

UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Toto, I Have A Feeling We're Not In High School Anymore!

A Handbook for Parents of Students with Disabilities

This handbook is directed primarily toward parents of students with disabilities. However, we hope that it is equally useful to high school teachers, counselors, and students themselves. It introduces some of the legal and philosophical changes that occur for students with disabilities upon graduation from high school and entrance into the University of Mary Washington. It was adapted, with permission, from one written by Dan Burke of the Disabled Student Services at the University of Montana at Missoula.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction: The Land of Oz.....	3
What is the difference between entitled to education and right to equal access to education?.....	4
What if my child was served under a 504 Plan instead of an IEP?.....	5
What is meant by reasonable accommodation?.....	7
What is meant by otherwise qualified?.....	9
What is meant by the phrase with or without reasonable accommodations?	9
Who will manage my son or daughter's educational services?	10
My son or daughter is adamant -- they don't want anything to do with any disability office! What happened?.....	11
How do students advocate for themselves in order to ensure they receive appropriate accommodations?	13
I understand the philosophy now, but what is the process, or how does ODS work?.....	14
Why doesn't ODS provide LD assessment?.....	15
How has my role as a parent changed?	16
My son or daughter had some subjects waived in high school -- why aren't they automatically waived in college?	17
Why does my son or daughter need a label?	18
If we sent their 504 plan or IEP to Admissions, are they automatically registered with ODS?	18
What do you mean you cannot disclose any information to me about my son or daughter's services?	19
What services does ODS provide?.....	20
What does my son or daughter do when a faculty member or instructor doesn't make time for them?.....	20
Okay, we've talked about academics, but what about my son or daughter's living situation?	21
Examples of Possible Housing Accommodations	21
The Student's Considerations.....	21
Conclusion: Off to See the Wizard	22

Introduction: The Land of Oz

As parents, we watch our kids go through enormous changes, changes that seem to turn the world on its head -- at least for us. After those first steps, nearly everything in the house is within reach and, without warning, the pace of life suddenly leaps into warp speed. Or how about when our child first begins to read, learns to drive, or starts dating? Again, everything seems to change almost overnight. For parents whose children have disabilities, however, the changes may come when a child doesn't reach these developmental milestones as expected. A child with physical disabilities doesn't learn to walk. A student with a learning disability struggles with reading. A blind teenager doesn't get a driver's license. Another of those world-tilting events is about to happen. Your young adult is starting college. They might feel much like Dorothy and Toto in the Wizard of Oz -- one minute in good old Kansas, the next in the Land of Oz. Everything may seem completely unfamiliar, both terrifying and wonderful all at once. Once your child turns 18 years old, they are legally an adult, responsible for their own actions and decisions--and free to make them. As they leave secondary school to enter a career in higher education, fundamental changes occur with respect to their education as a person with a disability. Any child who attends public schools has, 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 . But they are children, and as such warrant care, guidance and sometimes are separated from their peers for special attention if needed. In higher education, your student has a civil right to have access to their education. The fundamental principle at work is the assumption of integration and that the individual student is responsible for himself, and is not the responsibility of the institution. It's a distinction that can make all the difference. We hope this handbook will help you to better understand some of these distinctions and provide tips on how best to support your new college student on this exciting new road.

What is the difference between *entitled* to education and *right to equal access* to education?

Unlike elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary education offers access rather than entitlement to academic programs. Most parents of a child with a disability at some time learn something about the laws that govern their child's education in the public schools. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This act, commonly known as Public Law 94-142, provided that any child with a disability was "entitled to a free and appropriate education" in public school systems. That law, along with its numerous re-authorizations, reflects the nation's commitment to educating all its children, whether they have disabilities or not. Fundamentally, 94-142 and its successors (including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and IDEA Improvement Act of 1997) said that public schools, with your input and appropriate assessments, would determine what was most appropriate for your child's education. Then they were required to provide that education. As a parent, you may wish it had been that easy all along, and perhaps it was. Now, however, your child has reached their majority under the law, and the rules of the game have changed. The principles of 94-142 and IDEA, including the required IEP (Individualized Education Program), no longer apply. Section 504 Plans, under which many students are now served in high schools, are no longer valid either. In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. Modeled on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, ADA is a civil rights law. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, as long as the person is otherwise qualified. In the case of publicly funded colleges and universities, ADA affirms the right of a student with a disability to a level playing field.

