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# Accommodating Students with Dietary Restrictions and Food Allergies

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# Accommodating Students with Dietary Restrictions and Food Allergies

A Partnership between Student Accessibility Services and Clemson Home - University Housing & Dining



## Abstract

When working with students that have medically related dietary restrictions and/or food allergies who are requesting specific accommodations, collaboration between disability services and on-campus dining services is essential. April Beckwith, coordinator for Student Accessibility Services at Clemson University, and Martha Green, Registered Dietitian with Aramark Higher Education, will share their efforts to create a streamlined, interdepartmental process for accommodating students with medically related dietary restrictions and/or food allergies. Participants will leave with a better understanding of how to collaborate with campus stakeholders, as well as suggestions for creating a systematic process for holistically accommodating these students.

## Introduction

- April Beckwith » Student Accessibility Services at Clemson University
- Martha Green, RD, LD » Registered Dietitian with Aramark Higher Education  
» Represents Clemson Home - University Housing & Dining

## The Importance of Partnership

All first year students at Clemson University are required to live on campus and to purchase a meal plan through Clemson Home - University Housing & Dining. Therefore, effective collaboration between Student Accessibility Services and Clemson Home is essential when accommodating students with disabilities that live and dine on campus. The partnership between the two entities is dynamic and is executed on a daily basis in hopes to embody the mission of Clemson University.

Student Accessibility Services is a division of Undergraduate Studies. Clemson Home is a division of Student Affairs.

## Target Population

Clemson students seeking accommodations for a medically related dietary restriction and/or food allergy

- » Examples of Medical Diagnoses that May Need Dual Accommodations from Student Accessibility Services and Dining Services:
  - Irritable Bowel Syndrome
  - Crohn's Disease
  - Diabetes Mellitus
  - Celiac Disease
- » Food Allergies Amongst College Students
  - 15 million people have food allergies, 4% are adults (Food Allergy Research and Education)
  - Teenagers and young adults are at the highest risk for having a fatal anaphylactic reaction to a food allergen (Food Allergy Research and Education)

## Interdepartmental Approach: Collaboration with Clemson Stakeholders

An interdepartmental approach between campus stakeholders creates multiple opportunities for students with documented disabilities to pursue appropriate accommodations.

- » Division of Undergraduate Studies
  - Student Accessibility Services
- » Division of Student Affairs
  - Clemson Home – University Housing & Dining
  - University Housing & Dining Appeals Committee
  - Student Health Services
  - Counseling and Psychological Services

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## Examples of Interdepartmental Collaboration

### Student Accessibility Services

A student submits disability documentation initially to Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to obtain classroom and testing accommodations. While reviewing medical documentation, a SAS staff member realizes that the student is in need of classroom accommodations, but may also be in need of a consultation with the Registered Dietitian (RD) for Clemson Home-University Housing & Dining. When the student is invited to SAS for their "Welcome Meeting," they are given the RD's contact information. With the student's permission, SAS follows-up with the RD to let her know this student was referred for a dining consultation based on disability information. Minimal information regarding specifics of the disability is shared but is enough for the RD to prep for the consultation effectively. This is an example of proactive collaboration between SAS and Clemson Home, potentially avoiding a negative dining experience or a meal plan appeal.

### Clemson Home - University Housing & Dining

An incoming freshman checks the "Dietary Restrictions" option when signing up for on-campus housing and dining through the Clemson Home portal. The RD for Clemson Home is notified that the student has selected the dietary restrictions option. The RD contacts the student to set up an appointment during the first week of classes. During the meeting, the student discloses that they have a food allergy to peanuts. The RD discusses the dining options available to the student and reviews the food allergy policy. With the student's permission, the RD refers the student to SAS to review accommodations that may be necessary outside of housing and dining facilities. The student is now aware of additional resources on campus that will enable them to have a successful first-year experience at Clemson University.

### University Housing & Dining Appeals Committee

A first-year student on a mandatory meal plan submits an appeal to the University Housing & Dining Appeals Committee stating that the dining hall is unable to accommodate their dietary restrictions related to a medical diagnosis. The student does not disclose what the dietary restrictions are nor do they explain the medical diagnosis. The appeals committee refers the student to the RD and to SAS. The accessibility coordinator and RD arrange a joint meeting with the student. In the meeting, the student provides medical documentation that confirms a diagnosis of Irritable Bowel Syndrome and the need to follow a low-fat, high fiber diet. The RD shows the student how to access nutrition information for each menu item in order to help them select appropriate food in the dining hall. The accessibility coordinator registers the student with SAS and helps them to obtain classroom and/or testing accommodations. Due to the appropriate accommodations, the student no longer wants to appeal the meal plan and is able to find options in the dining hall.

### Student Health Services

A physician at Student Health Services refers a student newly diagnosed with Diabetes Mellitus, Type 2 to RD for Clemson Home. The student schedules a consultation with the RD to discuss appropriate food options in the dining hall and how to access nutrition information for each menu item. The RD asks the student if they would like to schedule an appointment with SAS in response to the student showing concern about being able to leave class to check blood sugar levels. The student agrees to meet with SAS and to release the medical documentation, provided by Student Health Services, to the accessibility coordinator for diagnosis verification. During the "Welcome Meeting" with the accessibility coordinator, the student expresses gratitude for on-campus resources to help them cope with their new diagnosis.

### Counseling and Psychological Services

A student receives a referral to SAS from the university's Counseling and Psychological Services. During the "Welcome Meeting" with SAS the student discloses that they have anxiety exacerbated by Crohn's Disease and would like to arrange for special classroom and testing accommodations. The accessibility coordinator arranges for accommodations after verifying the medical documentation. She also asks if the student would like to meet with the RD for Clemson Home so that the student can learn more about the dining options on campus. The student agrees to meet with the RD as they feel that the meeting would help reduce anxiety around choosing appropriate food options in the dining hall.

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## Special Considerations

It is important to distinguish if a dietary restriction is related to a medical diagnosis or to a lifestyle preference before initiating accommodations through Student Accessibility Services. An example of a dietary restriction related to a lifestyle choice or preference may include vegetarianism or veganism.

This type of dietary restriction does not warrant accommodations through Student Accessibility Services if it is not related to a medically documented disability.

Colleges or universities may require that students enroll in a mandatory meal plan. In this case, if Dining Services is unable to reasonably accommodate a student's documented food allergy or dietary restriction, then a release from the mandatory meal plan may be the most appropriate accommodation. However, all reasonable accommodations should be explored by both Student Accessibility Services and Dining Services with the student before the student is released from the meal plan. Exemption from a meal plan should not be the default accommodation for students with medically documented food allergies or dietary restrictions.

The University Housing & Dining Appeals Committee is comprised of housing and dining employees. The committee meets bi-weekly to review appeals submitted by students pertaining to both housing and dining contract related issues. Example: Student submits an appeal to be exempted from the first-year housing and dining requirement.

The Dining Services department for a college or university may not have access to a Registered Dietitian. If this is the case, Student Accessibility Services should coordinate with the Food Service Manager to develop reasonable and appropriate accommodations within the dining setting.

## References

Food Allergy Research and Education. (n.d.). *Food Allergy Facts and Statistics for the US*. Retrieved from FARE: Food Allergy Research and Education: <https://www.foodallergy.org/file/facts-stats.pdf>

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