

**TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE:  
A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS WITH ALTERNATIVE  
LEARNING STYLES**



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## **The College Search for Students with Disabilities**

Transitioning to college is often an exciting, yet overwhelming experience for many high school students and even more so for a student with learning needs. As you begin your college search, there are several factors to be aware of when looking to seek accommodations in higher education. It is never too early to begin making the preparations for this part of your life.

Like many other students looking to go to college, it is important to begin researching. Ask yourself:

- What are my career aspirations?
- What major am I really interested in?
- Do I want to go to a two-year, four-year or technical college?
- Do I want to go to a larger school or a smaller one?
- Do I want to go away to school and dorm, or do I want to commute?
- What are the academic requirements of specific institutions?
- What kinds of activities or opportunities does each school offer?
- What are the scholarships/financial aid that may be available?

You will also need to ask yourself a second set of questions:

- Do I want to disclose that I have a disability?
- What is the difference between high school and college for a student with a disability?
- What kinds of services does the college offer?
- What is needed to get accommodations?
- What should I be doing right now to prepare?

### **Where to Start**

Begin educating yourself on the differences between high school and college. Having accommodations in high school does NOT mean that you will necessarily have accommodations or modifications in college.

- Requesting services and utilizing them, is now completely up to the student. Each student must be their own advocate in seeking out and requesting the necessary accommodations and services.
- Obtaining the appropriate documentation for college is now up to the student. Each college has a certain level of criteria for acceptable documentation. Contact the appropriate office of each college to find out what is needed.
- Deciding what courses you will need to take is now up to the student. An adviser will usually be assigned to each student to assist in the planning of the necessary courses for their major, but the student is now in charge of what courses they want to take.

## **The College Search Process**

As you begin to research and visit colleges, it is essential to make a stop at the Student Support Office or Office of Disability Services (colleges may have a different name for this office) to get a better understanding of the services and/or programs that the college offers.

### **Programs vs. Support Services**

*Support services* are the resources available at no cost for students with disabilities. Support services include core accommodations, such as extended testing time. By law, colleges must provide accommodations for eligible students. Other examples of accommodations include sign language interpreters, course materials in accessible formats, accessible parking and classrooms.

*Programs* are specifically designed for students with disabilities and provide more in-depth services and accommodations. The most common types of programs are for students with Learning Disabilities, ADHD and Autism, among others. These programs sometimes have costs in addition to tuition. These programs may provide one-on-one tutoring, mentoring, and/or advisement with a learning specialist.

Not all colleges have programs, but all colleges must provide accommodations and support services to eligible students.

### **Questions for the Student Support Center**

- What are the eligibility requirements to receive accommodations/services through the Office of Disability Services?
- How many students are served by the ODS each semester at the college?
- What types of accommodations are available to students through your office?
- Are there fees associated with any services that are provided to students?
- What types of general academic support services are provided to students at the college?
- What types of technological assistance is available at the college?
- How does the ODS work with the faculty?
- How many courses do students take in a semester at the college to constitute being full-time? Is a reduced course load an option if needed?
- Are course substitutions granted to meet the academic requirements if needed?
- Is information available regarding the graduation/retention rate of the students that are served by the ODS at the college?
- What documentation is required to become eligible to receive accommodations and services through the Office of Disability Support Services?
- Based on the disability, are there specific evaluations or test results that need to be submitted to become eligible to receive services?
- How current should the documentation be?
- What is the process that is used to review the documentation and to determine eligibility?
- How many staff members are there in the Office of Disability Support Services? What are the main roles of the staff members?
- Are there any unique or additional services offered through the Office of Disability Support Services that students seem to find helpful?
- Does the Office of Disability Support Services offer a place for students to take exams or to study (i.e. a distraction reduced environment or a place to finish exams when extra time is needed)?

- If I am a student at the college, who would be my primary contact person in the Office of Disability Services?
- Are there services provided to assist freshmen students with the transition from high school to college?
- How are professors at the college notified about the academic accommodations for students with disabilities? What provisions are in place in case an issue occurs with receiving accommodations?
- What types of housing options or housing accommodations are available on campus?
- What types of resources are available on the campus that may be helpful to me (i.e. health center, counseling services...)? Are there fees for any of the on-campus services?
- What types of community resources are near the college that may be helpful for me (i.e. medical facilities, psychological services, consultants, specialists...)? Is the Office of Disability Support Services connected with any of these resources?
- Are there any considerations that students with disabilities should know about regarding the admission process at the college?

### **How to Prepare**

- Begin taking an active role in your IEP meetings.
- Learn about how your disability affects your learning and how you learn best.
- Practice speaking about your disability, how it affects you and explaining what your needs are to others.
- Start to research colleges online and go to their office for disability services for information on what the college provides and who you can contact for further information.
- Know that you are the best advocate for your needs.

