Resources for Student-Athletes with Disabilities

The Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ASR) provides documentation and appropriation of accommodations for students with disabilities.

The Student-Athlete Academic Initiative Working Group identified and compiled recommendations from reports over the past several years and linked each report recommendation to 21 academic processes. Report Recommendations for Resources for Student-Athletes with Disabilities

10.0 Resources for Student-Athletes with Disabilities

This process addresses how a student-athlete at Carolina may identify and disclose a learning disability, and what resources are available. Student-athletes with disabilities (learning or otherwise) can be described in three broad categories, based on the time at which their disability has been identified:

1. **Self-Identification.** Some student-athletes self-identify a learning disability during the admissions process by submitting a “statement of impact” with their application. After matriculating, some students may self-identify to UNC’s Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) or to one of the Learning Specialists or Academic Counselors in the Academic Support Program for Student Athletes (ASPA), or to an Academic Advisor in the College of Arts and Science. Regardless of how and when they self-identify, any student who would like to receive accommodations must register with ARS.

2. **Diagnosis after arriving at UNC.** All first-year student-athletes who enroll in Summer Session II complete an education questionnaire which provides the ASPSA with the student-athlete’s academic background as well as information about their learning styles. Incoming student-athletes arriving any other semester are provided with a short version of the education questionnaire. If this education questionnaire indicates a need for further testing to identify a diagnosed learning difficulty or disability, the ASPSA refers the student-athlete to an approved psychologist for further evaluation.

3. **Concussion.** UNC’s Sports Medicine Division and Team Physicians work with UNC’s Gfeller Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Research Center to screen student-athletes. The Gfeller Center collects and maintains data for baseline cognitive function. Not all athletes are screened, but most are (contact sports, gymnastics, etc. are screened; golfers are not). In the event of a head injury, the Gfeller Center can identify an individual’s loss of cognitive function due to concussion. Based on symptoms, physical examination and neuropsychological testing in Gfeller, Sports Medicine/Team Physicians formulate suggestions for academic accommodations for a student-athlete who has suffered a head injury. With the student’s permission, this information can be shared with the ASPSA and ARS.

There are three learning-related conditions that can put a student at academic risk. The challenges faced by students with these conditions may be intensified if their sport is in season as they transition to academic life at UNC.

- A student could have a documented learning and/or attentional disability (diagnosed prior to or during college) that could impact his/her academic performance. Accommodations offered through the ARS and services offered through the ASPSA are designed to help these students. However, having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Learning Disability (ADHD/LD), along with a full schedule, may place these student-athletes at risk for managing the academic rigor at UNC.

- A student could be at risk due to lack of academic preparedness and not have a diagnosable disability. Lack of academic preparedness in addition to a full schedule places student-athletes at risk for managing the academic rigor at UNC.

- A student could have an even more challenging adjustment if he/she has a documented learning and/or attentional disability and also lacks academic preparedness. The accommodations available through the ARS and the services of the ASPSA are not designed to compensate for lack of academic preparation, which can make for a staggering challenge given the academic requirements at UNC and the full schedules of student-athletes.

10.1 Office of Undergraduate Admissions Committee on Disabilities

The Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Admissions has appointed a Committee on Disabilities to advise the Office of Undergraduate Admissions about candidates who self-disclose disabilities and provide appropriate documentation.

As noted in the committee charge:

“When a candidate for admission discloses a disability by providing documentation from a physician, psychologist, or school, and when the comprehensive and holistic evaluation offered to all candidates indicates that the student will not be admitted competitively to the University, the Office of Undergraduate Admissions may, in its discretion, seek the committee to assess the candidate. The purpose of this assessment ... is to gain a better understanding of the full context of the candidate’s academic and extracurricular performance, as well as the candidate’s likelihood of academic success at the University.”
The Office of Undergraduate Admissions refers approximately 30-35 applications per year to the Committee on Disabilities. Most student-athletes do not self-disclose learning disabilities on their applications to UNC, so that few (if any) are considered by the subcommittee.

Under federal law, candidates for admission cannot be required to disclose disabilities; disclosure must be entirely voluntary, and neither disclosure nor non-disclosure may subject the student to adverse treatment of any kind.

