NORTHERN PENNSYLVANIA REGIONAL COLLEGE

Disability Services Handbook

For Students

Modified 7-18-2025

Disclaimer

This Handbook has been prepared for general information purposes only. No statement appearing in this Handbook constitutes a contractual obligation by NPRC and the Office of Disability Support Services. If any official policy statements of the College are in contradiction to statements appearing in this Handbook, such official policy statements will be deemed to have control over the statements appearing in this document. The College reserves the right to alter the terms of official policy statements and/or this Handbook at any time, without advance notice.

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Contact Information

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Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS)

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https://regionalcollegepa.org/disability-support-services/

Mission

The Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) is committed to fostering a welcoming and inclusive college environment that values diversity and is universally accessible to all.

The Office of Disability Support Services adheres to the compliance standards related to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA and ADAAA respectively), and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).

Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC) is a member of the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and supports the statements on Professional Standards and Code of Ethics and utilizes these codes as guidelines in services to our students. In addition, NPRC supports and utilizes the guiding principles of the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Higher Education (CAS) which articulate exemplary and anticipated levels of professional standards for disability services within student affairs and student services areas within a national context.

Introduction to Office of Disability Support Services

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 includes having a disability as a recognized source of discrimination within the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and seeks to ensure that those with a disability have equal opportunity and inclusion in all aspects of life. Higher education institutions that receive federal aid of any sort are responsible for fulfilling social and legal promises of the disability rights laws for students, faculty, and staff by providing accommodations and auxiliary aids, creating accessible learning environments, and complying with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 as well as the laws of ADA.

At NPRC, serving students is more than just a legal responsibility. It is a commitment we believe in and have defined through stated values that work with our mission and identity to focus the attitudes, principles, and activities of all those associated with the College. Our approach to disability services for students is supported through the NPRC values of lifelong, organizational learning; compassion; inspiration; integrity; innovation; and community.

Definition of Disability

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA) defines disability as any medical, physical, learning, or psychological condition that substantially limits someone from one or more major life activity such as seeing, hearing, thinking, learning, and self-care. Since the basis of the ADA's definition is legal, it is different from the Social Security Disability or Supplemental Security Income definitions.

The definition includes:

- A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits major life activities or bodily functions;
- A record of impairment, even if it is not classified as a medical disability; and
- Someone who does not have a medical disability, but is regarded as having a disability.

Medical, physical, learning, or psychological conditions may include, but are not limited to, AIDS, HIV, Asthma, Cancer, Cerebral Palsy, Diabetes, Epilepsy, Traumatic Head Injury, Specific learning disability, loss of limbs, Migraine Headaches, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Paralysis, Complications from Pregnancy, Psychiatric Disorders, Speech Impairments, Spinal Cord Injuries, hearing impairments, and visual impairments.

Major life activities are defined as, but are not limited to, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, thinking, concentrating, and working.

The law does not consider mitigating measures such as medication, therapy, or other steps an individual takes to help manage and control symptoms as a part of the qualification process under the ADA.

Higher Education and the Law

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Subpart E and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990, as Amended (ADAAA, 2008) prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities and mandate the provision of reasonable accommodations to ensure equitable access to programs and services. Per these laws, "no otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall, solely by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity." 'Otherwise qualified' means the student must meet the essential academic and technical standards required for admission or participation with the educational program or activity; meet the essential eligibility requirements for college services; and meet the requirements of the College's student code of conduct.

Furthermore, the law requires that an institution (public or private) be prepared to make appropriate academic accommodations and reasonable modifications to policies and practices to allow the full participation of students with disabilities in the same programs and activities available to nondisabled students.

Accommodations for a disability do not require Colleges or Universities to lower academic standards or fundamentally alter the nature of programs provided nor are reasonable accommodations intended for success within courses/programs. Rather, they are to ensure equal access. Adherence to the College's code of conduct as well as adherence to faculty directions and instructions are expected.

A pamphlet titled "Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know your Rights and Responsibilities" outlines a student's responsibility when preparing for postsecondary education.

Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in U.S. Department of Education explains the rights and responsibilities for those who are preparing to attend postsecondary schools. The pamphlet mentioned above also explains the obligations of postsecondary schools to provide academic accommodations, including auxiliary aids and services, to ensure a college or university does not discriminate on the basis of disability. OCR strongly encourages students to know their responsibilities and those of postsecondary schools under Section 504 and Title II. Being armed with knowledge improves students' opportunities to succeed as they enter postsecondary education.

Participating in the democratic process is another vital way to support and advance disability rights. In Pennsylvania, residents can register to vote online through the state's official voter registration portal PA Voter Services. By voting, individuals can help elect representatives and support policies that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equal opportunities for all.

