Developing Technical Standards for an Academic Program

Disability Support Services (DSS)
Hagerstown Community College
Academic vs. Technical Standards

**Academic standard** – standards that relate to a student’s academic performance.

*Example: Must have a gpa of 2.5 to be enrolled in a specific program (nursing).*

**Technical standard** – non-academic (physical, cognitive, behavioral) standards, skills, and performance requirements necessary for participation in an educational program.

*Example: Must be able to lift 50 pounds.*
Technical Standards are...

- Demanded of *every* student, with or without a disability.

- Non-academic criteria essential for participation in an educational program including, but not limited to physical, cognitive, and attitudinal abilities.
Technical Standards should...

• Focus on the skills and activities required to achieve the intended educational outcome (ex- issue is whether student can assess patient’s vision, not whether student can see the eye chart)

• Address *what* is to be accomplished, not *how* it is to be accomplished.

• *Not* be discriminatory but rather establish requirements necessary for participation in program.
Why Develop Technical Standards?

• Proactive approach

• May prevent enrollment of a student who is not otherwise qualified to complete a program, which results in higher completion rates.

• Prevent and/or avoid disability discrimination claims.
Benefits of Standards

• For students:
  • Make an informed decision whether to apply/declare a program based on interest and ability
  • Facilitate self-reporting disabilities
  • Opens the door to discussing possible accommodations.
Benefits of Standards

• For faculty
  • Assess applicants and student progress or lack thereof
  • Helps to effectively advise students interested in program
  • Protects from “watering down” requirements of a program
  • Creates legally defensibly parameters to avoid disability discrimination claims
  • Preserves academic freedom without impinging upon student civil rights
What to Review When Developing Technical Standards

• Goals and objective of your program (while standards are not academic, this often can serve as a starting point)
• Essential aspects of curriculum
• Any external requirements/resources (national accreditation requirements, codes of ethics, standards of professional practice)
• Other institutions with similar programs/technical standards
Technical Standards are Developed, Now What?

- Have students sign that they are aware and able to perform standards, either with or without accommodations.
- Publish technical standards, include on website, catalog, etc.
- Review standards regularly in conjunction with evolving needs (accreditation, professional, technology)