# DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER
# FAMILY GUIDE

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## AS THE FAMILY OF A STUDENT WITH A DISABILITY, YOU PROBABLY HAVE MANY QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR STUDENT'S FUTURE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE.

This guide was written with you in mind, to answer your questions, address your concerns, describe the new roles you and your student will play in the accommodation process, and explain how university disability services differ from secondary services.

The Disability Resource Center works to ensure that educational programming and services are accessible to college students with disabilities.

## AN **OVERVIEW**

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Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended, prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. According to these laws, no "otherwise qualified individual...shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination" in any program or activity. Individuals who are protected under these statutes include those with physical, sensory, or learning diabilities or other disabilities, such as health impairments or mental health impairments. As a family member of a student with a disability, it is important to understand that the laws that protect students with disabilities are different at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

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Secondary schools are governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Colleges and Universities are governed by the ADA and by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## TRANSITIONING TO **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Preparation is essential for a successful transition to college for all students and even more so for students with disabilities. Based on national data, these students are less likely than their peers without disabilities to persist and earn a post-secondary degree. Your student should begin preparing for life after high school by learning about his/her disability, how the disability affects him/her academically, what coping skills have proven to be effective in the past, and what his/her strengths and weaknesses are.

Self-advocacy skills are also crucial to a successful post-secondary experience. These skills are not learned overnight. Rather, students need time and practice to develop and fine-tune these abilities. Many college freshmen are unprepared for the amount of responsibility they will face in the collegiate environment. Encourage your student's participation in the transition planning process, as appropriate. If an academic, accommodation, or teacher-related problem arises, encourage your student to problem-solve and address the situation independently, while you offer support and additional help, only if needed. Several critical responsibilities that require self-advocacy skills are covered in the 'Student Responsibilities' section on page 11.

Finally, an awareness of the impact of the collegiate environment on academic success is also important. College students are expected to meet deadlines, be prepared for class and tests, and make wise use of their time. Making sure your student has developed time management, organizational, and study skills will go a long way in preparing him/her to be a successful college student.

AN AWARENESS OF HOW ACADEMIC NEEDS CAN BE MET, ESPECIALLY FOR A STUDENT WITH INVOLVED NEEDS, CAN HELP ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION.

## THE **ACCOMMODATION PROCESS**

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Universities provide academic accommodations to students who provide documented evidence of a disability that substantially limits a major life activity (e.g. learning, hearing, seeing, etc.).

Accommodations are designed to ensure equal access to academic programming and services. Accommodations must be reasonable and cannot alter the essential requirements of a course or program that a student is expected to meet. In order to register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and receive academic accommodations, your student must self-identify as a student with a disability by providing documentation and completing a collaborative interview with a DRC staff member.

As a family member, your role throughout this process is one that is primarily supportive rather than directive. Your student will be expected to lead the collaborative interview, as well as additional meetings to discuss accommodations with his/her instructors.

## STEPS TO ACCESSING **ACCOMMODATIONS**

**DOCUMENTATION**

The Disability Resource Center requires documentation from a qualified physician or other licensed professional in a field related to the disability.

Guidelines for what constitutes appropriate documentation for a particular disability are available on our website.

Please note that a copy of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan by itself may not be sufficient documentation, especially if the IEP or 504 plan does not contain a summary of relevant diagnostic information.

**COLLABORATIVE INTERVIEW**

Your student will meet with a Disability Resource Center staff member during the registration process.

He/She should be prepared to discuss the impact of his/her disability in the academic environment, his/her history of accommodations, and the accommodations being requested.

This information, together with the results of the documentation review, will help our staff and your student determine reasonable accommodations.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**

Once a decision has been made regarding accommodations, your student will be able to request his/her accommodation letters to provide to instructors.

He/She will need to to discuss with his/her instructors the impact of his/her disability and how the requested accommodations will support him/her in the classroom.

While you, as a family member, may want to advocate for your student and assist in the accommodation process, federal confidentiality laws prohibit college/university personnel from discussing your student's information with anyone, including parents, without written consent from the student.

The entire accommodation process is student-initiated. It is not the university's responsibility to initiate the accommodation process for the student as the student has the choice as whether or not to self-identify.

Accommodations, such as note-services and accommodated testing, require the student to follow established procedures. Your student could risk losing the support of these accommodations if the procedures are not followed.

## STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- *Ensuring that appropriate documentation is provided to the DRC.*

- *Requesting accommodation letters each semester. Accommodations will not be put in place until accommodation letters are presented to his/her instructors. Accommodations cannot be provided retroactively.*

- *Distributing the accommodation letters to his/her instructors and discussing with them any relevant information related to his/her disability and its impact on academics.*

- *Informing the Disability Resource Center if he/she experiences any difficulties with his/her accommodations or if the status of his/her disability changes. If our office does not hear from your student, it will be assumed that all is well.*

"My experience with the DRC was helpful, easy, and professional. Every staff member I interacted with was extremely friendly and willing to address any concerns I had. Without the DRC I would not have been able to be as successful at UF as I have been."

