

**Williams College**  
**Office of the Dean of the College**

**FACT SHEET - LEARNING DISABILITIES**

**Definition:** According to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (made up of the Council of Exceptional Children; Division of Learning Disabilities; the International Reading Association; the Association for Speech, Languages and Hearing; and the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities) a learning disability is “a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities....” In order to be considered a disability, the disorder(s) must substantially limit a major life activity.

**Diagnosis:** This is an educational diagnosis and the professional providing the assessment, rendering the diagnosis and making recommendations for accommodations, 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; the area of specialization; employment and state/province in which the individual practices. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated and signed.

**When choosing a diagnostician, make sure that the professional has experience in the field of adult learning disabilities. The Dean’s Office may be able to provide you with information about professionals 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 the disability, and recommends modifications to be provided. The documentation is intended to assist the student and the College in determining reasonable, appropriate and effective accommodations; testing must be current (usually within the past three years) and must be comprehensive. 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, individualized assessments of current cognitive processing and educational achievement are 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 or Psychological Services Center, and/or an outside disabilities consultant as necessary in order to determine an appropriate course of action. The dean communicates the need for the 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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