

## = CHAPTER 12 =

# Students With Disabilities

*Greg had become interested in physical therapy during his own rehabilitation after an automobile accident at age 15. Following a very serious left lower leg fracture, his surgeons performed a below-knee amputation. He wears a prosthesis and maintains an active lifestyle. In fact, he competed in football*

*and hockey in high school and currently plays intramural basketball. He hoped that he would be able to help others with amputations in the future.*

## Higher Education and Students With Disabilities

Federal and state laws and most institutional policies require a higher education institution to provide reasonable accommodation in its academically related programs to students with disabilities. This also applies to students in health profession education.[1-11](#)

University academic accommodations and support services are intended to provide students equal access by reducing the negative impact of their disabilities. The key federal legislative acts that support the rights of students with disabilities are the Rehabilitation Act of

1973, Section 504; Americans with Disabilities Act (1990); and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008.

## ***Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504***

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 706 (8) of this title, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service.” Institutions of higher education are included in the definition of institutions receiving federal financial assistance.[12](#)

## ***Americans With Disabilities Act***

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed July 26, 1990. It prohibits discrimination based on disabilities in the areas of employment, public services, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications. It requires all affected entities (businesses) to provide “reasonable accommodation” to persons with disabilities.[13,14](#)

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines “disability” as “(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment.”[14](#)

pulmonary dysfunction, mental retardation, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculoskeletal disorders, neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy), paraplegia, quadriplegia, and other spinal cord conditions, sickle cell anemia, specific learning disability, and end-stage renal disease. The disability must substantially limit a major life activity.[13,14](#) (Note that this is not an all-inclusive list.)

## What Is an Accommodation?

*Accommodation* refers to the provision of services that ensure equal access to a student with a disability (eg, providing extended examination time for a student who processes information more slowly than other students because of a learning disability).[14,15](#)

Academic accommodations and support services are determined on an individual basis. Each accommodation is based on documented functional limitations and is designed to meet a student's needs without fundamentally altering the nature of the student's instructional program(s) or altering any directly related licensing requirement.

Appropriate academic accommodations may include readers, note-takers, access to adaptive technology, part-time enrollment, or relaxed time frame for completion of degree requirements, substitution of coursework required for graduation, and testing accommodations.

## **What Are Academic Support Services?**

Appropriate disability-based support services may involve services such

as disability-related counseling; priority enrollment; referral to faculty, staff, campus resources, and community agencies; mobility assistance; and assistance in compensatory strategies for reading, writing math, and basic study skills.

## **Campus Resources for Students With Disabilities**

Most campuses provide an office that coordinates services to students with disabilities. These services focus on encouraging independence, assisting students in realizing their academic potential, and eliminating barriers to their participation in the academic environment. Services are provided in accordance with the specific documented needs of the student. [Tables 12-1](#) and [12-2](#) show examples of the types of ser-

## ***Americans With Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008***

The ADA Amendment Act of 2008 recasted the definition of disability to make it easier for an individual seeking protection under the ADA to establish that he or she has a disability. *Disability* is defined as “an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment.”<sup>15</sup>

### **What Is a Disability?**

This legislation applies to persons with disabilities, such as amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or

vices available on college campuses for students with disabilities.

TABLE 12-1

**EXAMPLES OF SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES<sup>16</sup>**

- Adaptive equipment
- Assistive listening devices
- Campus orientation
- Campus van service
- Computer laboratory
- Computer technology
- Disability counseling
- Disability parking
- Housing assistance
- Interpreters
- Mobility assistance
- Note takers
- Peer mentoring or counseling
- Priority enrollment

- Readers
- Real-time captioning
- Registration assistance
- Special materials
- Support groups
- Test proctoring
- Tutoring
- Workshops

Adapted from University of California, Los Angeles. Office for Students with Disabilities Support Services. Web page. [http://www.osd.ucla.edu/Support\\_Services.htm](http://www.osd.ucla.edu/Support_Services.htm). Accessed July 20, 2013.

# Requesting Accommodation

## *Student Responsibilities*

Students are responsible for disclosing and defining their disabilities and requesting accommodation(s). In

other words, identifying that you have a disability and asking for accommodation are personal decisions.