Differences Between High School and College

WHY APPROVED ACCOMMODATIONS MAY BE DIFFERENT IN COLLEGE THAN WHAT WAS RECEIVED IN HIGH SCHOOL

- High school students are issued accommodations and modifications for the purpose of achieving success. College students are issued accommodations for the purpose of access. College students' essential course requirements and expectations will not be modified.
- Colleges make decisions about the appropriateness of accommodations based on:
  - Impact of disability on individual student
  - Program requirements for the student's course of study
  - The reasonableness of the requested accommodations

Students and families must recognize and understand the differences between high school and college as they are making the decisions about whether college is a good fit for their current needs and future goals. The sections below, as adapted from *Essentials of Transition Planning* by Paul Wehman, 2020, describe the differences in key areas that may impact student learning.

APPLICABLE LAWS

High School	College
• Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973 • IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) • Intention of IDEA is about educational success	• Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973 • ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title II) • Intention of ADA is about equal access

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

High School	College
• IEP (Individual Education Plan) and/or 504 Plan • School provides evaluation at no cost to student or family • Documentation focuses on determining whether the student is eligible for services based on specific disability categories in IDEA	• High school IEP and 504 are not sufficient • Documentation guidelines specify the information needed for each category of disability • Students must get an evaluation at their own expense • Documentation must provide information on specific functional limitations and demonstrate the need for specific accommodations

SELF ADVOCACY

High School	College
• Student is identified by the school and is supported by parents and teachers	• Student must self-identify to the college disability services office
• Primary responsibility for arranging accommodations belongs to the school	• Primary responsibility for self-advocacy and arranging accommodations belongs to the student
• Teachers approach student if they believe student needs assistance	• Instructors are usually open and helpful, but most expect student to initiate contact if assistance is needed

PARENTAL ROLE

High School	College
• Parents have access to student's records and can participate in the accommodation process	• Parents do not have access to student's records without the student's written consent (FERPA release)
• Parent advocates for student assistance	• Student advocates for self

INSTRUCTION

High School	College
• Teachers may modify curriculum and/or alter curriculum pace of assignments	• Instructors are not required to modify the design or alter assignment deadlines
• Student is expected to read short assignments that are then discussed and often re-taught in class	• Student is assigned substantial amounts of reading and writing which may not be directly addressed in class
• Student seldom needs to read anything more than once; sometimes listening in class is enough	• Student needs to review class notes, text, and material regularly
	• Student is responsible for their own learning

GRADES AND TESTS

High School

- IEP or 504 plan may include modifications to test format and/or grading
- Testing is frequent and covers small amounts of material
- Makeup tests are often available
- Teachers often take time to remind student of assignments and due dates

College

- Grading and test format changes (i.e., multiple choice vs. essay) are generally not available
- Accommodations to HOW tests are given (extended time, test proctors) may be available when supported by disability documentation
- Testing is often cumulative, covering substantial amounts of material needed
- Makeup tests are seldom an option; if they are, student needs to request them through the instructor
- Instructors expect student to read, save, and consult the course syllabus (outline); the syllabus spells out exactly what is expected of the student, when assignments are due, and how student will be graded

STUDY RESPONSIBILITIES

High School

- Tutoring and study support may be services provided as part of an IEP or 504 plan
- Teaching time and assignments are structured by others
- Student may study outside class as little as 0 to 2 hours a week, and this may be mostly last-minute test preparation

College

- Tutoring DOES NOT fall under college disability services. Students with disabilities must seek out tutoring resources as they are available to all students
- Student manages own time and completes assignments independently
- Student needs to study at least 2 to 3 hours outside of class for each hour in class

NPRC's Commitment to Students

NPRC is committed to providing accessible programs, services, activities, and reasonable accommodations for any student with a documented disability as defined by the law. NPRC's Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) works to ensure students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to pursue an education based on their ability rather than their disability.

The ODSS assists students who have documented disabilities. Students registered with the Office are provided reasonable accommodations, on a case-by-case basis, to afford equal opportunity with respect to the institution's programs, activities, and services.

What is Reasonable Accommodation?

The definition of reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act is “any modification or adjustment to any activity to allow equal participation in the activity by a person who has a disability.” Equal participation means an opportunity to attain the same level of performance or to enjoy equal benefits and privileges as are available to a similarly situated student without a disability.

Reasonable accommodations might include the following:

- Extended time for exams
- Exams given in low distraction reduced setting
- Peer note takers in class
- Audiotaping of class lectures
- Sign language interpreters
- Audio books
- Brailed books or class material

Our goal is to create an accessible environment in which students become independent, self-empowered, self-advocates, and able to develop their strengths.

NPRC is obligated to make a reasonable accommodation only to the known limitations of an otherwise qualified student with a disability. To determine reasonable accommodations, the Office of Disability Support Services may seek information from appropriate College personnel regarding essential standards for courses, programs, services, activities, and facilities as well as documentation from a medical provider who has diagnosed and treated the disability.

