

# Office of Disability Services Handbook



**COLUMBIA  
SOUTHERN**  
UNIVERSITY

**Office of Disability Services Handbook, Published March 2026**

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**Policy Disclaimer**

At CSU, we are committed to ensuring that our students are kept informed of the latest principles, theories, and applications pertaining to their studies. However, CSU reserves the right to make changes, as deemed appropriate and without prior notification, in our course offerings, curricula, academic policies, and other rules and regulations affecting students.

**Office of Disability Services**

It is the policy of CSU to provide reasonable accommodation(s) for persons defined as disabled under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and all other local and state requirements related to students who have documented disabilities.

To request accommodations, please visit <https://www.columbiasouthern.edu/disability-services>.

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## I. PREFACE

Consistent with the mandates of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), as amended, Columbia Southern University is committed to providing individuals with disabilities equal opportunity to benefit from its educational programs and services. A 504/ADA compliance officer has been designated to coordinate the University's efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under these laws. Matters regarding university 504/ADA compliance should be directed to [ADAgrievances@columbiasouthern.edu](mailto:ADAgrievances@columbiasouthern.edu).

The purpose of this handbook is to inform students with disabilities about the support services and resources available at Columbia Southern University through the Office of Disability Services and the procedures to follow in order to utilize those services. For matters regarding reasonable educational accommodations or disability-related services, please contact the disability services coordinator in the Office of Disability Services.

Columbia Southern University is a member of the Association on Higher Education and Disability. The Office of Disability Services reviews the Association on Higher Education and Disability statements on Professional Standards and Code of Ethics and utilizes these documents as guidelines in the continued development of our services for students with disabilities.

### **ODS Mission Statement**

The mission of the Office of Disability Services is to ensure an accessible learning experience in which students with disabilities have equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities.

## II. DISABILITY LAWS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is considered the first civil rights legislation for persons with disabilities on the national level. It is designed to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The act states: “No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance . . .”

### THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in July 1990 and is patterned after Section 504 but extends the civil rights protections of Section 504 to persons with disabilities in private sector employment, all public services, transportation, and telecommunications. According to the ADA, any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities (such as walking, seeing, hearing, working, or learning) meets the definition of an individual with a disability. Also entitled to protection from discrimination are individuals with a record of such a condition or individuals who are regarded as having such a condition.

### RELEVANT TERMS

- Disability means a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.
- Physical or mental impairment means any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more body systems, such as neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, immune, circulatory, hemic, lymphatic, skin, and endocrine; or any mental or psychological disorder such as intellectual disability, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disability.
- Physical or mental impairment includes, but is not limited to, contagious and noncontagious diseases and conditions such as orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments, as well as cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, intellectual disability, emotional illness, dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic), tuberculosis, drug addiction, and alcoholism.
- Substantially limits means unable to perform a major life activity, or significantly restricted as to the condition, manner, or duration under which a major life activity can be performed, in comparison to the average person or to most people; the availability of some mitigating measure (such as a hearing aid) is not to be considered when determining if the disability substantially limits the individual.
- Major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, sitting, reaching, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, writing, communicating, interacting with others, and working, as well as the operation of a major bodily function, such as the functions of the immune system, special sense organs and skin, normal cell growth, and digestive, genitourinary, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, cardiovascular, endocrine, hemic, lymphatic, musculoskeletal, and reproductive systems.

- Individuals who are current users of illegal drugs are not protected under the ADA; however, addiction is considered a disability. Therefore, a person who is addicted to drugs but is not actively using drugs is considered a person with a disability and is protected by law.

### III. GUIDELINES FOR DOCUMENTATION

Students requesting accommodations from the Office of Disability Services at Columbia Southern University are required to submit documentation to verify eligibility. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended) individuals with disabilities are guaranteed equal access to programs and services; thus the documentation should indicate that the disability substantially limits one or more major life activities. It is the responsibility of the student to present appropriate documentation of a disability to the Office of Disability Services in a timely manner to secure accommodations, which typically cannot be made retroactively. It is recommended to contact Disability Services and provide appropriate documentation of the disability at least six weeks prior to the first course start date, although students may register at any time during their degree program.

#### AGE AND TYPE OF DOCUMENTATION

Documentation should validate the need for services based on the individual's current level of functioning in the educational setting. Documentation may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Medical records
- A record of a disability from a licensed, professional evaluator
- A psychoeducational evaluation with a diagnosis
- A military or veteran record of a disability
- A record of a disability or accommodations from a previous school or university

#### QUALIFICATIONS OF THE EVALUATOR

All psychological or medical reports must include the name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator. All reports should be on letterhead stationery, typed, dated, signed, and legible. Depending on the nature of the disability, secondary school evaluations or plans, such as an individualized education program (IEP) or a 504 plan, may not be sufficient documentation.

