# AHEAD Professional Standards

# **Administration:** Responsibilities related to the administration or management of the office serving students with disabilities.

1. Develops program policies and procedures (e.g., required documentation, course substitutions).
2. Develops program services.
3. Maintains up-to-date knowledge of emerging issues in disability services (e.g., ADD/ADHD).
4. Identifies/establishes program goals.
5. Evaluates program services.
6. Communicates program activities, services, and outcomes to institutional administrators.
7. Supervise/trains program staff.
8. Develops/administers program budget.
9. Compiles reports on program activities/services.
10. Develops program brochure and handbook.
11. Responds to requests for interpretation of legal mandates on campus-specific issues.
12. Evaluates program staff.
13. Interprets court/government agency rulings and interpretations affecting services for students.

# **Direct Service:** Providing services directly to students or acting on behalf of students with members of the campus community.

1. Maintains confidential student records (e.g., documentation of disability).
2. Serves as an advocate for students with faculty or administrators.
3. Determines program eligibility for services based upon documentation of a disability.
4. Responds to inquiries from prospective students or their parents.
5. Consults with students about appropriate individualized accommodations based upon documentation.
6. Provides information to students regarding their legal rights and responsibilities.
7. Communicates information regarding program activities and services to students.
8. Consults with faculty regarding the instructional needs of students.
9. Consults with institutional administrators regarding the needs of students (e.g., department directors).
10. Consults with other campus departments regarding the needs of students (e.g., health services, residential life, admissions, counseling services).
11. Communicates information regarding program services to the campus community (e.g., admissions brochure, student catalog).
12. Arranges auxiliary aides for students.
13. Arranges individualized accommodations for students (e.g., testing accommodations).
14. Distributes program brochure or handbook to campus departments (e.g., health services, counseling services).
15. Processes complaints/grievances from students.
16. Provides personal/individual counseling to students relating to disability issues.
17. Coordinates assistants for students (e.g., notetakers, interpreters, readers).
18. Provides academic advisement to students relating to disability issues.
19. Provides counseling/advisement to enhance student development (e.g., self-advocacy).
20. Assists students in self-monitoring the effectiveness of accommodations.

# **Consultation/Collaboration:** Working with campus or community personnel and agencies regarding students with disabilities or disability issues.

1. Consults with state, provincial, or community resources (e.g., rehabilitation services).
2. Collaborates with physical plant to ensure modifications to campus facilities.
3. Maintains up-to-date knowledge of adaptive technology.
4. Collaborates with campus architects to review or plan new construction and renovations.
5. Conducts campus-wide disability awareness activities (e.g., disability awareness day).
6. Communicates program activities to campus community (e.g., via campus newspapers).
7. Conducts outreach activities for high school students (e.g., college fairs, transition workshops).
8. Consults with campus personnel regarding job accommodations for faculty and campus staff with disabilities.

# **Institutional Awareness:** Providing training and expertise regarding disability issues to members of the campus community.

1. Serves on campus committees to develop institutional policies and procedures regarding students with disabilities.
2. Provides training for faculty regarding awareness of disabilities.
3. Serves on campus committees addressing regulatory issues affecting students with disabilities.
4. Provides training for campus staff regarding awareness of disabilities.
5. Responsible for organizing training for campus personnel regarding the legal requirements of serving students with disabilities.
6. Provides training for faculty regarding accommodations and auxiliary aides.
7. Provides training for institutional administration regarding awareness of disabilities.

# **Professional Development:** Maintaining up-to-date professional knowledge and skill.

1. Attends conferences and professional development workshops.
2. Reads professional literature related to postsecondary education and students with disabilities.
3. Holds membership in professional organizations.

