

### *Guidelines for Documenting Mental Health Disabilities*

---

1.) **A Qualified Evaluator.** Professionals conducting assessments, rendering the diagnosis of psychiatric, psychological, behavioral, and emotional disorders/syndromes, and making recommendations for appropriate accommodations, must be qualified to do so. These are licensed professionals with comprehensive training and expertise in mental health, skilled in differential diagnosis of psychiatric disorders, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, relevantly trained medical doctors, clinical social workers, counselors, and psychiatric nurse practitioners. Typically, the evaluator has had an ongoing therapeutic relationship with the student. The evaluator may not be a member of the student's family. The report must:

- include the 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; therefore, it is of utmost importance for psychological documentation to address an individual's current level of functioning and present need for accommodations. Due to the changing nature of psychiatric disabilities, a full report from a treating mental health professional completed within the past twelve months is considered current. The documentation may require an annual update, depending on the nature of the condition.

3.) **Comprehensive Documentation.** The documentation **must** include:

- A discussion of:
  - relevant developmental, historical, and familial information
  - evidence of current functional impairment
  - duration and severity of the disorder
  - expected progression or stability of the impact of the condition over time
- A diagnosis of psychiatric disorder based on *DSM 5* or *ICD-10* criteria, including:
  - a clearly stated diagnosis, subtype if applicable, and diagnostic code,
  - a list of the *DSM 5* or *ICD-10* diagnostic criteria as the basis for the diagnosis,
  - evidence of the ruling out of other potential diagnoses, dual diagnoses, and alternative explanations such as educational, linguistic, and cross-cultural factors,
  - a description of how the diagnosis substantially impacts one or more major life activities,
  - cannot include wording such as "seems to indicate" or "suggests,"
  - **NOTE:** Test anxiety, in and of itself, is not an accommodated disability.
- A description of current and past treatments, therapeutic techniques, assistive devices, medications, etc. used to ameliorate the impact of the psychiatric disability.
- A description of current functional limitations of the individual in an academic environment (e.g., impact on study skills, test-taking and organizational skills). Functional limitations should be determined without consideration of mitigating measures (e.g., medication). If the condition is episodic in nature, level of functioning should be assessed based on active phase of symptoms.
- 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.) **Psychological Instruments.** Though not explicitly required, psychological instruments may be useful in helping the evaluator render a more accurate diagnosis and, therefore, better recommendations for accommodation. If such tests are used, results should be included in the report. All tests should be current with an explanation of validity, reliability, and the purpose for which they are being employed. Scores must be reported in raw, standardized, and/or percentile ranks, if applicable.

5.) **Supporting Documentation.** The qualified evaluator'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.