Services for Students with Disabilities: The College Search
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Documentation of a Disability

- Various colleges define what specific documentation is required. Usually, they require an ER (completed within the last three years) and IEP.
- Check with the college of choice and discuss any updating of your documentation when you are developing your Transition Plan.

IDEA, Section 504, and ADA – Differences

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA
- Guarantees a free appropriate public education and governs the provision of special education services to students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools.
- The school is responsible for identifying students with disabilities, for providing all necessary assessments, and for monitoring the provision of special education services.
- The special education services are described in detail in the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Transitions Plan (ITP). These services can significantly alter the standard high school academic program.
- IDEA does not apply to higher education.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Colleges and universities do not offer “special” education. Under Section 504 and ADA, they are prohibited from discriminating against a person because of a disability.
- Institutions must provide reasonable modifications, accommodations, or auxiliary aids which will enable qualified students to have access to, participate in, and benefit from the full range of educational programs and activities which are offered to all students.
- Accommodations to be provided are made on an individualized basis and the school has the ability to select the specific aid or service it provides, as long as it is effective.
- Postsecondary institutions are not required to design special academic programs for students with disabilities. They are required to provide accommodative services so that qualified students with disabilities will have equal access to the regular academic program. After equal access is provided, it is everyone’s own responsibility to do well or not do well.
- Section 504 and ADA do not require postsecondary institutions to alter their requirements for admissions or graduation.
Applying to College

Awareness of Strengths

- Students with learning disabilities need to have an accurate idea of strengths they have to offer colleges as well as the academic requirements and admission procedures of the institutions to which they may plan to apply.

Disclosing the Disability

- Colleges and universities **may not require** disclosure of disabilities in the admissions process; however, students who decide to disclose their disability should begin the college application process as early as possible to allow the school adequate time to review documentation of the learning disability and to plan for necessary accommodations.

- Colleges/universities attempting to overcome past discrimination or wishing to overcome the effects of limited participation by students with disabilities may **invite** applicants for admission to indicate the existence of a disability on the application form, but may not require disclosure.

- **Disclosure of a learning disability may not be used by colleges and universities as a basis for denying admission.** The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (RA) (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) protect the civil rights of people with disabilities and require postsecondary institutions to provide reasonable, timely, and effective accommodative services. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) protects the confidentiality of student records.

- Students with disabilities, like all other prospective applicants, **must meet the admissions criteria** established by the college/university. The schools are not required to alter admissions requirements or standards.

- REMEMBER: If the college is not aware of the disability, the college would not be required to provide accommodations.

Some reasons why it may be helpful to disclose a Disability

- By disclosing the disability, it may explain possible discrepancies within various pieces of admissions documents. For example, a student with a learning disability may present a high school transcript with excellent grades but low SAT scores. Such discrepancies are typical of a student with a learning disability.

- If an admissions committee is not aware that such discrepant information is being presented by a student with a learning disability, admission may be denied.

- Disclosing does not guarantee admission; however, it can provide the admissions committee with additional insights.
How to disclose the Disability

- This can be accomplished in an essay, in the letters of recommendation, or in a separate letter included with the college application.
- If you choose to write a letter, include the following: a statement that you have a disability, which admission requirements you feel it affects and how, and what alternative or additional information you would like to have considered. Also provide official documentation of the disability by a professional.
- If you choose to explain the disability in an essay: explain the disability and how it accounts for discrepancies in the academic record, or convey an understanding of the disability, how academic strengths and weaknesses mesh with interests in courses and fields of study, or state plans for managing the disability at the college level and describe how they would work with the Office of Disability Services, noting their understanding of student responsibilities in making his/her college career successful.
- Different colleges have different ways of considering this information. Check with the disability services office or the admissions office about the procedures at the schools you are interested in.
- Unless the college/university directs you otherwise, send the specific information about the disability (ER and IEP) directly to the Disabilities Office with a separate cover letter. You should contact each school’s Disabilities Office to find out who the contact person is.

Why should I disclose the Disability?

- A disability has influenced your approach to learning, your determination, and many other things in your life. What you have learned about yourself and how you have dealt with your disability may say volumes about the kind of student you are.
- If you are below a minimum standard (or somewhere below average) requesting colleges to consider additional or alternative information is reasonable. The goal is to have the college consider a substitute measure or to take additional information into consideration.

What about Attention Deficit Disorder?

- The RA and the ADA prohibit discrimination against otherwise qualified students with ADD that substantially limits a major life activity such as learning. The ADA applies generally to public and private colleges, regardless of whether or not they receive federal funds.
- Students with ADD may choose if and when to disclose their disability. If admission and/or test accommodations are not needed, a student may elect to disclose the disability after admission.
Tips to Prepare for College

- Internships
- Summer pre-college programs for students with learning disabilities (check with schools of choice to see if this is offered)
- Visit campuses, particularly when classes are in session
- Talk with the Disability Support Services Office

Choosing a College

What you should be looking for in a college

- How are the academic programs structured?
- What general support services (tutoring, orientation courses, writing labs, technological support, etc.) are offered?
- What does the campus look and feel like?
- What is the typical class size for an introductory course?
- How are the disability services organized?