The Office of Undergraduate Admissions does not ask students to disclose disabilities when applying for admission. The Common Application also does not include questions about disabilities. On the “Apply page of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions website, an icon labeled “Student with Disabilities” leads to a page titled “For Students Applying with Disabilities.” This page states, “If you believe that your academic progress has been affected by disability-related issues, you are welcome to voluntarily supply documentation about the disability and its specific impact on your educational experiences.” The page further describes the documentation that a student self-disclosing a disability should provide: an IEP, 504 plan and/or a “statement of impact” written by the student. Students may also access this information from the Office of Undergraduate Admissions website through the “Ask Admissions” search feature.

When an applicant voluntarily discloses a disability and provides appropriate documentation, and when the application is subsequently read by the Admissions Committee, the reader indicates that the application includes both disclosure and appropriate documentation. If an applicant simply mentions a disability in an essay without providing documentation, or if a teacher or school counselor mentions a disability but the applicant does not, the reader does not mark the application as including both disclosure and appropriate documentation. The Admissions Office does not solicit documentation from students who mention a disability or whose counselors or teachers mention a disability. Neither disclosure nor non-disclosure of a disability, nor provision or non-provision of appropriate documentation, subjects a student to adverse treatment of any kind.

Applicants who voluntarily disclose disabilities and provide documentation are afforded the same comprehensive and holistic evaluation afforded to every other candidate for admission. Many students who voluntarily disclose disabilities are offered admission on the basis of this comprehensive evaluation.

If a reader believes that a student who has disclosed a disability and provided documentation cannot be admitted on the basis of this comprehensive evaluation, and the reader also believes that the student might have been admitted were it not for the impact of the disability, then the reader may request an assessment from the Committee on Disabilities.

The Committee on Disabilities then reviews documentation to provide the Admissions Committee with information regarding the student’s disability (e.g., how it has impacted the student’s past academic record or how it might impact the student at UNCS, along with an opinion on how well the student understands, accepts and has learned to manage the impact of his/her disability.

Students who do not self-disclose a disability or medical condition in the application and are subsequently denied admissions may choose to appeal the decision and to disclose their disability and provide documentation upon appeal. Such appeals are infrequent, the Office of Admissions estimates approximately 3-5 appeals per year based on non-disclosure of a disability.

While committee assessments are advisory, not binding, the Admissions Committee and/or the Director of Admissions will consider such assessments carefully before acting on candidates’ applications or appeals.

**10.2 Initial Screening**

All first-year student-athletes who are on campus for summer session II (football, men’s and women’s basketball, baseball and several Olympic sports) complete a hardcopy questionnaire to provide the ASPSA with information about their academic histories and learning styles. The ASPSA informs the students that the questionnaire may be used for identification of further testing to determine the presence of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This questionnaire has been validated by an outside licensed psychologist who specializes in testing for learning disabilities. The questionnaire is not timed and generally takes a student 60-80 minutes to complete. The learning specialists in the ASPSA evaluate the results of the questionnaire blindly (i.e. names are coded and questionnaires are matched after review).

The ASPSA also administers the questionnaire to student-athletes who either self-refer or are referred by their Academic Counselor to a Learning Specialist. These students typically are close to or on academic probation, or they have reported having significant academic difficulty. Learning Specialists use the questionnaires to discover as much as they can initially about student-athletes’ learning styles and possible difficulties.

Based on their responses on the initial questionnaire, some student-athletes are referred for further testing. The ASPSA works with the UNC Psychological Clinic and approved local psychologists in private practice to test identified student-athletes for the presence of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All psychologists who work with student-athletes must sign a contract with the University that stipulates strict confidentiality requirements. The psychologists, and the assessment reports that they produce, have been reviewed and approved by UNC Counseling and Psychological Services.

Student-athletes sign a release form indicating who can or cannot have access to the results from their full assessment. The ASPSA cannot mandate or require testing for a student-athlete, and some student-athletes opt out of further testing.

If during the assessment process a student-athlete is diagnosed with a learning difficulty or disability and makes the decision to take
10.3 Documentation of Disability and Informed Consent

Documentation of a diagnosed learning difficulty or disability belongs to the student-athlete. The ASPSA and the University must receive permission from the student-athlete to use and share this information.

In some cases, a student-athlete self-identifies his/her disability and provides documentation in the form of an Individual Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan under the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Some elementary and secondary students qualify for a disabilities classification and are entitled to a formal plan that describes how the school will support educational needs. These plans are outlined in an IEP or 504 Plan. Different rules govern colleges, and individual plans are not required for post-secondary students. Instead, colleges are mandated to provide reasonable accommodations.