# AHEAD Program Domains, Standards, and Performance Indicators

## Introduction

The Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) offers these Program Domains, Standards, and Performance Indicators as a guide for expanding the vision of disability equity at the postsecondary level. The Standards reflect an aspirational goal for disability resource professionals in addressing systemic and individual barriers for disabled people in all aspects of higher education. They are designed to guide campus administrators’ understanding of the breadth of disability resource work, direct the development and evaluation of disability resource offices, and improve the preparation of professional personnel. These Standards may also inform audiences outside higher education about the nature and scope of disability resource management in the postsecondary setting. In line with higher education efforts towards diversity, equity and inclusion, the overarching goal of disability resources is the mitigation of barriers to access for disabled individuals in all institutional programs, services, and activities.

To realize the goal, disability resource personnel must:

* Provide leadership and collaboration in framing a commitment to disability access and equity as an integral aspect of their institution’s culture (Domain 1),
* Advise and educate the campus community about disability and inclusive practices (Domain 2),
* Provide services, strategies, and accommodations to mitigate the barriers faced by individual disabled people (Domain 3),
* Administer office operations guided by a mission and with access to appropriate resources (Domain 4), and
* Enhance their professional knowledge and skills (Domain 5).

The five broad Domains provide an organizational framework for the Program Standards that relate to the work of disability resource offices. Beneath each Program Standard are multiple Performance Indicators that provide a non-exhaustive list of how each Standard can be implemented. Collectively, the Domains, Standards, and Performance Indicators provide benchmarks for colleges and universities related to the work of disability resource offices.

## Domain 1: Leadership & Collaboration

Disability resource professionals provide institutional leadership in advancing the equal participation of disabled people through a collaborative process.

### 1.1 Provide institutional leadership to foster equitable higher education experiences for disabled individuals.

1.1.1 Foster an institutional commitment to access and equity that positions disability as an integral and valued aspect of diversity.

1.1.2 Promote the development of institutional policies that clearly demonstrate a commitment to access and equity in institutional programs, services, and activities in all physical, digital, academic and cocurricular spaces.

1.1.3 Proactively advocate for the mitigation of barriers to access in all campus programs, services, and activities in physical, digital, academic and cocurricular experiences.

### 1.2 Collaborate with administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other relevant institutional personnel in the design of equitable campus environments.

1.2.1 Foster collaboration on disability issues among key administrative personnel (e.g., deans, registrar, facilities, information technology, campus legal counsel, human resources).

1.2.2 Work with the campus ADA coordinator or designated group to ensure a plan is in place for the regular review of physical accessibility (e.g., facilities, new construction and renovation, grounds) and the remediation of barriers.

1.2.3 Ensure access is included in the institution’s emergency and contingency planning.

1.2.4 Work with administrators to ensure that all information and communication technologies (e.g., enterprise level systems, such as the student portal, HR systems, and emergency notifications, and local tools, such as library search engines and digital courseware) developed, procured, and implemented provide an equitable experience for all users.

1.2.5 Ensure that all institutional communication and resources, including all websites and materials shared over the Internet, are provided in accessible format.

1.2.6 In partnership with institutional leaders (e.g., administrators and staff from residence life, dining services, recreation center, clubs and organizations), review and revise cocurricular policies and procedures that create barriers for students based on disability.

### 1.3 Collaborate with academic personnel to ensure disability is considered in the development, review, and revision of academic policies.

1.3.1 In partnership with academic leaders (e.g., deans, department heads, faculty senate), review and revise academic policies and procedures that create barriers for students based on disability.

1.3.2 Work collaboratively with academic affairs on the development, review, and revision of policies regarding program modifications (e.g., course substitutions, extension of academic deadlines).

1.3.3 Participate in the development, review, and revision of the institution’s academic qualifications and essential technical, academic, and behavioral standards.

1.3.4 Ensure that equitable policies and practices extend to practica, internships and clinical experiences on- and off-campus.

1.3.5 Assist with the development, review, and revision of policies and procedures for making and settling complaints of disability-related discrimination.

1.3.6 Partner with administration and faculty to ensure disabled students have equitable assessment experiences, including that appropriate space and resources are available for providing testing accommodations.

### 1.4 Foster a positive disability narrative that informs the campus culture and climate.

1.4.1 Provide opportunities for students to explore disability identity in ways that acknowledge intersections with other types of personal and group identity.

