

# Connecting Students to the Student Accessibility Resource Center (SARC)

## A Referral Guide for Faculty & Staff

WKU is legally obligated under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) and [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) to provide equal access to all academic and co-curricular programs. The Student Accessibility Resource Center (SARC) is the institutional unit charged with executing these federal civil rights requirements. These services are not discretionary; they are mandated conditions of operating a public institution of higher education and directly affect institutional risk, student retention, and instructional continuity. The primary goal of the [Student Accessibility Resource Center \(SARC\)](#) is to ensure that all students, who disclose a disability to the university, are provided access and opportunity to all facets of the Western Kentucky University experience. We do this by:

- facilitating and coordinating support services and programs that enable students with disabilities to maximize their educational potential,
- increasing awareness among all members of the WKU community so that students with disabilities have an opportunity to achieve academic success based on their abilities, not their disabilities,
- upholding academic integrity,
- helping to identify when an accommodation does not align with course fundamental objectives; and,
- partnering with faculty and staff; students and families, to answer questions related to implementation of approved accommodations.

The transition to college can be challenging. This is normal and developmentally appropriate. However, some barriers go beyond typical adjustment. Many students experience **both** adjustment challenges **and** disability-related barriers. Faculty and staff's roles are not to diagnose, but to **notice, normalize, and refer** students to the appropriate resource(s).

### **Look for Patterns, Persistence, and Impact**

Ask yourself:

- **Patterns:** *Does this difficulty show up across multiple classes or areas?*
- **Persistence:** *Has it lasted several weeks, months, or semesters without improvement?*
- **Impact:** *Is it substantially limiting the student's ability to participate, focus, or complete work?*

*If yes – it **may** indicate a disability-related barrier.*

### **Look for some key behaviors**

<b>3 Ps</b>	<b>Developmentally Appropriate/Typical</b>	<b>Potential Disability Barrier</b>
<b>Proportion</b>	Reactions fit the situation (e.g., nervous before an exam; challenges adjusting to college)	Reactions are extreme or ongoing/persistent (e.g., panic, avoidance)
<b>Progress</b>	Improves with support and time	Minimal improvement despite strong effort; intervention; professional support
<b>Persistence</b>	Temporary or situational	Chronic or worsening difficulties across semesters

## Tiered Guide for Faculty & Staff

(Examples – not exhaustive. Students may describe challenges in various ways.)

Normalize support and offer options. Focus on observable behaviors and impact (e.g., attendance patterns, engagement, access barriers, completion of work). When in doubt, referring a student to SARC is always appropriate.

### **Early Indicators of Academic Stress or Transition Challenges**

These phrases may indicate academic distress and/or transition challenges, and most are developmentally appropriate for college students transitioning from high school to college. If you hear phrases like these, you may monitor patterns, provide support, and consider a referral to the SARC team, or other student support services, if concerns persist or escalate.

#### **Adjustment to College Expectations**

- “College is very different from what I’m used to.”
- “I’m struggling to manage all the deadlines.”
- “I don’t know how to keep up with the workload.”

#### **General Academic Stress**

- “I’m overwhelmed lately.”
- “I’m trying but my grades aren’t improving.”
- “I freeze during presentations or discussions.”

#### **Organization & Study Skills**

- “I lose track of assignments.”
- “I don’t know where to start on big projects.”
- “Group discussions move too fast for me.”

#### **Faculty/Staff takeaways:**

- Start with supportive strategies (meet the student during your office hours, refer to tutoring and/or advising). If challenges appear persistent, long-standing, or tied to functional limitations, a SARC referral may be appropriate.
- These examples are **not** diagnostic indicators. Students may experience challenges for many reasons. Faculty and staff are encouraged to focus on observable barriers to learning or access and connect students with appropriate campus resources when concerns arise.

**Important Reminder:** Students may never use the word *disability*. Listen for descriptions of functional impact. Faculty and staff should avoid asking about diagnoses and instead connect students with appropriate campus resources.

## **When a SARC Referral May Be Helpful**

When you hear comments like those listed below, consider proactively mentioning SARC as a resource. These phrases often signal functional barriers that may be disability-related or previously supported through accommodations. Remind the student that disability related accommodations are available at WKU and show them ways to connect to SARC.

### **Academic Access & Testing**

- "I had an IEP, 504 Plan, or accommodations in high school or at a previous university."
- "I had extra time for tests or used a separate space for tests in high school."
- "I know the material but can't finish exams in time."

### **Cognitive / Attention / Learning Impact**

- "No matter how hard I try, I can't focus or stay organized."
- "Reading assignments take me hours longer than everyone else."
- "I process information slower and fall behind."

### **Mental Health or Emotional Barriers Affecting Access**

- "My anxiety/depression keeps me from functioning in class."
- "I get overwhelmed to the point I can't complete work."
- "Panic attacks or mental health symptoms interfere with attendance or participation."

### **Medical / Chronic Health / Fatigue**

- "I have a condition that causes flare-ups or frequent absences."
- "Fatigue, pain, or treatment schedules affect my coursework."
- "I recently received a diagnosis, and things feel harder now."

### **Sensory or Environmental Barriers**

- "Noise, lighting, or crowded spaces make it hard to function."
- "I need quieter environments to concentrate."

### **Faculty/Staff takeaway:**

You are **not** determining disability status – simply offering SARC as a support resource when students describe barriers to access.

