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# Accommodation Resources for Law Students



Student Services

## Table of Contents

<b>Policy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Accommodations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Requesting Accommodations</b>	<b>4</b>
Breakdown of ODS Coordinator & Student Services Liaison Responsibilities	5
<b>Required Documentation</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Timing of Requests</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Temporary Illness/Injury</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Practicums, Externships, and Fieldwork</b>	<b>7</b>
Additional Considerations	7
<b>Requesting Accommodations for the Bar Exam</b>	<b>8</b>
MPRE	8
New York Uniform Bar Exam and New York Law Exam	9
<b>Service and Assistance Animals</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Confidentiality and Self-Disclosure</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy</b>	<b>10</b>



## Policy

Students diagnosed with physical and/or mental impairments<sup>1</sup> qualify as persons with disabilities<sup>2</sup> when their conditions substantially limit them in one or more major life activities<sup>3</sup>. Columbia University provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are adjustments to policies, practices, or procedures that facilitate equal access and opportunity for students with disabilities to the University's programs, activities, and services.

We strongly encourage students to seek support when they need it to ensure that they are receiving equal access to the educational experience at CLS.

***This handbook provides a brief overview of available resources for students who need accommodations. Students are responsible for reviewing detailed guidance and requirements from the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#); and for initiating disability-related requests for accommodations with that office.***

If you have additional questions about the process for requesting accommodations, please contact ODS (by phone at 212-854-2388, by email at [disability@columbia.edu](mailto:disability@columbia.edu), or through their [virtual drop-in hours](#)).

## Accommodations

The Law School works with ODS to provide on-campus accommodations for classes, housing, and other University-sponsored events. ODS is the central University office responsible for facilitating equal access for students with disabilities by coordinating accommodations and support services. ODS works with students with all types of disabilities, including physical, psychological, sensory, learning disabilities, AD/HD, temporary, and chronic medical conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> A physical or mental impairment can be any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more body systems, such as neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, immune, circulatory, hemic, lymphatic, skin and endocrine. They also include any mental or psychological disorder, such as intellectual disability, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities. [29 C.F.R.1630.2\(h\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> The term "disability" means, with respect to an individual: (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment. [42 U.S. Code § 12102\(1\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> Major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working. A major life activity also includes the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions. [42 U.S. Code § 12102\(2\)](#).



A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course, program, service, or activity that enables a qualified student with a disability to have an equal opportunity to attain the same level of achievement or enjoy the same benefits and privileges that are available to similarly-situated students without disabilities. The University has a responsibility to provide accommodation(s) only to the known limitations of an otherwise qualified student with a documented disability.

Generally, an accommodation is not considered reasonable if it lowers or substantially modifies essential requirements; fundamentally alters the nature of a service, program, or activity; or results in an undue financial or administrative burden<sup>4</sup>.

Accommodations can include, among other things, in-class accommodations (e.g., seating preferences, permission to record classes, laptop use, and note-takers), additional AV support (e.g., Communication Access Realtime Translation Service), Assistive Technology and Alternate Format Materials, and exam accommodations. For a list of ODS services, please visit <https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>.

ODS recommends reasonable accommodations and academic adjustments based on a thoughtful analysis of each student's disability related needs, the University's programs and curricula, and the University's legal obligations under the amended Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

***The Law School will implement only the academic accommodations that ODS enumerates for a student in their accommodation letter. If a student feels that they are entitled to additional accommodations, they must request those through ODS and have them documented in an accommodation letter.***

## Requesting Accommodations

Students seeking reasonable academic and/or housing accommodations or support services must register with ODS. *Students cannot receive formal accommodations unless they are registered with ODS.* Accommodations and services from previous schools do not automatically transfer to Columbia.

Registration includes the following steps for all students:

1. **Registration Form:** Submit a completed [registration form](#) via fax to (212) 854-3448, email to [disability@columbia.edu](mailto:disability@columbia.edu), or in-person at Wien Hall Suite 108A.
2. **Supporting Documentation:** Submit documentation verifying your disability status and the need for accommodations (see [Required Documentation](#)).

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<sup>4</sup> US Department of Education: [Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities](#).

3. **ODS Review:** ODS reviews each request and determines eligibility for accommodations and services.
4. **Meeting with ODS Coordinator:** A coordinator from ODS will contact students to schedule an orientation meeting. During this required meeting, the ODS coordinator will review the policies and procedures regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations. This meeting will help to familiarize students with ODS and facilitate the accommodations process.
5. **Meeting with Student Services:** After meeting with the assigned ODS coordinator, students should contact Lillian Ringel, the Associate Director of Academic Counseling & Student Support ([accommodations@law.columbia.edu](mailto:accommodations@law.columbia.edu)) to discuss how the Law School will implement their accommodations. Lillian Ringel is Student Services' liaison to ODS and supports students who have or need academic accommodations.

ODS will also send a letter to the Office of Registration Services and Student Services' liaison to ODS outlining a student's recommended accommodations. Registration Services will work with the Office of Student Services to implement these recommended accommodations. The Law School implements only the accommodations that ODS enumerates for a student in their accommodation letter. If a student feels that they are entitled to additional accommodations, they must request those through ODS and have them documented in an accommodation letter.

