Disability Support Services (DSS)

Policy Regarding Documentation of a Specific Learning Disability

Students who are seeking support services from Pacific Lutheran University on the basis of a diagnosed specific learning disability are required to submit documentation to verify eligibility. Documentation of a learning disability consists of a professional evaluation, including psychological or educational testing results and including a written report which reflects the individual’s present level of information processing and his/her achievement level. This professional evaluation is considered by PLU to be a Medical Treatment Record and will be maintained as such by PLU in a manner that complies with state and federal law. The cost and responsibility for providing this professional evaluation shall be borne by the student.

The following guidelines are provided in the interest of assuring that the evaluation and report are current and appropriate for documenting eligibility. Documentation presented to Disabilities Support Services will remain in a confidential file in the DSS office. The Director of Disability Support Services is available for consultation with appropriate professionals regarding any of these guidelines. Documentation must:

1. Be prepared by a professional qualified by education and experience to diagnose learning disabilities, which would include but not be limited to: a licensed neuropsychologist or psychologist; educational psychologist; learning disability specialist or other appropriate professional certified to administer standardized psychological tests/statements identified below. Experience in evaluation of adults with learning disabilities is an essential requirement in this process. The report must include the name of the evaluator, credential(s) and dates of testing.

2. Be comprehensive in that all tests administered must be age appropriate, nationally normed, and individually administered; and include:

   a. Aptitude measures: The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale with subtest scores as the preferred measure, The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery and Tests of Cognitive Ability as an acceptable measure.

   b. Achievement measures: Current levels of functioning in all areas in which student accommodations are requested are required. Acceptable instruments include the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery: Tests of Achievement; Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK); or specific achievement tests such as the Test of Written Language-3 (TOWL-3), The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test- (WIAT), Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests.

   c. Cognitive/information processing abilities measures: Specific areas of cognitive functioning (e.g. short and long term memory, auditory and visual processing, processing speed) must be assessed. Use of the Wechsler Memory Scale and/or subtests from the WAIS, the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Ability, or neuropsychological test instruments with valid age-related norms is acceptable.
The above tests are **NOT** intended to be an exhaustive list or restrict assessment in other pertinent and helpful areas such as vocational interest, aptitudes and learning strengths. Rather they are a guideline to direct the areas needing assessment.

3. **Be current.** In most cases, this means within the past **three** years. Since assessment constitutes the basis for determining **reasonable accommodations,** it is in a student’s best interest to provide recent and appropriate documentation to serve as the basis for decision-making about a student’s request for accommodations in an academically competitive environment.

4. **Present clear and specific evidence.** Identify and state specific learning disability(ies). Individual “learning styles” and “learning differences” do not qualify as a learning disability.

5. **Include** in the report the exact instruments used, any exceptions to standardized procedures, test score data in percentiles and standard scores, a written interpretation of the results by the professional doing the evaluation.

6. **Provide a suggested list of possible academic accommodations,** with **supporting data** from the assessment, which is specific to the individual assessed. Requests which are not supported by proper and specified documentation will not be approved.

7. While the **professional evaluation** of a learning disability is considered by PLU to a Medical Treatment Record, records pertaining to the **academic accommodations** provided by PLU are considered to be Educational Records (and not Medical Treatment Records) as defined in the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 ("FERPA").** Records regarding **academic accommodations** may be utilized in the same manner and under the same conditions as other Educational Records. (www.plu.edu/print/handbook/conduct/FERPA.html).

8. Students should contact Disability Support Services with any questions or concerns regarding documentation of specific learning disabilities.
For Your Information

Documentation Necessary to Substantiate the Learning Disability Must be Comprehensive.

Prior documentation may have been useful in determining appropriate services in the past. However, documentation must validate the need for services based on the candidate’s current level of functioning in the educational setting. A school plan such as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan is insufficient documentation in and of itself, but can be included as part of a more comprehensive assessment battery. A comprehensive assessment battery and the resulting diagnostic report must include a diagnostic interview, assessment of aptitude, measure of academic achievement and information processing.

Each Accommodation Recommended by the Evaluator Must Include a Rationale.

It is important to recognize that accommodation needs can change over time and are not always identified through the initial diagnostic process. Conversely, a prior history of accommodation, without demonstration of a current need, does not in and of itself warrant the provision of a like accommodation.

The diagnostic report must include specific recommendations for accommodation(s) as well as a detailed explanation of why each accommodation is recommended. The evaluator(s) must describe the impact the diagnosed learning disability has on a specific major life activity as well the degree of significance of this impact on the individual. The evaluator(s) should support recommendations with specific test results or clinical observations. If no prior accommodation(s) has been provided, the qualified professional and/or the candidate should include a detailed explanation of why no accommodation(s) was used in the past and why an accommodation(s) is needed at this time.