



Charter Oak State College Office of Accessibility Services

Student Guide and Handbook
Revised January 12, 2023

OFFICE OF ACCESSIBILITY (OAS)

Welcome to Charter Oak State College's Office of Accessibility Services (OAS). This Student Guide and Handbook is intended to answer questions you may have regarding accessibility, the process for requesting accommodations, and next steps. The Student Guide and Handbook is broken into five sections (with links for easy access):

- 1) [Guiding legislation](#)
- 2) [Rights and responsibilities of the College](#)
- 3) [Rights and responsibilities of students](#)
- 4) [Definitions, Processes, and Policies](#)
- 5) [Getting Started](#)

GUIDING LEGISLATION

Section 504 and the ADA

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) provides that any person with a mental or physical impairment that limits one or more major life activities shall be considered for and entitled to reasonable accommodations.

Charter Oak State College is committed to providing qualified students equal opportunity to higher education through the provision of reasonable and appropriate accommodations and support services.

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) govern all student records. FERPA assures primary educational privacy rights to students including: 1) the right to inspect and review education records; 2) the right to seek to amend education records; and 3) the right to have some control over the disclosure of information from education records. Unless identified as "Directory Information.," FERPA protects academic records.

While FERPA does not protect medical information, documents submitted by persons requesting or receiving disability services used to determine appropriate educational placement and achieve educational goals, is protected and will be kept confidential unless a release of information is provided by the student or unless the release is specifically allowed under the law.

In accordance with FERPA, disability-related information may be shared on a limited basis within the academic community on a “need to know” basis pertaining to a specific and/or an emergency. The “need to know” is determined in each instance by the OAS Specialist and is very limited.

The OAS treats all materials pertaining to the documentation of a student’s disability as confidential and keeps the information locked within the OAS and separate from the student’s academic file. Only those faculty or staff directly involved in the provision of accommodations and/or services need to know that a student has a documented disability. Specific details of a student’s disability are not revealed unless the student chooses to disclose this information to the faculty or staff member.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COLLEGE

The College has the right to:

- Establish essential functions, skills, knowledge and standards for courses, programs, services, jobs and activities, and evaluate students on this basis.
- Request and receive current documentation that supports requests for accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services.
- Deny a request for accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services if, based on the assessment of the OAS, an individual fails to provide the required documentation, the documentation does not demonstrate the need for such accommodations and/or it imposes a fundamental alteration to the essential standard of a course, program or activity.
- Choose among equally effective accommodations, adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services.

The College is responsible for:

- Evaluating current and prospective students without regard to their disability.
- Providing or arranging reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services to students with documented disabilities in a timely fashion.
- Ensuring that courses, programs, services, jobs, activities and facilities are available and usable in the most integrated settings when viewed in their entirety.
- Maintaining appropriate confidentiality of records and communication, except where disclosure is authorized by the student or required by law.
- Provide, in timely fashion, information in alternate formats when requested.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT

Students have the right to:

- Equal access to courses, programs, services, jobs, activities and facilities available through the college.
- Equal opportunities to work, learn, and receive reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services.
- Appropriate confidentiality of all information regarding his/her disability, except when disclosures are required or permitted by law.
- Information available in alternate formats.

Students are responsible for:

- Registering with the OAS as an individual with a disability and provide appropriate documentation when an accommodation, auxiliary aid, or service is requested.
- Meeting qualifications and maintaining essential institutional standards for courses, programs, services, and activities.
- Reviewing letters of accommodations with his/her professor(s) to ensure mutual understanding of the specific accommodations granted in the course.

DEFINITIONS, PROCESSES, AND POLICIES

Connecticut Association for Higher Education and Disability (CT AHEAD) Documentation Guidelines and processes

In order to provide appropriate accommodations, official documentation of the disability is required. Charter Oak State College uses the guidelines as endorsed by CT Association for Higher Education and Disability (CT AHEAD).

In adherence to Amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act in 2008 (§. 3406) and revised Title I regulations, determination of eligibility for accommodations requires an interactive process and is made on a case-by-case basis.

Do I Need to Provide Documentation?

Postsecondary programs may request documentation of a disability. If a person obviously uses a wheelchair or is blind or deaf, no further documentation may be necessary. For those with hidden disabilities, such as learning disabilities, mental disorders or chronic health conditions, it is reasonable and appropriate for a program to request current documentation to establish the validity of the request for accommodations and to identify the accommodations needed.

What Kind of Documentation Is Needed?

