Technical Standards

Technical Standards are those physical, personal skills and attributes academic departments with graduate / professional programs expect students to acquire and display; they are, by their nature not academic or met solely through the acquisition of academic knowledge; however, some technical standards may be related to academic knowledge.

They are most widely applicable to professional / graduate programs as they are commonly associated with the ability to perform an occupational function or meet occupational expectations.

Expectations regarding Technical Standards can be applied at different phases of a student's graduate / professional program career i.e. at the application/admissions stage, when determining suitability for progression and at graduation. However, rightly, there may well be different levels of expectation as many programs will expect students to acquire or develop their Technical Standards skillset as a result of participation in the program. It would not be unreasonable for programs to establish a minimum level of competency in relation to Technical Standards as an indicator that the student will be sufficiently able to meet all of the standards at graduation. Indeed, a process of measuring an applicant's competencies in relation to the identified Technical Standards at the application/admissions stage can be effective in preventing problems later on. In addition, with particular reference to applicants with disabilities, such a process can help initiate an early consideration concerning the student's need for accommodations and status as otherwise or not-otherwise qualified.

History and Rationale for Technical Standards

The landmark Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, P.L. 101-336 (ADA or the Act), enacted on July 26, 1990, provides comprehensive civil rights protections to qualified individuals with disabilities. The ADA was modeled on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which marked the beginning of equal opportunity for persons with disabilities. As amended, Section 504 prohibits all programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance from discrimination against individuals with disabilities who are otherwise qualified to participate in those programs. With respect to post-secondary educational services, an otherwise qualified individual is a person with a disability who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the recipient's education program or activity.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title II and Title III are applicable to students with disabilities and their requests for accommodations. Title II covers state colleges and universities.
Given the intent of Section 504 and the ADA, the development of standards of practice for a profession, and the establishment of essential requirements to the student's program of study, or directly related to licensing requirements, is allowable under these laws. In applying Section 504 regulations, which require individuals to meet the academic and technical standards for admission, the Supreme Court has stated that physical qualifications could lawfully be considered technical standard(s) for admission.

Institutions may not, however, exclude an otherwise qualified applicant or student merely because of a disability, if the institution can reasonably modify its program or facilities to accommodate the applicant or student with a disability. However, an institution need not provide accommodations or modify its program of study or facilities if doing so (a) would fundamentally alter and/or (b) place an undue burden on the educational program or academic requirements and technical standards which are essential to the program of study.

Different technical standards will apply to different programs but below are some areas which are common and which may be refined or elaborated on as appropriate:

**Observation**

Requirements may include:

- gathering of accurate information
- integration / synthesis of information from multiple observations and/or modalities
- use of observations to inform on conclusions / actions

**Communication**

Requirements may include:

- efficient, effective, accurate and timely communication using a range of communication media as appropriate to the purpose and audience, for example in-person meetings, telephone, letters/memos, email, web-conferencing
- use of communication and sensory skills to convey and elicit information
- use of communication and sensory skills to facilitate decision making
- accurate perception of nonverbal information and cues in inter-personal encounters
Motor / Physical Skills

Requirements may include:

- sufficient motor function / physical strength and skills to execute physical functions and actions pertinent to the occupation
- fine and gross motor skills may be required along with functional use of the senses of touch and vision

Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative, and Quantitative Abilities

Requirements may include:

- ability to undertake effective research to build on professional expertise and inform decision making
- ability to synthesize complex information
- ability to exercise sound judgment with the benefit of this information and knowledge / skills?
- evaluate effectiveness of professional interventions.
- accurately follow course syllabi, assignment directions and any actions plan(s) developed by deans, faculty, administrators, or campus partner staff

Behavioral, Social and Personal Attributes

Requirements may include:

- emotional health and maturity
- establish rapport with stakeholders, clients and colleagues.
prompt attention to and completion of all responsibilities attendant to the occupation

• ability to nurture mature, sensitive, and effective relationships

• development of conflict resolution skills / ability to negotiate conflicting attitudes and opinions

• compassion, integrity, interpersonal skills, interest, and motivation?

• work cooperatively and with honesty and integrity with peers, faculty, and colleagues?