Accommodations are determined by the functional limitations as noted in the student’s documentation. In review of the documentation, the ODSS staff member will work with the student to help that person understand academic strengths and areas in which assistance might be needed due to the disability. The student plays an active role in determining what reasonable academic accommodations are effective for the student. These do not remain static throughout the student’s career at NPRC, and the student may find that, in certain classes, the accommodations are not needed, and in others, accommodations in addition to those originally planned are needed. The important thing to remember is that the accommodation requested and/or received should not fundamentally alter the nature or essential requirements of the class.

Not all students require the same accommodations, even if they have the same disability. Determining reasonable accommodations are done on a case-by-case basis to address the individual needs of the student.

Three unreasonable accommodation categories have developed from federal regulations and litigation. They are explained as follows:

1. An accommodation is unreasonable if it reduces the academic standards of a course, department, school, or institution. It is not reasonable to request that NPRC reduce its academic standards by expecting less of any student with a disability because of the disability. Every student must meet the minimum established standard to pass any course or achieve a degree from the institution.
2. Accommodations must be within the realm of possibilities. It is unreasonable to demand accommodations that are impossible to provide. Some accommodations are limited by the availability of resources, skilled personnel, acts of nature, or other circumstances beyond the control of NPRC. Of course, NPRC must act in good faith and do everything within its power to deliver all reasonable accommodations in a timely and appropriate manner.
3. Accommodations may not place financial hardship on the institution as a whole. An accommodation is unreasonable if it forces NPRC to place itself in financial danger. However, note that financial hardship applies to the institution as a whole and not to any sub-budget or subunit. If the College can afford the accommodation, it must be provided. Decisions regarding undue financial hardship can only be made by the President or the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs.

How to Register and Request a Reasonable Accommodation

Students with disabilities seeking accommodations must identify themselves as an individual with a disability and must provide documentation, from an appropriate licensed professional, of how the disability limits one or more major life activities and participation in courses, programs, services, jobs, activities, and/or facilities. A barrier to access stemming from the disability must be present. Students must understand that requesting reasonable accommodations is a process that takes time and are encouraged to be proactive in identifying their needs.

Please note: The primary form of communication between students and ODSS is through College-assigned email. Students seeking services or information from the ODSS have a responsibility to read and respond to emails daily.

1. Students anticipating the need for accommodations, both before and after enrollment, are encouraged to contact The Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) at supportservices@rrcnpa.org or 814-230-9010. Students may also initiate a contact call from ODSS by completing the ODSS Inquiry Request Form on the NPRC Disability Support Services webpage under New or Current Students > Student Services > Disability Support Services.
2. At the initial contact, ODSS will explain the process of seeking accommodations, answer questions, and clarify documents needed. Students will be asked to sign the Welcome Document and the Acknowledgement of Understanding form. These will be sent to the student through their College-assigned email.
3. Students must gather and then submit their supporting documentation from an appropriate licensed professional to the Office of Disability Support Services through one of the following means:

   Mailing address: 300 2nd Ave, Suite 500, Warren, PA 16365
   Fax: 814-313-7320
   Email: supportservices@rrcnpa.org

   Documentation guidelines are explained in this Handbook section titled "Documentation Guidelines for Disability Types" and can be emailed to the student upon request.
4. Upon receipt of the documentation of disability, the ODSS will review the request and the documentation/recommendations that have been made by the professional who provided the documentation.
5. ODSS will then contact the student to schedule a meeting/discussion to explore, determine, and facilitate reasonable accommodations.

Please note: Students may initiate inquiries before enrollment; however, the formal process of exploring accommodations will commence upon enrollment.

Documentation Guidelines for Disability Types

Written documentation that verifies the existence of a disability must be provided by each student requesting disability services and accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are based on a student's documentation and are determined by the specific nature of the disability and its functional limitations. The documentation must come from an appropriate licensed professional. A diagnosis documented by a family member will not be accepted due to professional and ethical considerations, even when the family member is otherwise qualified by virtue of licensure/certification. The issue of dual relationships as defined by various codes of professional ethics should be considered in determining whether a professional is in an appropriate position to provide the necessary documentation.

Students seeking accommodations are reminded that all disability-related or diagnostic documentation must be submitted only to the Office of Disability Support Services. For your privacy and to ensure proper processing, please do not send any medical or diagnostic information directly to instructors or to any other person or Office within the College.

Documentation must be within one year for medical, physical, and psychological disabilities and within three years for learning disabilities and ADD/ADHD. The documentation must be on the licensed professional's letterhead, signed by the licensed professional, and dated. In addition to diagnosis information, recommendations for accommodations and justification for why recommended accommodations are necessary should be included. There must be a very clear connection between the functional limitation(s) described and the recommended accommodation(s).

