



Accessibility Resource Center
~Ensuring Access, Supporting Success~

CONCUSSION GUIDELINES: RETURN-TO-LEARN

The NCAA mandates that colleges and universities implement a concussion management plan, which is primarily managed by the Athletics division. It is essential to the health and well-being of students to interweave a “Return-to-Learn” component. Return-to-learn is a parallel concept to return-to-play, which outlines the diagnosis and management of athletic related concussions. The NCAA states that the foundation of return-to-learn includes:

- Return-to-learn should be managed in a stepwise program that fits the needs of the individual.
- Return-to-learn guidelines assume that both physical and cognitive activities require brain energy utilization, and they similarly assume that such brain energy is not available for physical and cognitive exertion because of the concussion-induced brain energy crisis.
- Return-to-learn recommendations are based on consensus statements, with a paucity of evidence-based data to correlate with such consensus recommendations.
- Return-to-learn recommendations should be made within the context of a multi-disciplinary team that includes physicians, athletic trainers, coaches and administrators.
- Like return-to-play, it is not always easy to provide prescriptive recommendations for return-to-learn because the student-athlete may appear physically normal but is unable to perform at his/her expected baseline due to concussive symptomatology.

“The hallmark of return-to-learn is cognitive rest immediately following concussion, just as the hallmark of return-to-play is physical rest. Cognitive rest means avoiding potential cognitive stressors such as school work, video games, reading, texting and watching television. The rationale for cognitive rest is that the brain is experiencing an energy crisis, and providing both physical and cognitive rest allows the brain to heal more quickly.

As with return-to-play, the first step of return-to-learn is relative physical and cognitive rest. Relative cognitive rest involves minimizing potential cognitive stressors, such as school work, video games, reading, texting and watching television. For the college student-athlete, consideration should be given to avoiding the classroom for at least the same day as the sport-related concussion.”

The Thiel College Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) will address the needs of students with concussions or mild traumatic brain injury, as this medical diagnosis qualifies as a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It should be noted that depending upon the severity of the injury, a concussed student may require long-term assistance through the ARC. The ARC will consult all available medical documentation, the student, and the trainer (when necessary) to develop an individualized return-to-learn plan. The following academic accommodations are the most frequently recommended and utilized for students experiencing symptoms of concussion. Depending upon the individual needs of the student, some or all of the following may be included in an accommodation plan:

- Excused absence from class on the day of the injury.
- Delay exams until symptoms have subsided.
- Extra time for testing.
- Testing in a quiet environment.
- Assignments and testing in paper format (versus computer based).
- Allow student to put his/her/their head down in class without penalty.
- Allow student extra time to complete and turn in assignments.
- Notetaker to enhance student's own notes.

It is the responsibility of the student to contact the Accessibility Resource Center – either in person, by e-mail or by telephone. An appointment will then be scheduled with the Coordinator of the ARC, Erin Bain, and a plan for academic accommodations will be formulated. The student is responsible for following all ARC policies and procedures, including discussing the “Confidential Academic Accommodation Letter” with all appropriate faculty. A student experiencing symptoms of a concussion will receive accommodations on a time-limited basis and must report his/her/their full recovery status to the ARC so that accommodations can be concluded.

Students have the right to exercise self-determination and deny the provision of academic accommodations.

Additional information about concussion symptoms, effects on cognition return-to-learn, can be accessed on the following websites:

<https://www.ue.org/uploadedFiles/RRB%20Concussion%20and%20Return%20to%20Learn.pdf>

<http://www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety/concussion-guidelines>