For detailed information about the registration process, please review this page:  
<https://health.columbia.edu/services/register-disability-services>.

## Breakdown of ODS Coordinator & Student Services Liaison Responsibilities

Students with accommodations will work with both a coordinator from the Office of Disability Services and a liaison from the Office of Student Services. Below is a quick infographic to help you understand the division between these two points of contact:



# Columbia Law School

## Office of Disability Services Coordinator

- Coordinator is assigned by the Office of Disability Services
- Provides intake and evaluation of students' disability needs
- Writes accommodation letter for the Law School's Liaison
- Re-evaluates students for new accommodation requests

## Student Services ODS Liaison

- Works on application of student's accommodation letter
- Liaises between students, ODS, faculty, and staff as needed per letter
- Advises students on graduation requirements, classes etc.

## Required Documentation

All students who register with ODS must submit documentation to verify their disability status and the need for reasonable accommodations. ODS will not begin the review process until it receives a student's completed registration form **and** disability documentation.

This documentation must:

1. Be recent enough in order to assess the current impact on learning or a major life activity. Students requesting accommodations due to a chronic medical condition must submit documentation dated within 6 months as well as annually updated documentation.
2. Be sufficiently comprehensive to establish clear evidence of a substantial impact on one or more major life activities.
3. Be sufficient to establish a direct link between the underlying impairment and the requested accommodations.
4. Include a description of what mitigating measures the student has used and whether with such use the student may still require accommodation in order to access University programs, activities, and services.
5. Be issued by a medical or other qualified, licensed professional, unrelated by birth or marriage to the student, printed on letterhead, dated, signed, and including the professional's licensing information. No information may be redacted.
6. Include the student's history of receiving reasonable accommodations and academic adjustments, if such history exists.



7. Include specific recommendations for accommodations as well as an explanation as to why each is recommended as necessary.

([General Guidelines For Disability Documentation](#))

There are certain additional disability-specific documentation guidelines, including:

- Guidelines for Documentation of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity (AD/HD) Disorder.
- Sensory Disability Documentation Guidelines.
- Guidelines for Documentation of Learning Disabilities.
- Guidelines For Documentation Of Psychiatric Disabilities.

You can find these disability-specific guidelines here:

<https://www.health.columbia.edu/content/forms-and-guidelines>.

## Timing of Requests

New students joining the University should contact ODS immediately to initiate the registration process. ODS strongly recommends that incoming students register no later than July 15th so that accommodations can be determined prior to their arrival on campus for the fall. However, ODS accepts registrations throughout the year from all students.

ODS does not begin the review process until it receives a student's completed registration form and disability documentation. ODS reviews accommodation requests for the entire University, so the review process is not immediate. **The review process can take four to six weeks; please plan accordingly and submit your registration form and documents as early as possible.**

## Temporary Illness/Injury

ODS supports all types of conditions, including physical and learning disabilities, chronic illnesses, and temporary injuries. Temporary illnesses or injuries can also adversely affect a student's ability to fully participate in academic activities. Students who experience a temporary injury or illness and require assistance should meet with their course instructor(s) and academic advisor as soon as possible to determine appropriate plans for course work. They should also meet with ODS to determine if a formal accommodation is appropriate. To receive accommodations, students with a temporary injury or illness must go through the same registration process detailed above.

In some more serious cases, students can also talk to an academic advisor about the possibility of receiving an incomplete for the class, withdrawing from the class, or taking a leave of absence from the Law School (see [Leaves & Withdrawal](#)).



## Practicums, Externships, and Fieldwork

The Law School recognizes the importance of experiential learning for students' legal education. Experiential learning includes practicums, externships, fieldwork, clinics, pro bono, or other work experiences required as part of the student's academic program.

If a student requires accommodations during a field placement, it is the student's responsibility to request them in advance. Because field placement accommodations are made on a case-by-case basis, advanced notice is required so that ODS can work with the Law School's liaison to ODS and with field site personnel to develop an appropriate accommodation plan. Students should make their request for field placement accommodations as soon as possible and no later than three (3) weeks before starting at the site. Students are not required to use accommodations for their experiential learning. However, there are no retroactive accommodations for grades or performance.

### Additional Considerations

**Site Selection:** The selection of experiential learning may be a key factor in providing an optimal environment for academic and professional development. Students and their Disability Services Liaison should review potential sites based on the nature of the work environment and the responsibilities agreed upon between each site and academic supervisor. Students must identify the most critical factor(s) in determining their ideal placement. Disability accommodations should be one of the considerations. It is also the student's responsibility to find transportation to the experiential learning site, unless transportation is provided for all students.

**Application/Interview Process (if Applicable):** If an application or interview is required for acceptance into an experiential learning opportunity and the student needs an accommodation to participate, the student is responsible for making the accommodation request to ODS as soon as possible.

**Request for Accommodation for Experiential Learning:** Students with disabilities are neither required to disclose, nor may an institution inquire about, the presence of a disability unless the student is seeking reasonable accommodations. Students requesting accommodations must be registered with ODS.

