



New England College of Optometry

# Guidelines for Students with Disabilities and Required Technical Standards

Revised November 2015

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 College complies with all applicable laws related to disabilities, including requests for reasonable accommodations.

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 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 applicable law, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (“ADA”), as amended in 2008. At the same time, the College recognizes that prospective candidates must be capable of meeting certain standards to practice optometry.

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 with proper medical expertise to make the diagnosis for which accommodations are being sought. If the specialist is not approved by the College, the student will be required to obtain the diagnosis and recommendation for accommodations from a properly accredited specialist 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.* The documentation must have been completed within the last three years. In instances where the student is diagnosed with a disability during his or her time at the College, the student is expected to provide the documentation well before the time for which the accommodations are sought.

The College requirements for documentation do not necessarily mirror those of the National Board Of Examiners in Optometry which can be found at.

[https://www.optometry.org/pdf/ADA\\_Documentation\\_Guidelines\\_Requirements.pdf](https://www.optometry.org/pdf/ADA_Documentation_Guidelines_Requirements.pdf)

Students who anticipate seeking accommodations from the Board should be sure to review the Board’s documentation requirements and deadlines.

The College works diligently to accommodate students with disabilities. Requests for accommodation are evaluated on an individual basis. Students with disabilities who wish to be provided with accommodations should make such requests and provide all necessary paperwork well before the time for which he or she is seeking an accommodation. However, just because a student has received accommodations from the College or from a previous organization or institution does not guarantee that the same accommodations will be available in each environment, setting, or testing time period. Though the College will endeavor to work with the student with regards to reasonable accommodations sought, the reasonable accommodation may not necessarily be exactly what the student requests. Reasonable accommodations will take into account the needs of the student requesting an accommodation, fairness toward other students, and the standards of the College while fully complying with applicable laws.

**All students are required to meet all academic and technical standards *with or without reasonable accommodation.***

### **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 evaluations from a licensed professional 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 or her approved College representative. The report will be reviewed and requests for accommodations will be considered. Students with 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.

Student medical records and requests for accommodations will be kept confidential except where disclosure is necessary to provide the reasonable accommodation.

## FUNCTIONAL STANDARDS FOR DIDACTIC AND CLINICAL OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION

The functional standards for optometric education require that the candidate/student possesses 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 are 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 engage in an interactive dialogue 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:

- 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 ADA, the College makes no pre-admissions inquiry regarding disability. In general, most students with 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 and evaluates requests for accommodations necessary to assist students with disabilities in fulfilling the College's standards at a satisfactory level. Should additional information be required regarding the requested accommodations, the student and/or the student's evaluator may be required to provide additional information to the College. Should information be required from the evaluator, it will be requested after the College receives written permission from the student.

### **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 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 Associate Dean will evaluate the disability and request for accommodations. Instructors of record are informed in writing by the Associate Dean of Students of the approved accommodations.

**Students With Learning Difficulties Identified While at the College**

In general, students with learning difficulties 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 directed to seek a meeting with the Associate Dean of Students, who will review the nature of the problem, suggest learning skills strategies, learning styles, and discuss other possible causes for the difficulties. When appropriate, the student may be referred for testing and/or counseling. After the student follows the Accommodations Procedure, including the presentation of written documentation to the Associate Dean of Students, the Associate Dean will evaluate the disability and the requests for accommodations necessary to assist disabled students in fulfilling the technical standards at a satisfactory level. The instructors of record are informed in writing by the Associate Dean of Students of 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 to help them succeed.

**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. Please note that accommodations provided at the College do not guarantee accommodations for Board Examinations. Students who plan on seeking accommodations from the Board are responsible for complying with all necessary procedures for requesting those accommodations.