



Dear Parents, Guardians, Grandparents and Concerned Loved Ones,

This letter is directed primarily toward parents of students with disabilities; however, I hope that it is equally useful to high school teachers, counselors, and students. The letter introduces some of the legal and philosophical changes that occur for students with disabilities upon graduation from high school and entrance into Elms College.

Students attending public K-12 schools have, for the most part, a legal entitlement to an education, regardless of a disability. They must also receive their education in the least restrictive environment possible. In college, students have a civil right to have access to their education. The fundamental principle at work is the assumption of integration and that students, not the institutions, are responsible for themselves. Unlike elementary and secondary schools, postsecondary education offers access to — rather than entitlement to — academic programs, as the laws that govern the work are different. Access means much more than ramps, elevators, and wide parking spaces; it also means access to information and technology. Civil rights laws and reasonable accommodations are in no way intended to guarantee success, but designed to ensure equal access. Therefore, Elms College must make reasonable accommodations for students with diagnosed disabilities.

Reasonable accommodations are designed to remove or reduce barriers for qualified individuals with disabilities. As much as possible, accommodations are designed to minimize the functional limitations of an individual in a given task. These adjustments permit students with disabilities the opportunity to learn by removing barriers that do not compromise academic standards.

Accommodation examples include:

- Students who are deaf cannot hear class lectures. Provision of sign language interpreters as an accommodation gives students who are deaf access to the information discussed in the classroom at nearly the same time it is presented.
- Students who are blind are accommodated by receiving printed materials in an alternate format, such as audio CDs or in Braille.
- Students with mobility limitations, such as wheelchair users, may request that classroom locations be moved if the classroom is not accessible on a ground floor or by an elevator.
- Accommodations do not lower or effect substantial modifications to essential academic requirements.

College students are ultimately responsible for managing their own education, understanding functional limitations of their diagnosis, and requesting necessary accommodations.

As adults, all students go through a process of learning about themselves. They develop the skills of self-determination, including building confidence to advocate for the things they need in order to thrive and achieve. Student Accommodations and Support Services (SASS) strives to promote this kind of self-knowledge. It is in the development of these skills that SASS can best guide students with disabilities in their educational growth. These skills are critical, because it is the



students, not SASS, who will approach instructors and other staff to request the accommodations that are reasonable for them to receive. These are the skills all students need when they leave college and move successfully into their chosen careers.

In terms of “applying” for SASS services, the following applies to most students who register with Student Accommodations and Support Services; specifics vary depending on the student’s disability, functional limitations, and accommodations requested and supporting documentation provided.

1. If the student with a diagnosed disability meets the essential requirements for admission, a postsecondary institution may not deny admission simply because of a disability. The admissions process is separate of the SASS registration process and happens after a student has been admitted. Documentation verifying a disability should not be sent to the Admissions Office; it should be sent directly to the SASS Office after the student has been accepted to Elms College.
2. Student identifies themselves in a timely manner when an accommodation is needed and presents current, comprehensive documentation of disability.
3. SASS verifies the student’s disability and the functional limitations that result. Medical or psychological records are used in this process. Individualized Education Programs (IEP) or 504 Plans may not be adequate to demonstrate the functional limitations of a disability. In some cases, SASS may determine that the documentation provided is too old to be considered accurate. If the documentation is too old, SASS will recommend that the student obtain current assessments. This must be done by the student and at the student’s expense.
4. SASS reviews the documentation and determines if the student is eligible for accommodations. SASS will notify the student if additional information is needed.
5. If the documentation is complete, SASS meets with the student to determine appropriate accommodations.
6. This process also includes the development of accommodation letters for the student to distribute to faculty.
7. This process applies to housing accommodation requests as well.

At the postsecondary level, both parents and students experience a transition. A parent’s role shifts to a subtle hand of guidance when it comes to the process involved in the student’s education. Encourage the student to take responsibility for academic concerns and limitations. Both the parent(s) and student should acknowledge the disability and the limitations that stem from it. This will allow the student to identify areas in which he/she should consider accommodations to reduce or remove barriers. It will also make it easier for the student to convey their requests for accommodations to instructors or anyone from whom he/she may seek assistance. Encourage the student to register with SASS where they will be coached on how to proceed in obtaining reasonable accommodations.



Elms College does not evaluate and assess students with disabilities or suspected disabilities. In the logic of civil rights, students must assert and claim their right to equal access. The burden of proof is not on the institution. Student must identify themselves as a qualified person with a disability and be prepared to provide the documents that verify that claim according to the SASS registration process.

Once students, whether they are 18 years old or not, enroll in a postsecondary institution, they become the sole guardian of all records maintained by that institution. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1976 (FERPA), students have the right to access their own records upon written request. The parent or guardian does not share that right. This means that parents do not have legal access to their student's grades, transcripts, or any information concerning the services being provided through SASS. This information is confidential. However, we understand that students may wish to share educational information with parents and guests. Students wishing to grant access to their educational records to parents and/or guests can do so through signing a release form with SASS.

The information provided in this informational letter is designed to be supportive as students and families navigate the accommodation process with Elms College.

If you have additional concerns or questions please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

*Tynisha Henderson*

Tynisha Henderson, MA. Ed. Psy.  
Director of Student Accommodations & Support Services  
Elms College  
Alumnae Library  
291 Springfield Street  
Chicopee, MA 01013  
Office: (413) 265-2333 | Fax: (413) 594-3951  
Email: [hendersont@elms.edu](mailto:hendersont@elms.edu)  
Website: [www.elms.edu/sass](http://www.elms.edu/sass)