

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
PRACTICES FOR THE DOCUMENTATION AND ACCOMMODATION OF  
STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES – REVISED (May 2018)**

Federal and State law<sup>i</sup> and University of California policies<sup>ii</sup> require the University to provide reasonable accommodation in its academic programs to qualified<sup>iii</sup> students with disabilities, including students with learning disabilities.

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations appropriate to the nature and severity of the individual's documented learning disability in all academic programs, services, and activities.

University of California students with learning disabilities typically have average to superior ability, yet experience marked difficulty in one or more academic areas as a result of a significant information processing disorder. Specific learning disorder is a developmental disorder that begins by school-age, although it may not be recognized until later. It involves ongoing problems learning key academic skills, including reading, writing and math. To be considered a disability that warrants accommodations, the disorder must limit a major life activity.

## **I. DOCUMENTATION OF LEARNING DISABILITIES**

It is the responsibility of each student who requests services from the University of California to provide a comprehensive written evaluation of his or her learning disability. To verify the student's eligibility under Federal <sup>3</sup>, State <sup>4</sup>, and University <sup>5</sup> mandates and to document his/her need for reasonable accommodations and support services, this evaluation must demonstrate fulfillment of the following requirements:

### **A. Testing Must Be Comprehensive**

It is not acceptable to administer only one test in making a diagnosis. The domains to be addressed must include, but are not limited to, the following:

#### **1. Aptitude**

The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS-V) with scaled scores and percentiles and/or the Woodcock–Johnson Psycho–Educational Battery (WJ-IV): Tests of Cognitive Abilities (with standard scores and percentiles) are acceptable

#### **2. Achievement**

The student's current levels of functioning in reading, mathematics, and written language must be assessed under timed and untimed conditions to corroborate underachievement in specific academic areas. Acceptable instruments include: (a) the *Woodcock–Johnson Psycho–Educational Battery: Tests of Achievement (WJ-IV) including academic fluency tests* or (b) the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test IV and (c) specific

achievement tests such as the *Nelson–Denny Reading Test (NDRT)*, or the *Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests–Revised*. (*The Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT-4)* is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and, therefore, is not suitable by itself.) Additional formal and informal tests, as well as observations, may be integrated with the above assessments to assist in determining the presence of a learning disability and differentiating from co-existing disorders.

### **3. Information Processing**

Specific areas of information processing (for example, short- and long-term memory, reasoning, sequential memory, auditory and visual processing, processing speed, pragmatic expressive and receptive language and attention) are areas which should be considered. Suitable instruments include: the *WAIS–V*; the cognitive portion of the (*WJ–IV*); the *Wechsler Memory Scale (WMS–IV)*; the *Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing*; or the *Learning Efficiency Test-II*, designed to assist in corroborating the existence of processing disorders as identified by the *WAIS–V* or the *WJ–IV*, *Tests of Cognitive Abilities*, are recommended.

#### **B. Test Instruments**

The test instruments used to determine eligibility must be statistically valid and reliable, and standardized with age-appropriate norms.

#### **C. Test Score Data**

Test score data must be included in the diagnostic reports to document the basis of the diagnosis. Test data must be reported in standard scores and percentiles based on national norms. Additionally, diagnosing professionals are required to report standard scores using age norms when available (as they are for the *WJ-IV*).

#### **D. Testing Must Be Current**

Reasonably current documentation is needed to enable staff to determine the current functional limitations requiring reasonable accommodations and support services in the academic setting. Written reports must include the date of testing. The appropriateness of documentation will be determined by a Disabilities Specialist, the Disabilities Services Director, or other qualified staff member designated by the Disability Services Director. Additional testing may be required to determine the most appropriate accommodation(s).

#### **E. Diagnosing Professionals**

The professional(s) conducting the assessment and rendering diagnoses of specific learning disabilities must be qualified to do so. Qualified professionals include licensed educational or clinical psychologists, credentialed school psychologists, learning disabilities specialists, and speech and language pathologists. These professionals must have expertise in learning disabilities, training in administering the tests used, and be

experienced in working with adults. The diagnosing professional's name, title, signature and license number (if applicable) must be included on letterhead stationery.

## **F. Intake History and Presenting Concerns**

A written summary of the student's educational, medical, and family histories, and presenting concerns that may relate to learning disabilities, must be included in the diagnostic report. This summary should demonstrate that the student's difficulties in acquiring and using various academic skills are not the result of other factors such as educational under-preparation, sensory impairment, serious emotional disturbance, cultural differences, or insufficient instruction, but, indeed, point to a lifelong history of learning difficulties. Specific learning disorder is diagnosed through a clinical review of the individual's developmental, medical, educational, and family history, reports of test scores and educational history observations, and response to academic interventions.