1.4.2 Encourage collaboration and campus level engagement among diverse sources of disability knowledge, including offices, research centers, or scholars with expertise in disability studies.

1.4.3 Support campus events and initiatives that foster dialogue, understanding, and exploration of anti-ableism, disability history, and disability culture.

1.4.4 Include disability in the collection and review of institutional metrics, such as admissions, retention, graduation, financial aid, veteran status, and campus climate assessments, to understand and improve the experience of disabled students.

1.4.5 Partner with academic leaders to expand or explore the development of classes that focus on or integrate disability studies scholarship.

### 1.5 Promote disability representation at all levels of institutional decision making.

1.5.1 Participate on campus-wide advisory committees related to equity and diversity.

1.5.2 Participate on a campus-wide disability advisory committee consisting of faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community representatives.

1.5.3 Serve on decision-making bodies (e.g., such as faculty senate, general studies curriculum committee, strategic and financial planning committees, diversity initiatives, community relations) to ensure disability and access are considered as changes are proposed and contingency plans developed.

1.5.4 Foster opportunities for disabled students, faculty, and staff to contribute to campus decision-making processes.

## Domain 2: Consultation & Information Dissemination

Disability resource professionals share information, educate, and consult with a broad cross section of the campus community to facilitate equity for disabled individuals in all services, programs, and activities offered by the institution.

### 2.1 Advise and educate regarding disability, barriers, accommodations, and the institution’s responsibility for providing access.

2.1.1 Provide information and training to faculty, staff, and administrators regarding institutional policies and procedures for ensuring equitable experiences for disabled students.

2.1.2 Inform faculty of the procedures they and disabled students must follow in arranging for accommodations.

2.1.3 Provide information and training to campus units (e.g., residential life, facilities, academic support, library, information services, human resources) to increase understanding of accessibility, disability and their role and responsibilities in designing inclusive and accessible services.

2.1.4 Advise campus personnel (e.g., information services, human resources, marketing and communications, academic departments) regarding the institution’s obligation to procure and implement only accessible technologies and applications.

2.1.5 Provide training and feedback to facility and grounds personnel to foster a physically accessible campus environment.

2.1.6 Ensure key administrators are informed of legislative changes relative to access standards, promising practices in higher education disability services, and accessible technologies.

2.1.7 Advise campus student affairs regarding the intersection between disability and campus practices (e.g., student discipline, campus behavioral intervention team, student activities) that may require modification.

2.1.8 Advise, inform, and consult with cocurricular office administrators and staff regarding procedures and their role and responsibilities in providing, or supporting the provision of, accommodations.

### 2.2 Through proactive outreach, consultation, and training, foster an institutional commitment to inclusive design that minimizes the need for individual accommodations to achieve access.

2.2.1 Partner with instructional support staff to provide learning opportunities and encourage faculty to incorporate inclusive teaching and assessment strategies.

2.2.2 Provide training and technical assistance to student success personnel (e.g., academic success, supplemental instructional resources, career services, veterans services) to ensure their services are accessible to disabled students.

2.2.3 Collaborate with online learning personnel to ensure faculty is trained in the creation of accessible instructional materials and the use of accessibility tools within the learning management system.

2.2.4 Partner with campus instructional technology (IT) personnel to train all members of the campus community in the preparation of accessible materials.

2.2.5 Contribute to new faculty and staff orientation and training to increase awareness of disability, disability-related barriers, and inclusive design.

2.2.6 Provide training and technical assistance to student affairs personnel to ensure student programming is designed to be accessible and inclusive.

### 2.3 Disseminate information regarding disability resources and how to access them in accessible format through all institutional channels.

2.3.1 Encourage the inclusion of disability in the institutional statement of nondiscrimination.

2.3.2 Distribute information on availability of services via relevant campus publications (catalogs, programmatic materials, websites, etc.).

2.3.3 Ensure information on disability services (e.g., documentation requirements, statement regarding self-disclosure, processes for requesting and using services, individuals responsible for access) is on the institution’s website.

