



## OFFICE OF SPECIALIZED SERVICES

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## **SUBSTANCE ABUSE DOCUMENTATION GUIDELINES**

### **OVERVIEW**

Students who are seeking disability services through the Office of Specialized Services (OSS) at Ramapo College on the basis of a substance abuse diagnosis are required to submit documentation to verify eligibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended (ADA). Alcohol and/or substance abuse recovery is considered a disability under the ADA if a major life activity is substantially limited. Substance abuse is a condition of physiological and/or psychological dependence on any of a variety of chemicals, including illegal drugs, prescription or over-the-counter drugs, and alcohol. Students who are recovering from the abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, or who are in treatment programs are covered under the ADA and may be eligible for accommodations. While the use of drugs and alcohol alone does not rise to the level of impairment that constitutes a disability, abuse and dependence can. However, the ADA specifically excludes from the definitions of "individual with a disability" any person who is currently engaging in the illegal use of drugs.

It is important to understand that a diagnosis in and of itself does not substantiate a disability. In other words, information sufficient to render a diagnosis might not be adequate to determine that an individual is substantially impaired in a major life activity. Current and comprehensive documentation must be provided in order for a student to be eligible for support services and considered protected under the law.

The following guidelines are provided in the interest of assuring that documentation is appropriate to verify eligibility and support requests for reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids at the postsecondary level. A documentation form has been developed as an alternative to a traditional diagnostic report. The form can be found at the OSS website ([www.ramapo.edu/students/oss/documentation.html](http://www.ramapo.edu/students/oss/documentation.html)).

### **DOCUMENTATION GUIDELINES**

**Qualifications of the Evaluator** - Professionals conducting assessments, rendering psychological diagnoses and making recommendations for appropriate accommodations must be qualified to do so. Professionals are considered qualified by having comprehensive training and experience working with the substance abuser. Qualified professionals may include medical doctors, psychologists, licensed social workers, or chemical dependency counselors. It is not appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their family or others with whom they have personal or business relationships.

**Clerical Requirements** – A diagnostic report must include the name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator and include the signature of the professional and the date(s) of testing/assessments. The report must be typed and submitted on professional letterhead. Specific reporting format is left to the professional, but the required components must be clearly presented and easily discernable. Handwritten diagnostic reports are not acceptable.

**Background Information** – Information regarding the student should be presented in the diagnostic report that provides relevant background. The information should include such things as: history of presenting symptoms, medical and medication history, psychosocial history, and academic history.

**Current Assessment** – The diagnostic report must be based on assessment information that is recent in order to accurately describe a student's current functional limitations and need for academic adjustments, housing accommodations, auxiliary aids and/or services. Assessment information that is less than a year old is typically considered current.

**Diagnosis Explanation** – The diagnostic report should include a review and discussion of the DSM-IV criteria used in the diagnosis.

**Assessment Process** – It is expected that a description of the particular criteria and/or diagnostic tests used in the assessment will be explained.

**Limitations** – A description of the student's current functional limitations is expected within the report.

**Treatment** – It is helpful to include the treatment, assistive devices/services that are currently being used by the student.

**Accommodations** – It is helpful if the assessment reports include specific recommendations for accommodations as well as an explanation as to why each accommodation is recommended based on the evaluation. In addition, it is helpful to provide a description of any accommodation and/or auxiliary aid that has been used at the secondary or postsecondary level. Information about the specific conditions under which the accommodation was used and whether or not it benefited the student is useful. If no accommodations have been previously provided, it would be productive to explanation why none has been used and the rationale for the student's currently needing accommodation(s).

**DOCUMENTATION RETENTION** - All submitted materials will be held in OSS as educational records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Students have a right to review their educational records. However, students are encouraged to retain their own copies of disability documentation for future use as the college is not obligated to produce copies for students. Under current New Jersey record retention requirements, disability documentation is mandated to be held for only two years after a student has stopped attending the college.