

## Self-Advocacy: How Students Can Help Themselves

Successful college students with disabilities, college advisors, and campus disability support services staff agree that using self-advocacy skills is vital to success in college. The responsibility for provision of support services changes after high school. Throughout elementary and high school years, it is the school system's role to identify students and initiate special education services under the IDEA. However, once in college and under Section 504 and the ADA, it is the student's responsibility to self-identify and provide documentation of a disability.

College students need to know that they have a legal right to appropriate accommodations; these are not favors to be granted or denied, but requirements under the law. But since the students alone hold the responsibility to reveal that they have a disability, it is necessary for them to learn and practice self-advocacy while in high school.

Self-advocates are people who speak up in logical, assertive and positive language to communicate their needs. To be good at this, students need to understand themselves, their needs, and their responsibilities. The following are essential to self-advocacy:

- Know the requirements for the documentation of your disability. Bring the information with you to college when you enroll.
- Contact the office that handles disability issues right at the start of the school year.
- Learn the specific arrangements for accessing accommodations or support services. Have a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses. Understand your psycho-educational evaluations and be able to articulate what accommodations you will need in specific areas.
- Ask for help in analyzing the college courses you will select. Some questions to ask are:
  1. What materials are used in the class?
  2. What format is used in class sessions (lecture, discussions, etc.)?

3. What instructional techniques are used in the course?
  4. What tasks are the students required to perform in class and out of class?
  5. How are students evaluated in the course; what types of tests are used?
  6. How can students receive feedback to improve their performance?
  7. What course-related support systems are available, such as instructor access, teaching assistant tutorials, web-based resources, mailing list or list serves, special study sessions, etc.?
- After consultation with the disability service office, inform your professors of your accommodation needs. Do not expect the professor to know or figure out your accommodation needs. This conversation should occur as early in the semester as possible. If you wait until just before an exam, the accommodation may not be available.

## Resources

### **ACT Test Administration**

P.O. Box 4028

Iowa City, IA 52243-4028

(319) 337-1332; TTY (319) 337-1701

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

### **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)**

P.O. Box 540666

Waltham, MA 02454

(781) 788-0003 Voice/TTY

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

### **College Board Services for Students with Disabilities**

P.O. Box 6226

Princeton, NJ 08541-6226

(609) 771-7137; TTY (609) 882-4118

[www.collegeboard.com/disability/counsel/html/indx000.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/disability/counsel/html/indx000.html)

### **Council for Exceptional Children, Career Development and Transition Division**

1110 North Glebe Rd.

Arlington, VA 22201

(703) 620-3660; TTY (703) 264-9446

[www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

### **HEATH Resource Center**

George Washington University

2121 K Street N.W. Suite 220

Washington, DC 20037

(800) 544-3284; Voice/TTY (202) 973-0904

[www.heath.gwu.edu](http://www.heath.gwu.edu)

### **The K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled**

Edited by Marybeth Kravets and Imy Wax

Educators Publishing Service, Inc.

31 Smith Place

Cambridge, MA 02138-1000

(800) 225-5750

### **National Center on Secondary Education and Transition E-News**

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

Connecticut State Department of Education/Bureau of Special Education  
Transition Task Force/Transition Training Manual

**Office for Civil Rights, Boston Office**  
U.S. Department Of Education  
J. W. McCormack Post Office and Courthouse  
Room 707, 01-0061  
Boston, MA 02109-4557  
(617) 223-9662; FAX (617) 223-9669; TDD (617) 223-9695  
[www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition)

**Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities (7<sup>th</sup> ed.)**  
Edited by Charles T. Mangrum and Stephen S. Strichart  
Peterson's Guides  
P.O. Box 2123  
Princeton, NJ 08543-2123  
(800) 338-3282  
[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)

**Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFBDB)**  
20 Roszel Rd.  
Princeton, NJ 08540  
(800) 221-4792  
[www.rfbdb.org](http://www.rfbdb.org)

**Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability (CPED)**  
University of Connecticut  
Department of Educational Psychology  
Neag School of Education  
Hall Building, Ground Floor  
362 Fairfield Road, Unit 2064  
Storrs, CT 06269-2064  
<http://vm.uconn.edu/~wwwcped/tac-resc.htm>

**Wisconsin Department of Education**  
[www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/een/pdf/transpndrs.pdf](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/een/pdf/transpndrs.pdf)