

Defining Disability



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The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) defines disability, in part, as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits **a major life activity** of an individual.¹

How Do ADAAA Regulations Benefit Student-Athletes with Disabilities?

With the ADAAA regulations in place, the United States Department of Justice identified numerous benefits from providing broad coverage under the law. More student-athletes can utilize disability supports. This increases access to a wider scope of academic services, and student-athletes can reap the benefits by completing their degrees.

What Is a “Major Life Activity”?

A major life activity includes everyday actions and major bodily functions. For example, a student-athlete may experience difficulty hearing, eating, sleeping or communicating in some instances. A student-athlete might also experience difficulty with bladder functioning, breathing and other bodily systems. These examples are not exhaustive but represent some of the challenges student-athletes face that may require disability support and services.

A disability must “substantially limit the ability of an individual to perform a major life activity as compared to most people in the general population.” This limitation does not have to prevent, or significantly or severely restrict, the individual from performing a major life activity to be considered substantially limiting. The United States Congress determined that the definition of disability should include a broad coverage of individuals, to the maximum extent permitted by the terms of the ADAAA.²



¹ <https://www.revacomm.com/the-five-titles-of-the-americans-with-disabilities-act/>

² American Association of People with Disabilities
<https://www.aapd.com/>



What Is an “Education-Impacting Disability”?

The NCAA defines an education-impacting disability (EID) as a current impairment that has a substantial educational impact on a student’s academic performance and requires accommodation.³

Student-athletes may experience EIDs such as “learning disabilities or disorders, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, mental health disorders, medical conditions, deaf or hard of hearing, and autism spectrum disorder.”⁴

Self-Disclosure and Accommodations

All colleges or universities that receive federal funds are required to provide accommodations to students with education-impacting disabilities if they would like to access accommodations. However, it is the student’s responsibility and/or prerogative to approach the college and disclose their disability documentation to the college/university’s office of disability services and/or NCAA Education-Impacting Disability Services.

Accommodations can include options such as exams in an alternative setting with few distractions and additional time; a note taker or the option to audio record class lectures; assistive technology; flexible attendance; and accessible wheelchair ramps to buildings and rooms. These are just a few of the accommodations available that can remove barriers for disabled people and create better access to the educational process. The accommodations listed are based on institutional policy and resources, and are not dictated by the NCAA.⁵

³ [ncaa.org/sports/2014/11/25/education-impacting-disabilities.aspx](https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2014/11/25/education-impacting-disabilities.aspx)
⁴ NCAA, 2018, para. 1 as cited in White, 2020
⁵ fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/Student_Resources/EID_FAQ.pdf

“Major Life Activities” Under the ADAAA

Under the ADAAA, “major life activities” is expanded to include “major bodily functions.” The statute contains a nonexhaustive list of “major life activities” that includes additional activities to those currently listed in the ADA and Section 503 regulations, and a nonexhaustive list of “major bodily functions.” Specifically, the ADAAA provides that:



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
- Working



Major bodily functions include, but are not limited to:

- Functions of the Immune System
- Normal Cell Growth
- Digestive
- Bowel
- Bladder
- Neurological
- Brain
- Respiratory
- Circulatory
- Endocrine
- Reproductive Functions