

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Practices for the Documentation and Academic Accommodation of Students with Psychological Disabilities¹

Federal and State law² and University of California policies³ require the University to provide reasonable accommodation in its academic programs to qualified⁴ students with disabilities, including students with psychological disabilities.

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations appropriate to the nature and severity of the individual's documented psychological disability in all academic programs, services, and activities. The University is committed to providing equal access to its academic programs through reasonable accommodations appropriate to the nature and severity of the individual's documented functional limitations resulting from a documented psychological disability.

In defining a disability as primarily psychological in nature, these *Practices* consider the definition of mental disorders as described in the most current edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5)⁵ (DSM-5).

- *In the DSM-5² 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.³ 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 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.⁴*

For the purpose of these *Practices*, a mental disorder constitutes a verifiable disability only when there is a limitation in a major life activity, included, but not limited to, such as learning, caring for oneself; or when there is a record of 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

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accommodation. Eligibility for such services is made by the campus Disability Services professional staff, consistent with State and Federal law and University policy.⁷

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Professionals conducting assessments and rendering diagnoses of mental disorders must be qualified to do so. Comprehensive training in the differential diagnosis of mental disorders and direct experience in diagnosis and treatment of adults is necessary. Qualified diagnosing professionals would include, but are not limited to licensed psychologists, psychiatrists, and neurologists, or other professionals with training and expertise in the diagnosis of mental disorders. Such documentation should be on letterhead and contain the professional's signature and license number. Documentation must be current and dated generally be dated within the past 6 months.⁵

The documentation should provide responses to the following questions:

1. Does the student have a diagnosable mental disorder? If so, what is the specific ¹ (DSM-5) diagnosis? Please provide all pertinent diagnostic information including subtypes and/or specifiers for diagnostic domains & subgroups as well as psychosocial stressors and environmental stressors. ^{8b}
2. What were the assessment or evaluation procedures used to make the diagnosis?
3. Is there historical data that is pertinent to the disability?
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?
8. When did you last see this individual?

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 Disability Services office to determine whether the student is eligible for services and, if so, provide appropriate accommodations and services based on the documentation provided and in consultation with the student and

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other professionals, as appropriate.⁸ It is the responsibility of students who seek accommodations and services from the University of California to provide comprehensive written documentation of their disabilities. With the informed consent of each student, an appropriate and qualified member of the Disability Service office may contact the professional(s) who made the diagnosis, requesting further information in order to determine the most appropriate and reasonable accommodations.

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.

Each campus has procedures for resolving complaints or grievances regarding the provision of academic accommodations and services.

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¹ This document was reviewed and approved at the June 2013-meeting of the UC campus Directors of Services to Students with Disabilities.

² Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 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 5*, Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 2013 [10](#).

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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."