Contact the Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) for Documentation Guidelines that can be shared with a licensed professional who is qualified to evaluate and diagnose such conditions.

The following information details the documentation requirements by disability type for Northern Pennsylvania Regional College.

MEDICAL AND PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Visual Impairments

Documentation of a visual impairment should be from an ophthalmologist. It should explain the extent of an individual's visual fields, their degree of visual acuity, whether the condition is stable or progressive, if the condition is considered "low vision" or "blind". The documentation should also include whether visual aids are recommended.

Hearing Impairments

Documentation of a hearing impairment should be a report from an audiologist. This report should include results of an audiogram, will tell the type of hearing loss (either conductive or sensorineural), and degree of hearing loss.

Mobility Impairments

Documentation of a mobility impairment should be in the form of a letter from an appropriate health care provider. This letter must include the type of disability, state the functional limitations based on the disability, specifically state the duration of the functional limitations and any distance limitations, include suggested recommendation for effective, reasonable accommodations, be written by an appropriate health care provider (e.g., physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist depending on the nature of the disability), and be typed on official letterhead and signed by the provider.

Mobility Impairments

Documentation of a mobility impairment should be in the form of a letter from an appropriate health care provider. This letter must include the type of disability, state the functional limitations based on the disability, specifically state the duration of the functional limitations and any distance limitations, include suggested recommendation for effective, reasonable accommodations, be written by an appropriate health care provider (e.g., physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist depending on the nature of the disability), and be typed on official letterhead and signed by the provider.

Medical Conditions

Documentation should be from the treating physician and include a diagnosis, the student's functional limitations relevant to an academic setting, recommendation for accommodations, and justification for why recommended accommodations are medically necessary. There must be a clear connection between the functional limitations described and the recommended accommodations. Documentation should be within one year, however, for a chronic illness it may be older if the functional limitations do not change.

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY, ADD, ADHD

Learning Disabilities

The following guidelines for the documentation of a learning disability are provided in the interest of assuring that evaluation reports are appropriate to (a) document eligibility and (b) support requests for reasonable accommodations and appropriate academic adjustments. The Office of Disability Support Services is available to consult with diagnosticians regarding any of the following guidelines.

1. A diagnostic interview should be conducted at the time of testing. Because learning disabilities are most commonly manifested during childhood, historical information of learning difficulties in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education must be included. An evaluation report must also include a comprehensive diagnostic interview by a qualified evaluator who addresses relevant background information to support the diagnosis. Such information includes:
    - Developmental history
    - Academic history including results of prior standardized testing, reports of classroom performance and behavior, and notable trends in academic performance
    - Family history
    - Psychosocial history
    - Medical history including the absence of a medical basis for the present symptoms
    - History of prior psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy
    - Discussion of any dual diagnosis of alternative or co-existing mood, behavioral, neurological and/or personality disorders
    - A description of the presenting problem(s)

2. Testing must be comprehensive. It is not acceptable to administer only one test for the purpose of diagnosis. Minimally, domains to be addressed must include (but are not limited to):

    - Aptitude — The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-III (WAIS-III) with subtest scores is the preferred instrument. The Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised: Tests of Cognitive Ability or the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale: Fourth edition are acceptable.
    - Achievement — Current levels of functioning in reading, mathematics, and written language are required. Acceptable instruments include the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery- Revised: Tests of Achievement; Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK); Scholastic Ability Test for Adults; or specific achievement tests such as The Test of Written Language-2 (TOWL), Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised, or the Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test. The Wide Range Achievement Test is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore, is not suitable as the sole measure of achievement.
    - Information processing — Specific areas of information processing (e.g., short- and long-term memory; sequential memory; auditory and visual perception/ processing; processing speed) must be assessed. Use of subtests from the WAIS-R or the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Ability is acceptable.

    This is not intended to be an exhaustive list or to restrict assessment in other pertinent areas such as vocational interests and aptitudes.

2.

3. Testing must be current, preferably within the past three years. Because the provision of all reasonable accommodations and services are based upon assessment of the current impact of the student's disabilities on his/her academic performance, it is in a student's best interest to provide recent and appropriate documentation.
4. There must be clear and specific evidence and identification of a learning disability. Individual "learning styles" and "learning differences" in and of themselves do not constitute a learning disability.
5. Test scores/data should be included.
6. Professionals conducting assessment and rendering diagnoses of specific learning disabilities must be qualified to do so. Trained and certified and/or licensed psychologists, learning disabilities specialists, and educational therapists may be involved in the process of assessment. Experience working with an adult population is essential.
7. Diagnostic reports must include the names and titles of the evaluators as well as the date(s) of testing.
8. Examples of acceptable documentation for a learning disability may include a diagnosis that is recognized under the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-IV/V criteria; however, other documentation from other sources that shows adequate support for the need for an academic adjustment for a learning disability may also be acceptable.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Documentation of ADD or ADHD should be in the form of a report prepared by an appropriate professional (psychiatrist or psychologist) within the last three years. Reports prepared by a family physician are not sufficient. The report should include the following: a clear statement of ADHD with the DSM-IV/V diagnosis, a description of the symptoms which meet the criteria for the diagnosis, a summary of the assessment procedures and evaluation instruments which were used to make the diagnosis, information about current medication(s), and suggestions for reasonable accommodations which are supported by the diagnosis and the functional limitations of the individual.

MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES

Documentation of a mental health disability should be in the form of a letter or a report from a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist and recent within one year. Students seeking accommodations for a mental health disability must have evidence of the disability prior to any accommodation being considered**.** The documentation should include a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV/V) diagnosis. The documentation should also include the functional limitations brought about by the diagnosis (i.e., difficulties with concentration in individuals diagnosed with depression).

TEMPORARY MEDICAL CONDITION

Students with temporary impairments (e.g., broken arm, cold/flu/Covid, sprained ankle) can contact the ODSS Director with any questions or concerns; However, temporary conditions are not eligible for formal accommodations unless they are a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. Depending on the nature of the impairment, the student may be able to receive some form of assistance. Possible supportive services include:

- Note-takers/scribes
- Extended time on tests
- Use of laptop in the classroom
- Lateness to class due to mobility issue

Testing to Obtain Documentation for Reasonable Accommodations

Testing to determine functional limitations is not offered by Northern Pennsylvania Regional College. If testing is necessary, the student will be referred to the appropriate public or private agency, such as the state Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) which has an office to serve each PA county. Any associated costs will be the student's responsibility.

If the test results indicate that the student has a learning disability or other type of disability, ODSS staff will work through the accommodation process with the student.

Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals

Distinctions exist between service animals and emotional support animals. (See definitions below.)

A SERVICE ANIMAL is defined by ADA and by federal law 28 C.F.R. 35.104 as a dog (or miniature horse in some rare cases) that is individually trained to perform work or tasks for people living with disabilities. A service dog's work or tasks should be directed toward the person's disability. Examples of work performed include such things as retrieving dropped items, alerting a person to a sound, pressing an elevator button, or pulling a wheelchair. The crime deterrent effects of an animal's presence or the provision of emotional support, comfort, or companionship do not constitute a service dog's work or tasks. The most common types of service dogs include guide, hearing, medical alert, mobility, autism service, and psychiatric service dogs. Service dogs are not required to wear any type of identification and may accompany a person with a disability anywhere the individual is allowed to go, including work, class, eating establishments, and public transportation. A service animal may provide therapeutic support or may otherwise perform like an emotional support animal. But a service dog, unlike an emotional support animal, is individually trained to take specific action when recognizing the need to assist the individual with a disability.

TYPES OF SERVICES ANIMALS

- Guide Dog is a carefully trained dog who serves as a travel tool for people with severe visual impairments or who are blind.
- Hearing Dog is a dog who has been trained to alert a person with significant hearing loss or who is deaf when a sound (such as a doorbell) occurs.
- Service Dog is a dog that has been trained to assist a person who has a mobility or health impairment. Types of duties the dog may perform include carrying, fetching, opening doors, ringing doorbells, activating elevator buttons, or steadying a person while walking. Service dogs may also be referred to as assistance dogs.
- SSigDog is a dog trained to assist a person with autism. The dog alerts the handler to distracting repetitive movements common among those with autism, allowing the person to stop the movement. A person with autism may have problems with sensory input and need the same support services from a dog that might be given to a person who is hearing or vision impaired.
- Seizure Alert/Response Dog is a dog trained to assist a person with a seizure disorder; how the dog serves the person depends on the person's needs. The dog may stand guard over the person during the seizure, indicate to their handler in advance of a seizure, or the dog may go for help.
- Psychiatric Service Dog is a dog trained in helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects the rights of service animal users and mandates that state and local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations that serve the public must allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by service animals in all areas of the facility where the general public is allowed to go including college campuses.

At the College, NPRC students with a service dog can choose to have their service dog as part of their accommodation plan, but this is not required. Service dogs are an access right. Therefore, students with a service dog do not need to receive special permission to have the animal accompany them. Students with a service dog are responsible for knowing and following the service animal guidelines as identified below.

NPRC students are encouraged to register their service dog with the Office of Disability Support Services. The Office staff can then assist the student with notifying instructors, location proctors, and other College staff of the legitimacy of the service animal. The student's personal circumstances, disability, or other confidential information will not be shared.

Service Animals in Training: Under the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, a service animal trainer or an individual with a disability who is training an animal to perform as a service animal may take the animal into the same public spaces that service animals may access for the purpose of training. NPRC requires service animals in training to be registered with the College and to meet service animal guidelines as defined below.

