

**GRAND CANYON  
UNIVERSITY®**

STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES



# **STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES AT GCU**

A Guide for Students

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Starting college is an exciting step filled with new opportunities and the chance to become more independent. As you begin your journey at GCU, you might have questions about how to manage your coursework and campus life, especially if you have a permanent or temporary disability. The transition to college life might feel overwhelming at first, but GCU's Student Disability Services Office (SDS) is here to support you.

If you had disability modifications from elementary school to high school, you will find there are vast differences in how accommodations can apply in college. Accommodations are designed to provide equal access to courses and programs but are not meant to fundamentally lower or alter them. At the university level, you'll be responsible for advocating for yourself and communicating your needs. This means learning how to talk about your disability and how it affects you in an academic setting.

This guide is meant to explain what to expect, share important resources and highlight the steps you should take as you start your college life. It's also important for you to read the Student Access Policy in the University Policy Handbook, where you'll find detailed information about the process of accessing support and accommodations at GCU.

We hope this information gives you a clear understanding of how the SDS Office can assist you and helps you identify the best ways to take advantage of these resources as you begin your time at GCU.

We look forward to supporting you along your journey!

Sincerely,

Student Disability Services Office

602-639-6342

[DisabilityOffice@gcu.edu](mailto:DisabilityOffice@gcu.edu)

[gcu.edu/sds](http://gcu.edu/sds)

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## How Disability Services Differ Between High School and Post-Secondary Education

As you move from high school to college, it's important to know that colleges and universities have different requirements and processes for providing support to students with disabilities. Understanding these differences ahead of time can help you know what to expect and better prepare for your transition to university life.

<p>Colleges are <b>required</b> to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Make all college programs and services academically and physically accessible.</li><li>▪ Provide auxiliary aids, equipment and other reasonable resources, so that disabled students have equal access.</li><li>▪ Provide reasonable accommodations, so that students have the opportunity to equally participate in classes and activities.</li></ul>	<p>Colleges are <b>not required</b> to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Provide specific aids or accommodations if an equal aid or accommodation will meet the need.</li><li>▪ Provide accommodations that fundamentally alter, lower or substantially modify essential requirements of the course or program.</li><li>▪ Lower admission criteria or programmatic essential elements.</li><li>▪ Provide diagnostic assessments/Individualized Education Plans (IEP), personally prescribed devices, personal transportation or mobility devices, personal assistants/aids or private tutoring.</li><li>▪ Follow the requirements of an IEP plan.</li></ul>
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<b>Applicable Laws</b>	
<b>High School</b>	<b>College</b>
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is about student success.	The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is about student access.
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Subpart D.	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Subpart E.

<b>Parent's Role</b>	
<b>High School</b>	<b>College</b>
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 allows your parents to have full access to your education record.	The FERPA regulations state that, in higher education, you own your education record and experience. You can choose to provide authorization for your college to disclose portions of your academic record, but the authorization is limited to releasing records only and does not allow a parent or third party to act on your behalf or participate in college processes for you.
Your parents participate in the IEP or 504 plan meetings.	Your parents cannot represent you or take any action on your behalf. Any conversation or communication regarding you must include you.
Teachers discuss progress reports and grades with your parents.	Faculty will not communicate with your parents. All information about learning, instruction and grades should come from and will be communicated with you.

<b>Self-Advocacy</b>	
<b>High School</b>	<b>College</b>
Your parents are expected to advocate for you.	You are expected to advocate for yourself by understanding your disability and your needs.
Teachers monitor your student's progress and intervene if they believe they need assistance.	Faculty are here to help, but you are responsible for initiating contact with them if you need assistance.

<b>Obtaining Services</b>	
<b>High School</b>	<b>College</b>
Students are identified by parents and teachers.	You must self-identify to the SDS Office.
Specific services are outlined in an IEP or 504 plan.	You must request specific accommodations and provide supporting evidence through documentation.

<b>Documentation</b>	
<b>High School</b>	<b>College</b>
Documentation focuses on determining whether you qualify for services, based on specific disability categories in IDEA.	Colleges have specific documentation requirements. Minimally, it must be from a qualified medical provider, typed on letterhead and appropriately signed. The documentation must state your disability, provide information on how your disability limits your ability to fully participate, outline functional limitations and demonstrate a need for specific accommodations.
IEP and 504 plans may be renewed and continue through high school.	An IEP alone is typically insufficient; however, it can be submitted as documentation to inform and determine reasonable accommodations. Colleges are not obligated to follow the requirements of an IEP plan.