That means that the University of Mary Washington must ensure access to all students who are otherwise qualified. Access means much more than ramps and elevators and wide parking spaces. It also means access to information and to technology. Therefore, the University of Mary Washington must make reasonable accommodations for your student's disability, in order that they may be able to demonstrate their ability. However, civil rights laws and the reasonable accommodations they call for are in no way intended -- nor are they able -- to guarantee success. At most, a student can expect a more equal chance to do the same work as their peers.

What if my child was served under a 504 Plan instead of an IEP?

More and more students with disabilities are being served in public schools under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, rather than under IDEA. Thus, the document (if there is one) that drives services is called a "504 Plan" instead of an Individualized Education Plan or IEP. Students whose disabilities are "less severe" may not require or qualify for services under IDEA. (Note: In practice, many students with learning disabilities, attention disorders and emotional disabilities are placed into 504 categories.) However, since the public school district receives federal funds for special education, Chapter programs, and other programs, these students with disabilities still have a civil right to reasonable accommodations under Section 504. Do not expect that what 504 means in public schools will be the same as what it means in higher education. Truthfully, implementation of 504 services in public schools has been wildly inconsistent from district to district and state to state until now. Partly as a result of this disparity of interpretation, those of us in higher education recognize little of what is attributed to 504 in public schools. To our eye, 504 services in public schools often look far more like special education than civil rights. There are some good reasons for this -- federal regulations pertaining to Section 504 in public schools and virtually any other area of public life take somewhat different approaches. Section 504 in public schools, to be fair, is closely aligned with IDEA requirements in federal regulations. Again, this is a reflection of our differing attitudes and expectations of school-aged children as opposed to adults. Here are a few important distinctions to remember when making the transition from high school 504 services to higher education:

- In higher education -- as well as in employment, public services and public accommodations -- the individual with a disability bears the burden of proof. Unlike public schools, there are no requirements for providing evaluation of individuals with disabilities. The person with a disability must provide the evidence themselves. In public schools, whether under IDEA or Section 504, the school is responsible for adequate and regular assessments. This is no longer the case once a student leaves high school and attends a college or university.

- A 504 Plan from a high school -- or for that matter, an IEP -- is in no way binding upon any institution or entity outside of the school in which it was developed. There are no requirements for any plan under Section 504 or the ADA with respect to higher education, employment or other areas of public life. Thus there are no more meetings each year with counselors, teachers, etc. There is nothing to sign.
- "Free and Appropriate Education" (FAPE), first put forth in law under special education legislation in 1975 no longer applies. Though it is still referenced as a requirement for high school under regulations governing Section 504, there are no such references with respect to higher education in any federal regulations for either Section 504 or the ADA. Rather, higher education carries with it necessary costs, and students with disabilities must pay the same as their nondisabled peers. In higher education, then, FAPE is not regarded as a part of 504's nondiscrimination prohibitions. In all areas outside of public schools, nondiscrimination is accomplished by means of barrier removal, including "reasonable accommodations." *Note: Accommodations may not carry with them an additional charge of any kind, however.*
- The term "otherwise qualified individual with a disability" carries a different connotation, and subsequently greater weight and responsibility on the part of the individual than may have been the case in high school, and certainly elementary school. It means that students must meet academic standards. In public schools, this refers only to the age of the individual as being appropriate for elementary or high school. In higher education, it ultimately refers to a student's academic proficiency and ability to demonstrate learning.
- Integration is the order of the day. Terms such as "placement" and "least restrictive environment" are no longer valid. Placement in an environment which is restrictive or protective in any way would be a violation of an individual's civil rights, and counter to the spirit of Section 504 and the ADA.
- Some services provided to high school students under Section 504 may not be provided in higher education, because they in fact reduce the academic standards. Shortening assignments, for example, is viewed as compromising academic standards, and therefore is not "reasonable" to request in college.