To register a service dog, or a service dog in training, students complete, sign, and submit the registration form to the Office of Disability Support Services via email. Students are asked to include a picture of the dog for identification purposes. The form will be sent to the student through their College-assigned email, by request.

Service Animal Guidelines require the following considerations:

- The dog must be 'individually trained' to perform work or a specific task for the person with a disability. Two questions may be asked of service animal handlers:
  - Is the animal required because of a disability?
  - What work or task is the animal trained to perform for you?
- The dog must be kept 'under control' meaning it must be housebroken, not aggressive or pose harm to others, and it must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered. Allergies or fear of dogs does not constitute harm to others. The service dog is under the sole responsibility of the student or handler and leaving the dog unaccompanied or with another person would violate the service dog being 'under control.'
- The handler is responsible for immediate clean-up and proper disposal of all animal waste. Proper disposal includes disposing of the waste in a plastic bag, disinfecting the area (if indoors), and placing the waste disposal bag in a waste container outside.
- Service animals are required to be vaccinated in accordance with state and local laws.
- If the presence of a service dog fundamentally alters the nature of a program or activity, or is otherwise disruptive, it may need to be excluded.
- In any cases of contradictions or inconsistencies between the ADA and PA state policies, the ADA supersedes PA state policy.

For more extensive information about how the ADA applies to service animals, please reference the Service Animals Frequently Asked Questions page of ADA.gov.

PA law prohibits fraudulently misrepresenting a pet or other animal as a service animal, and violators may be subject to fine.

AN EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL (ESA) provides necessary emotional support to an individual that alleviates one or more identified symptoms of the individual's mental or psychiatric disability.

ESAs are prescribed by licensed mental health professionals as part of the treatment plan for a person. ESAs are not considered service animals because they are not expected to perform specific work or tasks that are directed toward a person's disability; they are not required to follow any behavior standards or training; and they are not allowed in public places with the exception of air travel and some housing units. [Please note: The Air Carrier Access Act and the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity define and recognize assistance animals to be service dogs and emotional support animals.] ADA does not recognize ESA as assistance/service animals. NPRC follows ADA law related to higher education.

NPRC students seeking an accommodation for access that includes an emotional support animal as the accommodation are expected to follow the process outlined in this handbook for reasonable accommodation requests.

Referrals to Supportive Services

Referrals to supportive services available within NPRC's footprint are to provide students as well as faculty and staff with available resources and support. Supportive services include, but are not limited to, the following: crisis intervention, conflict resolution, education on various social issues, linkage to community resources for students and their families, advocacy services, and education on various issues such as mental health, domestic violence, adult or child maltreatment and substance abuse.

Additionally, students may find the following resources helpful:

- AHEAD
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
- National Deaf Center
- National Federation of the Blind
- Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania

Accommodations Awarded-What's Next?

Students who are awarded an accommodation will receive a letter that outlines the accommodation(s) and the time period (term or academic year) in which they may be utilized. It is the student's responsibility to present a copy of the letter to the instructor if the student wishes to use the accommodations. It is recommended that the student confirms how the accommodations will be implemented in the course and discusses how the instructor can best assist the student to learn and be successful. Because the instructor may need time to adequately prepare, the instructor will implement the accommodation within 5 business days of receiving the award letter. Accommodations are not retroactive. All academic activities associated with a class are the responsibility of the faculty member to whom the class is assigned.

College personnel that disagree with an accommodation(s) determined by ODSS are required to provide the accommodation(s) until a resolution is agreed upon. See 'Appeal Process' on page 31.

Students are encouraged to maintain contact with The Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) once accommodations are in place so that their effectiveness can be monitored and evaluated and to continue accommodations in a subsequent term or academic year.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Individuals with disabilities at Northern Pennsylvania Regional College have the right to:

- Equal access to courses, programs, services, jobs, activities, and facilities offered through the College;
- An equal opportunity to learn, and to receive reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services (as necessary);
- Appropriate confidentiality of all information regarding the disability, except as disclosures are required or permitted by law; and
- Information in accessible formats.

Individuals with disabilities at Northern Pennsylvania Regional College have the responsibility to:

- Meet qualifications and maintain or exceed essential institutional standards for courses, programs, services, activities, and facilities;
- Identify as an individual with a disability when an accommodation is needed and to seek information, counsel, and assistance as necessary;
- Demonstrate and/or document (from an appropriate professional) how the disability limits their participation in courses, programs, services, activities, and facilities;
- Convey information to instructors about awarded accommodations;
- Be a self-advocate. Learn and gain a better understanding of your disability and your needs associated with the disability and advocate for these.

