

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Pulled from

The IUSM medical student handbook available at <http://msa.iusm.iu.edu/StudentManual/>

Committee on Students with Disabilities

The Indiana University School of Medicine Disabilities Accommodations Committee (DAC) reviews all requests for accommodations for a disability. The Committee membership includes the following: Medical Student Affairs Director of Mentoring and Student Development, the Learning Specialist, the Associate Dean for Medical Student Affairs, a representative from clinical faculty, a neuropsychologist, the IUPUI Director of Adaptive Educational Services, and legal counsel. Meetings of this committee are confidential.

The DAC reviews all requests for accommodation. They determine 1) whether or not a student is to be considered "disabled" at IUSM under the Americans with Disabilities Act, 2) whether or not the student seems otherwise qualified for medical school, based on our standards for capacity, 3) whether or not the student is entitled to accommodation, based on documentation, and 4) what specific accommodations, if any, would be most reasonable. The committee approves policy revisions related to disability issues as necessary. In order to maximize confidentiality, only members of the DAC have access to students' full diagnostic information.

Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities

Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act require the School to provide certain kinds of reasonable accommodation (to qualified students), when necessary to provide an equal learning opportunity. Under the law, "reasonable" must be individually determined after a student requests accommodation.

Qualifying

To qualify for accommodation, a student must identify him/ herself to the Director, Medical Student Affairs Office for Mentoring and Student Development (OMSD) and to the IUPUI Office of Adaptive Educational Services; declare the disability (or suspected disability) in writing; and request accommodation. It is also the student's responsibility to obtain a thorough written evaluation from an appropriate professional, documenting the presence, extent, and ramifications of the disability. In addition, the documentation should explain what specific types of accommodation the evaluator believes might be most helpful in offsetting the effects of the disability to an acceptable extent in a medical school environment. Our goal at IUSM is to provide equal opportunity without undermining the integrity of any course, clerkship, or program.

The student must obtain this evaluation at his/her own expense and arrange to have the evaluation form and all supporting documentation forwarded to the Director, Office of Mentoring and Student Development. If an evaluation has already been conducted in the past, the

Director will determine if it is recent enough. An evaluation performed more than three years earlier may not be acceptable, and there are instances in which an evaluation must have been completed within a few months or even weeks.

Disabilities Accommodations Committee (DAC) Review

After receiving acceptable documentation, the Director will convene the DAC to review the documentation and consider the student's requests. If appropriate, they will approve a plan for accommodating the student.

If the DAC determines that the documentation provided does not meet its established standards, additional information will be requested. If further evaluation is required, it remains the student's responsibility to arrange for that evaluation, at his or her expense.

Implementation

When a disability has been acknowledged, and a specific accommodation plan is approved by the DAC, the Director will meet with the student to discuss implementation of the plan. At that time, she will give the student a signed form outlining the approved accommodations. The student may then share a copy of this form with individual course and/or clerkship directors, or with other staff who have relevant responsibilities. Sharing this information is typically at the discretion of the student, and is his or her responsibility in order to arrange for accommodations. There may, however, be occasions on which the Director communicates directly with faculty or other administrators, on a need-to-know basis, about a student's functional limitations.

A student is not entitled to accommodation in any course, clerkship, or activity if the form is not presented before specific accommodations are needed. Course/clerkship directors provide approved accommodations to all students who have shown their forms, provided the forms are presented in a timely fashion. (Presenting the form as early as possible is recommended, and individual courses or clerkships may have deadlines.) If a student's accommodation plan includes assistive devices or extensive supplemental aid, additional time may be required to make arrangements, and the Director will help to make those arrangements directly.

Appeals

Any student wishing to appeal an accommodation decision made by the DAC should first appeal to the DAC itself. The student should explain in a letter why he or she believes the prior decision was unfair or unreasonable, and should include any available corroborating information with the letter. The Director of OMSD will accept the letter and schedule a meeting of the DAC as soon as possible. It may be necessary for the student to meet with the Committee to answer questions.

If a student disagrees with the DAC's decision after an appeal has been presented, that student may make a final appeal to the Dean of the Medical School. Once again, the student should submit a letter describing the situation and indicating why the DAC's decision does not appear to be fair or reasonable. The Dean will then consider the need and method for further review and study. The Dean's decision is final.

Confidentiality

Disability information is considered private. Faculty, with the exception of those on the DAC, do not have the right to access students' diagnostic information. Ordinarily, faculty members and other relevant staff need know only the accommodations that are necessary to provide an equal opportunity for students.

There are times, however, when certain faculty members and/or administrators may have a legitimate educational need to know about a student's functional limitations, as well. In such cases, the Director of OMSD may speak directly with those individuals to ensure appropriate planning. This kind of direct communication by the Director happens if the DAC has decided that members of the IUSM community have an educational need to know about a student's limitations, or if an issue arises that may involve the safety and well being of patients, students, or staff. Students are also encouraged to speak with faculty as openly as possible to facilitate better understanding and support.

Faculty and/or staff to whom accommodation forms are presented may copy these forms for their records, but they should take care to keep the information private. The accommodation information conveyed on the forms should be communicated only to other faculty and/or staff who have an educational need to know (for instance, those who are involved in providing the accommodations, or those who are responsible for the educational environment). If a faculty member or a student has any questions about specific accommodations, he/she may contact the Director of OMSD. All documentation and correspondence concerning a student's disability are kept in a separate file in the Office for Mentoring and Student Development.

Clinical faculty (e.g. clerkship directors) who have occasion to write student evaluations at the end of clerkships must be careful not to breach the confidentiality afforded students with disabilities. Written evaluations, which may be excerpted in the Dean's Letter or seen by others outside the IUSM community, should not mention disabilities or accommodations for disabilities in any way. Once a student has been approved for specific accommodations by the DAC, and has subsequently received those accommodations, that student should be held to the same essential performance standards as all other students. Therefore, clinical faculty should focus strictly on the student's performance in all these evaluations. With regard to letters of reference solicited by students, faculty members may mention a disability IF the student gives prior permission for them to do so.

Indiana University School of Medicine does not notify potential residency programs or other employers about student disabilities without specific permission from the student. Because students with disabilities, once accommodated, are held to the same standards as other students, we do not make notation of any kind on the transcript or in the official Dean's letter.

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