Documentation should be completed and signed by a professional familiar with the applicant and the applicant's disability such as a physician, psychologist, special education evaluator, therapist, or rehabilitation counselor. It should verify the disability and suggest appropriate accommodations. If previous documentation exists, it will likely be enough if it is current (usually no less than five years old). If no current documentation is available, it is the responsibility of the student to have new documentation prepared. This can sometimes mean paying to have a new evaluation done.

For further information about documentation for different disabilities, please see our [Documentation Guidelines](#).

The Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) views all information pertaining to a student's disability as confidential. Any information obtained by OAS is used to verify the disability, plan for appropriate services, and document service and communication with the OAS office.

Maintaining student disability information as confidential does not guarantee a student's anonymity. This means that OAS will only share information with faculty, staff or service providers on a need to know basis, which may include name and accommodation(s) being used. Please contact OAS for further information.

The following are the guidelines used by OAS regarding disability-related information:

- All disability-related information for students at Charter Oak State College is managed by OAS.
- Only authorized personnel working at OAS have access to this information.
- Disability information may be released only when a student has signed a Release of Confidential Information form (please contact OAS for electronic or hard-copy form). This includes information to be shared with family, other institutions, or a provider.
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) do not allow faculty, family members or third parties access to information pertaining to students' medical conditions, such as medical or psychiatric records unless OAS has a signed release or there is a need to know.
- Submitting an online request for accommodations authorizes OAS to notify faculty of the approved accommodations the student will be using in their class.
- The functional impact of a student's disability may be disclosed to faculty on an educational need to know basis.
- OAS may engage in discussions or consultations with faculty and staff, as needed, in order to effectively implement approved accommodations.
- Students may request to review the contents of their own file. This must be done with OAS staff present.
- Students may request a copy of the documentation of their disability by submitting a written request or in person. A student's records are retained for five years after the student's departure from Charter Oak State College.

CHARTER OAK STATE COLLEGE ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations at Charter Oak State College are provided based on student need relating to the disability and are determined on a case-by-case basis through the interactive process. Examples of possible accommodations are extended time for course assessments or timed tests, alternate formats such as audio books, and assistive technology.

Note: Accommodations are not retroactive. Accommodations from Charter Oak State College do not guarantee a passing grade in a course. Reasonable accommodations are to provide equal access and level the playing field. They do not guarantee success. Not all accommodations requested will be approved.

Documentation policies differ from one institution to another. The OAS' documentation policy is designed to fit the Charter Oak State College student climate and does not consider documentation requirements external to Charter Oak State College. If a student intends to apply to another institution or take a standardized test (GRE, MCAT, etc.) administered by an outside agency, the student is responsible for researching those documentation policies and should investigate requirements at least six months prior to an anticipated start date or test date.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course, program, service, activity, or facility that ensures equal opportunity for qualified students with disabilities to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a service, program, or activity. Aids, benefits, or services need not produce equal results, but must afford an equal opportunity to achieve equal results.

When necessary, OAS staff will consult with faculty regarding whether an accommodation would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity or whether an academic requirement is essential to the instruction being pursued or to any directly related licensing requirement. In doing so, the OAS will examine the following:

1. Barriers between individuals with disabilities and accessing courses, programs, services, jobs, activities or facilities without accommodations;
2. Requested modifications, accommodations, and auxiliary aids;
3. Whether effective alternatives exist, that would allow the individual with a disability to participate without lowering essential requirements or fundamentally altering the nature of the program.

4. Whether an academic requirement is essential to the instruction or to any directly related licensing requirement.

When the College determines that a modification related to facilities or communication would result in a fundamental alteration or undue burden, OAS shall acquire the written opinion of the proper authority, i.e. department chair of impacted discipline, providing the reasoning supporting the decision.

TIMELINESS OF DECISIONS CONCERNING ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

The OAS' goal is to process requests for accommodations in a timely manner. This means that we can usually process completed requests within 3-5 business days. During peak times, however, this timeline may take longer depending on volume of requests. Please consider this when seeking accommodations and submit your request for services as early as possible.

Initial request for accommodations

Initial requests for accommodations are considered complete when the OAS office has:

1. Received the [Intake Form in the Student Accommodate Portal](#)
2. Students have checked "Release of Information" box at the bottom of the intake form in Accommodate.
3. Received the "[Medical Provider Documentation](#)" form, which is to be uploaded in the Accommodate portal. The intake form has an upload button at the bottom of the form.
4. Engaged in the interactive process with the student. The interactive process is required by the ADA and allows the student and the OAS representative to discuss reasonable accommodation determinations based on the documentation, presentation of the disability in a post-secondary setting, and course/program requirements.
5. A determination for reasonable accommodations has been made.