Other questions to ask during the college search

- See the attached list of 25 questions (attained from Block Educational Consulting, Columbus, Ohio).

What colleges typically look for in prospective students

- 4 units of English
- 3 units of Math (Geometry, Algebra I, Algebra II)
- 3 units of Science (including labs)
- 2 units of Foreign Language
- 3 units of Social Studies
- 1 unit of Fine or Practical Arts
- 2 Units of Health and PE
- Grade Point Average
- Class Rank
- SAT/ACT Scores

Considering Community College

Factors that influence the Community College Choice

- Location – located within the county
- Cost – well below that of a four year public or private institution. In addition, a variety of financial resources may be available.
- Open Enrollment – accept high school degree or GED.
- Entrance Exam – many degree programs do not require standardized entrance exams such as SAT or ACT. They usually have a placement test
for entering students, which can be taken with accommodations. It measures skill level in math, reading, and English.

- **Programs of Study** – offer a wide variety of degree programs from technical programs to transfer programs.

- **Degrees** - The associate degree can be technical in nature and lead to immediate employment or academic in nature and satisfy the basic education requirements to transfer to a four-year institution to continue working toward a baccalaureate degree. DCCC has relationships with a variety of four-year colleges and universities in which a student can transfer.

- **Class Size** – classes usually average 20-40 which increases the possibility for individualized attention.

- **Course Offerings** – Variety of courses, times and locations.

- **Length of Program** – majority of programs are two years in length.

- **Support Services** – services may include financial aid support, placement and career services, student groups/clubs, athletics (varsity and intramural), library services, counseling and advising services, health services, academic support, tutoring, and disability services.

- **Disability Services** – a variety of support services are available to students with disabilities. The services should be investigated by the student since disability service staff can work closely with the student. Students MUST self-identify to the Disability Service Department and services provided are based on diagnostic information detailing the student’s disability.

- **Anne Binder** – DCCC contact for Students with Disabilities – (610) 325-2748.

**State Universities**

- [www.passhe.edu](http://www.passhe.edu) – The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education – this website will give you detailed information of all the PA State Universities.

- You can download their Services for Students with Disabilities – each state school’s accommodations are listed in detail

**Once you are accepted to a college/university**

**Self-Advocacy**

- The student holds the responsibility for self-identification and self-advocacy. The student should know their particular learning disability, academic strengths and weaknesses, and individual learning style.

- Need to describe their academic needs.

- College students have control over who knows about their disability and how to arrange accommodations; they will also be responsible to make those arrangements.
Examples of Accommodative Services (Learning Disabilities)
- Books on tape
- Extended time to complete exams (time and a half)
- Using a computer to write exams/papers
- Test taking in a quiet place
- Course waivers (if a course is essential to the student’s course of study or degree, it is unlikely that a waiver or substitution will be granted).

Examples of Accommodative Services (Attention Deficit Disorder)
- Structure in the class
- Simplify/repeat instructions as needed orally and in writing
- Frequent feedback from faculty
- In courses: priority registration, reduced course load, taped texts, tape recorders, course modifications, tailoring assignments, modified texts, priority seating, study guide, quiet room.
- Course substitutions (if possible)
- Encourage the use of support groups and counselors

Other important information on Accommodations
- Colleges must provide legally required services at no additional charge to a student with a disability.
- Generally, the college must provide services necessary to make courses, examinations and activities accessible to the student, but is not required to provide remedial services to improve the skill level of the student in the area of his/her disability.
- Colleges may charge supplemental fees for services that are over and above legal requirements. (Example, a fee may be charged for the services of a remedial reading tutor).

Applying for Accommodations on College Board tests

Special needs students planning to take college admissions tests such as the PSAT or SAT should request accommodations early in their high school career. Accommodations need only be requested once. Once approved, a student remains eligible for accommodations through graduation. Since the approval process takes 5 – 7 weeks, it is best to apply well before registration deadlines, preferably by the end of freshman year.

How to request accommodations:
- In most cases, students work with the school counselor to request accommodations online. The student and parent should sign a downloadable consent form and give it to the counselor to begin the process.
Students requesting accommodations without involving the school may submit a paper Student Eligibility Form (available for download) directly to the College Board.

**Documentation of Disability:**
The presence of a disability does not necessarily mean that the student will qualify for accommodations on College Board tests. Inclusion of an accommodation on an IEP or 504 Plan does not automatically qualify a student for the same accommodations on College Board tests. The counselor/SSD Coordinator must verify that available documentation meets College Board criteria. Many requests automatically require additional documentation. For example, a classification of “other health impaired”, the absence of a current IEP, or a request for 100% extra time always require documentation.