Perhaps the most important result of these differences lies in the changes in expectations for students with disabilities. That is, students with disabilities, such as Learning Disabilities and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders, aren't always expected to perform or achieve at the

same levels as their peers in high school. In other words, they aren't always expected to learn as much. Examples include such things as allowing an ADD student with limitations in short term memory to use his notes on exams -- even though his classmates can't. Or, perhaps a student with learning disabilities which limit her reading comprehension is provided an aide for her tests. The aide's job is to explain the questions in different words to the student. These examples may seem extreme, but they occur surprisingly often, judging by the comments of students that come to ODS asking for them. At the college level, both of these examples are considered to be a reduction of the academic standard. Thus they are not "reasonable" accommodations, nor is any instructor or department likely to permit them. The distinction lies in the difference between adjusting the environment in order to give students with disabilities a more level playing field on which to meet the academic standards, and in reducing the expectations for them in order to ensure success and to preserve self-esteem. In a competitive academic environment, all students must meet the academic standards, whether they have accommodations or not. In higher education, therefore, students with disabilities must possess higher level skills in all aspects of learning -- skills and strategies commensurate with the academic expectations in higher education and, later, professional careers. These necessitate more sophisticated strategies in many cases. Reasonable accommodations can create a level playing field, but once achieved, the student must then demonstrate their skills and knowledge adequately.

What is meant by *reasonable accommodation*?

Reasonable accommodations are made in order to level the playing field 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. Thus, wherever possible the disability is minimized as a measure of performance in the academic environment. This is typically accomplished with services or strategies focused on the end result, rather than the means by which that result is customarily achieved.

Consider these examples:

- A student who is deaf cannot hear class lectures. Provision of sign language interpreters as an accommodation gives the deaf student access to the information discussed in the classroom at nearly the same time it is presented, and in their first language of American Sign Language. Thus, the student has a better opportunity to interact with the rest of the class. Students who are deaf are often provided with note-takers, even though the lectures are interpreted. This is because it is virtually impossible to follow a signed lecture and take notes at the same time.
- A student whose physical limitations prevent them from writing efficiently or from writing at all, may request note-taking services as an accommodation. They may also use a scribe for taking exams. Thus, the student will not be graded on their inability to physically write, but on the ability to learn and to demonstrate that they have learned the material.
- Students with mobility limitations, such as wheelchair users, may request that classroom locations be moved if they are not accessible on a ground floor or by elevator.
- Blind students are accommodated by receiving printed materials (textbooks, course syllabi, handouts) in Braille, in electronic format or on tape.
- Students with learning disabilities may be accommodated in a variety of ways, depending on the limitations of their particular type of learning disability.

In these examples, as in practice, the student must meet the academic standards. They must demonstrate their mastery of assigned material. In other words, they don't receive "help," but they enjoy their civil right to learn and compete on the same level as their peers.

The ADA assumes that people with disabilities have contributions to make, and that they have every right to attend colleges and universities -- regardless of whether they have a disability. Thus, access means empowering students with disabilities to take better control of their academic environment, permitting them to demonstrate their skill and knowledge. It also expects, however, that they can meet the academic standards with or without appropriate accommodations.

What is meant by *otherwise qualified*?

When your son or daughter applied to the University of Mary Washington, they were required to demonstrate to admissions staff that they, indeed, met the admission standards for this institution. They provided their high school transcripts, college entrance scores (ACT or SAT) and any other important information about themselves having a bearing on their potential to succeed and contribute to the university's diverse campus community. If they have already been accepted to the university, then they have demonstrated that they are, in fact, qualified individuals, despite having a disability. This is different, of course, from the way things were when your student entered public school. Whether or not you knew of their disability at that time, or whether they acquired a disability later didn't matter. There was only one qualification for entry into public school -- as a child of the appropriate age; they were entitled to learn to the best of their ability. None of us would argue that every person is entitled to attend college and receive a bachelor's degree. We would no doubt agree, however, that any individual who meets admission standards should have an opportunity to earn a degree. For the most part, disability is not part of the process of determining qualifications. Following admission, we would expect that each individual would continue to demonstrate that they are otherwise qualified by meeting or exceeding the academic standards set by the institution, and they must do so whether or not they request accommodations.

What is meant by the phrase *with or without reasonable accommodations*?

