

Williams College
Office of the Dean of the College

FACT SHEET - CHRONIC ILLNESS

Definition: Chronic illnesses include conditions affecting one or more of the body's functions. These conditions can include, but are not limited to, the respiratory, immune, neurological and circulatory systems. There can be several different impairments and they can vary significantly in their effects and symptoms as well as in severity and duration. Some examples of chronic medical conditions are: cancer, chemical dependency, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, epilepsy, human immunodeficiency virus, multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy. In order to be considered a disability, the chronic illness must substantially limit a major life activity.

Diagnosis: The professional (e.g., physician, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant) providing the assessment, rendering the diagnosis and making recommendations must be qualified to do so. The documentation should include the following: the name, title and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification; area of specialization; employment and state/province in which the individual practices. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated and signed.

The staff at the Health Center may be able to provide you with information about professionals/specialists in this area who are qualified to conduct such assessments.

Eligibility for accommodations: Students are asked to provide a recent professional evaluation which identifies the disability, describes the substantial limitation caused by this condition, and recommends modifications to be provided. The documentation is intended to assist the student and the College in determining reasonable, appropriate and effective accommodations; test results must be applicable to the current situation. This documentation should include information regarding the onset, longevity and severity of the symptoms, as well as the specifics describing how it has interfered with educational achievement. Therefore, clear and specific evidence of chronic illness is necessary. All information is confidential, shared only with individuals determining the appropriate accommodations, and is not released to others without the student's permission.

Implementation: Students requesting accommodations submit a professional assessment of their disabilities to the Dean's Office for review. The request is discussed with the student, the evaluator providing the assessment, the Health Center and/or Psychological Services Center and/or an outside disabilities consultant as necessary to determine an appropriate course of action. The dean communicates the need for accommodation in writing, advising the appropriate individual that a particular accommodation must be implemented. Such a procedure continues on a semester-by-semester basis.

Grievance Procedure: If a student is refused an accommodation he or she believes is necessary, he or she may consult with the Associate Dean for Student Services or Assistant Dean of the College or the Assistant to the President. If an agreement cannot be reached, the student may take the grievance to the Disabilities and Accommodations Advisory Group which would review the original request and any additional relevant information in order to make a recommendation.

Questions:

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