<b>Accommodations</b>	
<b>High School</b>	<b>College</b>
Modifications are provided through an IEP, 504 plan and individualized instruction.	Reasonable accommodations are provided to ensure equal access and participation.
Modifications that alter curriculum or change course outcomes are permitted through an IEP.	Colleges cannot offer accommodations that fundamentally alter, lower or substantially modify essential requirements of the course or program. You are responsible for meeting any programmatic essential elements.
Modifications are broadly defined and typically allow the implementation of any types of adjustments.	Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis in conjunction with supporting documentation.

## Courses and Instruction

<b>High School</b>	<b>College</b>
Teachers have full access to your IEP or 504 plan and are included in meetings about your progress under the plan.	Faculty receive a brief letter verifying your approved accommodations. They do not receive information about your specific disability or diagnosis unless it is necessary to facilitate the accommodation.
Teachers work with you on due dates.	You are responsible for knowing when your assignments are due. Faculty are not permitted to provide accommodations outside of what is approved by the SDS Office.
Teachers may modify assignments and tests or waive portions to help reflect competency.	Modified grades and exams are not available. Assignments and other deliverables are not waived. You are responsible for submitting all required work; however, you may be eligible for exam or due date accommodations.
Teachers may provide extra credit.	There are no opportunities for extra credit.
Teachers may allow test retakes for a higher grade.	Exam retakes are seldom an option and are offered under extenuating circumstances only, not as an accommodation.
Teachers present information during class to walk you through your textbook and study materials.	Professors have lectures and supplemental materials to enhance the textbook and course materials, which you are expected to read/review before class.
Individual tutoring and study services may be provided as part of an IEP or 504 plan.	Studying and tutoring are not accommodations. You may utilize campus tutoring services on your own time, based on availability.

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## Self-Advocacy

In college, you are responsible for requesting disability accommodations and finding the support services you need. To do this well, it's important to understand your disability, know your strengths and challenges and figure out which strategies help you most. Building strong self-advocacy skills is essential for navigating college and making the most of available resources.

Here are some questions to help you reflect as you prepare for this new chapter:

- What differences between high school and college life do I need to be ready for?
- Am I prepared to take on the academic and social responsibilities that come with being a college student?
- If I don't feel ready yet, what steps can I take now to build these skills before starting college?
- If I am living on my own for the first time, how ready do I feel to live independently?
- How comfortable am I with clearly explaining my disability and the support I need?
- How can I take an active role in managing my educational needs and advocating for myself?

Mastering self-advocacy will help you become an expert on yourself, which can benefit you both in college and throughout your life.

## FERPA

Under FERPA, students who are 18 or older, or who attend a postsecondary institution, have the right to privacy regarding their educational records and control over the disclosure of this information. Third parties, including parents, do not automatically have access to your records. If you choose to disclose protected information to any third party, you must provide permission by completing the Student Information Release Form (SIRF) and selecting which specific information is releasable to them.

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While a SIRF allows GCU to provide you with a copy of specific information pertaining to your education record, it does not permit university staff to discuss the record, allow anyone you have designated to act on your behalf or include them in all university communications. Records are typically released as paper documents, not through detailed discussions with university staff. Outside of authorized information releases, it is your responsibility to share information with others. The university will only communicate directly with you on issues related to your student account and academic experience.

## **What Can be Accommodated?**

The SDS team partners with you to support your academic journey at GCU. Whether you need temporary assistance while recovering from a medical condition or injury or ongoing accommodations for a disability, SDS provides individualized support reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Each request is carefully reviewed along with supporting documentation to ensure your specific needs are addressed. The goal of SDS is to empower you, not only to navigate college successfully, but also to build confidence and independence that will serve you well after graduation.

## **Academic Support**

Every student learns differently, and SDS is here to help you access your coursework in a way that supports you. While all accommodations are determined based on supporting documentation, these are just a few of the academic accommodations that may benefit you:

- Extra time for tests or assignments. Testing accommodations do not approve additional days; only additional time is allowed.
- Private or reduced-distraction testing space.
- Accessible format course books, course materials, supplies and equipment.
- Assistive technology, such as Kurzweil.
- Creating notes ahead of class.
- Accommodation differentiation for online vs. in-person classes.
- ASL and CART services.
- Attendance considerations/plans due to unpredictable symptoms.

