The University of the State of New York The State Education Department Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR)

In the Matter of	
Petitioner,	
-against-	
Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – V (ACCES-VR),	ocational Rehabilitation
Respondent.	

FINDINGS OF FACT AND DECISION

efore: Impartial Hearing Officer	
For Petitioner:	Petitioner, Pro Se
For ACCES-VR:	District Office Manager
Dates of Hearing:	and
Place:	



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

I am an Impartial Hearing Officer, approved by the State Education Department. I was appointed to this Hearing by Kevin G. Smith, Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services ("ACCES-VR" or "the Agency"). I was notified of the appointment by letter Notice of Hearing of Anne Sternbach, Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, dated

"the Participant"). (IHO Exhibit I).

The Impartial Hearing was scheduled to begin at 10:00 am on		
at the located at		
; it started at p.m., when appeared. The hearing resumed on		
was advised in the Notice of Hearing about the		
Client Assistance Program (CAP) and right to have someone represent did		
not have representation and stated that wished to proceed without counsel. (T. 13).		
A list of the exhibits offered into evidence is attached to the decision. At		
request, I left the record open until the second open until the se		
prior impartial hearing decision. (T. 147). I received the decision on		
and the Agency's written comments on that decision on a second at which		
time I considered the record closed. ¹ I received the transcripts on		

¹ The prior due process hearing decision and ACCES-VR comments to it are appended respectively as Participant Exhibit E and ACCES-VR Exhibit 21.

ISSUE



had a recurrence of and received a medical				
withdrawal from moved back to moved back to health in				
order,' and applied to stated that has completed most courses required				
for degree, including				
but still needs to complete				
Phase II, which is four six-credit courses over four semesters.				
waived certain course requirements for and including and and courses.				
stated that has to complete five three-credit courses before can take the				
entrance exam to the program. explained that received two failing				
grades in error: one was for an online course that did not attend, and the other was				
for a class which left after the teacher became ill. stated that received an 'F'				
from (which attended in because the school did not				
provide a note-taker for stated that was accepted at				
program, but they could not process admission because has an unpaid tuition				
debt at stated that is applying to another program for a				
degree, and will request agency assistance if accepted.				
because some tuition has not been paid. was involved in an incident with				
Assistant Director of Accommodations during which was injured, and				
regarding which has instituted federal and state administrative complaints. This				
affected ability to receive accommodations. testified that was not				
uncooperative with agency staff, and that has medical issues, which caused to				
miss some appointments at the agency. stated that was demanding,				



ACCES-VR's POSITION











with the goal of becoming a registered or The Agency denied request to transfer case to its and in requested a due process hearing. On the impartial hearing officer ordered the Agency to transfer file to its office, assign a vocational counselor there to develop an IPE with the vocational goal of and fund completion of as degree in or a comparable at program. (Participant Exhibit E; ACCES-VR Exhibit 17). 4. Pursuant to the due process hearing decision, third case was transferred the case was closed in to the Agency's 5. On signed the Agency's College Fact Sheet, which outlines the Agency's policy and requirements regarding college or university training. (ACCES-VR Exhibit 20). with Agency assistance during the academic 6. attended transcript indicates that in both the year. The and semesters, registered for two 3-credit courses, and passed the courses, earning credits in two semesters. also transferred credits from programs previously (ACCES-VR Exhibit 13). attended at current case was opened in the 7. office in was assigned to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor missed first appointment with They met on After made repeated requests for information from stated 'this is not working out' and requested a new counselor. The request was denied, and a team consisting of



12. record indicates that on **second and the second academic probation**, and that in **second academic for two 3-credit courses and did** not earn any credits. (ACCES-VR Exhibit 13).

13. Subsequent to the due process request and first day of the instant hearing,

sent a letter regarding possible Agency funding for to attend during Spring, 2018, provided that timely meet with **sectors** and provide , a Spring **course** registration and schedule, and itemized bill, and financial aid information. (Participant Exhibit A, p. 1).

LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides for a variety of services to assist persons with disabilities to achieve an employment outcome and may include training at the college level. 29 U.S.C. § 701, et seq.

ACCES-VR Policy 100.00 Participant Involvement Policy (July, 2017), stresses the importance of participants "to be as independent as they desire in designing and fulfilling their individualized plans for employment (IPE)." <u>See Goldstein v. VESID</u>, 199 A.D.2d 766, 769, 605 N.Y.S.2d 425, 427 (3d Dep't 1993). However, while the policy encourages involvement, it does not mean that participants "have complete control over their programs. Vocational rehabilitation counselors must review, consider and approve all IPEs. Counselors will apply their professional judgment, vocational rehabilitation expertise, applicable laws, regulations, and policies, sound planning considerations, and responsible use of public funds. Services must lead to employment goals that are feasible, timely and attainable within the fiscal constraints of the program." (ACCES-VR Exhibit 16). IPEs must be reviewed regularly, and the counselor must determine if the

participant is making adequate progress towards the goal. (ACCES-VR Policy 206.00; ACCES-VR Exhibit 3)