NPRC Rights and Responsibilities

NPRC has the right to:

- Identify and establish essential functions, abilities, skills, knowledge, and standards for courses and to evaluate and determine reasonable accommodations on this basis;
- Request and receive, through the Office of Disability Support Services, current and appropriate documentation that supports requests for accommodations and/or auxiliary aids and services;
- Deny a request for accommodations and/or auxiliary aids and services if the documentation demonstrates that the request is not warranted, or if the individual fails to provide appropriate documentation;
- Select among similarly effective accommodations and/ or auxiliary aids and services; and
- Refuse an unreasonable accommodation and/or auxiliary aid or service that creates an undue burden for the College or imposes a fundamental alteration of a program or activity of the College.

NPRC has the responsibility to:

- Provide academic information to students with disabilities in accessible formats upon request, unless to do so would constitute an undue burden for the College;
- Ensure that courses, programs, services, and facilities for students, when viewed in their entirety, are available and usable in integrated and appropriate settings;
- Evaluate students on their abilities and not their disabilities;
- Provide or arrange reasonable accommodations and/or auxiliary aids and services for students with disabilities in courses, programs, services, and facilities; and
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality of records and communication.

Considerations

Assistive Technology (AT)

Students who are issued assistive technology as part of their accommodation will need to complete the Assistive Technology Loan Agreement Form, sent to the student by request through their College-assigned email, prior to receiving the AT. AT could include things such as a reader pen, text-to-speech software, and screen magnifiers. The College reserves the right to select tools that meet students' needs. Students may use their own personal assistive technology, but it must be approved by the Office of Disability Support Services and included in their awarded accommodations before use.

Field Experiences and Practica

Due to the varying nature of disabilities and the circumstances and requirements of field experiences and practica, any student wishing to explore accommodations for a field experience or practicum should follow the procedure outlined in the handbook section titled How to Register & Request a Reasonable Accommodation. Furthermore, any student with active accommodations for an NPRC course or academic term should keep in mind that the accommodations award letter clearly defines the accommodations and they do not necessarily carry into the field experience or practicum setting.

Syllabi Statement

Every NPRC course syllabus includes a statement for students on how to access the Office of Disability Support Services. That statement is as follows:

The College strives to create an accessible learning experience for all students. Students seeking accommodations for equitable educational access should contact NPRC's Office of Disability Support Services at 814-230-9010 or supportservices@rrcnpa.org. Notice of support approved by the Office of Disability Support Services must be provided to the course instructor by the student.

Universal Design for Learning

In keeping true to the mission of The Office of Disability Support Services, NPRC strives to create accessible learning environments for all students by implementing principles of universal design. Universal design "is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design." NPRC applies the following accomodations universally for all students:

- All assignments, exams, and grading criteria are listed in course syllabi and administered within Desire to Learn (D2L);
- Grades and feedback are published in D2L;
- Progress grades are submitted to the Office of the Registrar at weeks 4, 8, 12;
- Recordings of all class sessions are available to all students;
- Live captioning is available at each instructional location for class sessions; and
- Recordings of all class sessions are available to students of that course.

Retention of Disability Documentation

Documentation provided to the Office of Disability Services for disability accommodations will be kept on file for seven years from graduation or end of academic year of documented withdrawal from the institution. Reference NPRC-1805: Records Retention policy for detailed information.

Confidentiality and Release Information

Northern Pennsylvania Regional College and the Office of Disability Support Services is committed to ensuring that all information regarding a student is maintained as confidential as required by both state and federal law. Reference NPRC-9040: Educational Rights and Privacy and NPRC-9005: Clery Act Compliance policies for detailed information.

FERPA:

- Information contained in a student's file with the Office of Disability Services is considered part of his or her educational record and is protected under The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended (FERPA).
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.
- Annually, NPRC informs students of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended. This Act, with which the institution intends to comply fully, was designated to protect the privacy of educational records, to establish the rights of students to inspect and review the educational records, and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate or misleading data through informal and formal hearings. Students also have the right to file complaints with The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Office concerning alleged failures by the institution to comply with the Act.
- FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their minor children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students."
- Local policy explains in detail the procedures to be used by NPRC for compliance with the provisions of the Act. Copies of the policy and questions concerning FERPA can be obtained from the Registrar's Office at registrar@rrcnpa.org.

Confidentiality/Records:

- Disability-related documentation is maintained in a secure location and separate from individual student files. Disability-related information will not be released outside the college except in accordance with federal and state law. For example, records may be released in the following circumstances:
    - Pursuant to a court order or subpoena.
    - Written authorization for the release of information. Before giving such authorization, the student should understand the information being released, the purpose of the release, and to whom the information is being released. Information will not be released without consent unless state or federal law requires it.
    - To notify appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies.
- Students requesting in-class accommodations or faculty assistance acknowledge that some level of disclosure may be necessary to provide requested accommodation(s). This does not, however, furnish faculty or staff with the right to view a student's disability-related information or discuss it with others.

