

What is a Disability?

The information in this pamphlet will help you

- Understand many different types of disabilities
- Learn the definition of disability and
- Determine whether or not you qualify for protection and accommodations

Types of Disabilities

You might have heard the saying that no two snow-flakes are alike. The same thing can be said about a person with a disability. Persons with disabilities have many different characteristics. In fact, many persons with disabilities look just like everyone else; their disability may be hidden.

There are many types of disabilities such as **physical**, **sensory**, **cognitive**, **psychiatric**, and **health-related**.

Physical disabilities often cause a person to use special equipment like a wheelchair, cane, or prosthetic limb. Persons with physical disabilities may have difficulty with movement or self-care, but are otherwise just like everyone else.

Another type of disability that people are familiar with is **sensory disabilities**. Sensory disabilities affect the senses and include blindness and deafness. Sensory and physical disabilities are usually easy for people to notice, but not all disabilities are visible.

An example of an invisible disability is a **psychiatric disability**. This category includes conditions like bipolar disorder, depression, and many others. Medications and therapies often help persons with psychiatric disabilities to live and function successfully in the community.

Cognitive disabilities vary tremendously and can also be difficult to see. Learning disabilities are in this category. A person with a learning disability usually has average to above average intelligence but difficulty learning, remembering and communicating information. Learning disabilities come in many different forms and although they usually affect a person's ability to complete school-related tasks, learning disabilities can also affect job performance.

Some people with sicknesses or disease such as epilepsy, diabetes, and cancer are considered as having a **health-related disability**. Not everyone who is sick has a disability. You should check with your school's office for students with disabilities to see if you qualify for assistance. Have you ever received special services or accommodations for any of the disability types described above?

Yes No

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a law written to protect persons with disabilities from discrimination. The ADA defines disability as any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, or working. For more information about the ADA, refer to the brochure titled, "Rights and Responsibilities of Students with Disabilities." Deciding whether a student meets the definition of disability under the ADA is handled on a

case-by-case basis. Keep in mind that persons are not entitled to protection under the ADA simply because they have been diagnosed with a disability. The disability **must** substantially limit their ability to perform major life activities.

To help you understand the many disabilities covered by the ADA, a partial list follows.

- Physical, sight, speech, or hearing impairments
- Epilepsy
- Muscular dystrophy
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Cancer, heart disease
- Diabetes
- Chronic illnesses
- HIV or AIDS
- Psychiatric disabilities
- Cognitive disabilities
- Specific learning disabilities
- Developmental disabilities
- Recovered drug or alcohol addiction

Services Available in the College Setting

must seek out accommodations and services at the university's Disability Resource Center. This requires you to present the necessary paperwork to prove that you do have a disability.

For example, a student with a learning disability would need to go to the Disability Resource Center office and present test scores and records that document the disability.

Then the student would discuss with a staff member which reasonable accommodations are needed to be successful. The college uses the Individual Accommodations Model to determine appropriate and effective academic accommodations. The model helps both the student and the service provider select accommodations that are based on a student's needs, strengths, and goals. For a person with a learning disability, accommodations might include extended time on tests, test-taking in an isolated setting, a note taker, or the use of a tape-recorder.

Steps I Should Take if I Think I Have a Disability

a disability in the past or have one now, contact the Disability Resource Center. You must present records to verify your disability. Next, you will need to determine whether your disability is substantially limiting your ability to be successful in the college setting. If it is, you may be entitled to accommodations. **Keep in mind that accommodations must be reasonable and are provided to give you a fair chance at success in school not a privilege or unfair advantage.**

If you think you may have a disability but do not have the necessary paperwork, contact the Disability Resource Center. They may be able to help you identify the steps you need to take to receive services and/or accommodations.

Self Advocacy

5 in a 6 Part Series

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This Brochure is available in alternative formats upon request.

What is a Disability?

A short guide to explain and describe disabilities

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In a 6 Part Series