

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Policy on Disabilities Services

Both ancient Jewish tradition and our modern sense of ethics demand that the educational life at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion serve the needs of qualified students who live with any disability which impacts the learning experience. The College - Institute and its Administration, Faculty and Staff are committed to providing appropriate accommodations to address specific, documented disabilities, to ensure that students have an optimal educational experience during their tenure, even as we maintain a commitment to high academic standards and excellence.

All students who are admitted to the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion must meet published standards for admissions and graduation. However, a disability should not prevent an otherwise qualified individual from pursuing admission to or continuing study at HUC-JIR.

On each of our four campuses, the Dean or his/her designate will be responsible for documentation, record keeping, planning and coordination of any accommodations required for students with disabilities which impact the learning experience. Disabled applicants and students who require an accommodation due to a disability should identify themselves during the application process or to their program director and advisor upon matriculation. If the diagnosis occurs while the student is enrolled, the student should notify his/her program director and advisor immediately upon learning of the need for an accommodation. In both cases, it is the student's responsibility to provide medical documentation outlining the disability and any needs with respect to accommodations. The program director and/or advisor will notify the Dean or his/her designate who will oversee the process for assisting the student, and coordinate the efforts of the Administration, Faculty and Staff to provide appropriate support during the student's tenure at the College-Institute.

Disability Defined

Although not directly applicable to this policy, the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act's definition of a disability is instructive. According to the ADA a disability is a physical or mental condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as the ability to work, learn, see or walk. Using this definition, a learning disability is any condition that substantially limits a student's ability to learn.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

A federal law known as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits institutions that receive federal funding from discriminating against qualified persons with disabilities and requires them to provide such individuals with reasonable accommodations. Specifically, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states: "*No otherwise qualified handicapped*

individual in the United States...shall, solely by reasons of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

Examples of conduct prohibited under Section 504, as it relates to postsecondary institutions, includes:

- Limiting the number of otherwise qualified students with disabilities admitted;
- Making pre-admission inquiries as to whether an applicant is disabled;
- Excluding an otherwise qualified student with a disability from any course of study because of the student’s disability;
- Providing less financial assistance to students with disabilities than is provided to non-disabled students, or limiting eligibility for scholarships on basis of disability;
- Counseling students with disabilities who are otherwise deemed qualified into more restrictive career paths than are recommended to non-disabled students;
- Measuring student achievement using models that adversely discriminate against a student with a disability;
- Establishing rules and policies that have the effect of limiting participation of students with disabilities in educational programs or activities.

A “reasonable accommodation” means appropriate academic adjustments and reasonable modifications to policies and practices to allow for full participation of students with disabilities. The accommodation process typically begins once a student notifies a college of his/her documented disability and requests accommodations, but the process may also be triggered by circumstances or information received from other sources. Some examples of reasonable accommodations can be found below. Decisions as to what accommodations should be provided are individualized, and will be determined by the College-Institute based on interaction with the student and possibly others, such as health care professionals.

Examples of circumstances under which accommodations need not be provided include the following:

- The accommodation would result in a fundamental alteration of the program;
- The institution is being asked to address a personal need; or
- The accommodation would impose an undue financial or administrative burden.

Confidentiality

HUC-JIR and its Administration, Faculty and Staff adhere to stringent confidentiality policies regarding information concerning an individual’s disabilities. The College-Institute will not release any part of submitted documentation to third parties without the individual’s consent unless authorized or required by law. Our Administration, Faculty and Staff strictly adhere to the provisions set forth in the Family Education Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA).

Disabilities at HUC-JIR

Application

The College-Institute welcomes applications from prospective students who have been diagnosed with a disability. The College-Institute encourages applicants to share pertinent information regarding any diagnosed disability with the school, so that it can provide appropriate support.

Self-Identification during Student Tenure at the College-Institute

Students are responsible to inform their program director and advisor of any disability which impacts their ability to fully participate in HUC's programs and benefits.

Documentation

Students must provide documentation, acceptable to the College-Institute, to verify the existence of a disability. In cases involving asserted learning disabilities, standards established by the Educational Testing Service and other national bodies concerned with learning disabilities will usually apply and, documentation must generally meet four basic criteria to be considered valid:

1. **A qualified professional must conduct the evaluation.**

The name, title and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification as well as the area of specialization, employment and state in which the individual practices must be stated in the documentation. Diagnosis by someone outside an appropriate field of expertise for that diagnosis is not acceptable. All reports must be on letterhead, legible, dated and signed.

2. **Testing must be current, no more than five years old.**

Because HUC-JIR is being asked to provide accommodations based on the current impact of an individual's disability on his/her academic performance, it is in the student's best interest to provide recent documentation. If older documentation exists, HUC-JIR may ask that the student be evaluated again, or consult a specialist for an update on the prior information, before providing accommodations.

3. **Documentation necessary to substantiate a disability must be comprehensive.**

A comprehensive assessment battery and the resulting diagnostic report must, to the extent applicable to the disability at issue, include four elements:

- A. a diagnostic interview;
- B. an assessment of aptitude (a complete intellectual assessment with all subtests and standard scores reported);
- C. a measure of academic achievement (including current levels of academic functioning) in relevant areas such as reading [decoding and comprehension] and oral and written language; and,

- D. a report on information processing, including discussion of specific areas such as short- and long-term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/processing, processing speed, executive functioning and motor ability.

Other assessment measures, such as classroom tests and informal assessment procedures and observations may also be helpful in determining performance across a variety of domains.

The documentation must include a specific diagnosis, based on actual standardized test scores and other diagnostic tools where appropriate. Each suggested accommodation should be supported by an appropriate rationale. If more information is necessary, HUC-JIR may seek clarification from the evaluator before making a final determination on the appropriateness of any accommodation.

4. The documentation must contain an interpretive summary.

The evaluator must include a diagnostic summary based on the comprehensive evaluative process, drawing conclusions from the assessment results, ruling out other possibilities for academic problems, indicating the substantial limitations to learning presented by the disability and an explanation of how specific suggested accommodations will mediate the effects of the disability. It may be helpful to have the program director and/or advisor consult directly with the evaluator for the most detailed and accurate information.

Accommodations

Individual students will work with the Dean or his/her designate, to develop reasonable accommodations based on the documentation submitted. Accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

- Reduced course loads and program extensions, with the potential for ongoing financial aid
- Assistance with planning work and study schedules
- Testing accommodations (extended time, oral exams, readers/writers, etc.)
- Specialized library assistance
- Assistance and support during the senior placement process
- Provision of financial assistance or student support for:
 - note-taker services and reader services
 - tutoring services
 - access to research aids, language study aids and language study support

All accommodations will be discussed and approved as part of a comprehensive plan that will be agreed upon in writing, and reviewed and updated as necessary during the course of the student's tenure.

Self-Advocacy

An important goal for all our students is to become effective self-advocates. Students are expected to advocate for themselves with the support of the administration of the College-Institute. It is the student's responsibility to share appropriate information with Administration, Faculty and Staff. The program director and/or advisor will assist a student in advocacy, or advocate directly on behalf of a student, if the student desires assistance.

Staff and Faculty Training

HUC-JIR provides ongoing training for its Administration, Staff and Faculty on learning disabilities. Training will include guidance in definitions and documentation of disabilities, assistance with course construction and assessment methods, possible accommodations, suggestions for helping to advise and support students with disabilities and conferral with experts on individual issues. The Office of the Dean or its designate, along with the individual program directors, will serve as the clearinghouse for information on supporting students, and the coordinating office for training of staff and faculty.

More Information

For more information, please speak with the Office of the Dean or its designate, your program director, or your advisor.

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