## **Suggested Responses/Referral Language**

Make clear, caring statements:

- "It sounds like you've been dealing with this for a while – SARC might be able to help explore options and accommodations."
- "You don't need a diagnosis to start a conversation with SARC."
- "Many students find it helpful to connect with SARC to talk through support options."
- "SARC staff work with students to identify barriers, provide access, and make a plan."
- "I appreciate that you've tried this semester without using your previous accommodations. However, perhaps it's time for you to discuss how your previous accommodation plan can be set up at WKU."

### **Normalizing & Reducing Stigma**

These help faculty/staff introduce SARC without implying something is "wrong."

- "SARC is a resource many students use at different points in college – it's not just for one type of situation."
- "Connecting with SARC doesn't commit you to anything; it just gives you more information."

### **Framing SARC as a Collaborative Resource**

- "The SARC staff can help you think through what might make your learning environment more accessible."
- "They focus on removing barriers so you can show what you know."
- "You and the SARC staff can discuss what supports are reasonable for you."

### **Encouraging Student Autonomy & Self-Advocacy**

- "You're in control of whether you reach out – I just want to make sure you know the resource exists."
- "It might be helpful to explore options now rather than waiting until things feel overwhelming."
- "Starting a conversation early can make the semester feel more manageable."

### **When Students Mention Past Supports or High School Experiences**

- "College accommodations can look different, but SARC can walk you through what's reasonable here."
- "If you had supports before, SARC can help translate how those may work in college."
- "WKU's process is student-driven, and SARC can explain how that works."

### **Supportive, Non-Directive Language**

- "Would you be open to exploring SARC as an additional support?"
- "If you're interested, I can share the SARC contact information."

## Effective Engagement Strategies

### **The ADA syllabus statement plays an important role in promoting access and awareness.**

Including the required university ADA statement in your syllabus helps ensure students are informed about SARC services, understand how the accommodation process works, and know where to go if they have (or suspect they may have) a disability-related need. For some students, this may be their first introduction to SARC and the interactive process. Syllabus statements can be found here: <https://www.wku.edu/syllabusinfo/>

Determining disability status and reviewing documentation are responsibilities of SARC – not individual faculty or staff. **Disability disclosure is always the student's choice.** Once a student shares their Faculty Notification Letter (FNL; for classroom accommodations), that is an ideal time to engage in a supportive conversation about implementing approved accommodations. The FNL is a **communication tool** designed to facilitate this discussion. A reminder that the FNL is specific to the students' needs, not specific to a particular course. This is why we encourage discussing a student's FNL as soon as possible after it is presented to you.

A student's disability status and use of accommodations are confidential. Avoid discussing accommodations publicly, referencing them in front of peers, including diagnostic information in email communication to anyone other than the student, or asking questions about a student's diagnosis. Even well-intended statements such as, *"Since you have accommodations..."* may unintentionally disclose private information.

### **When in doubt, keep conversations private, use discretion and professional ethics, and consult SARC for guidance. Maintaining discretion preserves student dignity, builds trust, and supports an inclusive learning environment.**

Faculty and staff should **never** ask students:

- "Do you have a disability?"
- "What is your disability or diagnosis?"
- "Can you show me medical or psychological documentation?"
- "What's wrong with you?"

Ask open-ended, empathetic, non-diagnostic questions, such as:

- "What has been most challenging for you this semester?"
- "Are there any specific barriers you have had in my class?"
- "You seem to not be as engaged in class as you once were..." OR "Your homework has been turned in late recently...are there barriers making it harder for you to fully participate or keep up in class?"
- "What strategies or supports have helped you in the past?"

## WKU Student Support Resources

- [TRIO Student Support Services, Disabilities \(SSS-D\)](#) - (registered SARC students may be eligible for enrollment). Offers personalized academic support, providing financial assistance, and social support. (DSU 1079; inside the SARC)
- [Counseling Center](#) - personal mental health counseling (409 Potter Hall)
- [Talley Family Counseling Center](#) - personal and family mental health counseling (Located on the corner of Regents Avenue and Normal Street)
- [Kelly Autism Program Circle of Support](#) - a program that offers six areas of assistance specifically designed to address the challenges faced by students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and to increase their success on campus.
- [The Learning Center](#) - tutoring & academic success skills (DSU 1082)
- [WKU Medical Center](#) | 270-745-CARE (2273) WKU Health Services Building; Located at 1681 Normal Drive on the corner of Normal Drive and Regents Avenue.
- [Hilltopper Nutrition](#) - for dietary needs/restrictions and how to navigate on-campus dining. (Health Services Building)
- [Psychology Clinic \(psychological evaluation/assessment\)](#) (Gary Ransdell Hall 3012)
- [Dean of Students](#) - withdrawals from WKU; help with navigating classroom and campus environments, as well as university policies and procedures. (DSU 2122)
- [WKU Food Pantry](#) - for non-perishable food and toiletries to all members of the WKU community. (503 Regents Avenue, adjacent to Gary Ransdell Hall)
- [Parking & Transportation](#) - disability parking needs, para transit and ADA van service. (DSU Ground Floor; next to the Passport Office & WKU Store).
- [Center for Innovative Teaching & Learning \(CITL\)](#) - supports an inclusive learning environment that supports diverse needs, including those of students with visual, auditory, learning, and/or neurological needs, by prioritizing accessibility of course content and materials. (Honors College & International Center).
- [WKU Libraries](#) - screen reading software, scanning and copying services, wide and high computer stations, item retrieval assistance, and website accessibility.
- [5<sup>th</sup> Week Assessment](#) - a great opportunity for engaging with students

SARC provides services for students, however, [Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action/University ADA Services](#) (EEO) - support **Faculty/Staff** accommodations and accessibility needs (Wetherby Administration Building - Suite 317). Your needs are equally important.