Understanding this phrase is critical to understanding the distinction between a civil right and an entitlement. Put bluntly, it's legal for a student with a disability to flunk out of college. There is no guarantee of success. Civil rights laws do not mandate a safety net. Students with disabilities must perform at the level that their academic and professional programs expect of all students. The University will strive to level the playing field, but ultimately the student's work must be their own and be of a satisfactory quality. In addition to guaranteeing civil rights to

reasonable accommodations, the ADA also guarantees any individual with a disability the absolute right to refuse any accommodation. That means that ODS doesn't make sure that a student requests accommodations. In fact, ODS doesn't determine these unilaterally in typical cases. While the director of Disability Services relies heavily on documentation of the disability when determining accommodations, she also draws the student into a discussion of functional limitations and possible strategies. If a student doesn't request an accommodation, however, the consequences of that action belong to the student. The care and concern parents and teachers show students in public schools, ensuring they have services and make use of them, would be viewed in the adult world as paternalism and unwarranted interference. While it is perfectly OK and legitimate for parents and other important people to influence some decisions for children, adults make their own choices. The bottom line, then, is that students with disabilities must perform at satisfactory levels in their academic pursuits at the University of Mary Washington. If they do not request reasonable accommodations and perform poorly without them, their civil rights have not been violated. The student must then live with the consequences of unsatisfactory academic performance.

Who will manage my son or daughter's educational services?

The student is ultimately responsible for managing their own education, understanding their functional limitations and requesting necessary accommodations for a disability.

As adults, all students go through a process of learning about themselves. They develop the skills of self-determination, including confidence enough to advocate for the things they need in order to thrive and achieve. In the case of a disability, that includes advocating for equality -- their civil right. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) endeavors to promote this kind of self-knowledge. With respect to disability, each individual must be able to explain their functional limitations. That is, how their disability affects them or limits the ways in which tasks are performed. Students must also understand how those limitations can be effectively accommodated to create a level playing field for them in school. They will need to be prepared to insist at times, and to be firm in their conviction that what they ask for is reasonable.

It is in the development of these skills that ODS can best guide the student with a disability in their educational growth. These skills are critical, because it is the student, not ODS, who will approach instructors, other staff, and even other students to request the accommodations that are reasonable for them to receive. Clearly, these are the skills all students need to have when they leave the University of Mary Washington and move successfully into their chosen careers.

My son or daughter is adamant -- they don't want anything to do with any disability office!

What happened?

From the perspective of those of us with disabilities, this attitude or reaction to disability professionals is not surprising. In fact, it's a given that disability is devalued in our culture. It's easy to recognize that being ostracized by peers is devaluing. Unfortunately the good intentions of professionals and other adults can do as much or more to reinforce devaluation. Simply put, your student may feel shame about having a disability and want to turn away from it. Uncomfortable as it is to say, the experience of Special Education, resource rooms, or 504 services (adult services such as Vocational Rehabilitation and even ODS offices are not immune, either) may result in unintended effects on students. They don't want "help" anymore. They don't want someone looking over their shoulder. They don't want to be expected to achieve less than their peers. Whatever happened or didn't happen in high school, these are often the feelings students come away with, and may be part of what motivates a student to avoid the Office of Disability Services. Believe it or not, they simply may be trying to preserve a "positive" sense of self. Students rightly want to feel that the work they do in school is of equal value to that of their classmates. They often express discomfort at feeling like they are getting some *advantage* others may not have, and they struggle with the feeling that they could be the object of charity by well-meaning adults. They often tell us "I just want to make it on my own, without any *help*." ODS does not "help" students. We do not look over students' shoulders to ensure that they are getting their homework done and going to class. We don't hold their hands to get them through registration or financial aid problems, or reduce the academic standard so

they won't experience feelings of failure. These things, while intended to be helpful, are more likely to cement the conviction that the student is less qualified than other students to be at the University of Mary Washington. Rest assured -- kids recognize when that is happening. In the long run, that kind of help hurts. It can contribute to serious academic consequences when a student gets to college. Rejecting negative attitudes about disability, about ourselves, is the right thing to do, so long as we recognize that the assumptions and devaluation of disability are the underlying problem -- not the disability itself. The student may come to terms with their disability in one of two ways. The most important is changing their attitude about having a disability. This requires assuming the attitude that disability is a normal part of life, and that the student has every right to be here. It means they must look at accommodations, not as a reduction in expectations, but as a means to level the playing field -- because we *won't* reduce the academic standards. It also necessitates an acknowledgment of the functional limitations of their disability and refusal to apologize for being who they are.