Subsequent, unchanged requests for accommodations

OAS registered students are required to use their account in Accommodate to request an Accommodate Letter each term. For the most part, students do not need to submit new documentation. If new documentation is required (i.e., temporary disability, request for different/additional accommodations), the OAS will notify the student.

APPEALING ACCOMMODATION DETERMINATION

Any student, who disagrees with the accommodations or other services determined by the OAS should speak to the Director of Accessibility Services as soon as possible. Students should express their concerns and be prepared to offer reasonable alternative solutions.

If after consulting with the Director of Accessibility Services, the student is still dissatisfied regarding the proposed accommodation or provision of accommodation, the student should submit a detailed, written appeal addressed to the Provost within 10 business days of the decision.

Note: The College has the obligation to *provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations* to ensure that otherwise qualified students with disabilities have equal access to their academic education. If the College can provide an accommodation that is equally as effective as the one requested, the College is not required to provide the requested accommodation.

COMPLAINTS WITH ACCOMMODATION COMPLIANCE

Students should try to resolve issues with professors first. If unable to resolve the issue, then student should report their issues to the Director of Accessibility Services.

If the student believes that the Director of Accessibility Services' efforts to resolve the complaint have been unsuccessful, then the student may file a detailed, written appeal to the College Provost, Dr. David Ferreira within 10 business days of the last effort at resolution. Within a reasonable time, a meeting will be arranged between the student and the provost or designee

GETTING STARTED

At Charter Oak State College, we are committed to providing qualified students with disabilities the necessary academic adjustments and accommodations to ensure equal access to programs, services, and activities. Students seeking ADA accommodations must register with the OAS.

For New Students

1. Students seeking reasonable accommodations can reach out to OAS to request services by formally requesting for services with the Office of Accessibility through the Accommodate Student Portal. Students should fill out the [Intake Form](#) in the Accommodate student portal. Students should only use their Charter Oak State College email and they can upload documentation at the bottom of the intake form.

Students may use the [Medical Provider Form](#). Letters from healthcare providers are also accepted if they include the following information.

- ICD-10 or DSM-5 diagnosis code
 - Date of diagnosis, along with length of time the provider has been treating the patient/client
 - Note the functional limitations of the major life activities
 - Suggest reasonable accommodations for a post-secondary setting
 - The letter should be on official letterhead, include the provider's signature, license number, and contact information
2. It is highly recommended that the student contact OAS to speak with the Director of Accessibility Services to answer any questions.
 3. Once documentation is received, the Accessibility Specialist will contact the student schedule the interactive process.

Note: *In adherence to Amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act in 2008 (S. 3406) and revised Title I regulations, determination of eligibility for accommodations requires an interactive process and is made on a case-by-case basis. The [Office of Accessibility Services \(OAS\)](#) asks that any student in need of*

academic accommodations meet with staff by phone or in person. No student should delay meeting with the OAS out of concern for not having appropriate paperwork.

4. After the interview, the Director of Accessibility Services will evaluate the requested accommodation.
5. If accommodations are approved, the Director of Accessibility Services will: 1) contact the student to review services and expectations. Accommodation Letters are created within Accommodate and emailed to students and faculty. Students are responsible for using their Accommodate account to request a new accommodation letter each term, session, or semester.
6. It is the responsibility of students to review the letters with their professor to ensure mutual understanding and to communicate the student's needs in relation to the specific accommodations granted.
7. Students are also responsible for keeping the OAS informed. It is important that students alert the Director of Accessibility Services of any changes in: 1) accommodation needs and/or 2) changes in registration status or changes in course schedules (i.e. adding, dropping, withdrawals, etc.)
8. If an accommodation request is denied, the student will be notified in writing. If there is disagreement with the decision, the student may appeal the decision by going through the appeals process (*see section titled: Appealing Accommodation Determination.*)

For Returning Students

1. Academic accommodation requests are required each term. After registering for classes, the students should create an account in Accommodate. The OAS will be notified of the accommodation request.
2. The Director of Accessibility Services will review students' request for accommodations and notify the student if supplemental/updated documentation is required.
3. Students are responsible for reviewing their letters of accommodations and communicating with their professors to reach a mutual understanding of the accommodations.

4. Students are also responsible for keeping the Director of Accessibility Services informed. It is important that students alert the OAS of any changes in: 1) accommodation needs and/or 2) changes in registration status or changes in course schedules (i.e. adding, dropping, withdrawals, etc.)

For questions and further information, please contact Sarah Ellis, Director of Accessibility Services at scellis@charteroak.edu or 860-515-3846

