

Guidelines for Documenting Chronic Medical Health Disabilities

These guidelines apply to students who have chronic disabilities in the following areas:

- **Mobility** – limited function of movement in any limbs and/or fine motor ability
- **Systemic** – chronic illnesses or conditions affecting one or more of the body's systems
- **Acquired brain injury** – brain damage resulting from accident or illness that affects processing speed, memory, communication, motor, sensory, physical, and/or psychosocial abilities

Students requesting accommodations for chronic medical/health disabilities must submit documentation that meets the guidelines below. In addition, individuals with acquired brain injury may need to submit a psycho-educational test battery, as referenced in the Documentation Guidelines for Learning Disabilities.

1.) **A Qualified Evaluator.** Professionals conducting assessments, rendering a medical diagnosis, and making recommendations for appropriate accommodations must be qualified to do so. These are physicians, including licensed M.D.'s and D.O.'s. The evaluator may not be a family member. The documentation must:

- include evaluator's name, title, professional credentials, license and/or certification number,
- be presented in English on the professional's letterhead, typed, dated, signed, and legible.

2.) **Current Documentation.** Reasonable accommodations are based on the current impact of a disability. Comprehensive documentation from a qualified evaluator completed within the past twelve months can typically provide a current picture. The documentation may need to be updated annually so that we can best accommodate the student. Older documentation that establishes that the condition is permanent/unchanging may also be sufficient.

3.) **Comprehensive Documentation.** Medical disabilities encompass a myriad of conditions. In addition, medical conditions are often changeable in nature, and sometimes difficult to categorize. Documentation must therefore be thorough, giving a full picture of the individual, not simply a diagnosis. A diagnosis alone is not a basis for accommodation. Documentation must include:

- a description of the current impairment, including:
 - relevant medical history
 - the dates the condition was acquired and/or diagnosed,
 - a history of symptoms,
 - a summary of assessment procedures and evaluation instruments/reports used,
 - diagnosis duration and severity of the disorder,
 - treatment and medication history, including medication side effects,
 - if applicable, documentation of assistive devices and technology used, with estimated effectiveness; this would include a history of any disability-related accommodation(s),
 - status of the individual's condition - static, improving, or degrading,
 - expected progression of the condition over time.
- a diagnosis of medical disability must be rendered including:
 - clear statement of diagnosis, the subtype if applicable, with *ICD-10* code
 - the diagnostic criteria on which the diagnosis is based
 - cannot include wording such as "seems to indicate" or "suggests."
- the current functional limitations of the individual in an academic environment, which are **critical** to our understanding of the condition and a student's accommodation needs. These detail the ways that the diagnosed disability substantially limits the student in one or more major life activities.
- recommendations for accommodations in a post-secondary academic environment can be helpful if they include a clear rationale. Each recommendation should be based on interview, observation, and/or testing and correlated with both the diagnosis and the student's functional limitations.

4.) **Supporting Documentation.** The qualified physician's report, while necessary, is by no means the only documentation we can use to better understand and accommodate the student. Other helpful documents are: records of accommodation on standardized tests such as SAT, ACT, GRE, or LSAT, high school 504 plans or IEP's, previous psycho-educational evaluations, report cards, transcripts, and teacher, tutor, therapist, or employer reports. If needed for evaluation purposes, DASS may access students' SMU transcripts and records and contact current or former SMU instructors.