• integrate constructive criticism received in University, on-campus learning settings and off-campus learning settings

• correctly judge the limits of one's own competence and seek help from an appropriate source

• seek and effectively use help for medical and emotional problems that interfere with scholastic and/or professional performance

• show respect for all UNC - Chapel Hill personnel, as well as peers, clients, stakeholders and community members

• be free of the influence of illegal drugs and alcoholic beverages in classes and when engaged in any professional work / encounters

• deal with life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms, handle stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and by developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others

• seek and effectively use help for medical and emotional problems that interfere with scholastic and/or professional performance

• demonstrate appropriate personal hygiene habits
dress appropriately and in a manner befitting the profession

- possess maturity, self-discipline and sound judgment

**Flexibility / Adaptability**

Requirements may include:

- ability to adapt to changing situations in the short / immediate, medium and long term

- flexibility and the ability to function confidently and competently in the face of uncertainties

- show flexibility and be open to new ideas, and be willing and able to modify beliefs and practices as they relate to the professional area

**Professional Requirements**

Requirements may include:

- project an image of professionalism

- arrive (and be on time) for professional commitments, including classes and field experiences

- meet deadlines for course assignments and program requirements; a pattern of repeated absences, lateness, and failure to meet deadlines in courses or fieldwork is not acceptable

- demonstrate good attendance, integrity, honesty, conscientiousness in classes and when engaged in any professional work / encounters

- seek assistance and follow supervision in a timely manner, and accept and respond appropriately to constructive review of their work from supervisors?

- reflect on professional practice and accept constructive feedback in a professional manner, demonstrate the ability to act upon reasonable criticism.
demonstrate attitudes of integrity, responsibility, and tolerance?

- demonstrate honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing their own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials


- demonstrate the ability to understand the perspectives of others in the context of teaching, counseling, administration, etc. and the ability to separate personal and professional issues

- protect the confidentiality of client and stakeholder information appropriate to the profession unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law

**Accommodations and Technical Standards**

An academic department will require its students and graduates to become competent and compassionate practitioners in their field and meet the requirements of the intended occupation.

An academic department should not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities who apply for admission to the professional / graduate program. Otherwise, qualified individuals shall not be excluded from admission or participation in a professional / graduate program solely by reason of their disability or medical condition. An academic program, through ARS should provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation is one that does not require substantial program modification or lower academic standards. Reasonable accommodations can be provided in relation to academic requirements and to technical standards. Academic departments offering professional / graduate programs should be clear that technical standards are of equal importance with academic requirements and that it is necessary to fully explore the use of reasonable accommodations with candidates in both areas.

Should a candidate have or develop a condition that places the student in the position of not being able to meet a technical standard and no reasonable accommodation can be identified and this is such that it would jeopardize his or her ability to complete the program and pursue professional practice and licensure, the candidate may be denied admission.

Should an admitted student have or develop a condition that places the student in the position of not being able to meet a technical standard and no reasonable accommodation can be identified
and this is such that it would jeopardize his or her ability to complete the program and pursue professional practice and licensure, the student may be dismissed from the program.

Candidates for selection to a professional / graduate program should verify that they understand and can meet the technical standards established by a program or that they believe that, with certain reasonable accommodations, they can meet the standards.

It is the responsibility of a student with a disability (or a student who develops a disability) and who needs an accommodation to notify Accessibility Resources & Service of the disability, and to provide adequate documentation of the general nature and extent of the disability and the functional limitations to be accommodated. A student who has or develops any chronic disease or condition that may affect his or her ability to meet the technical standards will be expected to seek input and appropriate intervention from appropriate professionals.

**Accommodations for the Interview / Selection Process**

Graduate / professional programs have an obligation to make information about the program accessible and to make it known that there is a process to ask for reasonable accommodations in relation to the interview / selection process.

**The Following Statement Is Suggested**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for applicants with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities.

All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. Detailed information about the registration process is available at Student and Applicant Accommodations Policies [3]. For additional information, Contact ARS [4].

**If a Student's Ability to Meet the Technical Standards Changes**

If a student's ability to meet the standards changes while enrolled in the program, as deemed so by the program director or designee, a meeting with the student, program director, additional faculty member and a representative from Accessibility Resources & Service may be held to determine the best course of action. Accessibility Resources & Service can advise on appropriate documentation and evaluation of a student who states he/she could meet the program’s technical standards with accommodation.

The student must provide appropriate medical documentation of a qualified disability and properly request a reasonable accommodation pursuant to applicable laws. If the stated condition is a qualified disability, the University will confer with the student and appropriate professionals to identify possible reasonable accommodations and determine whether the student can meet the
technical standards with a reasonable accommodation. The accommodation shall not jeopardize personal safety, or result in a fundamental alteration of the educational experience to which the technical standards apply including all on-course experiences including 'in-class' activities and delivered via placements, externships and internships and all coursework and assessment activities deemed essential to graduation.

If you need any help with any aspect of identifying, specifying or determining accommodations in relation to technical standards please Contact ARS [4].

Source URL: https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/technical-standards

Links:
[4] https://ars.unc.edu/about-ars/contact-us