, and current documentation from an appropriately qualified professional regarding the disability and the need for accommodations (see OAA Documentation Guidelines below.) In order for Mercy College to fully determine eligibility for services and evaluate requests for accommodations or auxiliary aids, the Office of Academic Accessibility (OAA) needs documentation of the disability. Students are responsible for costs associated with obtaining the appropriate documentation.
3. Notify the College of accommodation requests prior to the beginning of a semester in order to provide the granted accommodation. However, accommodation requests can be made and will be considered at any time. Please note that granted accommodations are not effective retroactively so that a student will not be able to retake exams or redo assignments that were originally completed before he or she asked for and received an accommodation.
  - a. Reasonable accommodations include modifications to policy, procedure, or practice and the provision of auxiliary aids and services that are designed to provide equal access to programs and services for qualified individuals with disabilities. Accommodations are reasonable when they do not pose a direct threat to health, safety, or quality of care; when they do not fundamentally alter the nature of a program or service; and when they do not represent an undue financial or administrative burden.
  - b. Definition of Disability - The United States' Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines "disability" as "having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities." In addition, the ADA protects individuals from discrimination if they have a record of such impairments or if they are regarded as having such impairments. Additional protections are provided through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## **F. Essential Elements of Disability Documentation**

1. **The credentials of the evaluator(s).** Documentation should be provided by a licensed or otherwise properly credentialed professional who has undergone appropriate and comprehensive training, has relevant experience, and has no personal relationship with the individual being evaluated. A good match between the credentials of the individual making the diagnosis and the condition being reported is expected (e.g., an orthopedic limitation might be documented by a physician, but not a licensed psychologist).
2. **A diagnostic statement identifying the disability.** Documentation should include a

clear diagnostic statement that describes how the condition was diagnosed, provide information on the functional impact, and detail the typical progression or prognosis of the condition. When appropriate include diagnostic codes from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM) or the International Classification of Diseases (ICD).

- 3. A description of the diagnostic methodology used.** As appropriate, documentation should include a description of the diagnostic criteria, evaluation methods, procedures, tests and dates of administration, as well as a clinical narrative, observation, and specific results. Where appropriate to the nature of the disability, having both summary data and specific test scores (with the norming population identified) within the report is recommended. Diagnostic methods that are congruent with the particular disability and current professional practices in the field are recommended.
- 4. A description of the current functional limitations.** Information on how the disabling condition(s) currently impacts the individual provides useful information for both establishing a disability and identifying possible accommodations. Documentation should be thorough enough to demonstrate whether and how a major life activity is substantially limited by providing a clear sense of the severity, frequency, and pervasiveness of the condition(s). A combination of the results of formal evaluation procedures, clinical narrative, and the individual's self-report will be reviewed. While recent documentation is recommended in most circumstances, discretion will be used in Likewise, changing conditions and/or changes in how the condition impacts the individual may warrant more frequent updates in order to provide an accurate picture. The need for recent documentation depends on the facts and circumstances of the individual's condition.
- 5. A description of the expected progression of stability of the disability.** Information on the cyclical or episodic nature of the disability and known or suspected environmental triggers to episodes provides opportunities to anticipate and plan for varying functional impacts. If the condition is not stable, information on interventions for exacerbations and recommended timelines for re-evaluation are most helpful.
- 6. A description of current and past accommodations, services and/or medications.** Documentation should include a description of both current and past medications, auxiliary aids, assistive devices, support services, and accommodations, including their effectiveness (and side-effects) in ameliorating functional impacts of the disability.
- 7. Recommendations for accommodations, adaptive devices, assistive services, compensatory strategies, and/or collateral support services.** Recommended accommodations and strategies should be logically related to functional limitations; if connections are not obvious, a clear explanation of their relationship can be useful in decision-making. Mercy College has no obligation to provide or adopt recommendations made by outside entities. High school special education evaluations, Summary of Performance (SOPSOP) or Individual Educational Program (IEP) documentation, while helpful, may not provide adequate information to document a disability. In addition, references to academic weaknesses/learning differences/test anxiety alone may not substantiate a learning disability diagnosis.

