

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Disability Support Services

Parent Handbook

9th Ave Office Building, Suite 100
1701 9th Ave South

205-934-4205
dss@uab.edu
www.uab.edu/dss

In this packet you will find important information about the services available for students with disabilities. This information is intended to assist you as you help your child through the process of applying for accommodations.

Information contained in this packet includes:

- ☐ A Letter to Parents
- ☐ Steps for Registering for Services
- ☐ Frequently Asked Questions
- ☐ Confidentiality handout
- ☐ Self Advocacy handout
- ☐ The Differences in Legal Rights and Responsibilities in Secondary and Postsecondary Education
- ☐ Eight Basic Principles of the ADA

Please let us know how we can assist you in this process. We look forward to working with your son or daughter.

DSS Mission Statement: Disability Support Services is committed to making UAB programs and services accessible to students with disabilities. To prevent discrimination based on disability in all UAB student programs and services, the primary goal of DSS is to ensure an accessible university environment by working with students, faculty, staff and community agencies to provide appropriate accommodations.

DSS serves as the central contact point for UAB students with disabilities. DSS strives to provide appropriate academic accommodations and to have students' academic performance evaluated without the limiting effects of a disability.

A Letter to Parents

Congratulations! If you're reading this letter, it's because you have successfully navigated your son or daughter through high school. Your child has now begun the journey into higher education. Over the years, you have likely assumed the role of parent advocate for your child because of his or her disability. You have probably spent a great deal of time with teachers, counselors and administrators determining your child's needs, discussing his or her disability, and advocating for accommodations.

Now you're ready for a new arena and ready to learn about parent advocacy at the college level. The most important thing for you to learn about college advocacy is that it really needs to begin in high school. Up to this point, you have likely assumed the role of spokesperson for your son or daughter, but in college, that can no longer be the case. As soon as your son or daughter receives his or her diploma, all the rules change.

For many parents, the most difficult change between high school and college is the recognition that the laws of the US recognize an 18 year old as an adult. At the college level, this means that the student, not the parent, is the advocate. *See the handout "Self Advocacy" for more information about how to help your child become his or her own advocate.*

While the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* governs the provision of accommodations for children with disabilities in primary and secondary education settings, it does not apply in postsecondary settings (*see "The Differences in Legal Rights and Responsibilities in Secondary and Postsecondary Education" handout*).

Under *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)* the student must self-identify as a person with a disability, provide appropriate documentation of that disability and assist in the process of determining what accommodations would be effective in meeting his or her needs.

Under the *Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA)* no person from the college can discuss confidential information, which includes anything related to grades or disabilities, with parents, without permission from the student. At the high school level, the relationship is between the school district and the parents; at the college level, the relationship is between the college and the student.

To this end, our office is happy to discuss general information with you. This includes information about the process of applying for eligibility, specific documentation requirements, and how specific accommodations work at UAB. Confidential information such as grades or if your child has picked up accommodation letters, however, will not be discussed without explicit permission from your son or daughter.

It is our privilege and pleasure to serve the students with disabilities at UAB. We are committed to helping make UAB more accessible or every student. We will work one-on-one with your child to determine the accommodations that are appropriate for him or her at the college level.

Process for Students to Register for Accommodations

ALL STEPS MUST BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT TO BE ACTIVELY REGISTERED

1. **Application:** The application for DSS services is available on the DSS website: www.uab.edu/dss. The application must be completed by the student.
2. **Documentation of Disability:** Students with disabilities requesting accommodations from UAB must submit documentation of their disability to DSS. Documentation guidelines are available on the DSS website at www.uab.edu/dss. These guidelines should be provided to the person or agency responsible for conducting the evaluation.

Documentation costs are the student's responsibility. Documentation must be current (see guidelines for specific timeframes) and must represent testing on the student as an adult. Usually, documentation accepted by DSS is valid as long as students are continuously enrolled at UAB. However, students may need to present updated documentation to receive services through DSS if they leave UAB and return, or if students experience a significant change in their physical, mental, or social situation.

Guidelines are available for the following categories of disabilities:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Learning Disability
- Psychiatric Disorders
- Mobility, Sensory and Systemic Disorders
- Traumatic Brain Injury

DSS will evaluate the documentation and send notification of status to the student. If all documentation is complete, the student will be asked to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodations. If documentation is incomplete, the student will receive an e-mail that will specify what is needed.

