Documentation Guidelines for a Physical, Mobility, or other Health Issue

To receive accommodations for equal access and opportunity in a university to address a difficult physical, mobility, or other health related issue students should arrange clinical documentation that allows a sufficient understanding of the issue. The paperwork should be written by an appropriately licensed expert, preferably a doctor. For these types of issues the paperwork should:

1. Be written on an agency’s letterhead paper, indicate the phone number and postal address, and include the author’s dated signature.

2. Describe the author’s credentials to confirm expertise on the issue of concern (some clinicians attach a vita for this purpose).

3. Include a historical summary indicating how the issue arose, including any significant developments over time.

4. Describe the clinical methods that were used to evaluate the issue.

5. List the student’s current symptoms, indicating their magnitudes, duration and frequency; outwardly assign a diagnosis; and, describe any other important circumstances that are needed to understand the issue, such as how it may be expected to change over time.

6. Explain how the issue will substantially limit the student in relation to a college setting. For limitations related to learning the focus could be such things as: attending classes; being in lectures and taking notes; writing papers; completing reading assignments; giving speeches or presentations; taking tests, etc. For limitations related to the physical aspects of a campus the explanation should focus on such things as: relatively small classroom desks; use of computers; getting from one building to another; using stairways; living in a residential hall, etc.

7. A list of recommendations for the reasonable and appropriate accommodations that will be necessary to create equal access and opportunity for the student’s college education.

Concise statements on those topics may be sufficient if they adequately describe the circumstances. Pages copied directly from a medical file rarely meet these guidelines (typically they don’t discuss limitations or recommend accommodations in relation to a college education). Similarly, documentation may not meet the guidelines if it simply recommends how a student should be accommodated without adequately delineating the nature of the issue. The idea is that documentation should provide enough information that a lay person can understand the situation and make accurate decisions regarding the specific kinds of accommodations which seem necessary. The best documentation may be both the summary of a relatively recent evaluation and a concise doctor’s letter explaining how the issue will limit the student in relation to a college environment and education.