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Keep in mind that high school accommodations or those you received at another university may not apply at GCU, as college courses have different objectives and requirements.

## **Housing and Campus Life**

The SDS Office is dedicated to making on-campus living and campus life as accessible as possible for you. Services and accommodations may include:

- Arranging accessible housing features, such as roll-in showers, when medically necessary.
- Approving assistive animals with appropriate documentation.
- Providing food tours to help you learn about dining options and available support services on campus.
- Offering parking assistance.
- Coordinating accommodations for special campus events to ensure you have full access and participation.

## **ASD Connection Program**

For students on the autism spectrum, the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Connection Program offers individualized support that includes academic guidance, social connection and help with accommodations. The program focuses on the development of academic competence, social integration and self-advocacy.

## **Steps to Accommodation**

The interactive process is collaborative between you and the SDS Office to identify reasonable accommodations for temporary and permanent disability needs.

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In college, the purpose of accommodations is to remove barriers and ensure you have equal access to the learning environment. Only accommodations that do not fundamentally alter, lower or significantly modify essential requirements of a course or program can be approved. It's important to note that all students are held to the same academic standards, and your accommodations may vary from course to course. Here's what GCU's accommodation process looks like:

- **Starting the process:** Begin by submitting the Accommodation Request Form at [sds.gcu.edu](https://sds.gcu.edu), indicating the types of support you may need.
- **Sharing documentation:** You'll need to provide supporting documentation to the SDS Office. The University Policy Handbook outlines the types of information required, and SDS can help address specific questions.
- **Approved accommodations:** Once your accommodations are approved, SDS will notify you and your instructors. Your private medical information will only be shared if absolutely necessary to help implement your accommodations.
- **Unapproved accommodations:** If all or part of your accommodation is not approved, you can follow the Accommodation Grievance Procedure to request a review. The steps for that process are explained in the University Policy Handbook.
- **Ongoing conversations:** You can meet with your SDS administrator anytime to discuss how your accommodations are working or to review their use in your courses.
- **If your needs change:** If your accommodations aren't meeting your needs or if your medical situation changes, reach out to SDS to discuss what options for revising your accommodations may be available. Updated documentation may be required, and only SDS can approve or adjust accommodations.
- **If concerns come up:** If you have any concerns about how your accommodations are being implemented, please reach out directly to SDS. This is where self-advocacy skills are important. Only SDS can approve changes; faculty and staff outside SDS are not authorized to adjust approved accommodations.
- **Keeping accommodations active:** Accommodations stay in place until the listed expiration date or until you have been out of attendance for more than 14 days. If you take a longer break, you must notify SDS to reestablish your accommodations.

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## **Documentation Requirements**

Qualifying for accommodations in college is different from what you may have experienced in K-12 education.

While you may already be familiar with IEPs or 504 plans, it's important to understand that these documents, along with a doctor's note, are not sufficient on their own to establish eligibility for accommodations at the college level. Instead, they should be included in a comprehensive evaluation.

In college, documentation must come from a qualified provider who understands your medical needs and should clearly describe how your disability currently impacts your academic performance. Because college accommodations are determined based on your present needs, it's essential that all documentation is recent and accurately reflects your current situation.

Accommodations cannot be reviewed or approved until appropriate documentation is on file with SDS. SDS may need to request additional documentation if your initial documentation is insufficient, and you will need to work with your provider to help them obtain the additional information.

## **Resolving Concerns**

It is essential that you take an active role in understanding your accommodations and ask for clarification when needed. Being proactive in communicating your questions or concerns allows SDS to better support you and provide guidance to help you navigate any issues that arise. Please note that SDS communicates directly with students about individual circumstances, and parent or third-party involvement is limited to general policy and process information, even if a SIRF is on file.

If your situation changes or your accommodations are not meeting your needs, SDS is your primary point of contact. You have the right to request additional accommodations at any time, and these requests will be reviewed through the interactive process. Approval of new accommodations depends on your supporting documentation and several other factors, such as the timing within the semester, your specific program of study and relevant university policies.

