Technical Standards

(Essential Requirements for an Academic Program)

Technical Standards balance the right to accommodation and the right to protect the integrity of programs by identifying the essential elements of the programs, both academically and interpersonally. Departments should identify the functionalities of each program requiring some sort of field experience.

Engage in a Deliberative Process: Decisions to deny modifications as a fundamental alternation of an academic program must be made by an academic body for academic reasons. Institutions should determine technical standards through a deliberative process involving a) an academic administrator, such as a dean or department head, b) a group of people trained, knowledgeable, and experienced in the professional field (such as program faculty, relevant professional association representatives, and educational experts in the field).

There must be a careful, thoughtful, and rational view of the program and its requirements. Curriculum components, the educational philosophy of the program, the standards required for professionals in the field, established theories and methods of the profession, and the policies of sister institutions are pertinent. Proper consideration must be given to whether effective alternatives to established requirements exist that would allow students with disabilities to participate.

Perform an Individualized Assessment: Once the essential requirements have been identified, a student seeking accommodation is still entitled to an individualized assessment of his or her needs, and a determination as to whether there are reasonable accommodations available. This assessment must include the student’s input, and input from individuals knowledgeable about disabilities and fashioning accommodations.

Assist Students in Making an Informed Decision: Inform students of the technical standards/essential program requirements so that they can make their own determination. Consider creating a form for all students informing them of the technical standards. Students can be asked to sign the form when they are admitted into the program, and again as they’re about to go into a clinical. Students with disabilities should consider whether they can meet those requirements with or without accommodations. Faculty and staff should avoid discouraging students from an academic program, but should tell them the facts, provide the accommodations, and allow them to try.

The institution must insure that eligible students with disabilities receive a) reasonable modifications to rules, policies, or practices (accommodations); b) auxiliary (communication) aids or services; or c) removal of architectural, communication, and/or transportation barriers. Once these are provided, the student has an ongoing responsibility to remain qualified.