3. **Intake:** The student will have an individual meeting with one of the DSS counselors to discuss individual needs, specific accommodation requests and how their academic functioning is impacted by the disability.
4. **Accommodations Conference:** Once all documentation and eligibility requirements are met, the student will meet with a DSS counselor to discuss specific accommodations and the process of receiving accommodations. During this meeting, a counselor will also review the process of sending accommodation letters to their instructors.

Important Notes

- Just because a student received accommodations in high school or at another college or university, does not mean they are automatically eligible to receive accommodations at another institution.
- Many high school students have an IEP or 504 plan. Generally, these are not sufficient to receive accommodations in college. The student will likely need to have original documentation from a diagnosing professional or evaluator.
- Accommodations are generally not retroactive. The student begins receiving accommodations once they have completely registered with DSS and present their instructor with an accommodation letter.
- The registration process may take several days to weeks to complete depending on the completeness of the documentation submitted.
- Having a diagnosed disability does not necessarily mean the student will qualify for accommodations.

Frequently Asked Questions

A Handout Given to Students Registered with DSS

I have a disability and want to receive accommodations at UAB. How do I get started?

All students must be accepted at UAB to apply to receive accommodations. See the Admissions Office (934-8221) for information about applying to UAB.

1. **Obtain copy of documentation requirements for your disability.** These are available on our website at www.uab.edu/dss. You can also come by our office—9th Ave Office Building, Suite 100 at 1701 9th Ave S, e-mail dss@uab.edu, or call at 934-4205 or 934-4248 (TDD) to request a copy of our handbook and the specific documentation requirements.
2. **Complete a DSS application form and return to DSS** (available on the website or by contacting the DSS office). We cannot process documentation until we have an application on file from the student.
3. **Submit necessary documentation to DSS office.** Refer to documentation guidelines (page 13 of this handbook) for more information on what is needed by the DSS office to provide accommodations. You may have this mailed, hand-delivered, or faxed to our office:

UAB Disability Support Services
9th Ave Office Building, Suite 100
1720 2nd Ave S
Birmingham, AL 35294-1413
Fax: (205) 934-8170

4. **Follow-up with our office to make sure documentation is complete.** You may call, e-mail, or come by to check on the status of your documentation. *It is your responsibility to make sure all documentation is complete.*
5. **Once documentation is complete, DSS will notify you.** Once you receive this notification, then you will make an appointment with a DSS counselor to have an accommodations conference where you will receive your accommodation letters, and have your orientation to DSS services.

What documentation is required?

See specific documentation guidelines. If you had an IEP or 504 plan in high school, these documents can be valuable sources of information, but may not be sufficient as the primary source of documentation of a disability. Evaluation by a qualified professional with expertise in the area of your disability is required. Also, previous accommodations from other institutions do not automatically guarantee services at UAB.”

Who will I work with during the application process and once I’m accepted?

You will work with our disability specialist counselors throughout the process. At any point in time you have questions or concerns, our counselors will be available to help you.

What accommodations can I expect?

DSS handles each request for services individually, based on your documentation, which ensures you'll receive the accommodations that are appropriate for you. Here are just a few examples of common services DSS can provide:

- priority registration
- extended time for exams
- sign language interpreters
- books in alternative formats
- tape recording of lectures
- note-taking assistance
- testing environments with reduced distractions:
- screen reader applications
- screen magnifier applications
- large monitors
- accessible workstations
- ergonomic keyboards
- closed-captioning
- Braille translation software
- voice-to-text software

This list does not include all the services and equipment available. If you have a specific accommodation request, please inform DSS.

DSS does not provide financial aid, attendant (personal) care, transportation services, or tutoring.

I am an Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) client. What should I do?

You can request that your Vocational Rehabilitation counselor send in the documentation they have regarding your disability.

I am not a client of ADRS, but would like to apply. Now what?

ADRS offices are located throughout the state of Alabama. Other states have just as many. Apply through the office nearest you. You may contact the local ADRS Homewood office at 290-4400. If you have trouble, contact the main office in Montgomery at 334-288-0220 or 1-800-441-7578.