If a student requests accommodations, he or she is likely to be responsible for registering with the appropriate on-campus office and making his or her specific needs for accommodation known.

Most on-campus offices for students with disabilities require that students take responsibility for providing documentation of the disability and making specific requests for reasonable accommodations and academic support services. A sample of student responsibilities for requesting accommodations is shown in [Table 12-3](#).

TABLE 12-2
<b>EXAMPLES OF DISABILITY-SPECIFIC SERVICES<sup>16</sup></b>

	(longer time periods, distraction-free rooms), test proctoring to ensure test security and that indicated conditions are in place
Priority enrollment/registration assistance	Priority enrollment for access to certain classes
Special materials	Written materials and textbooks in alternative formats, such as enlarged print, Braille, raised-line drawings, and audio recordings.
Technology and resources	Adaptive equipment and assistive computer technology, including scanners, voice-synthesizers, reading machines, voice recognition programs, large screen displays, Braille screen displays, and printers
Other services	Housing appeals, tutorial referrals, disability management counseling, and information and referral



Adapted from University of California, Los Angeles. Office for Students with Disabilities Support Services. Web page. [http://www.osd.ucla.edu/Support\\_Services.htm](http://www.osd.ucla.edu/Support_Services.htm). Accessed July 20, 2013.

# Documentation of Disabilities

Students requesting accommodations and/or support services under the ADA and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 must provide documentation of the disability that substantially limits a major life activity. To accurately determine the appropriate accommodations, the documentation must be current and reflective of the adult's current functioning.[14](#),[15](#)

## *Physical Disabilities*

Documentation of physical disabilities must be based on appropriate diagnostic evaluations administered by trained and qualified (ie, certified and/or licensed) professionals (eg, medical doctors, ophthalmologists, psycholo-

gists, neuropsychologists, audiologists). Disability diagnosis categories include the following:

- Orthopedic disability
- Blind or visual impairment
- Deaf or hard-of-hearing
- Traumatic brain injury
- Other health-related/systemic disabilities

The diagnostic report must include a clear diagnosis and history, including secondary conditions, results of diagnostic tests, associated symptoms, medications, and functional manifestations. This must include substantial limitations to one or more major life activity and must indicate the degree of severity. The report should also include recommendations and the rationale for accommodation. If the accommodation recommendations are specific to limitations in learning, an appropriate evaluation of a learning disability must also be performed. Students should always

*SERVICES*

Learning disability services	Disability-related counseling with a learning-disability specialist, taped textbooks, extended time for tests, alternative test formats, note takers, audio taped lectures, adaptive technology, tutoring, support groups, learning skills workshops, and peer counseling
Deaf and hard of hearing student services	Sign language interpreters, note takers, real-time captioning, assistive listening devices, disability-related counseling, and tutoring
Mobility assistance program	Transportation services, orientation and mobility assistance for students with visual impairments, disability parking
Note-taker services	Note-taker services are for students with disabilities that limit their abilities to take notes
Reader services	Tape recorded assigned classroom readings
Testing accommodations	Test-taking conditions



check well in advance regarding deadlines for required documentation, as late submissions may result in delays in service delivery.

## ***Learning Disabilities***

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities defines the term *learning disabilities* using the following definition<sup>18</sup>:

*Learning disabilities refer to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not*

*by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other [disabling] conditions (for example, sensory impairment, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient, or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of these conditions or influences.*

TABLE 12-3

**SAMPLE OF STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN REQUESTING ACCOMMODATION<sup>17</sup>**

*RIGHTS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES*

- The institution will designate an office that is responsible to review disability documentation to determine eligibility for accommodations.

preters, scribes, and accessible classrooms.

- The student will discuss accommodations needed in the classroom with faculty. The student is responsible to provide the faculty member with an accommodation letter to support this request.
- The student will schedule needed services well in advance and inform the appropriate office so that services can be coordinated, such as adapted computer and/or specialized technology, or test proctoring/special testing.
- It is the student's responsibility to notify his/her instructors that a test must be made available to the office far enough in advance to allow for the processing of alternative print format requirements, and/or the scheduling of a scribe or an interpreter if the student is visually or hearing impaired, respectively.
- The student will make arrangements personally for all independent living

needs, personal care attendants, or homework assistance. This is not the institution's responsibility.