## **G. Written Report**

The reports must describe the testing procedures, the instruments used to assess the individual, and interpretation of the test results related to the behavioral observations and intake history. The diagnosing professional is encouraged to use direct language in the written report, including whether a learning disability is confirmed or ruled out.

Finally, there must be clear and specific evidence and identification of the student's learning disability. Individual learning or processing differences do not, by themselves, constitute a learning disability. The determination of a learning disability should be based on: (a) an educational history, (b) behavioral observations, and (c) significant cognitive processing deficit and clearly marked impact on one or more areas of achievement. The diagnosis requires persistent difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic, or mathematical reasoning skills during formal years of schooling. Symptoms may include inaccurate or slow and effortful reading, poor written expression that lacks clarity, difficulties remembering number facts, or inaccurate mathematical reasoning. Current academic skills must be well below the average range of scores in culturally and linguistically appropriate tests of reading, writing, or mathematics.

To receive a diagnosis as described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (DSM V)*, the difficulties must not be better explained by: (a) intellectual or developmental disabilities, (b) external factors, such as economic or environmental disadvantage or lack of instruction (c) vision or hearing problems, (d) a neurological condition (e.g., pediatric stroke), motor disorders, or (e) difficulties due to limited English language proficiency, and must significantly interfere with academic achievement, occupational performance, or activities of daily living.

To establish eligibility for accommodations under state and federal law, the documentation must show current functional limitations imposed by the learning disability in the academic setting, and evidence that the learning disability limits a major life activity.

## II. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES

University academic accommodations and support services are not intended to remediate but are to provide students equal access by reducing the negative impact of their disabilities.

"Remediation" is defined as instruction in basic skills not acquired earlier in the educational process (for example, basic spelling), while "accommodation" refers to the provision of services that ensure equal access to a student with a learning disability (e.g., providing extended examination time for a student who processes information more slowly than other students because of a learning disability).

Academic accommodations and support services are determined on an individual basis. Each accommodation is based on functional limitations as identified in the documentation 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.

It is the responsibility of a Learning Disabilities Specialist, the Program Director, or other staff member designated by the Director to determine appropriate accommodations and services. This determination will be made following an intake interview conducted by a Disabilities Specialist or the Disability Services Director with the student, reviewing the information furnished by the diagnosing professional(s) and the students' requests. There must be an illustrated connection between the impact of disability, the described barrier and the accommodation request. If there is not appropriate and sufficient evidence on which to base decisions concerning accommodations and services for a student with a learning disability, the student may be referred for additional assessments (e.g. tests of intelligence, cognition/information processing, and academic achievement).

Each campus has procedures for resolving complaints or grievances regarding the provision of academic accommodations and support services.

1. These *UC LD Practices* were revised within the scope of the *Guidelines for Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults*, the national model published by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (*AHEAD*).
2. The *Practices* (formerly *Guidelines*) were originally issued in August, 1988. The revised version was adopted by the Directors of the University's Disabled Student Services on October 27, 1994. The current *UC LD Practices* were adopted by the Directors in July, 1998. Updated in June 2009, and June 2013.
3. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the ADA Amendments Act of 2012 are the pertinent Federal laws; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 uses the term "academic adjustments" when referring to ways of promoting instructional and programmatic access for students with disabilities. The term "reasonable

- accommodation and support services" is used in these Practices because it emphasizes the goal of addressing the student's disability-related need for equal access in the academic setting.
4. California Education Code Part 40, Chapter 14.2 (conditions for State funding of services to disabled students) and Government Code sections 1135 and 12926 are the pertinent State law.
  5. University of California Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations, and Students, Section 140.00: Guidelines Applying to Non-discrimination on the Basis of Disability.
  6. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. (DSM-5) American Psychiatric Association. American Psychiatric Association Publishing. 2013.
  7. Gerber PJ: The impact of learning disabilities on adulthood: a review of the evidenced-based literature for research and practice in adult education. *J Learn Disabil* 45(1):31–46, 201
  8. Gabbard, GO. *Gabbard's Treatments of Psychiatric Disorder, Fifth Edition.* American Psychiatric Publishing. 2014

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<sup>i</sup>. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2012 are the pertinent Federal laws. For pertinent State law, see Chapter 14.2, Section 67310 of the California State Education Code.

<sup>ii</sup>. University of California *Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Organizations and Students*, Section 140 (*Guidelines Applying to Non-discrimination on the Basis of Disability*).

<sup>iii</sup>. "Qualified" with respect to post-secondary educational services, means "a person who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the education program or activity, with or without reasonable modifications to rules, policies, or practices."