Disagreements About Determinations

A complaint and appeal process has been established to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/Section 504 mandate to "provide for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints alleging any action that would be prohibited." If an individual has been denied an accommodation that they requested and would like to appeal the denial, the individual may file a complaint through the process detailed below. During the complaint process, an individual should continue to fulfill academic requirements until a final determination has been provided.

A faculty or staff member who is asked to implement an approved accommodation for an individual, but does not agree with the Office of Disability Support Services determination, may also utilize this process. A faculty or staff-initiated complaint cannot delay the implementation of an accommodation which the Office of Disability Support Services believes to be in compliance with ADA – Section 504. Personnel are required to provide the accommodation until a resolution is agreed upon.

Any individual who requires an accommodation to participate in the Office of Disability Support Services Complaint & Appeal Process may request that accommodation by contacting the Office for assistance. The contact information is provided at the beginning of this handbook.

Step 1:

If informal discussions with appropriate college personnel have not resolved the issue, the individual shall submit a written or recorded complaint to the Director of Student Services, or their designee, no later than twenty (20) business days of notification of the awarded or deferred accommodation.

The complaint shall include the reason for the appeal as well as any additional information the individual would like to submit regarding the disability-related need for the accommodation.

Step 2:

The Director of Student Services, or designee, shall meet with the individual within ten (10) business days of the receipt of the complaint.

During the discussion with the Director of Student Services, or designee, the individual should be prepared to explain why the deferred accommodation is needed to address the current impacts of their disability at NPRC (having received an accommodation from a previous institution or in the K-12 system is not in itself a sufficient basis). If the individual (instructor or other NPRC personnel) is objecting to the approval of an accommodation they are to implement, they should be prepared to explain the basis for their objection.

The Director of Student Services, or designee, will make a decision regarding the individual's appeal within five (5) business days. The Director's decision will be in writing and will be sent to the individual's NPRC email address. If through the appeal process the accommodation is granted, then the accommodation will be granted moving forward. Accommodations are not retroactive.

Step 3:

If the individual still feels the issue is not resolved, the individual may then file an appeal with the Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services (VPESS) within ten (10) business days of the Director's determination. This is the final step – the decision of the Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services, or their designee, is the College's final determination on the matter.

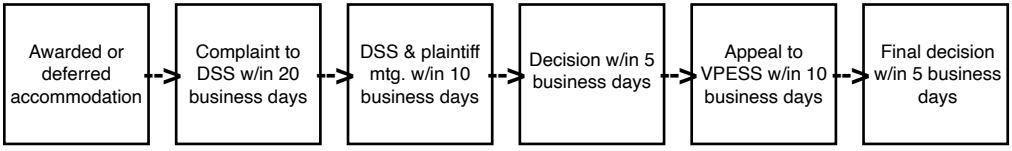
To appeal at this level, the individual must provide the VPESS with:

1. New information that was not provided to the Director of Student Services, or
2. Information that the individual believes shows they were not provided with due process by the Director of Student Services.

The VPESS, or their designee, will review and address the matter. In undertaking a review of the complaint, the VPESS may interview, consult with, and/or request a written response to the issues raised in the complaint from any individual they believe to have relevant information.

The VPESS, or designee, will make a decision regarding the individual's appeal within five (5) business days. The VPESS's decision will be in writing and will be sent to the individual's NPRC email. If through the appeal process the accommodation is granted, it will be granted moving forward. Accommodations are not retroactive. Should additional time be necessary, the VPESS will notify the individual and the Director of Student Services in writing.

[See Timeline below for a summarized picture of the determination disagreement procedure.]



Grievance Procedure

Any student who believes that he or she has been harassed or discriminated against as a result of a disability by any NPRC department, faculty, or staff member working in and for the college, may register a complaint and follow the complaint procedures set forth in policy NPRC-9260: Student Grievance and Complaint.

NPRC Policies to Reference Related to Disability Services

Policies listed below or found within this handbook can be found on the NPRC Policies webpage.

NPRC-1310: Policy Development and Review

NPRC-1210: Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity

NPRC-1805: Records Retention

NPRC-3035: Course Syllabus Adoption

NPRC-3235: Behavioral Code of Conduct for Students

NPRC-3245: Assignment and Use of Grades

NPRC-3700 Disability Services Handbook for Students

NPRC-9005: Clery Act Compliance

NPRC-9040: Educational Rights and Privacy

NPRC-9100: Disability Support Rights & Responsibilities

NPRC-9260: Student Grievance and Complaint

NPRC-9315: Admission and Enrollment Standards for Academic Students

NPRC-9415: Withdrawal

FORM 5010-04: Technology Resources Acceptable Use Policy