- The student will adhere to the institution's student code of conduct and meet academic and technical standards required for admission or participation in the educational program or activity. Every student is held to the same high standards. The university is not obligated to provide an accommodation that will require substantial change to course or program activity.
- The student will attend classes regularly and meet all course requirements.
- The student will bring concerns about accommodations or services to the attention of the designated office for support services.

Adapted from University of Texas at El Paso. *The Center for Accommodations and Support Services: Student Rights and Responsibilities*. <http://sa.utep.edu/cass/rights-and-responsibilities>. Accessed October 12, 2014.

Many students with learning disabilities typically have average-to-superior ability, yet they experience marked difficulty in one or more academic areas as a result of a significant information processing disorder. To be considered as a disability that warrants accommodation, the disorder must substantially interfere with the student's participation in the educational process.

The student who requests disability-related services must provide a current and comprehensive written evaluation of his or her learning disabilities. Extensive print and video resources are available at the Association on Higher Education and Disability website (<http://www.ahead.org>).

There must be clear and specific evidence and identification of the student's disability(ies). Individual learning or processing differences do not, by themselves, constitute a learning disability.

- The student's disability-related information will be treated as confidential.
- The student will receive appropriate accommodations in the classroom and/or campus.
- The student has the right to appeal decisions regarding accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids.

### ***RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES***

- The student is responsible to disclose the disability for which he/she is seeking accommodation.
- The student will provide adequate medical documentation to verify the existence of a disability that supports the need for an accommodation.
- The student will meet posted deadlines for requesting accommodations. Many support services require advance planning, such as readers, inter-

The determination of a learning disability is based on the following:

- An educational history
- Behavioral observations
- Clearly specified and significant intracognitive and cognitive-achievement discrepancies
- Current functional limitations imposed by the learning disability in the academic setting
- Evidence that the disorder substantially interferes with the student's educational progress<sup>18</sup>

## **Standards of Performance in Physical Therapist Assistant Education**

Individual academic programs are responsible for defining standards of performance and request that students inform them if they require reasonable

accommodation to meet those standards.

Essential functions are key duties ([Table 12-4](#)) that student physical therapist assistants must be able to complete, with or without accommodation.<sup>19</sup>

## **Employment Issues for Physical Therapist Assistants With Disabilities**

The ADA requires employers to *make reasonable accommodations* for a qualified individual with a known physical or mental disability. Examples of reasonable accommodations include job restructuring, reassignment to a vacant position, part-time or modified work schedules, assistive technology, or aides or qualified interpreters. The ADA does

not require employers to make accommodations that pose an “undue hardship” (defined as significantly difficult or expensive). Tax credits are available to businesses that remove architectural barriers, target jobs for individuals with disabilities, or provide assistive technology or interpreters to workers with disabilities.[20](#)

Employers are required to make reasonable accommodation for qualified individuals with a disability who are defined by the ADA as individuals with a disability, who satisfy the job-related requirements of a position held or desired, and who can perform *the essential functions* of such position, with or without reasonable accommodation ([Table 12-5](#)).

The employer identifies the job’s essential functions. Job descriptions, giving evidence of a job’s essential functions, are prepared before an individual is interviewed or selected for a position. If the individual cannot perform an es-

# Clinical Education Issues

*Hilary was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis during the first semester of the physical therapist assistant program. One year later, she was in remission; however, she often felt fatigued after physical exertion. Although she tried to conserve energy, she found herself wiped out at the end of an 8-hour clinical day. She requested an 18-week clinical assignment, instead of the usual 9 weeks and requested that she attend the clinic from 8:00 a.m. to noon daily.*

Clinical education courses are usually held in off-campus clinical sites. Those clinical sites, through their agreements with the physical therapist assistant program, agree to make accommodations for student learning. Changes in the type of assignment,

daily hours, or duration of the assignment would all be reasonable accommodations.

However, the student is always responsible for requesting accommodations that will assist him or her to meet the essential job functions. The clinical and academic faculty are responsible to ensure that all educational conditions meet national and state laws and are in compliance with ethical guidelines for the practice of physical therapy.