#### a. Specific Disability Documentation

- i. **Learning Disabilities:** Psycho-educational assessment conducted by the diagnosing licensed psychologist, psychiatrist, or other appropriately credentialed professional specializing in learning disabilities.
- ii. **Psycho-educational Testing:** The comprehensive psycho-educational test battery should include intelligence/ability testing and educational/achievement testing. A full diagnostic report, including all standard test scores as well as subtest scores and the evaluator's narrative is recommended. Assessments should be normed for adults, i.e. WAIS-III rather than WISC-III.
- iii. **Attention Deficit Disorder:** Psychological/Psycho-educational assessment conducted by the diagnosing licensed psychologist, psychiatrist, or other appropriately credentialed professional.
- iv. **Psychological Disabilities:** Psychological assessment conducted by the diagnosing licensed psychologist, psychiatrist, or other appropriately credentialed professional.
- v. **Speech and Hearing:** Full report of assessments conducted by the diagnosing licensed speech/hearing specialist, audiologist, or other appropriately credentialed professional.
- vi. **Visual:** Full report of assessments conducted by the diagnosing licensed ophthalmologist, optometrist, or other appropriately credentialed professional.
- vii. **Mobility:** Evidence of substantial limitation in upper and/or lower extremity mobility. As appropriate, this may or may not include full report of assessments conducted by the diagnosing licensed medical doctor/physician or other appropriately credentialed professional.

#### G. Review of Documentation and the Determination of Accommodation

1. **All documentation will be reviewed on an individual, case-by-case basis.** This calls for an individualized inquiry, examining the impact of a disability on the individual and within the specific context of the request for accommodations. There is no list of covered disabilities or accepted diagnostic criteria.
2. **Determination of accommodations is an interactive process.** The Director of Accessibility may contact the evaluator, as necessary and with the student's permission, for clarification of any information (tests results, conclusions, recommendations, etc.) contained in the documentation. An interview with the student will be conducted in order to inquire about the disability, understand its impacts and identify appropriate accommodations. The institution and the individual with a disability will determine appropriate accommodations.

**3. Documentation of a specific disability does not translate directly into specific accommodations.** Reasonable accommodations are individually determined and based on the functional impact of the condition and its likely interaction with the environment. As such, accommodations may vary from individual to individual. Accommodations granted at Mercy College of Ohio in no way guarantee that the same accommodations will be granted at other institutions, testing centers, or licensing agencies. Students are solely responsible for pursuing accommodations at other institutions, testing centers, or licensing agencies. OAA may assist in the process at the student's request.

**H. Process of Approved Accommodations**

Once an accommodation has been granted, the student's instructors will receive, by the student's request, email notification from the Office of Academic Accessibility to verify the accommodations each semester. Students with accommodations are also responsible to speak with each of their instructors about their needs and work with them to enhance their learning. Students with accommodations are to submit their testing schedule to the Testing Center Coordinator at the beginning of each semester if their tests will be proctored in the Testing Center. Students who have received accommodations may request modifications to those accommodations at any time.

**Academic Honesty & Integrity**

An accommodation based on a student's disability may relate to the administration of testing, examinations, or other coursework. Students provided with such accommodations must continue to adhere to the College's academic honesty & integrity policy and to the College's Student Code of Conduct. Failure to adhere to the academic honesty & integrity policy and the standards of behavior may result in corrective action.

**Confidentiality Statement**

Students that are sending disability documentation should send this directly to the Office of Academic Accessibility, not with your Mercy College application. Documentation of disability is maintained in the Office of Academic Accessibility services, separate from student's academic record. Information shared with the Office of Accessibility Services is kept confidential from all other College offices.

**Ethical Standards/Statement**

The OAA follows the standards for disability services programs, developed in collaboration with The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and The Council for the Advancement of Standards on Higher Education (CAS). This information can be found at:

<http://standards.cas.edu/getpdf.cfm?PDF=E86A6AC1-C709-8EBF-8697C7CA1D64DA2D>.