

Are You Ready for College?

As a student with a disability, it is important to be mindful of this concept: you need all the competencies anyone attending college needs *plus* whatever special skills or strategies you need to cope with your particular disability. High schools are mandated to provide transition services, while colleges are not. So it is best to acquire the college level skills you'll need while you're still in high school, rather than wait until you arrive on a college campus. Going to college comfortable with yourself and ready to meet the challenges can make the difference between success and failure.

It is a good idea to complete the following self-assessment to help you decide if college is the best choice for you at this time. If you cannot answer some of the questions, discuss them with your parents, teachers, counselors and others who will give you an honest assessment.

1). *How good is my academic background?*

- Am I enrolled in college prep classes that will prepare me for college course work?
- Do I have the same assignments and am I mastering the same body of knowledge and skills as other students?

2). *Are my standardized test scores adequate?*

- What are the ranges of scores that colleges I am interested in look for?

3). *What are my individual strengths and weaknesses?*

- Do I have difficulty decoding, comprehending, or completing reading assignments within a reasonable time?
- Do I have difficulty with math? Am I good with mathematical/ quantitative reasoning? Do I need to use a calculator for basic math?
- How good is my written expression? Is my handwriting legible? Do I need a word processor?
- Have I mastered grammatical and editing skills?
- Can I research and organize material for lengthy compositions and term papers?

4). *What kinds of tests do I do well on?*

- Am I prepared for challenging multiple-choice or short-answer questions that require me to apply and synthesize the material taught?
- Do I do well on written essays?

5). *Are my study skills and learning strategies adequate?*

- Do I have good listening skills? Do I take good notes?

- Am I organized enough to juggle a class schedule, complete short-term and long-term assignments, and stay current with the course syllabus?
- Can I sustain attention in challenging classes?

6). *Am I disciplined enough to manage my time and meet academic deadlines?*

- Do I deal well with unstructured environments?
- Can I handle the choices and freedoms that I will face in a college environment?

7). *Am I determined to succeed in school?*

- Am I willing to work harder than other students on occasion to accomplish the same goals?
- If I receive a poor grade on a test or paper, am I willing to contact a teacher and accept constructive criticism in order to improve my performance?

8). *Do I have a positive attitude and am I flexible?*

- Is my confidence and self-esteem reasonably healthy?
- Am I able to withstand difficulties and pressures?
- What effect does stress have on my academic achievement?

9). Do I have good problem-solving and decision-making skills?

- Can I access community and college resources for assistance if needed?

THINK ABOUT YOUR ANSWERS.

ARE THEY THE ANSWERS OF SOMEONE WHO IS READY FOR COLLEGE NOW?

What Are the Differences Between High School and College?

Classes	
High School	College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 hours per day • 37 weeks • 1,080 hours (approximately) • Typically a school year is 36 weeks long 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 hours per week • 28 weeks • 336 hours (approximately) • Academic year is typically divided into two 15 week semesters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class attendance is usually mandatory and monitored carefully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance policies may vary with each instructor (poor attendance may impact performance)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes generally have no more than 20-30 students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes may have 100 or more students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifications that change course outcomes may be offered based upon the IEP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifications that change course outcomes will not be offered. Modified high school courses may not be accepted in the

	admissions process
Instructors	
High School	College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade and check completed homework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May assume homework is completed and students are able to perform on a test
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May remind students of incomplete assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May not remind students to complete assignments. It is the student's responsibility to check with the instructor to see if requirements are being met
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May know student's needs and approach student when they need assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are usually open and helpful, but expect students to initiate contact when assistance is needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher/student contact closer and more frequent (5 days/week) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor/student contact less frequent (1-3 times each week) and more difficult to arrange
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be available before, during, or after class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May require students to attend scheduled office hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have been trained in teaching methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have content knowledge, but not necessarily formal training in teaching methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often provide students with information missed during absence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expect students to get information from classmates when they miss class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present material to help students understand what is in the textbook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May not follow the textbook, but lectures enhance the topic area (the student must connect lectures and textbook)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often write information on the board or overhead to be copied for notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May lecture non-stop. If they write on the board, it may be to support the lecture, not summarize (good notes are a must or a tape recorder should be used)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach knowledge and facts leading students through the thinking process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expect students to think independently and connect seemingly unrelated information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often take the time to remind students of assignments and test dates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expect students to read, save, and refer back to the course syllabus (a syllabus tells the student exactly what is expected, when assignments are due, and how often he or she will be graded)

