

The New England College of Optometry

Guidelines for Students with Disabilities
and
Required Technical Standards

Approved by the Faculty of The New England College of Optometry

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Guidelines for Students with Disabilities

The New England College of Optometry (the College) has a long history of maintaining high standards while actively supporting and accommodating students with disabilities. The following defines the policy and procedures for admission, matriculation and continuation leading to the degree of Doctor of Optometry (O.D.) at the College.

ADMISSIONS

The Committee on Admissions chooses applicants who seem best qualified not only by scholastic record, college recommendations, interview and involvement in college and community activities, but also by less tangible qualities of personality, character, and maturity. All students must possess the physical and emotional capabilities required to undertake the full curriculum and achieve the level of competence required by the faculty. It is expected that the student will act independently. Students with disabilities applying to the College must have the knowledge and skills to function in a broad variety of clinical situations and to render a wide spectrum of patient care. The College takes very seriously its obligations to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Amendments of 1992 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. At the same time, the College recognizes that prospective candidates must be capable of meeting certain minimum technical standards. Students who have been accepted by the Committee on Admissions and who request specific reasonable accommodations to complete the curriculum must provide a diagnosis and recommendation for accommodations plan to the College. *The accommodations plan must be produced by an accredited specialist approved by the College. If the specialist is not approved by College, the student will be referred to a specialist of the College's choice, at the student's own expense.* It is the student's responsibility to seek out and provide this information *before the start of the entering academic year.* Requests for accommodation are evaluated on an individual basis. Technological compensation may be available to assist individuals with a variety of disabilities and may be permitted, but ordinarily the use of human intermediaries who may interject their power of selection and observation in place of the student's will not be permitted.

All students are required to meet all academic and technical standards *regardless of identifiable disabilities and regardless if accommodations are requested or utilized.*

ACCOMMODATIONS PROCEDURE

All students, regardless of the timing of the disability or of the identification of the disability, are required to present complete documentation of the disability if accommodations are requested. Students who self-identify prior to admission or those who become disabled while at the College must seek evaluation from a licensed professional. This must be done at the student's own expense. After receiving a diagnosis and suggested accommodations, the student must present the report to the Associate Dean of Students. The report will then be given to the Accommodations Evaluation Committee and requests for accommodations will be reviewed. Students with physical disabilities must contact the Associate Dean of Students prior to the beginning of classes or as soon as possible after classes begin. This office coordinates course scheduling and lecture-facility accessibility with the instructor of record, facility administrators and the physically disabled student as well as any approved specific accommodations.

FUNCTIONAL STANDARDS FOR DIDACTIC AND CLINICAL OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION

The functional standards for optometric education require that the candidate/student possess abilities and skills in the following areas: 1) observation; 2) communication; 3) sensory and motor coordination; 4) intellectual-conceptual, integrative and quantitative abilities; and 5) behavioral and social attributes. Each of these areas is described in this document. In any case where a student's abilities or skills in one of these areas is compromised, he or she must demonstrate alternative means and/or abilities to meet the functional requirements. It is expected that seeking and using such alternative means and/or abilities shall be the responsibility of the student. Upon receipt of appropriate documentation, the College will be expected to provide reasonable assistance and accommodation to the student.

Observation Abilities

The student must be able to acquire a defined level of required knowledge as presented through lectures, laboratories, demonstrations, patient interaction and self-study. Acquiring this body of information necessitates the functional use of visual, auditory and somatic sensation enhanced by the functional use of other sensory modalities. Examples of these observational skills in which accurate information needs to be extracted in an efficient manner include:

Visual Abilities (as they relate to such things as visual acuity, color vision and binocularity):

- visualizing and reading information from paper, films, slides, video and computer displays
- observing optical, anatomic, physiologic and pharmacologic demonstrations and experiments
- discriminating microscopic images of tissue and microorganisms
- observing a patient and noting non-verbal signs
- discriminating numbers, images, and patterns associated with diagnostic tests and instruments
- visualizing specific ocular tissues in order to discern three-dimensional relationships, depth and color changes

Auditory Abilities:

- understanding verbal presentation in lecture, laboratory and patient settings
- recognizing and interpreting various sounds associated with laboratory experiments as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures

Tactile Abilities:

- palpating the eye and related areas to determine the integrity of the underlying structures
- palpating and feeling certain cardiovascular pulses

Communication Abilities

The student must be able to communicate effectively, efficiently and sensitively with patients and their families, peers, staff, instructors and all members of the health care team. The student must be able to demonstrate established communication skills using traditional and alternative means. Examples of required communication skills include:

- relating effectively and sensitively to patients, conveying compassion and empathy
- perceiving verbal and non-verbal communications such as sadness, worry, agitation and lack of comprehension from patients
- eliciting information from patients and observing changes in mood and activity
- communicating quickly, effectively and efficiently in oral and written English with patients and members of the health care team
- reading and legibly recording observations, test results and management plans accurately
- completing assignments, patient records and correspondence accurately and in a timely manner

Sensory and Motor Coordination Abilities

Students must possess the sensory and motor skills necessary to perform an eye examination, including emergency care. In general, this requires sufficient exteroception sense (touch, pain, temperature), proprioceptive sense (position, pressure, movement, stereognosis, and vibratory) and fine motor function (significant coordination and manual dexterity using arms, wrists, hands and fingers.) Examples of skills required include:

