

Services for Students with Disabilities

Policy Overview

Five Branches University is committed to making its educational and employment opportunities accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. As an equal opportunity employer, the University does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the hiring, promotion, and retention of otherwise qualified faculty and staff. In this regard, Five Branches University has implemented the following policies:

- Five Branches University strictly prohibits any form of discrimination on the basis of an individual's disability.
- Five Branches University offers individualized assessment and reasonable accommodation to otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities.

These policies apply to every facet of the University's operations, including but not limited to admissions, academic requirements, financial aid, or any other school-administered program or service.

Definitions

1. For the purposes of this policy, a person with a disability is defined as any person who has a physical, psychological, and/or medical impairment, which substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such impairment; or is regarded as having such impairment.
2. For the purposes of this policy, an otherwise qualified person with a disability is defined as any individual with a disability who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission and participation in the University's educational program and activities.

Policies and Procedures

1. Reasonable Accommodations for Otherwise Qualified Individuals:
 - a. The University seeks to accommodate students with disabilities on an individual basis. Individual students are given reasonable and necessary accommodations based on specific information and assessment data documented by a professional from outside the University, who in the judgment of the University, is qualified to provide such information and assessment.
 - b. The University will offer accommodations to otherwise qualified students and applicants unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of its academic programs, impose an undue financial or administrative burden, or would result in lowering academic and other essential performance standards.

- c. Students with disabilities who require accommodations must make those needs known to Student Services Department as soon as possible, so that accommodations can be arranged in a timely manner at the beginning of each term. Accommodations are not granted on a retroactive basis. Students are also welcome to contact the Student Services Department throughout each term to review their needs and receive support for pursuing a collaborative process with faculty and/or staff to ensure equal access and prevent discrimination.
2. Verification of Disability

Applicants are not required to notify the University of a disability or need for accommodations prior to admission.

 - a. Following admission, any student who, because of a disability, needs a special accommodation with respect to any policy, practice, service, or benefit, is required to notify the University and provide appropriate information including the reason for the request and the specific type of accommodation requested. In order to provide the accommodations on a timely basis, it is recommended that new students inform the University of the need for accommodations well in advance of their matriculation.
 - b. A student or applicant requesting special accommodations because of a disability will be required to provide current professional verification by a licensed physician, psychologist, audiologist, speech pathologist, rehabilitation counselor, physical therapist, occupational therapist, or other professional healthcare provider who, in the opinion of the University, is qualified in the diagnosis and assessment of the disability. The student must provide the verification documentation to the Student Services Department. The cost of obtaining the professional verification will be borne by the student.
 - c. If the initial documentation is deemed incomplete or inadequate to determine the present extent of the disability and appropriate accommodations, the University reserves the right to require supplemental assessment of the disability. The cost of the supplemental assessment will be borne by the student.
3. Documentation Guidelines

Typed on letterhead, dated, and signed by a qualified professional

 - a. Diagnostic Statement with any related diagnostic methodology
 - b. Functional limitations or symptoms
 - c. Severity and/or expected progression.
 - d. Current and/or past accommodations.
 - e. Any recommended accommodations.
4. Records and Privacy

Medical information provided to the University by student as part of a request for accommodation(s) is treated as confidential medical records under applicable laws and school policies. Such information is provided only to individuals who are privileged to receive such information on a need to know basis. If a health record is used to make a decision in providing a student accommodation, the health record will become a permanent part of the student's record and the normal FERPA provisions for safeguarding the record will apply. All documents produced by consultants in the performance of services for the University will remain the property of Five Branches University.

5. Admissions Policy

The University does not discriminate on the basis of a disability. Any information concerning an applicant's disability provided during the admissions process is voluntary or optional and is maintained in accordance with laws relating to confidentiality. The University uses this information only for the purpose of avoiding past performance difficulties that the students may have experienced due to disabilities as reflected in their academic records. No limitations are placed on the number or proportion of persons with disabilities who may be admitted or enrolled.

6. Prohibition Against Retaliation

The University strictly prohibits any form of retaliation against any student or applicant who requests an accommodation, reports or participates in the investigation of a complaint, or otherwise exercises rights secured by this policy.

7. Internal Grievance/Appeals Procedures

Complaints or appeals related specifically to services for students with disabilities should be brought to the attention of the Student Services Director, who will review the matter and attempt to informally resolve the situation. In the event that the matter cannot be resolved, students have the right to use the University's grievance/appeal procedures.

- a. Students who have complaints concerning administrative or academic policy may submit the grievance in writing to the Student Progress Review Committee (SPRC). The SPRC will review the complaint and gather all relevant information prior to making a decision. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision of the SPRC, she/he may submit a written appeal with all relevant documentation to the Academic Dean and the President. Following this, the matter may be given to the Board of Directors for further review. The Board will then make one of two determinations: (1) The issue is not appropriate for the Board to consider, in which case, the decision of the SPRC is final, or (2) the Board may decide to consider the grievance, confirming or overturning the decision of the SPRC. In either case, the decision of the Board of Directors will be final.

8. External Grievances

Although students are encouraged to attempt to resolve grievances using the University process, they have the right to file any grievance directly with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Complaints filed with the OCR must be filed within 180 days from the time the incident occurred.

Steps to Requesting Accommodations

1. Submit a completed Accommodation Request Form and any other supporting documentation.

- a. Students with disabilities who require accommodations must make those needs known to Student Services Department as soon as possible, so that accommodations can be arranged in a timely manner at the beginning of each term. Accommodations are not granted on a retroactive basis. All information must be submitted in person, delivered via mail, or faxed. Documentation will not be accepted through e-mail.

2. Submitted information is reviewed.
 - a. Student information will be reviewed on an individual, case-by-case basis in the order that it is received. After the review, a Student Services Advisor will contact the student to set up an appointment to discuss possible accommodations. If you have not heard from the Student Services Department within 3 weeks of submitting information please contact the office.
3. Meet with a Student Services Advisor
 - a. The student will meet with a Student Services Advisor to discuss Disability Services policies and procedures as well as possible accommodations and resources available. If necessary, the Student Services Advisor will advise the student of any additional information needed.

Student Responsibilities

In addition to requesting accommodation services and providing the verifying documentation, students are responsible for the following:

1. To contact the Student Services Department if he/she has a disability and desires accommodations.
2. To email each of his/her professors a letter of accommodations provided by the University after the student has completed a request for disability services and accommodations have been established.
3. To contact the campus office manager at least 2 weeks prior to a scheduled examination date if you have a testing related accommodation. If you do not schedule your time in advance, a testing space cannot be guaranteed.