Studying	
High School	College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study times outside of class may vary (may be as little as 1-3 hours per week) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally need to study at least 2-3 hours outside of class for each hour in class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors may review class notes and text material regularly for classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should review class notes and text material regularly (use time between classes wisely)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected to read short assignments that are discussed and re-taught 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantial amounts of assigned reading and writing may not be directly addressed in class (it is up to the student to read and understand assigned material or access support such as books on tape)
Testing	
High School	College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent coverage of small amounts of material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually infrequent (2-3 times per semester) coverage of material. May be cumulative and cover large amounts of material. Some classes may require projects instead of tests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make-up tests are often available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make-up tests are seldom an option, and if requested, may be refused
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test dates can be arranged to avoid conflicts with other events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually, tests are scheduled without regard to other events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently conducts review sessions prior to tests and emphasizes important concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty rarely offer review sessions. If so, students are expected to be prepared and to be active participants, or to find study groups

Grades	
High School	College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given for most assigned work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May not be provided for all assigned work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good homework grades may assist in raising overall grade when test grades are lower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tests and papers provide the majority of the grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra credit options are often available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally speaking, extra credit options are not used to raise a grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial test grades, especially when low, may not have an adverse effect on grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First tests are often “wake up calls” to let you know what is expected. They may count for a substantial part of the grade. Contact academic advisor if the first grade is poor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduation requirements may be met with a grade of D or higher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirements may be met only if the student's average meets departmental standards (generally a 2.0 (C) or higher)
Other Factors to Consider	
High School	College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State and/or district policies may determine eligibility for participation in extracurricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postsecondary institution policies may determine eligibility for participation in extracurricular activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents typically manage finances for school related activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are responsible for money management for basic needs and spending money. Outside jobs may be necessary and become one more activity to be considered for time management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and teachers may provide support and guidance setting priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are responsible for setting their own priorities

Adapted from: SMU A-LEC Homepage and OKC Community College Accessibility Handbook

Selecting a College That is Right for You

Start your college search by considering many of the same criteria all students use. Review the following checklist when embarking on your college search:

Type of Institution:	2-year or 4-year
	Public or private
	Co-ed or single sex
Admission Requirements:	Open or selective
Characteristics of the School:	Residential or commuter
Student Population:	Under 1,000
	1,000-2,500
	2,500-5,000
	5,000-10,000
	10,000+
Physical Size of Campus:	Sprawling or compact
Setting:	Rural or suburban or urban
Costs:	Tuition and financial aid options
Majors Offered:	Do fields of study match my interests?
Athletic Opportunities:	Varsity or club or intramural
Work Study Program Availability:	
Cultural & Social Experiences:	Community and college

A student with a disability must especially consider his or her specific needs and compare colleges in terms of the actual services and their availability. Through research, college visits and asking the appropriate questions of admissions and college disability service providers, a student can determine which postsecondary institution provides the support services best suited to his or her needs.

Questions to Ask a College Disability Service Office:

1. What information must be provided to document a disability and to whom should it be given?
2. How accessible is the campus to its students with physical disabilities?
 - a. Availability of transportation across campus
 - b. Accessibility of buildings
3. Where is the disability services office on campus and does it have evening hours?
4. How is the disability service office staffed? Is the staff trained in specialized areas of disabilities such as LD or ADHD? Are they full-time or part-time? Is there a separate LD program?