Documentation for any disability should state the diagnosis and include the clinical history that establishes the onset, or date of diagnosis, of the disability as well as duration and/or prognosis and as much of the following as possible:

- Procedures used to diagnose, evaluate, and/or assess the disability
- Description of any medical and/or behavioral symptoms associated with the disability
- Identification of medications, and side effects, that could significantly impact the student in an academic environment
- Statement specifying functional limitations caused by the particular disability
- Any recommended accommodations associated with the identified functional limitations

## IV. REQUEST FOR ACCOMMODATIONS

Columbia Southern University provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Academic accommodations are not retroactive. Students are not eligible to retake assessments or resubmit any assignments taken prior to the date that Office of Disability Services Intake forms were received and accommodations were approved. Below is the procedure to request academic accommodations and services based upon documented need.

### PROCEDURE

The Office of Disability Services develops and coordinates plans for the provision of reasonable educational accommodations. Eligible students include those who are enrolled or admitted in degree and non-degree programs offered by the university and are considered qualified to meet all university program requirements despite a disability. Students wishing to receive accommodations for a disability must register with the Office of Disability Services and provide documentation of a disability.

Registration information and documentation forms are located at <http://www.columbiasouthern.edu/disability-services> and may be obtained from the Office of Disability Services by contacting [disabilityservices@columbiasouthern.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@columbiasouthern.edu) or 888-785-3005.

#### **Step I: Self-Disclosure**

Self-disclosure and requesting accommodation are the first steps in advising Columbia Southern University of a need for an accommodation due to a disability. Submitting a signed self-disclosure form begins the accommodation process.

Columbia Southern University accommodations are not applicable to exams administered by external organizations, whose guidelines may differ. Testing accommodation requests for certification or licensure exams should be submitted directly to the regulatory body (testing organization) in advance of the exam.

#### **Step II: Documentation**

Columbia Southern University requires submission of documentation of the disability, along with the completed self-disclosure form, to the Office of Disability Services. The registration packet includes the Student Self-Disclosure and Accommodation Request form, Student Release of Information for the Diagnosing Professional form, and the Disability Verification Form for the Diagnosing Professional. The Office of Disability Services is not responsible for obtaining documentation on behalf of a student. Students may be asked to provide updated documentation as needed for case management and accommodation plan revision.

#### **Step III: Accommodation Decision**

Columbia Southern University is committed to providing equal access to all educational programs, regardless of handicap or disability. Once official documentation has been received, Disability Services will review the documentation and recommended accommodations from the diagnosing professional and the student's accommodation requests.

The student and a Disability Services staff member will discuss the requested reasonable accommodations in order to reach an agreement. Please note that the amount of time needed to arrange any particular accommodation may vary. For accommodation-related concerns, students may communicate with the disability services director in the Office of Disability Services at the contact information listed above.

#### **Step IV: Communication**

Course professors will be notified of the agreed upon accommodations and ensure the accommodations are provided. If there is a change in professor, students must contact the Office of Disability Services immediately, or formal accommodation may not be in place for the course. Students should notify Disability Services when any new course enrollments are submitted to ensure that the new course professors will be notified of the accommodations. Accommodations will not automatically transfer to newly enrolled courses or new degree programs.

#### **Step V: Accommodation Complaints/Grievances**

Students should voice any complaints regarding accommodations or disability-related services to the disability services director in the Office of Disability Services. To submit a CSU 504/ADA grievance, please email [ADAgrievances@columbiasouthern.edu](mailto:ADAgrievances@columbiasouthern.edu).

## **V. CONFIDENTIALITY AND RELEASE OF INFORMATION**

The Office of Disability Services considers all material pertaining to a student's disability as confidential. All student record information is governed by FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, sometimes referred to as the Buckley Amendment). The primary rights given to students are the right to inspect and review education records, the right to seek to amend education records, and the right to have some control over the disclosure of information from education records.

A student may provide written permission giving the Office of Disability Services permission to discuss the disability with faculty and staff, parents, coaches, and/or advisors who require further information. Disability-related information will be shared only on a limited basis within the institutional community. Information will not be released without consent unless federal or state law requires it.

## **VI. TEMPORARY HEALTH SITUATIONS**

Accommodation requests for temporary disabilities are considered on a case-by-case basis. Students must provide documentation of the disability and register with the Office of Disability Services.

Students who need information on applying for an adjusted course end date or a course withdrawal should contact their academic advisors. For more information, please see the [CSU Student Handbook](#).

## VII. RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

### A. STUDENT RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

#### **Students have the right to:**

##### **Accommodations**

- Request reasonable educational accommodations from the Office of Disability Services due to a disability.
- Discuss approved accommodations with Disability Services and voice any concerns to the disability services director.
- Receive accommodations in a timely manner.

##### **Confidentiality**

- Share only their accommodation plan and not details of the disability with instructors.
- Expect all disability-related information to be treated confidentially.