- instillation of ocular pharmaceutical agents
- insertion, removal and manipulation of contact lenses
- assessment of blood pressure and pulse
- removal of foreign objects from the cornea
- simultaneous manipulation of lenses, instruments and therapeutic agents and devices
- reasonable facility of movement
- injections into the eye, lids, or limb

Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative and Quantitative Abilities

Problem solving, a most critical skill, is essential for optometric students and must be performed quickly, especially in emergency situations. In order to be an effective problem solver, the student must be able to accurately and efficiently utilize such abilities as measurement, calculation, reasoning, analysis, judgment, investigation, memory, numerical recognition and synthesis. Examples of these abilities include being able to:

- determine appropriate questions to be asked and clinical tests to be performed
- identify and analyze significant findings from history, examination, and other test data
- demonstrate good judgment and provide a reasonable assessment, diagnosis and management of patients
- retain, recall and obtain information in an efficient manner
- identify and communicate the limits of one's knowledge and skill

Behavioral and Social Attributes:

The student must possess the necessary behavioral and social attributes for the study and practice of optometry. Examples of such attributes include:

- satisfactory emotional health required for full utilization of one's intellectual ability
- high ethical standards and integrity
- an empathy with patients and concern for their welfare
- commitment to the optometric profession and its standards
- effective interpersonal relationships with patients, peers and instructors
- professional demeanor
- effective functioning under varying degrees of stress and workload
- adaptability to changing environments and uncertainties inherent in patient care
- positive acceptance of suggestions and constructive criticism

Candidates with questions or concerns about how their own conditions or disabilities might affect their ability to meet these functional standards are encouraged to meet with an optometry school counselor prior to submitting an application.

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Pre-Enrollment Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, the College makes no pre-admissions inquiry regarding disability. In general, most students with physical disabilities are identified or self-identify prior to enrollment. Students who know that they have learning disabilities (including attention deficit disorder) may or may not self-identify prior to enrollment.

If students do not self-identify, they will be expected to fulfill the curricular requirements without the benefit of accommodations. Once identified, students are responsible to complete the documentation process in accordance with College standards. A copy of the student's documentation must be presented to the Associate Dean of Students prior to the academic year in which the student expects to enter. The documentation must have been completed in the calendar year prior to admission to the College. Students are then interviewed by the Associate Dean of Students, who reviews the documented diagnosis and the recommended specific accommodations. The Evaluations Accommodation Committee, composed of the Associate Dean of Students and the Vice President and Dean of Students, Administration, and Alumni and will evaluate requests for accommodations necessary to assist disabled students in fulfilling the technical standards at a satisfactory level. The student is encouraged to discuss the disability with the instructor of record and all of the student's instructors of record are informed in writing by the Associate Dean of Students as to the nature of the student's disability and the approved accommodations.

Students Who Become Disabled At The College

Students who become disabled while attending the College and who wish to request reasonable accommodations are expected to notify the Vice President and Dean of Students, Administration, and Alumni and to seek the assistance of the Associate Dean of Students in requesting accommodation. Students must follow the steps described under Accommodations Procedure on page 2 of this document. The Accommodations Evaluation Committee will evaluate the disability and request for accommodations. The student is referred to the Associate Dean of Students for coordination of the specific accommodations within the curriculum. The student is encouraged to discuss the disability with the instructor of record and the instructors of record are informed in writing by the Associate Dean of Students as to the nature of the student's disability and the approved accommodations.

Students With Learning Difficulties Identified While at the College

In general, such students are not identified until they experience academic and/or behavioral difficulties. Identification may be by self-identification or observation by instructor of record, the Student Affairs Committee, the Associate Dean of Students or fellow students. Students having academic difficulty are often directed to seek a meeting with the Associate Dean of Students, who will review the nature of the problem, learning skills strategies, learning styles, and other possible causes for the difficulties. When appropriate, the student is referred for testing and/or counseling, which will be at the student's own expense. After the student follows the Accommodations Procedure, including the presentation of written documentation to the Associate Dean of Students, the Accommodations Evaluation Committee will evaluate the disability and the requests for accommodations necessary to assist disabled students in fulfilling the technical standards at a satisfactory level. The student is referred to the Associate Dean of Students for coordination of any specific accommodations within the curriculum. The student is encouraged to discuss the disability with the instructor of record and the instructors of record are informed in writing by the Associate Dean of Students as to the nature of the student's disability and the approved accommodations.

Available Resources

The New England College of Optometry expects all of its students to become highly effective and competent Doctors of Optometry. Support services are available to all students. Students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to make use of these and other services.

Professional Services

The Associate Dean of Students can conduct intake interviews. If a complete diagnostic evaluation, psychiatric referral, or physical examination is warranted, students will be referred to the appropriate resource person or agency at their own expense. Student health insurance *may provide partial* funds for testing.

Advisory System

Each student with a documented disability can request access to a member of the faculty familiar with the student's history and disability. The faculty member can act as a student advocate when seeking services or appearing before the Student Affairs Committee, offer advice as requested or simply act as a sounding board when necessary.

Tutorial Service

Tutoring is available for students by request, or, in the case of clinical tutoring, by referral from a preceptor. The Associate Dean of Students provides the student with the name and email address of a tutor. It is incumbent upon the student to make arrangements for the tutorial sessions.

National Optometric Board Examinations

Review sessions for United States Board Exams are usually offered. Students wishing special accommodations during testing are advised to contact the Board of Examiners *at least 12 weeks* prior to the test dates.