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While it is important to communicate with your instructors regarding day-to-day course matters, only SDS can approve or modify disability accommodations. Faculty members are not permitted to implement accommodations beyond what has been officially approved by SDS.

## **Accommodation Animals**

Any students who require an accommodation service or emotional support animal to live in GCU housing must go through the Steps to Accommodation process. Service animals and emotional support animals serve distinct and separate purposes and have different requirements. This information is non-exhaustive.

Please review the University Policy Handbook for detailed information on this topic.

### **Service Animals:**

- They are defined by ADA law as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.
- A specific housing accommodation request is required.
- They are permitted in all buildings, classroom spaces and public communal areas.
- One cannot be shared between students, nor are other students permitted to provide care or feeding for the animal.

### **Emotional Support Animals:**

- They are defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as an animal that provides emotional support, alleviating one or more symptoms or effects of a person's disability, but do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities.
- A specific housing accommodation request is required.
- Documentation that confirms your disability and your need for the animal is required; general online certificates, registrations and licensing documents are not acceptable.
- An appropriate, qualified medical provider must be familiar with your disability, your need for the animal, as part of an individualized ongoing care plan, and ensure your need meets the other criteria outlined in the University Policy Handbook.

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- They can only stay in your specific residence and in eateries with outdoor seating. Emotional support animals are not permitted in academic spaces or communal areas, whether indoors or outdoors.
  - One cannot be shared between you and other students, nor are other students permitted to provide care or feeding for the animal.
  - Emotional support animals are not allowed on GCU-sponsored travel.
  - They must remain in your care during long periods away from campus, including school breaks and holiday periods when you aren't living on campus.
  - They are not permitted on campus prior to approval. Violations result in the immediate removal of the animal from campus property until official approval is obtained. Violations will result in a Code of Conduct referral.

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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Differences Between High School and College Disability Services**

#### **Will I receive the same disability services I received in high school?**

In higher education, only accommodations that do not fundamentally alter, lower or substantially modify essential requirements of the course or program can be approved. Therefore, potentially some but not all, accommodations you received in high school may be available.

#### **Will I follow the same IEP I had in high school?**

No. K-12 and post-secondary laws and requirements differ, so do the available services and accommodations. An IEP can be submitted as documentation to inform and determine reasonable accommodations, but post-secondary schools are not obligated to follow the requirements of an IEP plan.

#### **Do accommodations need to be renewed every year, like a 504 plan or an IEP?**

Academic accommodations for a permanent disability will automatically be applied each semester. If you wish to modify your accommodations, you must complete a new Accommodation Request Form. If you take a break from classes, you must send us a new Accommodation Request Form to reestablish your accommodation.

#### **I am transferring from another college. Can I transfer my accommodations?**

Students should not assume they will receive the same accommodations at GCU as at their previous school. Each college and university establishes documentation and accommodation guidelines based on its academic program objectives and outcomes. Documentation sufficient for one institution may not be sufficient for another.

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## **Are there services or accommodations that SDS does not provide?**

- Diagnostic assessments to determine eligibility
- Personally prescribed devices (i.e., hearing aids or specialty glasses)
- Personal transportation or mobility devices (i.e., wheelchairs or scooters)
- Personal assistants or aides
- Private tutoring

## **Parent and Student Roles and Responsibilities**

### **What responsibilities do my parents have for me with my disabilities?**

In terms of your college experience, you are considered an adult. The goal is for you to become your own advocate. You must start and be fully involved in the accommodation process, as your accommodation(s) are intended to support your success. We encourage your parents to take on a coaching role and support you in developing your self-advocacy.

### **Can my parent request an accommodation for me?**

No. Only you, the student of record, can act on your account. You must complete the accommodation request yourself.

### **Can my parents reach out to my instructors directly?**

No. You must communicate with your instructors. If you are experiencing issues, you should contact the SDS Office for assistance.

### **My parents had regular communication with my teachers in high school. Will they get updates on my status from SDS?**

No. Updates must come from you. Parents cannot communicate directly with your instructors, but you may choose to include them in conversations with SDS. Please discuss this with the SDS Office first.

### **How can my parents monitor my grades?**

If you have granted your parent(s) approval to receive information about your grades via a SIRF, they can contact your student services counselor for assistance.

### **How can I give my parents access to speak on my behalf?**

A SIRF must be completed to fulfill FERPA guidelines. With a SIRF, limited information can be shared; only you can act on your account.

