

Student Accessibility and Accommodation's Role at Puget Sound

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What is SAA's role and scope of authority at Puget Sound?

The law requires that universities have one person or office determining disability accommodations.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq5269.html>.

Puget Sound had designated SAA to ensure that the University complies with our legal mandates regarding student disability accommodations and has authorized SAA to determine reasonable disability accommodations for students who qualify for protection under the [Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#). SAA cannot write accommodations for students who do not have disabilities; SAA cannot write accommodations that alter academic standards.

SAA's ensures that students with disabilities, as defined under the law, are provided equal access to academics and the campus community. Faculty and other departments rarely challenge an SAA request because we have their trust that we are diligent about following the law. At times, there may be tension between what students perceive as reasonable, what faculty perceive as appropriate, and the law. SAA manages this tension by following higher education best practices, the [Department of Justice's Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\)](#) guidance, and reviewing disability case law, investigations, lawsuits, and settlements. When there is a complex situation between a student, instructor, department, and SAA, SAA consults with disability law attorneys.

[Critical Principles of Federal Disability Discrimination Law](#)

What is the first step to requesting disability accommodations?

The [home page of SAA's website](#) has detailed information. SAA also has a [public accommodation request page](#).

What if I have a learning disability but was not evaluated in K-12 and cannot afford psycho-educational testing? What if I only have an evaluation from grammar school?

In rare situations, a student may be unable to provide documentation of a learning disability because their K-12 school district did not identify their need and their family did not have the resources for psycho-educational assessments. SAA works on a case-by-case basis with these students. SAA is more liberal than most colleges with what we accept as documentation of a learning disability. For example, according to The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), "Less than half of colleges that require documentation of a disability accept an IEP or 504 plan as sufficient, stand-alone verification. Some colleges will not accept evaluations that are more than three years old. Others require diagnostic data normed for adults rather than K–12 students. These requirements are unnecessarily burdensome, especially because private evaluations are costly and may be out of reach for many undergraduates."

Here is an article from the NCLD titled [Preparing for Postsecondary Education](#) **does** accept IEPs and 504 plans if they contain a diagnosis and description of the functional limitations. SAA accepts evaluations completed during K-12 because a student may learn how to compensate for a learning disability, but that does not mean they have outgrown it. The rigor of college material poses new challenges. The OCR (Office for Civil Rights) has [information on auxiliary aids and services for postsecondary students with disabilities](#).

Does an IEP or 504 Plan continue in higher education?

The [IDEA \(Individuals with Disabilities Education Act\)](#) protects children with disabilities from birth through high school. The IDEA does not apply to higher education. In higher education, students must be "well enough" to meet academic standards with or without disability accommodations. They have equal access but not the right to progress and receive a degree.

SAA considers IEPs and 504 Plans when determining accommodations, but SAA will not continue all previous accommodations beyond providing equal access and leveling the playing field.

Does SAA provide specially designed education to meet the needs of individual disabilities?

No, SAA does not provide specialized instruction. Special education services end after high school. All Puget Sound students have access to peer tutoring, peer writing advisors, and assistance with time management in the Center for Writing and Learning. <https://www.pugetsound.edu/center-writing-learning>

What happens during an intake meeting?

During the initial SAA Intake Meeting, the student and the Accommodation Specialist identify the disability symptoms that hinder equal access to academic and campus life. The student and Accommodation Specialist discuss reasonable accommodations to address these barriers. There needs to be a rational connection between a requested accommodation and the disability symptoms. Accommodations cannot lower academic standards or fundamentally alter the University's programs and services.

The law requires that accommodations be determined on an individual basis. SAA does not have a list saying, "If this, then that." Disabilities affect students in unique ways and varying severities. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/auxaids.html>

Who attends the intake meeting?

The student requesting accommodations must attend the meeting. They can invite family members or a friend. However, the student must be able to discuss their disability symptoms and participate in a collaborative process with the Accommodation Specialist or the Director to determine necessary accommodations.

What support services does SAA provide?

SAA supports students with using their accommodations. We do not have special education services, academic advising, or tutoring. All students receive free tutoring in CWL. SAA refers students to campus resources and staff in other departments who can help with specific issues. We keep referral sources handy for quick reference. Some examples are:

[Center for Writing and Learning](#)

[Resource Gateways | University of Puget Sound](#)

[Center for Intercultural and Civic Engagement](#)

What if I disagree with an SAA decision?

When a student is unhappy with SAA or disagrees with a decision, ideally, the student should tell SAA, but they can also meet with the [Dean of Faculty Affairs](#).

Student Responsibilities in the Accommodation Process:

- Students are covered under disability law if they meet the academic standards with or without accommodation.
- Self-identify as having a disability.
- Provide documentation.
- Participate in the collaborative process to determine necessary accommodations.
- Follow SAA's policies and procedures for implementing accommodations each semester.
- Read all SAA emails. These emails contain reminders and instructions on all processes that an SAA student must complete, from requesting accessible books to booking exams.
- Respond to all SAA and instructor emails.
- SAA procedures are easy to follow. During the first semester, a staff member will demonstrate how to use your Accommodate account and explain everything required to receive your accommodations.
- Meet with each instructor every semester to discuss logistics.
- Immediately notify SAA if there is a problem with implementing accommodations.

What is the SAA Peer Mentoring Program?

The SAA Peer Mentoring was created with a generous donation from a parent of a student with a disability. SAA continues to receive donations from various families that keep this program viable. The mission of the program is to help students with autism and social anxiety connect to and enjoy the campus community

Mentees are paired with a mentor who meets regularly with their mentee. The meetings are “active.” Active meetings are walks, sharing a meal, going to the gym, attending a campus event, or other activities that do not require small talk and polite conversation. There are also weekly group activities such a board game night, bowling, cooking, painting, local excursions and celebrations. Mentors receive training, meet key people from departments across campus and receive weekly supervision meetings. Mentors share their experience and practical tips for managing academics and interacting with peers and instructors. They also encourage their mentees to use student resources across campus.