#### **Students have the responsibility to:**

##### **Accommodations**

- Submit documentation meeting university guidelines, substantiating the need for accommodations. The Office of Disability Services is the only office designated to review disability documentation and determine eligibility for accommodations.
- Meet course and degree program technical and performance standards and be evaluated in the same manner as other students.
- Notify Disability Services if accommodation is no longer needed.
- Notify Disability Services immediately when an accommodation is not being provided.
- Notify Disability Services of new course enrollments for degree and non-degree programs.
- Follow established policies and procedures in order to gain access to approved accommodations.

##### **Confidentiality**

- Confidentially discuss accommodations and any other concerns.

### B. FACULTY RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

#### **Faculty have the right to:**

##### **Accommodations**

- Expect verification of a student's eligibility for requested accommodations in the form of an accommodation notification email from the Office of Disability Services.
- Expect students to meet course and degree program academic standards.

##### **Confidentiality**

- View a student's accommodation plan. (Faculty members do not have the right to ask students if they have a disability or about the nature of the disability disclosed. However, if students choose to disclose their disability, this information must be treated confidentially. Faculty members should not request medical or disability documentation from students).

**Faculty have the responsibility to:****Accommodations**

- Establish and communicate essential course requirements and objectives.
- Provide Office of Disability Services contact information to students as needed upon request or disclosure of a disability.
- Provide accommodations to students who are registered with the Office of Disability Services for reasonable accommodations, without requiring reminders from students before providing the accommodations.

**Confidentiality**

- Treat and protect all disability-related information as confidential medical information, for example, keeping printed or electronic copies of emails or other communications private.

**C. COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES****CSU has the right to:****Documentation**

- Request documentation meeting university guidelines from students, substantiating the need for reasonable educational accommodations for individuals with a disability.

**Accommodations**

- Expect students and faculty to work cooperatively with the Office of Disability Services to facilitate accommodations.
- Deny unreasonable academic accommodations, adjustments, or auxiliary services. Accommodations cannot impose undue hardship to, or fundamentally alter, a program or activity of the college.
- Provide accommodations or services only after appropriate documentation has been provided by the student and the student has completed registration with the Office of Disability Services.

**Confidentiality**

- Communicate relevant information, accommodations, and services or assistance to university officials and final exam proctors on a need-to-know basis.

**CSU has the responsibility to:****Accommodations**

- Establish and communicate essential course requirements and objectives.
- Provide reasonable educational accommodations only to students who are registered with the Office of Disability Services.

**Confidentiality**

- Treat and protect all student disability-related information as confidential medical information, for example, keeping printed or electronic copies of emails or other communications private.

## VIII. DISABILITY SERVICES RESOURCES

**Academic Consultation** – The Office of Disability Services staff will provide academic consultation to students as it relates to issues of disability. Disability Services staff members do not take the place of a student’s assigned academic advisor.

**Accommodation** – Individualized reasonable educational accommodation requests are considered on a case-by-case basis through an interactive process for students with disabilities who choose to register with the Office of Disability Services.

**Accommodation Letters** – The Office of Disability Services will provide an accommodation notification email to faculty members for registered students, confirming a documented disability and listing the student’s approved educational accommodations. The email does not disclose the type of disability or any other confidential information. Students should notify Disability Services at [disabilityservices@columbiasouthern.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@columbiasouthern.edu) or 888-785-3005 when new course enrollments are submitted, in order to confirm registration status and help ensure provision of accommodations.

**Advocacy** – The Disability Services staff may serve as an advocate within the university for students with disabilities when appropriate.

**Alternative Text** – For academic use only, the Office of Disability Services accepts requests for alternative course textbook formats from eligible students. Fulfillment times for alternative textbook requests vary; therefore, it is suggested that the request be submitted upon enrolling in a course.

**Career Counseling Assistance** – Disability Services may collaborate with the Career Services Office when disability-related considerations are involved.

**Course Substitution or Waiver Assistance** - The university does not wish to compromise academic standards; therefore, course substitutions or waivers are considered only on a case-by-case basis for students who are registered with the Office of Disability Services. Such requests require a review of course and degree program requirements and appropriate disability documentation provided by the student in order to be considered for approval by university administration.

**Disability Information and Evaluation Referral** – The Office of Disability Services may provide students with information on agencies that can assist with disability concerns beyond the scope of the services that are offered by the university, including information on external organizations for students who need assessments or evaluations. The student will be responsible for the cost of any external services.

**Success Center** – The Success Center offers services to students that can aid in their success throughout their academic careers. The Success Center is comprised of the Office of Disability Services and of the Math and Writing Centers, which offer academic assistance for all students in the areas of writing and math and assist students with the development of study skills and time management skills. Students can contact the Math and Writing Center specialists at 877-875-0533.