Where can I get a scholarship?

Oftentimes students mistakenly refer to the financial aid of Vocational Rehabilitation Services as a "scholarship". Financial assistance provided through Vocational Rehabilitation is considered financial aid; not everyone is eligible. Students may find additional information and resources through the UAB Financial Aid Office (205 934-8223). Students are advised to schedule an appointment with a Financial Aid consultant and should be aware that most scholarships and financial aid options are not disability-related

Confidentiality and Your Disability

A Handout Given to Students Registered with DSS

Now that you are in college, you are an adult. The laws of the United States recognize an 18 year old as an adult. All documentation, forms and information that you submit to Disability Support Services are kept in a confidential file. We will not discuss your information with anyone without your specific permission.

This includes faculty, doctors, and parents. Under the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) no person from the college can discuss confidential information, which includes anything related to grades or disabilities without permission from the student.

Faculty. If a faculty member calls to ask questions about your accommodations, with your permission, we will discuss your specific accommodations with them. We will, at no time, release information about your disability or diagnosis, as this is confidential information.

We encourage you to not disclose your disability to faculty as well. Some faculty, being well-intentioned, may say, "If you tell me your disability, then I can know better how to help you." You do not need to tell them your disability in order for them to provide accommodations. If you have given them your accommodation letter, then you can let them know that the accommodations listed will be helpful to you. If you have any difficulty with faculty telling you that they need to know your disability, please contact DSS as soon as possible.

Parents. Federal law prohibits us from discussing confidential information with your parents as well. This includes any information related to grades or disabilities. Our office cannot release any confidential information without your explicit permission. Remember, at the college level, the relationship is between the college and the student.

Self Advocacy

A Handout Given to Students Registered with DSS

Now that you are in college, it's up to you to advocate for yourself and your needs. When you were in high school, your parents and teachers likely determined what you need and discussed your disability. Teachers and parents likely identified that you had a disability and made arrangements for you to receive services. In college, the process works much differently. In college you must do the following to receive accommodations:

- It is the student's responsibility to self-identify and disclose a disability to an institution
- It is the student's responsibility to provide the necessary required documentation of a disability

In addition to self-identifying and providing the necessary documentation, you will need to be able to answer these questions when arranging for your accommodations:

- What is your disability?
- How does your disability affect you in the classroom?
- What accommodations have been helpful in the past?
- What accommodations do you think you need?

Advocating for yourself also means that it is your responsibility to talk to your professors about what you need. It is up to you to decide if and when you will use your accommodations. You may choose to use accommodations in some classes while not in others, or a combination of accommodations if they suit your specific needs. The decision is up to you. So, you will need to be able to discuss the following with professors:

- Which accommodations you intend to use in the classroom (don't assume that they know)
- Coordinate with them how the accommodations will be provided, such as extended time on tests, alternative format for tests, etc.

Professors and instructors will not remind you when assignments are due or if you have incomplete assignments. They will have no parental contact. They expect that you will read, save, and refer back to your course syllabus. You are completely responsible for your classes. If you need assistance, they expect you to approach them and ask.

Some other examples of things you will need to do to advocate for yourself in college:

- Act as independent adults
- Arrange your own weekly schedule
- Contact your instructors regarding assistance
- Arrange for and obtain your own personal tutoring
- Self monitor and seek assistance and help when needed

The Differences in Legal Rights and Responsibilities in Secondary and Postsecondary Education

	Secondary Education	Postsecondary Education
What is the law?	IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 504: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990	504: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
What is the intent of the law?	IDEA: To provide a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment to identified students with disabilities, including special education and related services. 504/ADA: To ensure that no other-wise qualified person with a disability is denied access to, benefits of, or is subject to discrimination solely on the basis of disability.	504/ADA: To ensure that no other-wise qualified person with a disability is denied access to, benefits of, or is subject to discrimination solely on the basis of disability.
Who is covered under the law?	IDEA: All infants, children and youth requiring special education services until age 21 or graduation from high school.	504/ADA: All qualified persons with disabilities who, with or without reasonable accommodations, meet the college's admissions requirements and the specific entry level criteria for the specific program and who can document the existence of a disability
What is a disability?	IDEA: A list of 13 disability classification areas are defined in IDEA and include specific learning disabilities. 504/ADA: have no such list. A person with a disability is defined as anyone who has: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. any physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life functions; 2. a history of such an impairment 3. or is regarded as having such an impairment. 	504/ADA: A person with a disability is defined as anyone who has: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. any physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life functions 2. a history of such an impairment 3. is regarded as having such an impairment. ADA: also includes HIV status and contagious and non-contagious diseases.