# Finding Success in College

## Student Roles and Responsibilities in College

- Advocate for his/her needs.
- Self-identify with the appropriate office at the college.
- Formally request accommodations of the institution and participate in the process of determining which accommodations are successful.
- Provide appropriate documentation.
- Speak with faculty members about their needs.
- Adhere to the college's rules in regards to testing accommodations, (e.g., if there is a time requirement to set-up testing accommodations, etc.).
- Become active in their college career.

## Classroom Preparation/Etiquette

- Be on time to every class.
- Come prepared; bring something to write with, paper, textbook and any assignments.
- Turn off all unnecessary devices (e.g., your cell phone, iPod, etc.).
- Participate in all classroom discussions.
- If you are late, speak with your instructor after class.
- If you will be absent, e-mail your instructor.
- Get the phone number of at least two people in your class that you can contact if you miss something.

## Time Management

- Invest in a planner or organizer.
- Write down all your assignments, when things are due and exam dates into your planner or organizer.
- Set aside time each day to read, study and complete homework assignments.
- Choose a place to study that is distraction free.
- Set deadlines for yourself and stick to them.
- Don't procrastinate, be proactive.
- Keep all class syllabi with all your notes and assignments for class.

## Self-Advocacy

Important skill that a student with a disability must possess is self-advocacy. Start to:

- Know what your disability is and how it affects you – be as specific as possible.
- Be able to talk with others about what your disability is and what your needs are.
- Identify your strengths, weaknesses and needs.
- Know how you learn best and what study techniques work best for you.
- Know our rights and responsibilities and the institution's policies and procedures.

### **Working with Professors**

Once you have met with the Student Support Center, the decision will be yours to provide professors with your disability accommodation letter(s).

A large part of self-advocacy is learning how to speak about what your needs are. To better assist you in speaking with your professors, here are several suggestions to help you get started.

Carefully read over your syllabi and make sure you are clear on all the course requirements.

Next you can either:

- Speak with your professor after class to make an appointment
- Email your professor to set up a meeting
- Visit your professor when they have office hours

### **When Speaking with Your Professor**

You may feel nervous about speaking with a professor for the first time concerning your disability accommodations, but all professors are open to helping you succeed in college. You should understand what accommodations you will need. How they assist you in learning and know what areas you excel in. Once you answer these questions, begin practicing what you might say:

- Provide them with the sealed letter from the Student Support Center. Let them know that you are registered with the office and what accommodations you will need for their class.
- Mention the areas of that particular class that you are strong in and the ways that your accommodations will assist you.
- Discuss the procedure for requesting certain accommodations.
- Finally, thank the professor for meeting with you and tell them you appreciate the time they spent with you.

## ACCES-VR

The Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation is part of the New York State Education Department. Their purpose is to help people with disabilities, who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, find and keep suitable employment. Everything they do is either to determine if you are eligible for services, or to help you develop and reach an employment goal.

There are four things that are needed to determine eligibility:

1. Individual has a disability
2. The disability creates an impediment to employment
3. The individual can benefit from rehabilitation services
4. Vocational rehabilitation services are required to achieve employment

While you are still in high school, you may set up a meeting to take place at your high school. Your parent or guardian will be invited to participate. Please speak to your counselor about setting up this meeting. At the meeting, our ACCES-VR counselor will ask you about your future goals and plans and discuss what is needed to help you reach these goals. You can meet with your ACCES-VR counselor as often as you need. Once you leave high school, the meetings will take place at the ACCES-VR district office in Garden City or in a community location. Everything ACCES-VR does is directed towards helping you achieve and maintain employment.

Examples of types of services ACCES-VR provides include:

- Vocational counseling
- Assessment for career planning
- Assessment for assistive technology
- Purchase of assistive technology
- Funding towards the cost of education or training after high school
- Assistance with some transportation costs
- Funding for academic support services (note taker, tutors)
- Job readiness and job placement services to help you get and keep a job (may include job coaching)

Many of the services that ACCES-VR provides are regardless of family income; however, some services are based on financial need.

## **Long Island Colleges with Programs for Students with Disabilities**

All colleges and universities have an office dedicated to assist students with disabilities navigate this new academic environment and help request accommodations when needed. Please reach out to the office for students with disabilities at the colleges and universities you are interested in. Most importantly, once you decided what school you will be attending, you need to reach out to this office and identify yourself as a student with a disability.

As described on page 3 of this booklet, some schools offer extensive programs which offer students additional support in college.

### **Examples of Specialized Programs for Students with Disabilities**

Adelphi University Bridges Program  
University of Arizona SALT Program  
Curry College PAL  
Dean College Academic Coaching and Strive4Success  
Hofstra University PALS Program  
Landmark College  
LIU Post Academic Resource Program (ARP)  
Marist College Learning Support Program  
Mitchell College Thames Program  
Nassau Community College Aspires Program  
Nassau Community College Achilles Project  
NYIT VIP Program  
St. Joseph's College PASS Program