



## **Disability Accommodations and Support Services Policy**

Vassar College is committed to providing individuals with disabilities equal access to the academic courses, programs and activities of the College. In accordance with the provisions of Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the College strives in its policies and practices to assure not only nondiscrimination but to provide for the full participation of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of college life. In support of this mission, the Office of Disability and Support Services provides services to self-identified students with disabilities. The Office of Disability and Support Services also provides assistance in identifying appropriate support and accommodations in the work environment for faculty and staff. Disabilities may include, but are not necessarily limited to, visual impairments, mobility and orthopedic impairments, hearing impairments, chronic medical conditions, learning disabilities, and psychological or emotional disorders.

### **I. The Office of Disability and Support Services**

The role of the Director of Disability and Support Services is to evaluate requests for accommodations and services based on the needs of self-identified students, faculty or staff members with disabilities, and to coordinate accommodations, auxiliary aids and services with appropriate College personnel. To ensure the provision of reasonable and effective accommodations, individuals must provide documentation of their disability or disabilities by an appropriate professional. Individuals with disabilities must also provide the Director of Disability and Support Services sufficient time to evaluate the request, to determine the appropriate course of action, and to implement appropriate accommodations and support services.

While the accommodation preference of the individual with the disability will be taken into consideration, Vassar College is not required to provide the preferred accommodation as long as the alternative accommodation is reasonable, effective and provides equal access. Vassar College is not responsible for providing services of a personal nature, or for providing prescribed devices or services. Because college and departmental requirements are implemented for sound pedagogic and academic reasons, it is not the policy of the college to waive requirements. Students in need of modifications to their academic program may petition the Committee on Leaves and Privileges, in consultation with the Office of Disability and Support Services, for academic modifications.

Requests for accommodations and auxiliary aids and services involve evaluation of the following criteria by the Director of Disability and Support Services and other Vassar faculty, administration, or staff, as appropriate:

- a) Whether the person meets the criteria for being otherwise qualified as an individual with a disability under the ADA and Section 504;
- b) Whether the disability is appropriately documented in writing by a qualified professional. The amount and type of required documentation will be based upon the nature of the disability and the nature and duration of the requested accommodation;
- c) Whether the requested accommodation or support service is appropriate to the needs of the person with the disability and appropriate for the academic course, program, activity or work environment;

- d) Whether the student, faculty or staff member will have equal access or opportunity without the accommodation or support service;
- e) Whether the accommodation will fundamentally alter the academic course, program, or essential requirements of the job;
- f) Whether an alternate accommodation or academic modification could be implemented to provide equal access and opportunity.

The Director of Disability and Support Services will remain available for consultation during the period of accommodation in case modifications to the accommodation or support service become necessary. If a resolution to a request for accommodations and support services, or modifications to such requests, cannot be achieved through informal negotiation, either party involved in the accommodation or support service may file an appeal, as outlined in Sections III through V.

## **II. Confidentiality**

Individuals with disabilities are entitled to privacy and discretion in the handling of all disability-related information. Disability-related information provided to the Office of Disability and Support Services will be used solely for the purpose of enabling Vassar to provide services related to the individual's disability. Information on disabilities is collected and maintained separately from other academic or employment information and is kept in secure files with limited access. Disability documentation is not considered a part of a student's permanent academic record or of an employee's personnel file. It is the policy of the College to maintain confidentiality in all informal and formal proceedings, except as otherwise specified in these statements of procedure.

## **III. Appeals**

Vassar College has adopted an internal appeals process for the prompt and equitable resolution of complaints or disagreements about accessibility, accommodations, auxiliary aids and services, and modifications to academic courses, programs, and activities. In addition, recourse can be sought through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Office of Civil Rights (EOR), the State Division of Human Rights, or the Courts. State and Federal statutes of limitations are typically 180 days.

The Faculty Director of Affirmative Action/Section 504/ADA Coordinator has been designated to coordinate the College's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Section 504/ADA Coordinator handles inquiries about compliance, and investigates complaints of disagreements or denials of disability-related accommodations and auxiliary aids and services.

If an individual feels that an accommodation, modification, or auxiliary aid or service is not appropriate, reasonable or effective, the individual may file a petition for appeal with the Faculty Director of Affirmative Action. If the Faculty Director of Affirmative Action for any reason of conflict of interest, illness, or prolonged absence is unable to carry out his or her responsibilities, a designee shall be appointed by the President of the College.

The ADA/Section 504 Appeals Committee shall consist of the Faculty Director of Affirmative Action/ADA/504 Coordinator, who shall serve as Chair, an appointed member of the faculty, and an appointed member of the Committee on Disabilities Issues (CODI). If at any time, the student, faculty or staff member requires an accommodation to participate in the appeals process, the individual must communicate that need to the Faculty Director of Affirmative Action/ADA/504 Coordinator.

#### **IV. Filing an Appeal**

a) Where to file a petition for appeal

The petition for appeal should be filed with the Faculty Director of Affirmative Action, ADA/504 Coordinator in writing and mailed to Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, Campus Box 645.

b) When to file

The petition for appeal should be filed within 30 days of the date of the decision by the Office of Disability and Support Services. Time periods may be extended if the individual has good reason, as determined by the ADA/504 Coordinator. Whenever time deadlines or procedures set forth in the appeals process create problems owing to the nature of the complaint, the urgency of the matter, or the proximity of the upcoming event or program, the ADA/504 Coordinator, in consultation with the petitioner, will determine whether an expedited appeals procedure can be fashioned.

Upon receipt of a petition, the ADA/504 Coordinator will review the petition for appropriateness and timeliness. The ADA/504 Coordinator will provide the petitioner with written notice of receipt of the petition within 5 working days, and advise the petitioner of the College's appeal policy and procedures for disability accommodations and services.

c) What to file

The petition must be signed, dated and include the following:

- (1) The person's name, address, phone number, and employment or academic status;
- (2) A description of the accommodations, if any, that were proposed by the Office of Disability and Support Services with an explanation of why such a proposal or provision is insufficient;
- (3) If appropriate, a description of the preferred accommodation, modification, or auxiliary aid or service, and how the accommodation would provide equal access to the academic course, program, or activity.

#### **V. Reviews and Decisions of Appeals**

The ADA/Section 504 Appeals Committee will conduct a review of the petition for appeal. In undertaking this review, the Appeals Committee will examine the written evidence provided by the petitioner. The Committee will then interview, consult with, or request written evidence from, any individual the Appeals Committee believes to have information relevant to the issues raised in the petition.

The ADA/Section 504 Appeals Committee will render a decision on whether the proposed accommodation is adequate or inadequate within fifteen working days of the receipt of the petition. The decision by the ADA/Section 504 Appeals Committee will be communicated in writing by the Chair with a copy provided to the Office of Disability and Support Services and other appropriate College staff.

If the proposed accommodation is deemed by the ADA/Section 504 Appeals Committee to be inadequate, the case is remanded to the appropriate College committee, administrator, faculty or staff, who, in consultation with the Office of Disability and Support Services, will then seek a new accommodation or support service that is reasonable, appropriate and effective.

If there is an agreement during the review process between Vassar College and the petitioner to retain the original accommodation or auxiliary aid or service or change to another

accommodation, the Chair will prepare a written memorandum of agreement to be signed by the individual and appropriate College administrators, faculty, or staff.

Once the appeal has been settled, the Office of Disability and Support Services, administrator, faculty, or staff, as appropriate, will then impose or initiate proceedings for implementing the accommodation or support service.