2.3.4 Provide disability related grievance and complaint procedures on the institution’s website.

2.3.5 Provide information about the availability of assistive technology on campus including the location of specific software and hardware.

## Domain 3: Access and Equity

Disability resource professionals address individual situations and support the implementation of accessibility solutions, including design changes and accommodations.

### 3.1 Work with individual students to identify disability-related barriers and strategies for mitigating them through design changes and accommodation.

3.1.1 Determine individual student rights to accommodation through a nonburdensome and ongoing interactive process that considers student narrative and appropriate, relevant documentation of disability.

3.1.2 Assess, through an individualized, interactive process, whether requested accommodations are necessary to ensure access in individual contexts.

3.1.3 Determine whether requested accommodations are reasonable.

3.1.4 Communicate to students their right to access and privacy and their role in implementing effective accommodations.

3.1.5 Explain to students and faculty what makes an accommodation appropriate or “reasonable.”

3.1.6 Consider student preference in deciding on specific accommodations and evaluate alternative access solutions.

3.1.7 Consider assistive technology (AT) solutions in the mitigation of identified barriers; provide/refer student for training as necessary.

3.1.8 Communicate the denial of a requested accommodation to students in writing and include information on how to grieve the decision.

3.1.9 Follow up with students to ensure agreed upon accommodations are effective.

3.1.10 Refer students to campus and community resources (e.g., counseling services, academic support, multicultural centers, vocational rehabilitation) as needed.

### 3.2 Consult with faculty members to mitigate disability-related barriers for individual students through design strategies and reasonable accommodations.

3.2.1 Consult with faculty on accommodation decisions when there is a potential for a fundamental alteration of an academic requirement.

3.2.2 Inform faculty of accommodations that should be provided to their students and the faculty role in implementing them.

3.2.3 Collaborate with faculty to ensure that design changes or accommodations are effective in providing access and are implemented efficiently.

3.2.4 Follow up with faculty when students report that an accommodation is not available or is ineffective.

3.2.5 Address concerns about student behaviors perceived as potential conduct code violations in light of disability.

3.2.6 Consult with department representatives and community agency personnel to ensure accessibility in internships, field placements, and other community-based academic experiences.

### 3.3 Consult with administrators and staff to implement design strategies and reasonable accommodations that mitigate barriers identified by individual disabled people.

3.3.1 Collaborate with on- and off-campus partners (e.g., admissions, career services, residence life, dining services, library, event management) to address barriers to access identified by disabled individuals.

3.3.2 Follow up with campus units when individuals report a lack of access or unavailable/ineffective accommodations.

## Domain 4: Office Administration and Operations

Disability resource professionals are guided by a program mission, have appropriate resources to fulfill the mission, operate under practices consistent with the mission, and establish an ongoing process of assessment in achieving the mission.

### 4.1 Develop and publicize a program mission that advances the institution’s commitment to access.

4.1.1 Develop and disseminate a program mission statement and philosophy that is aligned with the mission of the institution and with the values of the profession, including accessibility, equity, and diversity.

4.1.2 Use the mission statement for strategic planning, establishing specific goals, and reviewing progress regularly.

4.1.3 Promote understanding of and support for the mission by office personnel and institutional stakeholders.

4.1.4 Advocate for a reporting structure that strategically positions the office to fulfill its mission.

4.1.5 Develop a staffing plan appropriate to achieving the mission and advocate for its implementation.

4.1.6 Ensure the mission aligns with a service delivery model that respects students’ experiences, autonomy, and responsibility.

4.1.7 Regularly review the mission for its alignment with emerging best practices and as a tool to assess progress.

### 4.2 Ensure the institution has committed appropriate resources for coordinating services for disabled individuals.

#### *Staff*

4.2.1 Establish staffing at the level necessary to address individual and systemic barriers in a timely manner.,

4.2.3 Prioritize hiring a diverse staff that represents multiple identities and demonstrates understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

4.2.4 Provide services by personnel with training and experience in working with disabled college students (e.g., student development, relevant degree programs).