5. Are there extra costs associated with the disability support program?
6. Is there an orientation program or a summer preparation course especially designed for students with disabilities?
7. Who supervises an accommodated test?
8. What is the graduation rate for first-year students and how does this compare with the rate for students with disabilities?
9. What special services are provided to students with special disabilities?
 - a. Supports in the areas of study skills, writing labs, organizational skills, or time management staffed by individuals trained in the area of learning disabilities.
 - b. Is course specific tutoring available? Is this different than the services provided by your program staff?
 - c. Counseling services in personal, academic or vocational areas.
 - d. What adaptive technology is available?
10. Do you anticipate that the services you are describing to me now will be available next year?
11. What is the school's history of providing disability services? Have any lawsuits or Office for Civil Rights complaints been filed against the school in the past five years? If yes, how were these resolved?
12. What is the climate on campus for students with disabilities?

Comparison of Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges for Students with Disabilities

Institutional Characteristics	
Two-Year College	Four-Year College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller student population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger student enrollment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open admissions with placement test to qualify for college credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive admissions with SAT and ACT tests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong community commitment with focus on regional economic factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College can be isolated from the surrounding community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-year time frame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-year time frame
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate's degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's degree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate and career programs completed within 1 year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Arts or Professional degrees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower tuition costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to high tuition costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental courses offered to increase possibilities of success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College skills and ability required at enrollment
Student Characteristics	
Two-Year College	Four-Year College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often older students, 25+ years old 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily students 18 - 23 years old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live at home, commute to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many live in dorms on campus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many students employed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited employment during semesters

What Type of Support is Available at College?

What makes the transition process especially confusing is that every college differs in terms of how much support is offered to students with disabilities. Although special education services do not exist at the college level, some colleges do in fact offer comprehensive support *programs* to students with disabilities. These programs may include the opportunity to work with disability or learning specialists to develop learning skills and strategies. They

may provide individual or group tutoring for students in specific subject areas. In contrast to the IDEA, colleges may charge an additional fee to students to receive these services.

It is important to note, however, that these fees can be charged for these disability programs because they are above and beyond what is required by Section 504. Instead, colleges are only required to provide disability *services*. In a disability services model, the institution only provides individually appropriate accommodations, such as extended test time or reduced distraction testing environments to students with documented disabilities. Colleges are not required to have disability specialists on staff. Instead, there must be an identifiable contact person who can assist students in receiving appropriate accommodations. Although in many cases this person will have knowledge of specific disabilities, it is not required. Colleges may not charge additional fees to students to receive individually appropriate accommodations.

The following chart highlights some of the key differences in disability service models. Students and families should carefully consider what level of support would be important to have in place to promote a successful transition and college experience. It is important to understand that this chart offers a set of guidelines. What is actually offered at a particular school may contain some but not all of the elements in a column, or in some cases, may go beyond what is listed in a column.

Continuum of Postsecondary Disability Support Services

Decentralized Services	Loosely Coordinated Services	Centrally Coordinated Services	Comprehensive Support Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal contact person • Limited support services • Few established policies • Students dependent on sympathetic faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal contact person • Generic support services and accommodations available • Peer tutors available • Students referred to other on-campus resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time program coordinator • Services housed in disability office • Accommodations provided • Established policies and procedures • Emphasis on student self-advocacy • Adaptive technology may be available • Specially trained disability specialists may be available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time program director • Assistant director or coordinator • Full range of accommodations • Established policies and procedures • Emphasis on student self-advocacy • Adaptive technology available • Trained disability specialists available • Individualized support available

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized support plans developed
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Adapted from McGuire, J.M. & Shaw, S.F. (1989). Resource guide of support services for students with learning disabilities in Connecticut colleges and universities. Storrs: A.J. Pappanikou Center on Special Education and Rehabilitation: A University Affiliated Program, University of Connecticut. (Revised, 1996)

Another useful way to identify the types of support available at different colleges and universities is to use a commercially available resource guide. For example, the following guides can often be located at your library's reference section, at bookstores, or on the Internet:

- Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders (7th Ed)
- The K&W Guide to Colleges: For Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder (Princeton Review)

As with the chart, the labels that are used to describe the various levels of support in these guides may vary from college to college. The actual services may differ from what is listed in the guide. It is important to call the office for students with disabilities at a particular school and ask questions about the types of support offered and to then draw conclusions about whether this level of support will be appropriate.

What Type of Documentation Will I Need to Submit?

