



Quarterly Update

Housing and Residential Life for Students with Disabilities

On-campus residence life contributes to student growth and development beyond the classroom. These residential communities develop support networks, creative programs, social activities, and cultural diversity. Daily living in these communities brings new perspectives to concepts studied in class and otherwise helps to broaden students' horizons. University housing and residential life, therefore, are important elements of a college education for students. For students with disabilities, these units may be even more critical as access to the academic programs and campus activities can be more easily facilitated given the proximity of these events.

Legal Provisions

Under the provision of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, universities may not discriminate in the recruitment, admission, educational process or treatment of students. Students who have self-identified, provided documentation of a disability, and requested reasonable accommodations are entitled to receive approved modification of services that enable them to participate in and benefit from all educational programs and activities. This means that on-campus housing and residential life must be accessible to qualified students with disabilities. Students with disabilities should not be denied access to comparable housing or segregated from the general student population.

Coordination with Disability Services

Residence Life and Disability Services are often in communication with one another on disability-related issues. On most campuses, the Disability Services Office is responsible for receiving and reviewing disability-related documentation in order to determine appropriate accommodations. All documentation guidelines must be followed so appropriate accommodations can be made. Disability Services may forward verification of the disability and recommendations for accommodation to the Residence Life staff. Confidentiality of medical and disability documentation is critical with respect to the student's right to privacy. Information should be shared only on a need-to-know basis and for the purpose of assuring appropriate accommodations.

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Procedures

Universities have established procedures and guidelines for requesting on-campus housing and students with disabilities are typically asked to follow these general procedures, including all relevant applications. In most instances, the student with a disability will be asked to complete some type of accommodations request form. Housing accommodations are determined on a case-by case basis, according to documented need. It is important to meet deadlines for housing applications and apply for housing as early as possible. Advanced planning allows sufficient time for consideration and implementation of the accommodations being requested.

Documentation

Students may be required to provide current documentation of a disability or medical condition to support a request for a housing accommodation. The documentation should verify the existence of a condition that causes significant functional limitations in a residential environment and relate to the current impact of the condition to the requested modifications. Disability Services staff can help in determining what documentation is needed to support the housing accommodations being requested.

Other Issues to Consider

Emergency Evacuation Procedures for Students with Disability

As much as universities have specific plans for dealing with emergency situations, students with disabilities should take responsibility for themselves and prepare for an emergency ahead of time. Some steps for students with disabilities to consider:

- Familiarize yourself with the facility's evacuation procedures
- Locate and remember exits, exit routes, stairways, elevators and telephones
- Identify individuals in advance who will assist you in leaving the building
- Get to know your resident advisor; let the advisor know how to best assist you

Service Animals

Federal law requires that institutions accommodate individuals with service animals. A service animal is specially trained to perform specific tasks to benefit a person with a disability. Without the service animal the student may not have an equal opportunity to use or reside independently in the facility. The student may be asked to provide documentation of the training that meets the federal definition of a service animal.

Personal Attendants

Personal attendants are individuals who provide personal and individualized care to a student with a disability. Personal attendants may need access to the housing facility and parking at different hours of the day and night depending on the needs of the student. Some personal attendants may need to room with the resident. Universities should have policies and procedures in place to address the needs of a student with a disability who requires the services of a personal attendant.