**Guidelines for Documentation:**
- **Test scores** for nonphysical disabilities must include results from both a cognitive ability test and a nationally normed, individually-administered achievement test, including scaled scores and grades for all subtests. Age/grade equivalents and percentiles are not sufficient. The WRAT, WASI, Nelson-Denny, and Kauffman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) alone are not sufficient. Test scores must be current within five years.
- **Psycho-Educational Evaluation:** Submit the most recent evaluation including a rationale for each of the requested accommodations and indication of how the accommodation is being used at school (the accommodation must have been used in the past four months).
- **Extended time:** When extended time is requested, applicants are encouraged to submit scores from both timed and untimed tests. Consideration should be given to whether extra breaks, small group testing, or large block answer sheets might be more appropriate.
- **Computers:** (available for essay questions only, without spell-check) Requests for computers must include documentation of a diagnosed disability that substantially impacts written expression skills. For example, in the case of dysgraphia, the student must provide documentation of a fine motor problem and an academic test of written language.
- **Physical and/or Psychiatric Disabilities:** Documentation must include a summary of assessment procedures and instruments used to make the diagnosis, a narrative summary of evaluation results, and description of how the disability impacts testing. Except in rare situations, a medical note cannot substitute for comprehensive testing. Documentation for psychiatric disabilities must be current within one year.
Visual Disabilities: Documentation should include the student’s visual measurements and results from the most recent eye examination.

ADD/ADHD – documentation must include the most recent cognitive and academic tests results

For more information, visit the College Board website at www.collegeboard.org

There are four major categories for testing accommodations:

- **Presentation** (e.g., large print; reader; Braille; Braille device for written responses; visual magnification; audio amplification; audiocassette; sign/oral presentations).

- **Responding** (e.g., verbal/dictated to scribe; tape recorder; computer without grammar/cut & paste features; large block answer sheet).

- **Timing/scheduling** (e.g., frequent breaks; extended time; multiple day; specified time of day).

- **Setting** (e.g., small group setting; private room; special lighting/acoustics; adaptive/special furniture/tools; alternative test site with proctor present; preferential seating).
Questions to Ask during the College Search

by Lydia S. Block, Ph.D.

It is important to start the college search looking at the same factors that all students consider. Size, geographic location, selection of majors, admissions requirements, cost, resources, athletics and social activities, are important features of a college experience. Once these things are considered it is time to ask the following questions:

Is there a separate admissions process for LD students?

What documentation is required? Are accommodation determinations based on the high school IEP recommendations?

Is there a separate LD program?

Are there selective criteria for admission to the LD program?

Is there a separate fee for enhanced LD services?

How many LD students do you serve?

What is your retention rate for all freshmen? For LD students?

What is your graduation rate for all students? For LD students?

Does your institution offer remedial and/or developmental courses for credit towards graduation?

Does your institution offer substitutions for foreign language or math courses? If so, what documentation is required? What is the process?

Do you ever offer waivers? Under what circumstances?

Do you have staff members trained in the area of learning disabilities?

What is the LD counselor/student ratio?

How long does a student wait to get in to see a counselor (a day, a week..)?

How do you handle emergencies? Are there walk-in hours?

How are testing accommodations handled? If I qualify to take my exams with extended time how much time can I have? Where do I take the test?

What if my exam is in the evening and your office is closed?
If I need a distraction-free space will I always get it?

What services do you offer?

- tape recorders
- alternative forms of testing
- note taker
- option to tape lectures
- extended time on exams
- reading machines
- typing services
- taped textbooks
- computer availability
- distraction free space
- support groups
- calculator use during exams
- priority registration
- study groups

Do you offer tutoring? If so, is it offered by:

- LD Specialist
- Faculty Member
- Graduate Assistant
- Peer Tutor
- Paraprofessional

Are tutors trained to work with LD students?

Is there a fee for tutoring?

Do you offer career planning? Can graduates use career services?

Does the academic adviser work in tandem with the LD specialist?

Do you offer study skills and/or learning strategies courses? Are they offered for credit?

What is the climate on your campus for LD students?

Do you expect the services that you are telling me about today to ALL be here in the Fall?

Are there regular workshops for faculty members about working with LD students?

How many complaints do you get from students about faculty or staff members in
a year? How are they handled?

Does your campus have an ADA/504 Compliance Officer?

Have any lawsuits or OCR complaints been filed against your campus?

Is there strong support from the faculty members and administration for this program?

Look for a program that addresses the student's needs and help the student to be realistic!
Resources

Block Educational Consulting. *Questions to Ask During the College Search.* Columbus, Ohio.


Latham, Patricia H., Latham, Peter S. *Attention Deficit Disorder in College: Faculty and Students Partner in Education.* National Center for Law and Learning Disabilities.


Reamer, Anne. (Spring 1997). *Transition to College.* National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center Linkages.

Ziegenfuss, LaVerne R. *The Good College Match for Students with Learning Differences: What’s a Parent to Do?* Widener University – Assistant Dean of Student Support Services.

Websites

[www.advocacyinstitute.org](http://www.advocacyinstitute.org) *Questions to Ask during the College Search.* Block Educational Consulting, Columbus, Ohio.

[www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org).


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