## Summary

Federal legislation mandates accommodation for students with disabilities. An understanding of the types of services available for students with disabilities and the educational program's requirement to provide those services will assist students with disabilities to successfully complete physical therapist assistant education.

essential function, even with accommodation, the individual is not considered as *a qualified individual with a disability* under the law.

The employer and employee determine the type of accommodation that will enable the employee to perform the essential functions of the position. Accommodations of a personal nature (such as a guide dog for an employee with a visual impairment or a wheelchair for an employee with paraplegia) would not be the employer's responsibility.

Employers must provide a list of essential functions of a job. The essential functions listed in [Table 12-4](#) are representative of the essential functions for the physical therapist assistant in an employment situation.

TABLE 12-4

**ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS FOR  
THE PHYSICAL THERAPIST  
ASSISTANT STUDENT<sup>19</sup>**

	<i>CATEGORIES OF ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS</i>	<i>DEFINITION</i>	<i>EXAMPLE OF TECHNICAL STANDARD</i>
1.	Critical thinking/ problem solving skills	Ability to collect, interpret and integrate information, and make decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect, interpret and integrate information, and make decisions.</li> <li>• Read and comprehend relevant information in text-books, medical records, and professional literature</li> <li>• Identify cause/effect relationships in the provision of health care</li> <li>• Identify patient problems and adjust patient goals and interventions appropriately within the health care team plan of care</li> <li>• Respond calmly and effectively to emergencies</li> <li>• Know when and how to apply universal precautions</li> <li>• Use effective teaching, learning, and test-taking strategies</li> </ul>
2.	Interpersonal skills	Ability to collaboratively work with all physical therapist assistant students and with program faculty in the classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work collaboratively with all physical therapist assistant students, faculty, staff, clinicians, and patients in the classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings</li> <li>• Embody the spirit of cooperation and collegiality, employing basic conflict management skills as situations require</li> <li>• Establish positive and supportive rapport with patients/clients and colleagues</li> <li>• Participate in all laboratory situations to experience both clinician and patient roles, receiving and communicating empathy</li> <li>• Establish positive, supportive, effective, and harmonious relationships in diverse settings, with diverse patient/clients and colleagues</li> </ul>
3.	Behavioral/emotional/ social coping skills	Ability to respond appropriately to stressful environments or during impending deadlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond appropriately to stressful environments or during impending deadlines</li> <li>• Display maturity, good judgment, sensitivity, and emotional stability when in academic and professional settings</li> <li>• Manage heavy academic schedules and deadlines</li> <li>• Concentrate on professional duties without distraction in all settings</li> <li>• Set priorities and perform all aspects of therapy services in fast-paced academic and clinical situations</li> <li>• Cope effectively with psychosocial issues involving illness, disability, and death without hindering effective performance of duties</li> </ul>

4.	Communication skills	Ability to communicate effectively in English using verbal, nonverbal, and written formats with faculty, other students, patients, families, and health care workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate effectively in English using verbal, nonverbal and written formats with faculty, other students, patients, families, and health care workers.</li> <li>• Describe and teach physical therapy procedures in both oral and written format</li> <li>• Give directions to patients and family members</li> <li>• Answer questions to the satisfaction of patients, coworkers, physicians, and other health care providers</li> <li>• Keep accurate logs and records of treatment procedures and charges using appropriate medical terminology, correct spelling, and grammar</li> <li>• Demonstrate active listening skills. Recognize, interpret, and respond to nonverbal behavior of self and others.</li> </ul>
5.	Physical mobility/ motor skills	Sufficient motor ability to execute the movement and skills required for safe and effective physical therapy treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Execute the movement and skills required for safe and effective physical therapy treatment</li> <li>• Demonstrate adequate coordination, balance, speed, and agility to assist and safely manage patients who are walking on level and unlevel terrain, including stairs, ramps, grass/gravel, curbs, and diverse home flooring</li> <li>• Demonstrate and perform exercise programs and functional activities required of established patient care interventions without injuring self or others</li> <li>• Move, adjust, and position patients or equipment, which involves bending, stooping freely to the floor, reaching overhead, lifting, pulling, or guiding a weight of 200 to 250 pounds</li> <li>• Provide emergency care and administer CPR</li> <li>• Stand, kneel, sit, walk, or crawl for 90 minutes without rest</li> <li>• Perform transfer and gait training techniques using correct and safe body mechanics</li> <li>• Manipulate, with sufficient dexterity bimanually, the devices used in physical therapy, such as adjusting gauges and dials with one hand while moving thermal/electric devices with the other hand</li> <li>• Manipulate small nuts/bolts and therapy equipment settings with sufficient hand strength and dexterity</li> </ul>

