

### *Guidelines for Documenting Visual Impairment*

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1.) **A Qualified Evaluator.** A licensed ophthalmologist would be considered qualified to render a medical diagnosis, and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. The evaluator may not be a family member. Documentation must meet the following criteria:

- include the name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator,
- 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, so the documentation must describe an individual's current level of functioning and need for accommodations. The currency of documentation is dependent upon the nature of the vision loss. Thus, if the condition that leads to the loss of vision is progressive, DASS will request documentation that is within the **last two years**. Documentation for non-progressive visual impairments should be no older than **five years**. However, each request will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

3.) **Comprehensive Documentation.** Documentation must 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 clear statement of a visual disability with supporting data. Should not include wording such as "seems to indicate" or "suggests."
- A summary of present symptoms, which meet the criteria for diagnosis of a visual disability.
- Medical information relating to the student's needs and the status of the student's vision (static, improving or degrading), and expected progression of the condition over time
- Its impact on the demands of the academic program and the functional limitations of the visual impairment in an academic environment. Functional limitations should be determined WITHOUT consideration of mitigating measures (e.g., corrective lenses, etc.).
- Narrative or descriptive text providing both quantitative and qualitative (i.e., visual acuity exam) information about the student's abilities which might be helpful in understanding the student's profile, including the use of corrective lenses and ongoing visual therapy (if appropriate).
- 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 ophthalmologist'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.