

# GUIDELINES FOR DOCUMENTATION OF PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES

**Note:** The Kansas Association of Higher Education and Disability has developed standards for documentation of a Psychiatric Disability that can be used by post-secondary institutions to determine appropriate accommodations. It is important to note that “psychiatric disabilities” is a generic term used to refer to a variety of conditions involving psychological, emotional, and behavioral disorders and syndromes. The terms psychological disabilities and psychiatric disabilities are used interchangeably in this document. The official source designed to outline the criteria used in making a diagnoses are the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV-TR). Each post-secondary institution in Kansas may adapt these guidelines to fit the unique needs of their own institution in accordance with national standards.

## **Introduction**

Students requesting accommodations or services because of a psychiatric disability are required to submit documentation to determine eligibility in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A diagnosis of a disorder/condition/syndrome in and of itself does not automatically qualify an individual for accommodations under the law. For students previously diagnosed who have not continuously received medical and educational support, a comprehensive evaluation may be necessary to determine whether academic accommodations are appropriate. To establish that a student is covered under Section 504 and the ADA, the documentation must indicate that the disability substantially limits some major life activity.

The following guidelines are provided in the interest of assuring that documentation of a psychiatric disability is complete and supports the request for accommodations. WSU will determine eligibility and appropriate accommodations, case-by-case, based on the quality, recency and completeness of the documentation submitted. The following guidelines provide students, schools, and qualified professionals with a common understanding of the components of documentation that are necessary to validate a diagnosis of a psychiatric disability, the impact on the individual’s educational performance, and the need for academic accommodations for the purpose of the ADA and Section 504.

## **Terms**

**Psychiatric disabilities:** Comprise a range of conditions characterized by emotional, cognitive, and/or behavioral dysfunction. A diagnosis of a disorder does not, in and of itself, meet the definition of a disability necessitating reasonable accommodations under the ADA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

**Major life activity:** Examples of major life activities include walking, sitting, standing, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, caring for oneself, and other similar activities.

**Functional limitation:** A substantial impairment in the individual’s ability to function in the condition, manner, or duration of a required major life activity.

## **Documentation Requirements**

### **A Qualified Professional Must Conduct the Evaluation**

The assessment must be administered by a trained, qualified, and licensed professional, who has had direct experience with adolescents and adults with psychiatric disorders. A qualified professional may include but is not limited to a medical doctor, psychologist, or student clinician who is being supervised by a professional. The evaluator's name, title and professional credentials and affiliation should be provided. The professional completing the evaluation should not be a family member. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated, signed, and otherwise legible.

### **Documentation Must Be Current**

Reasonable accommodations are based on the **current** (i.e. within the last six months) impact of the disability on academic performance. A diagnostic evaluation should be relevant to the student's learning environment and show the student's current level of functioning. If documentation does not address the individual's current level of functioning, a re-evaluation may be required.

### **Documentation Must Include a Specific Diagnosis**

The report must be comprehensive and include a specific diagnosis based on the DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria. It is recommended that the clinician report the diagnostic criteria used to support the diagnosis. The diagnostician should use direct language in the diagnosis, avoiding the use of terms such as "suggests" "appears" or "is indicative of".

### **Co-existing Conditions**

The diagnostic assessment should examine the possibility of co-existing conditions including medical disorders and learning disabilities. The evaluator should consider and discuss the possibility of alternative conditions that may mimic psychiatric disorders.

### **Documentation Must Be Comprehensive**

Documentation should be based on a comprehensive diagnostic/clinical evaluation that includes the following:

1. History of presenting symptoms
2. Duration and severity of the disorder
3. Relevant developmental, historical, and familial data
4. Procedures used to diagnosis the disorder (include a list of all instruments used in the assessment and test scores as applicable)
  
5. A description of current functional limitations in the academic environment as well as across other settings
6. Relevant information regarding medications, the student's history of compliance with medication and the anticipated impact on the student in an academic environment
7. Relevant information regarding current treatment

### **Recommendations for Accommodations**

A diagnostic report should include specific recommendations for accommodation(s). A prior history of an accommodation, without a demonstration of a current need, does not in and of itself warrant the provision of similar accommodation. Each accommodation recommended by an evaluator should include a rationale. The evaluation should support the recommendations with specific test results or clinical observations. If an accommodation is not clearly identified in the diagnostic report, WSU will seek clarification and, if necessary, more information, and will make the final determination as to whether appropriate and reasonable accommodations are warranted and can be provided. WSU reserves the right to request reassessment when questions regarding previous assessment or previous service provision arise. Depending on accommodations recommended, additional psycho-educational, neuropsychological or behavioral assessments may be necessary.