Who is responsible for identifying and documenting need?	School districts are responsible for identifying and evaluating potential students with disabilities. When such a determination is made, the district plans educational services for classified students at no expense to the family.	Students are responsible for self-identification and for obtaining disability documentation from a professional who is qualified to assess their particular disability; cost of the evaluation must be assumed by the student, not the post-secondary institution.
Who is responsible for initiating service delivery?	School districts are responsible for identifying students with disabilities and providing special education programs and services, including related services, and transition services as delineated in an Individualized Education Program.	Students are responsible for notifying the Disability Support Services staff of their disability and of their need for reasonable accommodations. Accommodations (not special education) are provided on a case-by-case, as-needed basis in order for students with disabilities to have equal access to the institution's programs and activities.
Who is responsible for enforcing the law?	IDEA is an entitlement law, enforced by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services in the US Department of Education. Local enforcement is the responsibility of the NYS Department of Education Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID)	504/ADA: are civil rights statutes overseen by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) , and the US Department of Justice in conjunction with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) .
What about advocacy?	The parent or guardian is the primary advocate. Students with disabilities from age 14 on must be invited to participate in the IEP process. If the student does not attend, the district must ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered.	Students must be able to self-identify and discuss their disability and needs in order to work with the Disability Support staff to implement reasonable accommodations. The Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) guarantees student confidentiality. Conversations with parents regarding confidential information without written consent from the student are illegal.

Basic Principles of the ADA As They Apply to Colleges & Universities

By J. Trey Duffy

1. **The ADA is a civil rights law intended to provide equal access and opportunity for people with disabilities.** It is not intended to afford anyone special privileges.
2. **Disability = Impairment + Substantial Limitation + Major Life Activity.** Determining impairments and major life activities is relatively straightforward. Measuring what constitutes a “substantial limitation” is the complex aspect of determining disability. Not everyone with impairment is disabled; only those whose impairments rise to the level of “substantial limitation” are qualified as disabled.
3. **The individual must be otherwise qualified.** In education this means the individual meets the academic and technical standards for admission or participation. However, if the qualification for attending a specific event, such as a lecture or performance, is having a ticket, then an individual with a disability possessing a ticket is qualified.
4. **Institutions must provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities.** Reasonable accommodations are modifications to policies, practices or environments that allow an individual with a disability equal access or opportunity.
5. **Institutions do not need to provide a reasonable accommodation if it fundamentally alters the nature of the program or activity.** For example, a student, who because of their disability will miss several weeks of class, asks for permission to work from home and not attend classes. This may be reasonable, but the request can be denied if the instructor/college believes attending class is fundamental. Attendance may be fundamental in a foreign language class and not be fundamental in math (e.g. all the math assignments can be done at home and class participation may not be an essential requirement).
6. **Students must self-identify, provide documentation of disability and request services and accommodations.** Accommodations requested after the fact are not appropriate and generally need not be provided.
7. **The institution can decide on the type of accommodation to be provided and need not always provide what is requested.** The institution should consider specific requests and provide them whenever reasonable and feasible. The primary issue is that accommodations need to be ‘effective.’
8. **Only individuals who currently have a “disability” are entitled to accommodations.** An individual with a “history” of a disability is protected from discrimination but is not disabled for the purposes of receiving services and accommodations. For example, an individual acquires the substantially limiting impairment of cancer. For two years, the student requests and receives a reduced course load, a campus disability parking permit, a notetaker when he/she is unable to attend classes and additional time on examinations (due to the effects of the chemotherapy). Three years after being diagnosed the student is fully recovered. The student no longer is disabled. However, they are protected against discrimination related to their prior history of having cancer. For example, it would be discriminatory if a graduate program took the cancer into consideration for admission purposes.