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**I have concerns, and I'm not sure they're being addressed.  
What steps should I take?**

Please schedule a meeting with SDS and, if desired, include your parent(s) so concerns can be addressed together. The office generally responds within 24-48 business hours.

**What if I'm struggling in classes, even with accommodations?**

Ask yourself whether you are using all the granted accommodations to their full extent. You can also ask for assistance from SDS, as they may be able to assist with referrals to additional resources, such as tutoring.

**Accommodations Process and Implementation**

**What is GCU's documentation criteria?**

GCU requires a typed, signed letter from a medical provider that explains your symptoms and challenges and how they impact you at school.

**Note:** Documentation in higher education is determined independently by each institution. The documentation criteria vary from institution to institution, which means accommodations at one university do not guarantee the same at another.

**Once I'm approved for accommodations, how are they implemented?**

The SDS Office sends notifications as needed.

- **Academic accommodations:** Emails are sent to instructors, and adjustments are made in the learning system.
- **Non-academic accommodations:** Coordination occurs with housing, facilities and other departments.

**Who at GCU is aware of my SDS status?**

Your disability status is confidential within the SDS Office, but other staff may be informed of an accommodation as needed to provide services. They are told only the needed accommodation, not the underlying disability.

**Will SDS provide check-ins with me?**

You must initiate these yourself. The SDS Office can schedule weekly meetings if you want check-ins, course planning or resource guidance.

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### **Who can assist me if I'm struggling academically?**

GCU offers various resources to support any academic struggles. See the "Resources" section below or contact the SDS Office or your student services counselor for help finding support.

### **Who can assist me if I'm struggling socially?**

Support is available for social struggles as well. The "Resources" section below or the SDS Office can help direct you to the proper resources.

### **Does the SDS Office offer tutoring services?**

Tutoring for all GCU students is available at no cost through the Academic Centers for Excellence (ACE), both in-person and online.

### **How can I register for housing accommodations?**

Please complete an Accommodation Request Form and submit the required documentation. Please read the "Steps to Accommodation" and "Documentation Requirements" sections above for requesting accommodations and submitting documentation.

### **I'm experiencing challenges with my living arrangements on campus. What options do I have?**

Residence Life has staff to assist with roommate or living issues. Please see your RA or RD for help. If your challenges relate to disability or accessibility issues, please contact the SDS Office.

### **What if I have questions about the disability services my student is receiving?**

If you have concerns about accommodations, please contact SDS to discuss.

## Important Resources and Contacts

Contact	Phone	Email
Academic Centers for Excellence	602-639-8901	ACE@gcu.edu
Campus Operations (Parking)	602-639-7739	Campus.Parking@gcu.edu
Canyon Health and Wellness Clinic	602-639-6215	HealthCenter@gcu.edu
Career Services	602-639-6417	CareerServices@gcu.edu
Department of Campus Recreation	602-639-7559	CampusRecreation@gcu.edu
Department of Housing Operations	602-639-6240	housing@gcu.edu
Department of Residence Life	602-639-6244	Residence.Life@gcu.edu
Department of Spiritual Life	602-639-6750	Spiritual.Life@gcu.edu
Department of Student Care	602-639-7007	StudentCare@gcu.edu
Department of Student Engagement	602-639-7250	Student.Engagement@gcu.edu
Department of Welcome Programs	602-639-6002	WelcomePrograms@gcu.edu
Diversity	602-639-7756	diversity@gcu.edu
GCU Library	602-639-6641	library.gcu.edu/AskALibrarian
Institutional Access and Compliance (Title IX)	602-639-5900	TitleIX@gcu.edu
International Students Office	602-639-8105	ISO@gcu.edu
Mail and Copy Center	602-639-7905	MailCenter@gcu.edu
Office of Academic Records	1-800-800-9776	AcademicRecords@gcu.edu
Parent Resources	602-639-8950	ParentConnection@gcu.edu
Public Safety	602-639-8100	security@gcu.edu
Student Disability Services (SDS)	602-639-6342	DisabilityOffice@gcu.edu
Student Employment Team	N/A	StudentEmploymentTeam@gcu.edu
Student Services Counselors (SSC)	1-800-800-9776	Your SSC's email address
Technical Support	1-877-428-8447	TechSupport@gcu.edu

All accommodation requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.



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