GENERAL INFORMATION ON DISABILITIES

What constitutes a disability?

A disability is defined as a physical, mental or emotional condition that affects one or more major life activities (such as processing information, writing, hearing, or seeing). Rowan University is mandated by federal law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, to ensure that:

“No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States …shall, solely by reason of...disability, be denied the benefits of, be excluded from the participation in, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

What are the laws related to disabilities?

Section 504 protects the rights of qualified individuals who have disabilities; the law defines a “qualified person with a disability” as one “who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the education program or activity.”

Disabilities covered by legislation include (but are not limited to) AIDS, blindness, cancer, cerebral palsy, diabetes, epilepsy, head injuries, hearing disabilities, specific learning disabilities, loss of limb(s), multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, emotional disabilities, speech disabilities, spinal cord injuries, and vision disabilities.

Under the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, colleges and universities may not discriminate in the recruitment, admission, educational process, or treatment of students. Students who have self-identified, provided documentation of disability, and requested reasonable accommodations are entitled to receive approved modifications of programs, appropriate academic adjustments, or auxiliary aids that enable them to participate in and benefit from all educational programs and activities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act contains more specific information about compliance issues in post-secondary education than the American With Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed into law in 1990. The ADA, however, did extend the law to cover public and private institutions of higher education and any other entities that receive funding. The ADA has also facilitated access to public services.

Eligibility Requirements for Disability Services

Disability services are provided by the SOM Center for Teaching Learning (CTL) for all students on the Rowan University Stratford Campus. Students must submit appropriate documentation of a disability and meet with a CTL staff member to establish eligibility for services. Even though students are encouraged to register with the CTL upon entrance to the School, it is not unusual for students to wait and avoid seeking assistance until they experience difficulties.

Although students are not required to identify themselves as having a disability, they are not eligible for support until they have done so. Students are required to submit written documentation, most often psycho-educational diagnostic testing, that is no older than three years and that meets specific guidelines.

The CTL determines appropriate academic adjustments and arranges to provide needed auxiliary aids. Accommodations are provided at no expense to the student and are based upon each individual’s unique needs. The process of requesting and receiving accommodations is interactive; all constituents—the student, the instructor, CTL and individual departments and programs—work together to make sure the process works. It is the responsibility of the CTL staff to determine eligibility for services based on documented disability and consultation with others as needed.
The law requires that records and information documenting a disability remain confidential. The CTL can disclose the specific nature of a student’s disability only when that student requests the release of information. Therefore, it is not appropriate for faculty members or department staff to request written copies of medical records of testing information. All questions regarding the credibility of a student’s qualification for services should be directed to the CTL for clarification.

**Accommodations**

The Center for Teaching and Learning facilitates Rowan University’s compliance with these federal laws by providing services and appropriate/reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. This does not mean excusing a person with a disability from responsibilities or lowering expectations in the classroom, but rather allowing the student to use her or his abilities to assimilate information or perform class work in a manner that allows fair competition with other students.

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course, program, service, job, activity, or facility that enables a qualified individual with a disability to have an equal opportunity to attain the same level of performance or to enjoy equal benefits and privileges as are available to an individual without a disability.

Accommodations are designed to lessen the effects of the disability and are required to provide fair and accurate testing to measure knowledge or expertise in the subject. In other words, the purpose is to adjust for the effect of the student’s disability, not to dilute academic requirements. The evaluation and assigning of grades should have the same standards for all students.