If you are even partly successful in communicating these ideas to your student, you will have done more for them than you will ever know. But for many students who come to UMW wanting to shed their disability "status" like a snake sheds its skin, they may likely experience the second way of coming to terms with their disability. They may not come to ODS until they are in trouble academically, or with Financial Aid. It may seem as though some students need to be knocked down hard before they are ready to learn how to hold their heads up without shame. This is an unfortunate, but common, aspect of the disability experience.

What else can you do? Keep sending them the message that it's up to them, that you have faith in them, and they have nothing to be ashamed of or apologize for. Let them know that a visit to ODS doesn't mean a commitment. That they are in control of their academic career and civil rights also means the right to refuse any accommodation. But they ought to fully inform themselves about what their choices may be before deciding.

Then, let them decide for themselves.

How do students advocate for themselves in order to ensure they receive appropriate accommodations?

Again, in order to ensure a level playing field, students must advocate effectively for the accommodations they require at UMW. The student must understand their disability and the ways in which it limits their functioning at the university. The limitations of the disability, not the disability itself, are the reason accommodations are recommended and provided. So that's the first step--knowing what accommodations are reasonable and why. ODS provides some of these accommodations, known as auxiliary services. For some accommodations, however, the student makes the request of the instructor. For instance, when using a scribe for an exam, the student must identify themselves to the instructor and make the request. The student and the instructor determine the best arrangements to make. In any case, the student should ensure that the accommodations provided give them the most level playing field to them on that particular exam.

In some cases, students have not been provided with the accommodations they have requested. Other times the accommodations are inadequate. In those instances, ODS will work with the student in order to find the best resolution. The next step for students is to acknowledge that discrimination against people with disabilities exists. It takes many forms, including paternalism and sometimes indifference.

I understand the philosophy now, but what is the process, or how does ODS work?

The following list generally applies to most students who register with ODS. Specifics vary depending on the student's disability, functional limitations and accommodations that will be requested and provided.

1. First, the University must verify the student's disability and the functional limitations that result. Medical or psychological records are used in this process. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 Plans are *not* adequate to demonstrate the functional limitations of a disability. In some cases, ODS may determine that the records provided are too old to be considered accurate. In such instances, the ODS director will recommend that the student obtain current assessment. This must be done by the student and at the student's expense, though ODS maintains a list of qualified professionals in the area who can provide appropriate assessment.
2. Next, the ODS director and the student discuss the limitations of the disability and decide on the appropriate accommodations. These accommodations, such as readers, sign language interpreters, etc., may be provided by ODS. Others require the student to make the request of the instructor.
3. Contact between the ODS director and the student is a crucial part of determining how the student will obtain accommodations.
4. The ODS director drafts a letter for students to give to their instructors. The letter introduces the student and informs the instructor that the student's disability has been verified by ODS. Thus, the letter's purpose is to assist the student in requesting accommodations from instructors.
5. Students are encouraged to experiment with a variety of auxiliary aides, services, and strategies to ensure maximum access to academic programs. All such services are authorized by the ODS director, so it is imperative for students to talk with the director if they feel their accommodations need some adjustment. New or varying strategies may

- be necessary from one course to the next, depending on the nature of the material, presentation style, and the media used in the classroom.
6. ODS recommends that students identify and request accommodations with plenty of advance notice to ensure their accommodations will be there when they need them. Ideally the student should contact their instructors prior to the first day of class to discuss test formats and the possibility of test accommodations. They will need to remind the instructor again at least a week before each exam, and then confirm the arrangements before the test day.

Why doesn't ODS provide LD assessment?

Neither the Americans with Disabilities Act nor Section 504 make it incumbent upon institutions of higher learning to evaluate and assess students with disabilities or suspected disabilities. This is, of course, in contrast with the student's entitlement to assessment and services in public schools. In the logic of civil rights (as opposed to educational entitlement), the individual must assert and claim their right to equal access. As such, they cannot then put the burden of proof on the institution, employer, or business. One must identify oneself as a qualified person with a disability and be prepared to provide the documents that verify that claim.