–DRC Student

## DRC **SUPPORT SERVICES**

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| **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LAB** | The Assistive Technology Lab features six work stations with printer access. The lab provides registered students access to software programs such as: screen readers, screen magnifiers, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and other reading and writing support tools. Students are asked to make an initial appointment in order to receive training on the programs they are interested in using. The lab is open 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday–Friday. |
| **FREE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES** | The DRC provides free access to the following assistive software: Read&Write Gold, Kurzweil 3000-firefly, MAGic, and JAWS. To sign-up for access to this software, please visit software.ufl.edu/student-agreements. |
| **INDIVIDUAL STRATEGY SESSIONS** | Individual Strategy Sessions are available to registered students to provide academic support and strategies tailored to meet a student's specific needs. Strategy work could include assistance with time management, organization, goal setting, or study strategies. |
| **FACILITATED PEER SUPPORT GROUPS** | Facilitated Peer Support Groups are available for registered students to provide educational and solution-focused support in a group setting. Groups provide psycho-educational information and support to students in the management of the impact of disability on academics. Support groups are formed at the beginning of each semester and meet weekly. Typically two support groups are offered, one with a mental health focus (anxiety & depression) and one with a learning strategy focus. |

Benefits to students:
- Interact with others experiencing similar concerns
- Provide a confidential and supportive environment
- Learn from the experience of others
- Create a sounding board for concerns

THE DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER IS

# COMMITTED TO EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS

# HIGH SCHOOL vs UNIVERSITY
## COMPARISON CHART

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Accomodations in colleges and universities are governed by different laws than at the high school level. As you transition, it is important to know the differences in the services offered.

**HIGH SCHOOL**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

**UNIVERSITIES**

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

| | | HIGH SCHOOL | UNIVERSITY |
|---|---|---|---|
| **PROVISIONS** | IDEA: | School will provide free and appropriate education to all students. | College/University will provide access to program and services for students with disabilities equal to those academic programs and services available to all students. |
| | 504: | No difference in access than for all other students. | |
| **IDENTIFICATION** | IDEA: | School will identify students with potential disabilities. | College/Unversity will inform all students of the location of the disability services DRC and the procedures for accessing services; student will self-identify or disclose his/her disability to DRC. |
| | 504: | Parent and/or guardian must bring disability information to the attention of the school-based 504 Coordinator/Committee. | |
| | IDEA: | School will provide assessment and evaluation. | Student will provide documentation of a disability to DRC for review and verification; student will obtain evaluation, if necessary. |
| | 504: | No assessment/evaluation is provided. | |
| **ELIGIBILITY** | IDEA: | Eligibility for services is diagnosis-driven and disabilities are classified according to specified diagnostic criteria. | Eligibility for reasonable accommodation is diagnosis-driven by severity of impact of the disability on a major life activity(ies). |
| | 504: | Eligibility for accommodation is diagnosis-driven. | |
| **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT** | IDEA: | School will involve parent and/or guardian in placement decisions. | Student will act as an independent adult; DRC will protect a student's right to privacy and confidentiality. |
| | 504: | No separate placement issues are considered. | |
| **ACADEMIC SUPPORT** | IDEA: | School will involve students in programs where they can benefit in any way, as recommended by the placement committee and agreed to by the parents and/or guardian. | DRC will prepare letters to instructors specifying accommodations that must be provided based on documentation; student will contact his/her instructors to activate accommodations for each class each semester. University personnel will work to ensure academic programs and services are accessible. |
| | 504: | No separate academic programs are provided. 504 Plan specifies modifications/accommodations to be provided in all programs, services, and activities. | |
| **ACADEMIC SCHEDULE** | IDEA: | School will structure part or all of a student's daily schedule. | Student will arrange his/her own academic schedule with guidance from an academic advisor. |
| | 504: | No separate academic programming is provided. | |
| **EDUCATION PLAN** | IDEA: | School will develop Individual Education Plan (IEP) which teachers follow towards meeting established outcomes. | No plan is developed specifying outcomes. |
| | 504: | School based 504 Coordinator/Committee develops 504 Plan. | |
| **ACCOMMODATIONS** | IDEA: | School will modify educational programs/programming, as needed. | DRC will prepare letters to instructors specifying accommodations that must be provided based on documentation; college/university personnel will work to ensure academic programs and services. |
| | 504: | 504 Plan specifies modifications/accommodations to be provided in all programs, services, and activities. | |
| **NON-ACADEMIC SERVICES** | IDEA: | School will provide certain non-academic services. | Student will arrange for and obtain his/her own personal attendants, tutors, individually designed or fitted assistive technology, etc. |
| | 504: | No difference in access than for all other students. | |

## STUDENT **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The Disability Resource Center is committed to ensuring all information regarding a student remains confidential as required by "The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act" (FERPA). Student files maintained by the Disability Resource Center are accessed by authorized office staff only. Information will be shared only after a student has signed a consent form or if required by federal or state law. Information regarding registration with our office is not reflected on a student's transcript or diploma.

If you would like to request this guide in an alternative format (e.g. large print, electronic file) or if you have any comments or questions about the contents of this guide or the services provided by the Disability Resource Center, please contact us at 352-392-8565.

## CAMPUS **RESOURCES**

**Career Resource Center**
*www.crc.ufl.edu*

**Collegiate Veterans Success Center**
*www.dso.ufl.edu/veteran*

**Counseling and Wellness Center**
*www.counseling.ufl.edu*

**Dean of Students Office**
*www.dso.ufl.edu*

**Gator Parent & Family Association**
*www.dso.ufl.edu/nsfp/families-nsfp*

**Gator Lift and Disabled Parking Decals**
*www.parking.ufl.edu*

**Office for Student Financial Affairs**
*www.sfa.ufl.edu*

**Student Health Care Center**
*www.shcc.ufl.edu*

**Teaching Center**
*www.teachingcenter.ufl.edu*

**U Matter, We Care**
*www.umatter.ufl.edu*

**Writing Studio**
*www.writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio*