

## College Planning for Students with Disabilities

There are more options than ever before for students with disabilities. The spectrum of services runs from special colleges and programs for students on the autism spectrum, to programs that assist students with attention deficits and/or learning disabilities, to colleges that offer some services and classroom and/or testing modifications for those whose learning differences do not require a full special education setting or ethos.

In general, colleges that service students with disabilities fall into two categories:

- those who require all applicants to meet the regular admission standards of the college or university.
- those who have established separate standards for those with learning differences.

As might be expected, the colleges who require all applicants to be admissible under the same standards tend to offer the services mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Act: test modifications, reduced course loads, assistive technology and tutoring done by professionals or other students. Students are, in most cases, expected to advocate on their own behalf with faculty and the services, generally, are free.

Colleges who have programs dedicated to the needs of students with disabilities tend to offer both more and more focused assistance, e.g., summer pre-college experiences, learning specialists, academic and psychological counseling, help with social concerns, programmatic coordination with faculty, professional tutors, targeted career services, and preferential registration. Many “programs” require the student to pay additional fees.

It is critical that students with disabilities who require more focused services collaborate closely with their special education teachers and the school psychologist to determine their exact needs as each program is distinct in the kinds of students it best serves. The counselor can begin to help with the search for an appropriate placement once the services the student requires are defined. Students whose needs are best served by a college that offers a program will want to confine their search to colleges that offer one.

Families often struggle with the question of whether to disclose an identified disability to college admissions personnel. Again, this question is best handled individually and must take into account the services the student will require in college. The decision to disclose can certainly come *after* the admission decision in the case of those who are simply seeking test modifications, assistive technology or reduced course load. In fact, some colleges do not even present the question on their applications. In cases where students are applying to “programs,” however, the disability must be disclosed in order to gain entry. In either case, school personnel are prohibited by law from disclosing a student’s disability without written permission of a parent. Of course, you may consult your counselor to discuss the question of disclosure.

Students with disabilities should, by the end of eleventh grade, consult with the school psychologist to ensure that any required psycho-educational testing is up to date – up to date, in general, means that the testing will have been done within the two years before the student enrolls in college. Current testing and/or current 504 plans are critical for any student who hopes to use accommodations in college whether or not they disclose before enrolling. Accommodations in college are granted only after review by the Office

of Disability Services and may or may not be the same as the accommodations afforded the student in high school.

We recommend that students with disabilities visit the Office of Disability Services when visiting campuses. Note that the name of the office may vary from place to place; the admissions office will be able to direct you to the proper place. Admissions staff will also be able to tell you if the college offers a special program for students with disabilities.

### **QUESTIONS FOR THOSE REQUIRING SERVICES**

- What kinds of services are offered for those with my disability?
- Will I be expected to reveal my disability in my application?
- What is the exact procedure I must follow to be considered for services? When and how will I know whether I qualify?
- Are faculty members generally receptive to the need for modifications?
- Does your office help with academic advising?
- Is tutoring available? Who does the tutoring? Will I have to pay for it?
- How many students are registered with your office? Do you have enough staff to meet their needs?
- Will I be able to take a lighter course load?
- Are there any other questions I should ask you?

### **QUESTIONS FOR THOSE REQUIRING A PROGRAM**

- Is there a brochure that describes the program?
- Is the program well suited for my disability?
- How many full-time students with disabilities are enrolled in it?
- Do students in special programs take regular college courses?
- Are special courses required of students in the program? Do they carry college credit? Can the credit be used towards the degree?
- Are there additional tuition or fee requirements for students?
- What must I do to be considered for the program?
- When will I know if I have been accepted?
- Do you collaborate with faculty on my behalf?
- Does your office help with academic advising, scheduling and advice about which faculty are receptive to student with my needs?
- Do you have a pre-college summer program? Must I attend? How much does it cost?
- Does anyone in your office monitor my progress? Who can I turn to if I feel overwhelmed?
- Are tutoring and/or counseling mandatory?
- Are the tutors learning specialists or other students?
- Who can my parents contact if they have concerns about me?

## A SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The questionnaire that appears below will help you determine the kind and degree of help you need to be successful in college. The questionnaire is taken from the Marist College Office of Special Services web site.

<b>TIME MANAGEMENT/ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I complete daily assignments on time.		
I plan steps for a project.		
I start a project on time.		
I complete a project on time.		
I know the best study environment for me.		
I know how much time I will need to spend daily on course work.		
I know how long I should allow for daily studying.		
I know the time needed to get ready for a task.		
I know the time needed to learn new skills.		
I am comfortable asking for advice.		
<b>READING</b>		
I understand information in print the first time I read it.		
I ask myself questions as I read.		
I summarize after I read.		
I pick out supporting details.		
I skim for a general overview.		
I scan for key words and vocabulary.		
I recognize information I have read when it appears another way.		
I remember information I have read.		
I convert what I have read into my own words.		
I read for pleasure.		
I integrate information with what I already know.		
I demonstrate my knowledge on tests that require reading.		
<b>WRITING</b>		
I use my notes when writing a paper.		
I am able to organize my ideas.		
I edit my own work.		
I write using correct grammar.		
I write using proper spelling.		
I can write a research paper.		
I can speak my ideas better than I can write them.		

<b>NOTE TAKING</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I understand what I hear.		
I shut out distractions.		
I stay focused for a class period.		
I am able to write while I listen.		
I write fast enough to keep up with the speaker.		
I copy notes accurately from an overhead or the board.		
I know various note taking methods that work for me.		
I pick out the important points while taking notes.		
I use my notes to learn the necessary material.		
I organize my notes in a useful way.		
I organize my notes in a way that matches my learning style.		
<b>TEST TAKING/ASSESSMENT</b>		
I demonstrate my knowledge in the following formats:		
• Multiple-choice test		
• True/false test		
• Essay		
• Fill in the blank test		
• Oral – tell answers aloud		
• Written report		
• Project		
• Portfolio (compilation of work samples)		
<b>TEST MODIFICATIONS I THINK I NEED</b>		
Extended time		
Reader		
Scribe		
Alternative test site (lights, sound, furniture, etc.)		
Use of assistive devices (computer, calculator, tape recorder, etc.)		
Other:		
<b>SELF-ADVOCACY</b>		
I know the environment in which I learn best.		
I know how to learn material when the teacher's style is different from my own.		
I seek help when I need it.		
I am assertive. (I can speak up politely.)		
I can communicate my ideas.		
I can communicate my feelings appropriately during a conversation.		

I listen attentively in conversations.		
I am aware of and respect personal space.		
I can effectively listen and communicate to help resolve conflicts when I am in a disagreement.		
I organize my notes in a way that matches my learning style.		

<b>WRITING AND TECHNOLOGY</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I can keyboard efficiently.		
I can write a paper using a word processor.		
I am fluent in:		
• Microsoft Word		
• Wordsmith		
• Dragon Naturally Speaking		
• Kurzweil 3000		
I use a hand-held spell checker.		
I add frequently-used words to my spell check program.		
I have found other software that helps me locate the words I am trying to use.		

Going to college will require you to have answered “yes” to a least some of these criteria. Even if you are capable of doing some of these things some of the time, it will be to your advantage if you practice the academic and living skills listed here while you are still in high school, little by little. The answers to the survey questions should help you and your family decide on a plan of action to develop independent academic skills during your senior year. You can consult your teachers and counselor for help with this plan, too.