



## **Guidelines for Documentation of Psychological Disabilities in Adolescents and Adults**

### **Definition:**

A psychological disability is a condition which is listed in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fourth Edition, (DSM IV), and is identified as a moderate to severe clinical disorder or personality disorder. In addition, the condition must reflect a psychiatric or psychological condition that interferes with a major life activity such as working, learning, caring for oneself, etc.

### **Documentation of Disability:**

All students seeking accommodations must disclose the presence of a specific disability to the appropriate person or office at each college in the VSC. Documentation of diagnosis from an appropriately qualified practitioner and a request for accommodation must be presented in advance of need. Documentation must include a complete evaluation with relevant background information, evidence of diagnosis that substantially limits one or more major life functions based on the criteria published in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), and suggestions for accommodations in an academic setting. The cost of obtaining documentation is borne by the student. If the initial documentation is incomplete or inadequate to determine the extent of the disability and reasonable accommodations, the college has the discretion to require additional documentation. Any cost of obtaining additional documentation is also borne by the student. If a second professional opinion is requested, the college bears the cost.

The ADA prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities and requires "reasonable" accommodations that can be made without "undue hardship" to an institution. With or without accommodations, students must meet the requirements of each college in the VSC including: demonstrate academic achievement, abide by college policies, and engage in acceptable behaviors.

**Qualifications of the Evaluator:** Current and comprehensive information must be requested and obtained from a licensed professional (e.g. psychiatrist, psychologist, neuropsychologist, physician). The documentation should include the following: the name, title and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification; area of specialization; employment and state/province in which the individual practices. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated and signed.

**Diagnosis:** Students are asked to provide a recent professional evaluation which identifies a diagnosis of a psychological disorder according to the DSM-IV. Documentation should include

the date of diagnosis, information regarding the onset, longevity and severity of the (presenting) symptoms, medications being administered and possible side-effects.

Eligibility for accommodations: The documentation must describe the challenges faced due to this condition in an academic environment, and recommend academic accommodations to be provided. The documentation is intended to assist the student and the college in determining reasonable, appropriate and effective accommodations. All information is confidential, shared only with individuals determining the appropriate accommodations, and is not released to others without the student's permission.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

A student who has been certified with a psychological disability is responsible for meeting with the appropriate staff person at the college in order to arrange for reasonable accommodations for specific courses or campus services each semester. Once reasonable accommodations have been decided upon, as supported by the documentation provided, the student provides written consent for the staff member to write a letter for appropriate faculty and staff members detailing the accommodations. Information about the disability is only given to faculty and staff with the permission of the student, and on a limited basis, so that accommodations may be provided. The student is responsible for delivering the letter and contacting the faculty/staff member to arrange for implementation of the accommodations.