

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)