

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a disability?

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** is a law written to protect persons with disabilities from discrimination. The ADA defines disability as any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits the ability to perform major life activities, such as walking, standing, seeing, speaking, hearing, breathing, taking-care of oneself, learning or working.

Deciding whether a student is eligible for accommodations under the ADA is handled on a case-by-case basis. A disability, in and of itself, does not necessarily require accommodation. In order to require an accommodation, a disability must limit functioning in school. The accommodations are then directly connected to any limitation that comes from the disability.

What are the different types of disabilities?

You might have heard the saying that no two snowflakes are alike. The same thing can be said about persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have many different characteristics. Sometimes a disability is obvious, and sometimes it is hidden. Physical and sensory disabilities are most often obvious.

Physical Disabilities often result in a person using special equipment such as a wheelchair or prosthetic limb. Persons with physical disabilities may have difficulty with movement or self-care. This includes individuals with temporary disabilities (such as a broken arm, broken leg, etc.)

Another type of disability that people are familiar with is sensory disabilities. **Sensory Disabilities** affect the senses and include blindness and deafness.

Other disabilities are not easily noticed. These are sometimes called hidden disabilities and include psychiatric, cognitive and health-related disabilities.

The category of **Psychiatric Disabilities** includes bipolar disorder, depression, and many others. Persons with psychiatric disabilities sometimes take medication and/or attend therapy to aid in living successfully in the community.

Cognitive Disabilities can vary considerably and are most often difficult to see. Learning disabilities are in this category. By definition, a person with a learning disability has a significant difference between ability and achievement in one or more areas. This often results in difficulty with learning, remembering or communicating information. Learning disabilities come in many different forms and they usually affect a person's ability to complete school related tasks.

People may be considered as having a **Health-Related Disability** if they have an illness such as cancer, epilepsy, arthritis, or diabetes, among others, although people may have an illness without having a disability.

What is adequate documentation?

Documentation is, quite simply, paperwork that verifies the presence of a disability and identifies how the disability affects the student in a school setting. The student is responsible for any costs involved in obtaining adequate documentation, if necessary.

Documentation is considered to be adequate if:

- It is provided by a licensed diagnostician who is qualified in the appropriate specialty area of the diagnosis
- It includes written assessments and identification of the disability
- It identifies recommended post-secondary accommodations
- It is recent enough to reflect the current impact or functional limitations of the disability
- It is a complete IEP or 504 Plan supported by the Department of Education

What is a reasonable accommodation?

A reasonable accommodation is any change or support that gives a student with a disability an equal opportunity to participate and benefit from school. Accommodations are basically adjustments to how things are usually done and help students with disabilities succeed in areas that are impacted by the disability. Reasonable accommodations are provided to give students with disabilities a fair and equal chance of success in school: they are not a privilege or an unfair advantage.

What are accommodations?

Accommodations are reasonable and appropriate academic adjustments granted to a student to make courses accessible after a review of their intake packet and disability documentation. Students must meet with the Disability Resources staff before the beginning of each semester to discuss arrangements for needed accommodations.

Accommodations:

- Provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in school
- Must be appropriate and effective for each individual
- Must be provided at no cost to the student with a disability
- Cannot fundamentally alter a program or course
- Cannot lower or change the academic or conduct standards of PCC
- Cannot cause an undue burden
- Do not include personal devices such as canes or hearing aids
- Do not include personal services such as assistance with dressing, eating, or personal Hygiene

What accommodations cannot be provided?

- Accommodations that lower or change classroom standards or program standards cannot be provided. For example, although a student may have an accommodation for extended time for taking tests, the test must not be easier or harder than the test the other students take.
- Personal devices such as canes or hearing aids and personal services such as assistance with dressing or eating cannot be provided.
- Accommodations that would change the essential functions of a program or class cannot be provided. For example, a person taking a class in small engine repair who has limited use of his/her hands could not be allowed to take a written test instead of actually repairing an engine. The essence of the course is to actually repair the engine, not to talk or write about it.
- Accommodations that would endanger the safety of the student or others cannot be provided.
- Please note that tutoring is not recognized as an accommodation, it is a service that PCC provides to all enrolled students.

What is the difference between accommodations at the college level vs. the K-12 system?

College life holds different challenges for students with disabilities. If you are a college student, you are considered a responsible adult by faculty and staff. You will be responsible for meeting course requirements and, as a student with a disability; you will be responsible for advocating for your needs. Services are available to you, but you are responsible for seeking them out. In contrast to your experience in elementary through high school where many responsibilities were assumed by your school, the responsibilities you have at the college level change. Below you will find some of the differences between high school and college:

High School:

Identifies students with disabilities, if they do not self-identify

Provides educational and psychological testing as needed

Involves parents or guardians in Academic decisions

Holds annual reviews and develops individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Modifies educational programs when necessary

Provides free and appropriate education

Provides personal services through school nurse or health service

Falls under entitlement law (IDEA)

Two-Year College:

Provides reasonable and appropriate accommodations for students who self-identify and furnish adequate documentation

Receives and keeps education and psychological assessments confidential. Does not provide testing but does provide referrals for psychological testing when needed

Communicates with parents only at the request of the student who has signed a release form

Requires the student to request accommodations each semester

Does not modify educational programs or fundamentally alter a course

Informs student of their right to equal access to post-secondary education

Allows for personal services which are arranged for and obtained by the student

Falls under ADA & ADAAA legislation

Remember: PCC considers college students to be independent with protection for privacy and confidentiality. PCC staff may not talk with a student's parent or guardian concerning academic activities without permission as was allowed in grades K-12.

Although eligibility for services in the K-12 setting was determined on the basis of a diagnosis, college accommodations are based on the impact a disability has on attending and completing college. Documentation of a disability at PCC needs to be more than just a diagnosis. It must discuss the manner in which the disability impacts the life of a student.

College students with disabilities must be otherwise qualified. This means that with or without accommodations, they must be able to meet the same standards as do all other students at PCC.