4.2.5 Ensure staff has knowledge of the applicable laws that provide for an accessible higher education experience for disabled students.

4.2.6 Assign staff with appropriate training to each aspect of service delivery (e.g., assistive technology, communication access, digital access, accommodation implementation, etc.).

4.2.7 Ensure that personnel adhere to a relevant code of ethics (e.g., AHEAD, APA).

#### *Space*

4.2.8 Operate from a welcoming, accessible office space appropriate to meet service needs and ensure appropriate confidentiality.

#### *Budget*

4.2.9 Administer a budget to support office operations.

4.2.10 Administer, or participate in the administration, of a budget to support individual accommodations.

4.2.11 Ensure adequate budget is available to support the timely implementation of accommodations determined to be reasonable.

4.2.12 Communicate budgetary needs and strategies, expense projections, and budget updates to institutional administrators.

4.2.13 Advocate for additional internal and external funds as needed to address individual situations and create equitable campus environments.

4.2.14 Ensure that professional development funds are available for staff.

#### *Equipment*

4.2.14 Acquire, maintain, and update appropriate technology to support effective staff productivity (e.g., computers, assistive technologies, service coordination software).

4.2.15 Implement a secure, computerized database to maintain and organize confidential student records; facilitate coordination of services; support communication with students and faculty; and support development of reports.

### 4.3 Create, review, and revise professional practices for the effective and efficient delivery of services.

4.3.1 Create written procedures and practices for determining student status as a “qualified individual with a disability” eligible for accommodations; review and revise as needed.

4.3.2 Create written procedures and practices for determining reasonable accommodations; review and revise as needed.

4.3.3 Establish a process for conferring with faculty to determine whether an accommodation would fundamentally alter an essential course or program objective.

4.3.4 Establish a process for notifying faculty (and/or others with a need to know) of the accommodations determined to be reasonable for individual students.

4.3.5 Create, written procedures for managing common accommodations (e.g., test accommodations, interpreting); review and revise as needed.

4.3.6 Develop procedures for determining when provisional accommodations are appropriate; review and revise as needed.

4.3.7 Develop an internal procedure for students to grieve accommodation decisions; review and revise as needed.

4.3.8 Maintain professional, FERPA-protected records that document eligibility, availability of accommodations, and services provided for each student.

### 4.4 Design and implement a rigorous program of ongoing assessment to improve service delivery and demonstrate institutional impact.

4.4.1 Establish a written assessment plan that aligns with the program mission statement and philosophy and includes qualitative and quantitative data and measurable goals; review and revise the plan as needed.

4.4.2 Collect data to track use of accommodations and services.

4.4.3 Collect data to identify campus barriers, track outreach activities, and guide development of technical assistance and collaboration.

4.4.4 Collect data to assess student, faculty, and administrator satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of services.

4.4.5 Collect data to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of services and identify areas for improvement.

4.4.6 Collect and utilize data from all relevant campus units to evaluate services, improve practices, and identify additional resource needs.

4.4.7 Develop an annual report of activities, achievements, and needs to document institutional impact and share with administrators.

## Domain 5: Professional Development

Disability resource professionals maintain up-to-date professional knowledge and skill relevant to access and equity for disabled individuals.

### 5.1 Provide disability resource professionals with ongoing opportunities for quality professional development.

5.1.1 Provide orientation to new staff.

5.1.2 Determine professional development needs of staff members on an individual basis, including disability, access, technical, executive, and leadership knowledge and skills.

5.1.3 Support staff in accessing on- and off-campus professional development activities with release time, coverage of work assignments, and funding.

### 5.2 Provide opportunities for disability resource professionals engage in professional communities to contribute to the growth and development of the field.

5.2.1 Recommend staff for service on institutional committees and work groups.

5.2.2 Nominate staff for leadership positions in disability organizations (e.g., governors’ councils, AHEAD Affiliate groups).

5.2.3 Provide staff with funding, release time, and coverage to contribute to the growth and development of the field.

*NOTE: AHEAD Program Domains, Standards, and Performance Indicators developed/revised in 1999, 2006, 2021.*