ACCES-VR Policy 405.00 College and University Training Policy (April, 2009) states that the participant is expected to maintain satisfactory academic performance necessary to meet degree requirements within agreed the upon time frames. The counselor must review grade transcripts and meet with the participant to assess continuing progress towards an academic major consistent with the employment goal. Repeated inability to meet academic performance standards will result in review of the IPE and employment goal. Participants are expected to follow usual timeframes for achieving a two or four year degree, i.e. four semesters for an AAS degree; however, the Agency may provide funding for two additional semesters for an AAS program. This includes part-time training. The timeframes are cumulative, and include changes in school, major, and case re-opening. Participants are required to inform their counselor immediately before dropping any agreed upon courses. If a participant has less than 12 credits for a semester, the semester will be considered part-time training subject to specific rules: if training is initiated on a part-time basis, within two years the participant should have achieved the vocational goal or entered into full-time training. If dropping a course reduces the number of credits to below the full-time course load, the semester must be counted as part-time, and the maximum on part-time training applied. (ACCES-VR Exhibit 4).

DECISION

After reviewing the facts, policies, regulations, and law relating to this matter, I find that request for a different counselor should be denied, and that has not



documentation. All this was done notwithstanding missed appointments, repeated lateness, and continued failure to timely provide required information such as grades, transcripts and proof of courses taken. The record indicates that it was who 'did not listen' to the Agency counselors' repeated requests for required information, and was unable or unwilling to timely comply with these requests. All the Agency requests at issue (grades, transcripts, course programs, and financial information) were reasonable and required pursuant to Agency policy regarding funding of higher education.

I find that the Agency should not be required to continue to fund efforts to become an , because failed to make satisfactory progress: in the four semesters that registered at failed to make satisfactory progress: in the four semesters which is the usual minimum for one semester. admitted that has to complete more than one full semester of college before is even eligible to take the entrance exam for the clinical program, which will then require several more semesters. The students records produced in evidence reflect many dropped and/or withdrawn courses, and some failing grades. offered many excuses for the lack of progress: health issues, incompetent instructors, and incidents at school. In has a history of serious health issues and family responsibilities, which had an unavoidable adverse impact upon education. However, many of these issues pre-date the school years in question here, and there is little documentation of issues directly affecting these years.

undocumented excuses are insufficient to explain failure to attend and complete courses and attain satisfactory grades over an extended period of time. I note that testimony and statements to the counselors is replete with misrepresentations and contradictions: first stated that was 'almost done' with goal, but as noted above, is till more than one full semester away from finishing the program that is pre-requisite to the clinical program; the student records submitted in evidence do not support claim to have completed specific courses (see T. 234-236), none of which appear on the records; told would take courses in to 'make up' for incomplete courses from but the records I do not credit do not reflect any courses taken in statement that grades for were not available by

My decision regarding the Agency's responsibility to continue sponsoring college education is based upon lack of satisfactory progress, but I will address a 'timing' issue raised at the hearing. I do not agree with the Agency's argument that it does not have to sponsor an program for more than three years – the policy (405.00) is that the Agency will sponsor up to six semesters for an program, but does not indicate that these must be **consecutive** semesters, so that a participant who for some reason did not attend school for one semester could take more than three years to complete six semesters. However, the documentary evidence indicates that achieved less than 12 credits for each of the semesters attended semesters Agency policy dictates that these must be considered part-time training, and that if the IPE goal is not attained within two years of such training, the participant must enter a full-time program. The Agency would not be required to continue to sponsor a part-time program.

Dated:

Impartial Hearing Officer

APPEAL NOTICE

Please take notice that this is a final decision. If you disagree with the decision, you may seek judicial review through action in a New York State or United States District Court of competent jurisdiction.

LIST OF WITNESSES



List of Exhibits admitted into Evidence:

<u>IHO:</u>

- I. Notice of Hearing
- II. Due Process Request

Participant:

- A. (i) Letter from Agency to Participant
 - (ii) Income Verification Report
 - (iii) Letter from to Participant
 - (iv) Bursar Statement
 - (v) Manage Service Indicators
 - (vi) Letter from to Participant
- B. Email: to Participant
- C. Letter: College to Participant
- D. Letter: Disability Rights NY to Participant
- E. Due Process Hearing Decision

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ACCES-VR:

1. 2. Case Note – ACCES-VR Policy 206.00 re: IPE February, 3. 4. ACCES-VR Policy 405.00re: College and University Training April, 5. (a) **AAS Degree** (b) College Transcript and Grade Reports Various Dates (c) Letter: University to ACCES-VR (d) Letter: ACCES-VR to Participant (e) University Statement re: Participant Attendance and Credits University Transcript (f) Transcript (g) 6. University Transcript

7.	IPE	
8.	Federal Student Aid Statement	
9.	ACCES-VR Contribution Calculation	
	Worksheet	
10.	Schedule	Spring
11.	IPE Change	
12.	Case Note –	
13.	Transcript	
14.	Attendance Policy and	
	Grading System	Undated
15.	Policy Statements	Undated
16.	ACCES-VR Policy 100.00 re:	
	Participant Involvement	
17.	Statement re: Participant's Agency Cases	
18.	Case Note:	
19.	ACCES-VR Payment Status	
20.	ACCES-VR College Fact Sheet	
21.	ACCES-VR Comments to Prior	
	Due Process Hearing Decision	Undated