



**PACIFICA**  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE

## **Policy for Accommodating Students and Applicants with Disabilities**

### **Introduction**

The Disability Services Office provides advocacy and support to students with documented physical, learning, and psychological disabilities. We collaborate with all sectors of the Institute to identify, remove, and mitigate barriers, ensuring that our students can fully participate in all aspects of academic life. The Disability Services Office works with all aspects of the Institute to remove or mitigate barriers for students living and studying with disabilities to promote academic success. Pacifica Graduate Institute is committed to ensuring equal access to all programs and prohibits disability discrimination.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and other applicable laws, Pacifica Graduate Institute is dedicated to providing equal access to all its programs and activities. We are committed to an ongoing dialogue and action to enhance accessibility and to celebrate the contributions of all students, affirming that students with documented disabilities are vital to a vibrant and diverse campus community.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Disability Services Office is to ensure equal access to all academic programs and activities for students with documented disabilities at Pacifica Graduate Institute. We are committed to fostering an inclusive educational environment by coordinating reasonable accommodations and support services that empower students to achieve their full potential. Our efforts focus on promoting independence and self-advocacy, raising disability awareness, and strengthening collaborations with faculty and staff to support the diverse needs of our student body.

### **Mandates**

There are two legal mandates that protect students with disabilities from discrimination and ensure that they have equal access to all aspects of the educational experience. These laws include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended in 2008.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states: “No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States...shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from

participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

### **Disability Defined**

A disability is defined by the ADA as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment or being regarded as having such an impairment in condition, manner, and/or duration. Major life activities include, but are not limited to, such functions as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.

Major life activities also include the operation of major bodily functions including, but not limited to, the immune system, sensory organs, skin, normal cell growth, digestive, genitourinary, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, hemic, lymphatic, musculoskeletal, and reproductive functions. The operation of a major bodily function includes the operation of an individual organ within a body system.

### **Students Requesting Accommodations**

#### ***Accommodations Defined***

An accommodation is defined as: (a) the modification of policies, practices, and procedures; (b) the provision of auxiliary aids and services; (c) academic adjustments and modifications intended to remove barriers to equalize access to education.

#### ***Reasonable Accommodations***

Pacifica provides services and reasonable accommodations as required by the ADA and Section 504 to students with documented disabilities. Recognizing that each student and disability is unique, accommodations are tailored individually. The Disability Services Office evaluates each request by considering the student’s disability, history, and the specific requirements of the course or program to determine the appropriateness of an accommodation.

Students needing accommodations must inform the Disability Services Coordinator as early as possible. Responsibility lies with the student to communicate their needs in a timely manner, and they should not assume that Pacifica is aware of these needs from the admission application or other informal communications. Accommodations are granted prospectively following eligibility verification; retroactive accommodations are not provided.

For accommodations requests, students should contact the Disability Services Coordinator, who will guide them through the documentation and registration process. Note that temporary impairments are generally not considered disabilities under this policy, except in rare cases where the limitations are exceptionally severe.

The provision of accommodation considers the nature and extent of the disability, the impact on the specific courses, and the resources involved. While Pacifica is committed to

accommodating students with disabilities, it cannot guarantee that all requested accommodations will be feasible, particularly if they would impose undue hardship or fundamentally alter the nature of a program or activity.

### **Disability Verification**

To establish eligibility for accommodations, the Disability Services office engages in a collaborative and deliberative process with the student. This process involves gathering information directly from the student about their disability to understand its impact and inform decisions on necessary accommodations.

As part of this interactive process, Disability Services may require external documentation to confirm the need for and nature of accommodations. Acceptable documentation can include educational or medical records, reports from licensed healthcare providers or assessments. A letter from a licensed healthcare provider that confirms the disability and describes the functional limitations often suffices.

This documentation should be current and relevant. Generally, accommodations are implemented within fourteen days of receipt of appropriate documentation verifying the disability.

### **Admission of Students with Disabilities**

Pacifica makes admission decisions based on criteria that do not consider an applicant's disability. The Institute ensures that no admission or eligibility criteria unfairly screen out applicants on the basis of their disability, unless such criteria are essential to prevent overburdening or fundamental alterations to the program, service, or activity offered.

Applicants with disabilities are required to meet the same minimal standards as all other applicants to gain admission to Pacifica's program, service, or activities. This includes meeting the specific requirements of the program for which they are applying.

### **Grievance Process for Students with Disabilities**

#### *Purpose*

This process ensures a prompt and equitable resolution for students who believe their requests for accommodations have been improperly denied or that they have faced discrimination based on their disability. It aims for resolution through mutual agreement addressing the students' concerns while ensuring due process for all.

#### *Informal Process*

Students are encouraged to first address any grievances informally by discussing their concerns with the involved faculty or staff member. Alternatively, students can contact the Disability Services Coordinator, who can facilitate discussions for alternative solutions or refer the matter to the Program Chair or Director for further mediation.

### *Formal Process*

If informal efforts are unsuccessful, students may initiate a formal grievance by submitting a written complaint to the Disability Services Coordinator within 30 days of the incident. If the grievance involves the Coordinator, it should be filed directly with the Provost. The grievance will be reviewed, and additional information will be gathered. A decision or resolution will typically be provided within 14 days, but no later than 30 days after the complaint is filed.

### *Appeal Process*

Should the resolution be unsatisfactory, students may appeal by submitting a written request to the Provost within 21 days of receiving the decision. This request should summarize the grievance and include all relevant documentation. The Provost will investigate further and issue a final written decision within 21 days.

### *Special Circumstances*

If the grievance involves the Provost, it should be directed to the Office of the President, who will also provide a final decision within 21 days.

### *Ensuring Non-Discrimination*

In cases where discrimination or improper denial of accommodations is confirmed, appropriate measures will be implemented to prevent future occurrences.

### **Confidentiality**

Student records are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Disability Services Office upholds the confidentiality of disability-related information. Documentation is strictly guarded, and access within Pacifica is limited to individuals who require it to ensure appropriate accommodations.

Accommodation Letters issued by the Disability Services Office Coordinator specify approved accommodations without disclosing specific diagnoses or functional limitations. On a legitimate educational basis, the Coordinator may share information about the impact of a disability and necessary accommodations with relevant campus personnel. Such discussions are conducted only after consulting with the student and are limited to specifics needed for housing arrangements, academic accommodations, instructional strategies, or other pertinent matters.

Pacifica is legally bound to not release any disability-related records or personally identifying information outside the institution without explicit written consent from the student or a court order. Students wishing to disclose such information to external parties must complete a Release of Information Form, which is then stored in their file.