In other cases, a student-athlete’s disability is identified after arriving at UNC. Student-athletes sign off with the ASPSA to allow the initial screening questionnaire to be shared with a contracted evaluator. Student-athletes also sign off with the evaluator to share the results of testing back with the ASPSA and also with the ARS.

10.4 Resources for Student-Athletes with Disabilities

UNC provides various resources for student-athletes with disabilities.

10.4.1 Learning Specialists in the ASPSA

Learning Specialists help students learn how to learn. They coach student-athletes on time management and academic skill building, and they also work one-on-one with academically at-risk student-athletes and those who have been diagnosed with a learning disability.

10.4.2 Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS)

UNC’s Office of Accessibility Resources and Service is open weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ARS does not identify student-athletes separately from other students. The only way ARS knows that a student is an athlete is if the student tells them, or if the student signs a release for ARS to copy the ASPSA Learning Specialist on their initial correspondence to the student. ARS conducts all meetings for determining accommodations for students identified with documented disabilities or medical conditions. If the student being considered is an athlete, with the student’s consent, the ASPSA sends ARS the required documentation which includes the following:

1. The student’s current impact statement, which is written or recorded by the student and explains, “This is how my learning difficulty/disability impacts my learning, and these are the accommodations that I need.”
2. The student’s official documentation (e.g., IEP, 504 Plan, psychologist’s evaluation, etc.)

10.4.3 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Learning Disability Services (housed in UNC’s Learning Center)

The Learning Center provides a range of academic support to any UNC student from its main offices in SASB-North and office for peer tutoring in Dey Hall. Services are primarily offered between 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with limited programs offered during evening hours. Professional staff help students optimize their academic experiences at Carolina. Learning Center services are not designed to provide remediation to students with academic deficits, but rather to develop college-level time management and study strategies for any Carolina student. The Learning Center’s ADHD/LD Services offers resources that are similar to those offered by staff in the ASPSA. Staff from ADHD/LD Services serve on the Accessibility Resources and Service Documentation Review Team. Occasionally, student-athletes work regularly with staff at ADHD/LD Services. The only way staff learn about a student-athlete’s status is if the student shares this information. Student-athletes sometimes find it challenging to utilize ADHD/LD Services due to conflicting schedules with class, team practice and tutoring/study sessions. ASPSA Academic Counselors work with the student-athlete and ARS to facilitate communication and accommodation services.

10.5 Accommodations

Any students with an identified learning disability who wishes to seek formal accommodations must register with ARS. Examples of available accommodations:

- Note-taking (A volunteer in the class takes notes for the student and receives community service hours.)
- Extended time or separate setting for exams (initially coordinated with the professor, students must communicate with the ARS if they need to utilize the testing center for exam accommodations. Sometimes a faculty member will proctor.)
- Audio books
10.5.1 Sample Copy of Accommodations Letter

Accommodation Plan – Confidential / FERPA Protected

Student: Student / PID / email

Semester: Fall Semester / 2014

Dear Professor _____,

[Student] is registered with Accessibility Resources and Service and has a documented disability or medical condition with impacts which require academic accommodation(s), including resources and/or services. The express purpose of accommodations is to ensure that a student enjoys equal access to the course or program without fundamentally altering the nature of the class/course or compromising academic standards.

[Student] is enrolled in your _____ class for the 2014 Fall Semester. [Student] has chosen to let you know about the following accommodations, including resources and services, which we have determined as being reasonable and appropriate:

1. Separate Setting
2. 50% additional time

Some parts of this student’s Accommodation Plan may require your assistance. You will find further information about these accommodations and the respective responsibilities of the student, faculty colleagues and ARS staff at http://accessibility.unc.edu/accommodations.

[Student] will be making contact with you shortly to discuss the above.

Please note that the information contained in this notification is subject to FERPA regulations and as a matter of courtesy, we ask that you respect the confidentiality of the student in this matter.

If, at any time, you have any questions, concerns or suggestions or need any assistance with the implementation of the accommodations detailed above, please feel free to contact us at 919-962-8300 / accessibility@unc.edu. Accessibility Resources and Service is located in Suite 2126 of the Student Academic Services Building – North.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this matter.

Signed:

ARS Director

ARS Assistant Director

ARS Testing Coordinator

ARS Accessibility Specialist

10.5.2 Delay between Assessment and Accommodations

Assessing and approving student-athletes for specific accommodations involves many steps and takes time. The process requires flexibility on behalf of the student-athlete, his/her coach, the evaluator and the ARS.

