Documentation Guidelines for Physical, Mobility, and Health-Related Issues

To receive accommodations for equal access and opportunity in a university setting students should arrange clinical documentation that sufficiently confirms a disability situation currently exists and allows an understanding of it. The paperwork should be written by an appropriately licensed expert, preferably a doctor. For a physical, mobility, or health related issue the paperwork should include:

1. An agency’s letterhead paper, indicating the phone number and postal address, and be signed and dated by the author.

2. Describes the author’s credentials to confirm expertise on the issue of concern (a vita could be included for this purpose).

3. Include a historical summary indicating how the student’s issue arose, any developments over time, and provide adequate information regarding the student “as an adult.”

4. Describe the clinical methods used to evaluate the issue; list the student’s symptoms, indicate their magnitudes, duration and frequency; outwardly assign a diagnosis to the issue; describe any other important circumstances; and, describe how the issue can be expected to change over time.

5. 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; listening to lectures and taking notes; writing papers; completing reading assignments; giving speeches and making 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.

6. A list of recommendations for the reasonable and appropriate accommodations that will be necessary to create equal access and opportunity so the student can receive the information and attempt the activities that are necessary for a college education.

Concise statements that on those topics may be sufficient if they adequately describe the circumstances. Pages copied directly from a medical file rarely meet these guidelines (i.e., 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 student’s 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 that are 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.