The Office of Disability Services provides a list of qualified professionals in the area for students to choose from. This occurs when information is too old to accurately reflect the student's functioning, if the student has not been previously diagnosed with a disability, or if the professional who did the assessment would not be otherwise qualified in that area. For example, a speech pathologist would not likely be qualified to assess for learning disabilities. Nor would a teacher for blind and low vision students be qualified to assess communication disorders in most cases. (Note: ODS will not accept documentation if the professional making the assessment is related to the student.)

How has my role as a parent changed?

When your child was in public school you were the ever-present safety net. It was you who attended parent/teacher conferences and IEP or 504 planning meetings. You were readily involved in their life. You were there to make sure your child was getting the appropriate education entitled to all children. After all, that's the role of a parent. In high school, you may have begun to see some changes in your adolescent. They began to assert their independence. Maybe taking the car on a road trip with friends-- friends that they chose to hang out with. Maybe they began to require more personal space, withdrew from family outings on occasion, and perhaps strained against accepted family routines.

At the post-secondary level, this transition continues. You increasingly give your support in a slightly different fashion. Your role shifts to a subtle hand of guidance when it comes to the process involved in your student's education. Encourage them to take responsibility for academic concerns and limitations. Both of you should acknowledge the disability and the limitations that stem from it. This will allow them to identify areas in which they should consider accommodations to level the playing field. It will also make it easier to convey their requests for accommodations to instructors, other students, and anyone from whom they may seek assistance. Encourage your student to register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) where they will be coached on how to proceed in obtaining reasonable accommodations. College is the first testing ground where your new student will and must be their own advocate. Expect them to develop their independence further through making the suitable arrangements to ensure success in their classes.

My son or daughter had some subjects waived in high school -- why aren't they automatically waived in college?

There are no "automatic" waivers in higher education. In fact, there are no waivers at all. Rather, under certain circumstances, students may be granted substitutions for some courses. But substitutions will be considered only when the student demonstrates that they are both OTHERWISE QUALIFIED, and that the substitution removes a disability-related barrier to their academic program. Remember that ADA provides for reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Under ADA, however, it is not reasonable to lower the academic standard. Therefore, requests for substitutions must be accompanied by convincing documentation supporting the claim. For example, a student with a specific learning disability affecting their ability to learn math processes is majoring in English literature. They have good documentation of their learning disability that strongly supports their claim that the resulting functional limitations may prevent them from succeeding in a college math course. Perhaps they already tried a lower level math course and have been unsuccessful even with reasonable accommodations and tutoring. This student may ask ODS for a course substitution for the math requirement in their general education area. The director would decide, based on the verification of functional limitations and the classes requested, and the impact on the student's course of study. The committee must determine that the substitution would not reduce the academic standard and that it would be a reasonable accommodation for an otherwise qualified student with a disability.

Now consider the same student with a learning disability affecting math, but who plans a degree course in physics or chemistry. These disciplines will have additional degree requirements in mathematics. A course substitution for general education requirements in math will not prepare the student for what is to come in these fields of study. Certainly, they will have a much more difficult time negotiating such a degree program. In fact, their major department would have the right to deny math substitutions, as they could be considered unqualified for such a degree on this basis.

Why does my son or daughter need a label?

Parents and students are often understandably sensitive about the use of labels. None of us wish to be described or defined by what is wrong with us, or by what our problems might be. Students may have been consistently compared against normal expectations, and understandably felt embarrassed or even ashamed of their disabilities. Your student may feel that they want to be considered normal now that they are out of high school and going to college. Our vision at ODS is that disability is a natural part of life. People with disabilities have always been around and they always will be. And they have every right to be here! Further, students with disabilities have every bit as much to contribute to the University and to society as any other group of individuals. Thus, it is important to change attitudes about disabilities. With that in mind, remember that ODS has the responsibility to verify a student's disability. Part of that process is to identify the functional limitations of the mental or physical condition. Once established, a student with a disability may receive accommodations. Most important, this process of verification makes it clear to all that this student has civil rights which are protected by the ADA and Section 504. If the student doesn't have a disability, their civil rights are not protected. If students do not make their disability known, they may not be able to enjoy the level playing field promised them as their civil right. So, does your student have to have a label? The answer, as you may have surmised, is twofold: No, they don't. But neither should they be embarrassed nor try to hide who they are.

If we sent their 504 plan or IEP to Admissions, are they automatically registered with ODS?