**Director of Externships and Field-Based Learning and Instructor Responsibilities:** When students apply to an externship there should be clear written competencies and expectations for activities and behavior while at a field placement site. If there are exceptions to certain requirements, those should be listed as well. Liliana Vaamonde, Director of Externships and Field-Based Learning, will work with ODS and the Student Services liaison to ODS in considering a student's specific needs and identifying what reasonable accommodations can be made while meeting the essential components and/or eligibility requirements of the placement. All parties will respect the confidentiality of accommodated students. In doing so, they will





provide only the details of the accommodations to those who need to know, including those at the site, in order to implement the requested accommodations.

### **Requesting Accommodations for the Bar Exam**

Students who receive academic accommodations in law school should also consider requesting accommodations for the bar exams after graduation. Students should carefully review the accommodation procedures for their specific jurisdiction. Students can find a directory of state bar admission agencies here: <https://reports.ncbex.org/comp-guide/directory/>.

To allow for sufficient time to process your accommodation requests, we recommend that you submit your request to the relevant state's Board of Bar Examiners and/or the National Conference of Bar Examiners (for the MPRE) at least four weeks before the submission deadline.

#### **MPRE**

The National Conference of Bar Examiners provides reasonable accommodations to MPRE candidates with documented disabilities.

Candidates for the MPRE must apply for accommodations and receive their determination *before* registering and scheduling a test appointment. Accommodations cannot be added to an existing test appointment. The NCBE recommends that candidates submit applications well in advance of the desired MPRE test administration, and no later than the Recommended Submission Date for that administration.

Students should carefully review the following page for more information about the process and deadlines for requesting accommodations for the MPRE:

<https://www.ncbex.org/exams/mpre/ada-accommodations/>.

#### **New York Uniform Bar Exam and New York Law Exam**

The New York State Board of Law Examiners (NY BOLE) provides non-standard testing accommodations to applicants with disabilities for the Uniform Bar Exam (UBE) and the New York Law Exam (NYLE). NY BOLE provides accommodations to the extent such accommodations are timely requested, reasonable, not unduly burdensome, consistent with the nature and purpose of the examination, and necessitated by the applicant's disability.

Students should carefully review the following page for more information about the process and deadlines for requesting accommodations for the UBE and NYLE:

<https://www.nybarexam.org/ada/ada.htm>. This page also includes the NY BOLE Test Accommodations Handbook.



## **Service and Assistance Animals**

Service and assistance animals provide individuals with disabilities with enhanced autonomy and independence. Student who want to bring their service or assistance animal to live in University housing must do the following:

- Submit a [Service and Assistance Animal Registration](#) Form and disability documentation to ODS.
- Follow the procedures outlined in [Service and Assistance Animal Guidelines and Procedures](#).

A service animal is a dog, or in some circumstances a miniature horse, that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. An assistance animal is a dog, cat, or other domestic animal that provides emotional support to alleviate one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability.

Approved service animals are generally permitted throughout campus, including in classrooms. Assistance animals are only permitted in privately assigned living space in University housing. Please review the above guidelines for more details.

## **Accessibility**

The University is committed to fostering a campus that is accessible to people with disabilities. It conducts an on-going program to remove physical barriers and makes significant accessibility improvements every year. For questions or concerns regarding access, please send an email to [access@columbia.edu](mailto:access@columbia.edu). You can find campus access maps here: <https://eoaa.columbia.edu/content/accessibility>.

If you discover that one of the Law School's accessibility features is broken or otherwise unusable, please email [Building Services and Operation](#) at "fix-it@law.columbia.edu".

## **Confidentiality and Self-Disclosure**

Accommodation information is confidential and shared within the University on a need-to-know basis. The Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) regulates disclosure of disability documentation and records that ODS maintains. Under this federal law, a student's prior written consent is generally required before ODS may release disability documentation or records. Accommodation letters prepared by ODS do not state the student's specific diagnosis or underlying medical condition. The letters simply explain that the student has provided appropriate documentation of a disability and list the approved academic accommodations for that student.

You can read more about the Disability Policy on Confidentiality here: <https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-policy-confidentiality>.



Many students who receive accommodations have invisible disabilities and their need for accommodations may not be readily apparent. ***Under no circumstances should a student feel obligated to disclose their diagnosis or the specific nature of their disability to anyone outside of ODS, including faculty, other students, or any administrative office (such as Registration Services and Student Services).*** This information is part of a student's confidential file with ODS, who has the ultimate responsibility for determining if an accommodation is appropriate. Students can of course disclose their disability to anyone on campus to the extent that they feel comfortable. However, if a student feels pressured to disclose this information against their will, they should immediately contact ODS or the Office of Student Services.

### **Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy**

The University is committed to providing a working, learning, and living environment free from discrimination and harassment and to fostering a nurturing and vibrant community founded upon the fundamental dignity and worth of all of its members. Please review the [Non-Discrimination Statement and Policies](#) for more details about these rules and the process for reporting violations.

Students can also contact the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#) (212-854-5511 or [eoaa@columbia.edu](mailto:eoaa@columbia.edu)) if they have any questions about these policies or need to report a violation of any University policy.