Colleges and universities are not required to conduct educational or psychological evaluations of students, either to confirm a pre-existing disability or to identify a suspected disability. Instead, the responsibility for providing (and possibly paying) for this evaluation rests with the student. There are several reasons why postsecondary institutions request the documents, or documentation, that describe the student's disability. First, it is a method to verify that a student who is requesting accommodations or other disability related support services does in fact have a disability that substantially limits a major life function. Second, comprehensive and up-to-date documentation helps both the college and the student best understand the impact of the disability at that point in the student's academic career. For this reason, it is beneficial for the student to provide current documentation.

The exact nature of the documentation and when it must be submitted will vary depending upon the type of disability. Obviously, a student with a psychological disability will require different documentation than a student with a learning disability. The following links present the documentation guidelines for a range of disabilities and from a variety of postsecondary institutions and for Educational Testing Services:

Institution/Organization	Link to Documentation Guidelines
Fairfield University	http://www.fairfield.edu/student_serv/disabilitydocs.htm
Southern Connecticut State University	http://www.southernct.edu/departments/dro/IE4/StdHB/Eligib.htm
University of Connecticut	http://www.csd.uconn.edu/accesssv.html
Connecticut Association on Higher Education and Disability	http://vm.uconn.edu/~wwwcped/guidlms.htm
Educational Testing Services	http://www.ets.org/disability/index.html

Section 504 does not mandate specific guidelines related to documentation requirements. Instead, these guidelines can be set by an individual institution. Students should contact the disability service office of the particular schools they are interested in attending to learn the specific documentation guidelines, as well as the timeline for which this documentation should be submitted (e.g., at admissions, after enrolling). As changes are made to special education laws in relation to assessment and evaluation, it will be particularly critical to understand the documentation requirements of the postsecondary institution that a student is planning to attend.

What Are My Legal Rights?

One of the most important things to understand about disability support services at the college and university level is that it will be very different than special education services at the high school level. The student will be faced with very different legal rights and responsibilities. Understanding these differences is critically important for a successful transition.

In high school, students with disabilities are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law entitles students to a free, appropriate public education, and requires that school districts develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each student. This IEP may contain specific modifications, accommodations, and instructional techniques that the student's school must employ in order to help the student achieve success. A team composed of professionals and the student's parent(s) makes decisions about the student and her plan of study. Ideally, but not always, the student is included in this process.

However, once the student graduates from high school, these special education services end. ***Special education service and modifications provided under an IEP will no longer be available.*** Disability services at the college level are directed by two laws that are very different from IDEA. These laws are Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Consider the wording of Section 504:

“No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall, solely by reason of his or her handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. (29 U.S.C. 794)”

The words of this law reflect that Section 504 is a civil rights law. As such, it is concerned with ensuring accessibility to qualified individuals with disabilities. What does this mean for students at the college level?

First, a student must be qualified for admission to an institution, regardless of the existence of a disability. Thus, while the institution may factor in the impact of the disability in admissions decisions, this is not required. If the student is determined to be eligible for admissions, then he or she has the right to:

- individually appropriate academic adjustments (accommodations) and auxiliary aids;
- non-discriminatory treatment because of a disability; and
- full access to all programs and services.

Second, while the student has certain rights as a person with a disability, he or she will have new responsibilities as well. It is the student's responsibility to:

- prove eligibility for admission;
- prove and *maintain proof* of eligibility (e.g., maintain acceptable grades) for protection under Section 504 and ADA;
- self-identify and initiate requests for accommodations in a timely manner;
- submit appropriate documentation that verifies eligibility for protections and services;
- monitor the effectiveness of accommodations;
- make decisions related to courses and plans of study; and
- Assume costs and fees for education as appropriate.

The following chart provides a useful summary of the changes in legal protections from high school to college.

Note that at the postsecondary level, the majority of the responsibilities shift from a school or a team of professionals to the student.

Responsibility		
Issue	High School	College
Identification	School	Student
Assessment	School	Student
Programming	School/Parents	Student/Institution
Advocacy	School/Parent	Student
Decision Making	Placement Team	Student
Transition Planning	Placement Team	Student
From: Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire (1992)		