

YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

Applying to College for Students with Disabilities



The decision on whether or not to disclose a disability upon application to a college is a personal decision. Colleges are prohibited from discriminating against students with disabilities in college admissions and cannot limit the number of students with disabilities admitted to the college. Generally speaking, if a student has utilized supportive services throughout high school, it may be advantageous to disclose this information. The college will receive an authentic picture of the student and both parties will be better able to assess if this is a good fit. Again, this is a personal choice; the high school should not disclose this information without student and parent consent. There are several reasons why disclosure can assist a student. In doing so, the student will get a clear picture of what services are available at the campus and if their needs can be met. This disclosure may help explain inconsistencies on the transcript or on admissions exams. Applicants may also want to share how this disability has or has not affected them in their life and how they have dealt with this adversity. Disclosing a disability does not mean that a student is assured that they will gain admission if they do not meet certain standard admission requirements.

If a student or parent is uncomfortable with sharing this information upon application, they may choose to disclose this information after acceptance. The student or parent should contact the Office of Special Services on the campus and make an appointment to speak with a counselor. They should ask about the documentation they would need to bring to this meeting. All documentation should be current, preferably completed within the last three years. The office may ask for a copy of the 504 plan, IEP, declassified student document and/or the most recent psycho-educational evaluation completed by the school psychologist at the high school. A written evaluation or report by a private physician or evaluation center may be necessary as well. Make an appointment to review these documents and be prepared to discuss the educational needs. The student should be able to identify the nature of the disability and how it impacts their performance in the classroom and on assessments. Self-advocacy is a key element to success on the college campus, and even more so, for a student with a disability. The student needs to identify what services are necessary for them to be successful on the campus and why they are needed.

The IEP utilized in high school falls under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Services for students at the college level are provided under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Although these laws do not provide a stipulation for IEP's, this document will be utilized to determine services needed at the college level. At the high school level, the IEP and 504 plan are mandated to be followed as the student has a right to an education paid for by the state while a college education is considered a privilege.

Parents of students with disabilities can assist their child by helping them increase independent living skills before they attend college. Let the high school age child make their own appointments, do their own laundry and manage a checking account and debit/credit card with supervision. Encourage them to work after school and become involved in community service experiences to develop improvement in time management and communication skills. Let the student advocate for their needs in the high school setting as much as possible. Keep in mind that the parent will not be there with them on a daily basis when they go to college. In fact, the Buckley Amendment requires that the student give written permission for the college staff to speak to their parent. While parents are actively involved in planning at the high school level, students in college are considered adults and must advocate for themselves. Strengthening these skills before they go will benefit them immensely. Make sure that the child is the one that is ready to go to college and wants to go; a highly motivated student can overcome most obstacles. A positive attitude, adaptability, determination and a commitment to obtain a college degree are great contributors to success.

It is important to visit the college before admission and investigate what types of supportive services are on campus. Inquire about summer programs that may be of great benefit for students with disabilities. Students that enroll in these programs spend several weeks during the summer before freshman year to become acclimated to the campus while completing college preparatory courses. This can be of paramount importance for many students.

There are different levels of support on the college campus:

Highly Structured Programs for Students with Disabilities: These programs provide comprehensive supportive services. The decision for entrance to these programs is made by the Office of Special Services and requires full documentation as well as a contract for services and attendance. There may be an additional fee for this type of program.

Coordinated Services: These services are not mandatory and no contract is signed as the student voluntarily requests the services needed. The Office of Special Services may also coordinate this program.

Support Services: Most colleges provide supportive programs to assist students with disabilities but these programs vary in structure from college to college. It is beneficial to investigate the learning center services and staff to see if they are able to meet the needs of the student. These services may not be affiliated with the Office of Special Services. Other smaller and more personal colleges that have no specific program may meet the needs of the student due to involved and accessible faculty.

Accommodations provided at the college level may involve the following:

Extended time for testing on exams

Additional time to complete coursework

Use of audio books and note taking assistance

Assistance for those with auditory or visual disabilities

A scribe for testing with a separate setting

Study skills, note taking and time management instruction

Modifications in the instruction of courses

Course substitutions

Tutoring services

Accommodations at the college level must be individualized and are provided to create a level playing field, but the success of such accommodations and programs are up to the student. It is expected that the student will discuss their needs with their professor. Accommodations at the high school level are created to ensure student success; at the college level, reasonable accommodations are created to ensure that academic requirements are not discriminatory.

Websites/Books:

www.collegeacademicsupport.com

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

www.collegexpress.com

www.ldonline.org

K & W Guide to College Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders

Learning Outside the Lines – Jonathan Mooney, David Cole & Edward Hallowell

Colleges that Change Lives – Loren Pope

Survival Guide for College Students with ADHD or LD – Kathleen Nadeau

7 Steps to Success: High School to College Transition for Students with Disabilities – Elizabeth Hamblet

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