6.	Sensory abilities	Sufficient auditory, visual, and tactile ability to monitor and assess health needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and assess patient's health needs with sufficient auditory, visual, and tactile acuity</li> <li>• Visual (corrected as necessary) recognize and interpret facial expressions, body language, and patient posture; identify normal and abnormal patterns of movement; discriminate color changes and interpret and assess the environment up to 20 feet; read or set parameters on physical therapy equipment</li> <li>• Auditory (corrected as necessary) recognize and respond to soft voices or voices under protective garb, auditory timers, equipment/emergency alarms, and effectively use devices for the measurement of vital signs and breath sounds. Be able to hear patients and respond to patients' critical needs when not in direct line of sight</li> <li>• Tactile—palpate a pulse and detect changes or abnormalities of surface texture, skin temperature, body segment contour, muscle tone, and joint movement</li> </ul>
7.	Professionalism	Ability to demonstrate professional behaviors and a strong work ethic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate unselfish, honest, moral, and ethical behavior in all academic and professional settings</li> <li>• Take initiative; be creative, prepared, flexible, enthusiastic, cooperative, tolerant, respectful of authority, and industrious in all academic, clinical, and professional settings</li> <li>• Demonstrate time management skills that promote punctual attendance to class, laboratories, and clinics as required</li> <li>• Demonstrate a work ethic that is consistent with professional standards.</li> <li>• Recognize personal limitations and request assistance as appropriate.</li> <li>• Demonstrate responsibility for personal and professional development</li> <li>• Demonstrate respect for the patient, other health care providers, and the profession of physical therapy</li> <li>• Maintain confidences</li> <li>• Present professional appearance and maintain personal hygiene</li> </ul>

Reprinted with permission of Greenville Technical College Physical Therapist Assistant Program. Essential Functions and Technical Standards For Physical Therapist Assistant Students. <http://gvltec.edu/PTA/>. Accessed July 20, 2013.

## TABLE 12-5

# DEFINITION OF ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS<sup>20</sup>

*Essential functions* are the basic job duties that an employee must be able to perform, with or without reasonable accommodation.

Factors to consider in determining whether a function is essential include the following:

- Whether the reason the position exists is to perform that function
- The number of other employees available to perform the function or among whom the performance of the function can be distributed
- The degree of expertise or skill required to perform the function

Adapted from Department of Health and Human Services. Office of Civil Rights. Fact Sheet: Your Rights under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/factsheets/504.pdf>. Accessed July 20, 2013.

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# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Write down the contact information for your campus Office for Students With Disabilities. Write down the URL address of the Web page.

Name of director:

Campus location:

Telephone:

Website:

2. If you have a disability, write down any accommodations that you will request to enable you to complete your professional education in physical therapy.

If you do not have a disability, consider the accommodations that the following students requested. From your understanding of the provisions of the ADA, discuss whether these are reasonable. Why or why not? What services might be of value to these students?

Case A: Selena had been hard-of-hearing since early childhood.

Case C: John fractured his left tibia in a roller blading accident during summer break. His cast was removed 2 weeks prior to beginning his final clinical internships. He began his first internship and found that his foot was swelling at the end of the day. He found it impossible to continue at the pace required in the clinic. He requested an 8-week leave of absence from the program and went to recuperate at his parent's home.



She had never experienced difficulty before in her academic work. When she received an “F” on her first kinesiology test, she requested that the instructor prepare a written transcript of each lecture prior to the lecture so that she could read it as the instructor spoke in class.

Case B: Karen’s asthma was worse than usual this semester. The chemicals in the anatomy laboratory seemed to trigger her chemical sensitivities and cause her increased shortness of breath. She requested a rebreathing mask, similar to that used by firefighters, to eliminate this as a problem.