Steps:

1. Student-athlete decides to have a full assessment to identify a possible learning disability.
2. Student-athlete works with an ASPSA Learning Specialist to get an appointment with a contracted evaluator (see 10.2 above). The assessment may involve multiple sessions and may require multiple appointments.
3. Contracted evaluator writes report, which may take up to two weeks.
4. Student receives report and sets up an appointment with the ARS. Student submits an Impact Statement and the report to the ARS to request accommodations based on suggestions made in the report.
5. The ARS Team meets every Tuesday to discuss requests, and then assigns appropriate accommodations.
6. The ARS meets again with the student-athlete to go over the accommodations.
The ARS has suggested several ways to expedite this process:

- The evaluator can immediately submit a brief initial findings report, which the student-athlete can submit to the ARS with an impact statement to receive provisional accommodations more quickly. The ARS will make a final decision on accommodations after receiving the full report.
- Student-athletes may miss practice to go to their appointments and meet with ARS staff. The student-athlete’s practice schedule should never be a hindrance to the process of moving the assignment of accommodations along more quickly. Student-athletes should not use practice time and/or team-related time commitments as an excuse to miss these appointments. Team-related activities never take precedence over a student’s efforts to be tested for a disability and/or to seek accommodations. If a student-athlete uses this excuse to an ARS staff member or other administrator, the administrator should contact the student’s ASPSA Academic Counselor immediately.
- Further, the ARS Director provides regular updates (at least once per semester) on this issue to the Provost, the Athletic Director (or his designee) and the Director of the ASPSA.

### 10.6 Course Substitution Process

- If a student has a documented disability, he/she may request a course substitution in place of a required course. The Office for Undergraduate Curricula handles all requests/petitions for course substitutions. The review team consists of the Associate Dean and Course Evaluation Coordinator for Undergraduate Curricula, Faculty from Romance Languages and the Math Department, ARS Director and a representative from the Learning Center. Other academic departments are consulted on an as needed basis depending on the nature of the request.
- The course substitution review committee meets three times a semester to review petitions.
- Not all course substitution requests are from students with documented disabilities, but the majority of requests do come from students who have a documented disability or medical condition.
- A student must demonstrate significant difficulty in learning a foreign language or math in order to submit a petition for foreign language or math course substitution. The petition is usually accompanied by a letter from a faculty member who has taught the student in the failing course.
- Students find out about the course substitution option through their advisors, ASPSA Academic Counselors, Learning Center staff members, ARS staff members, or sometimes through faculty.
- Between 2004-2014, 135 course substitutions have been granted. Approximately one third (46) have been for student-athletes.
- Academic major requirement substitution requests are made to a Department Chair, not to the Office of Undergraduate Curricula.

### 10.7 Procedures for a Student-Athlete with Head Injury

- The student-athlete sees the Team Physician for evaluation. Using patient history, a physical exam and neuropsychological testing (if necessary), the Physician completes an evaluation.
- Every concussion is different. Sometimes a concussion will require at least 48 hours of no activity. Some injuries require weeks of recuperation. The Team Physician evaluates each injury accordingly. Sports Medicine/Team Physician stresses the student’s mental recuperation and healing first; their priority is to get the student back to class. When all symptoms subside, the Team Physician focuses on getting the student back to athletic participation.
- The Team Physician coordinates follow-up with the Griller Center to have the student evaluated (e.g., Neurocom Balance Test) and to make “return to play” decisions for student-athletes involved in a head injury. [http://concussionvitalsigns.com/Manuals/unc_concussion_policy_6-1-10.pdf](http://concussionvitalsigns.com/Manuals/unc_concussion_policy_6-1-10.pdf)
- When necessary, the Team Physician advises the student-athlete to inform his/her professors of the injury and explain any absences from class.
- The Team Physician completes a “Notification of Student with Concussion” form and sends it to the Dean of Students Office, which communicates with all of the student’s professors (regardless of whether the student has contacted his/her professors already).
- The Team Physician also contacts the student’s ASPSA Counselor or the ASPSA Director.
- If a student’s symptoms persist and he/she continues to require accommodations, the ASPSA can coordinate with the ARS to make arrangements (e.g., postponement of exams, note-taking, etc.).

See Process 9.7 regarding student-athlete absence due to illness, injury or surgery.