No. Unlike high school, each student must register separately to ensure their access to accommodations. Each student must come to ODS to begin the process of verifying their

disability, and determining which accommodations may be reasonable for them to request. From there, your student will be coached on how to obtain those accommodations. Remember, 504 Plans and IEPs from high school have no weight in higher education -- they are neither binding on a college or university, nor can they be used to verify a student's disability for civil rights purposes. Urge your student to be active in requesting their accommodations. Do not assume the professor will take care of it, that ODS will pull your student through school, or that you will do it for them -- this is college, they are capable adults, their education is largely their own responsibility. Also, your student's registration with ODS is confidential. The disclosure of this information to faculty, other students, or university staff -- including their parents -- is their prerogative as an adult.

What do you mean you cannot disclose any information to me about my son or daughter's services?

Once your student enrolls in a post-secondary institution, whether they are 18 years old or not, they become the sole guardian of all records maintained by that institution. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1976 (FERPA), the student has 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 they are being provided through Disability Services. This information is confidential. However, they may sign a written release of information which gives the institution the right to disclose their records to their parents. The only time a student's record may be disclosed without written consent would be to comply with a subpoena or in an emergency situation where the health and safety of the student or another individual is threatened.

What services does ODS provide?

ODS coordinates and provides accommodations for academic programs. Services may be individualized to address a specific functional limitation. ODS services are optional and students may select one or more services to best accommodate their functional limitations. Experimentation with accommodations is encouraged. Some accommodations may have qualifying factors so that not all students may be eligible. Some examples of ODS services include priority registration, scribes, note-takers, assistive technology, interpreter services, relocation of classes to accessible facilities, and various other accommodations.

What does my son or daughter do when a faculty member or instructor doesn't make time for them?

First and foremost, the student should be persistent. The University of Mary Washington boasts an excellent faculty. It is critical that communication between the student and instructor results in the provision of appropriate accommodations. For example, students are encouraged to hand the instructor the letter of verification that ODS provides. This is best accomplished either before classes begin or during the first week of classes. This introduces the student and their requests for accommodations early. Students will likely need to talk with instructors more than once a semester, so the first face-to-face meeting is very important. It can be helpful to note days and times that attempts were made to contact the instructor, as well as when the instructor received the student's letter of verification. The student can always try catching the instructor before or after class. All instructors should have published office hours in which they are available to meet with students. The ODS director will advise students if difficulties arise, and may offer to meet with the student and instructor in some cases. If the instructor's office is not physically accessible to your student, the instructor will make arrangements to meet them in an accessible location.

Students have a number of options open to them in the event that communication with instructors does not result in receiving accommodations. Again, students should stay in touch with the ODS director to discuss all their options. Most importantly of all - never give up!

Okay, we've talked about academics, but what about my son or daughter's living situation?

Both Residence Life and Dining Services at UMW are readily accessible to and usable by students with many disabilities. Students, especially those with physical disabilities, are strongly encouraged to investigate and prepare strategies for self-care, access to food services, etc. prior to arrival on campus in the fall.

The University of Mary Washington's Office of Residence Life offers a number of accessible housing options. Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with disabilities whose limitations require them. In addition, UMW's Dining Services provides access in a variety of ways. Dining Services can accommodate specialized dietary requirements, as well as provide dietary counseling for students with food allergies, diabetes, and other conditions. Remodeling in dining facilities has created greater physical access. Students with physical limitations that prevent them from carrying food trays will be accommodated by dining staff.

Examples of Possible Housing Accommodations

- Air conditioning
- Service animals
- Single rooms
- Wheelchair accessible rooms
- Fully accessible wheelchair apartments

The Student's Considerations

- Certification of trained service animal
- Provisions for disposal of animal's wastes

- Space for equipment such as battery chargers or Hoyer lift
- Provision for personal services
- Personal Care Attendants
- Scheduling
- Parking

Conclusion: Off to See the Wizard

So here you are, your child is entering the world of adulthood, and taking the first steps of a marvelous journey. It's a world completely different from any other -- both strange and wonderful. As they enroll at the University of Mary Washington, the things that you and your student came to expect before, almost as black and white at times, are gone. It's all in Technicolor now.

We hope this handbook has been helpful in preparing you and your student for what's coming next. It may be very trying at times, but we know it can also be extraordinary. *Welcome!*