



Getting into College: What Students with Disabilities Want to Know

Thinking about what you will do after high school can be both an exciting and scary experience. The number of students with disabilities attending college is increasing each year. Students who attend college demonstrate growth in many areas: academic skills, social skills, independence, self-advocacy skills, and self-confidence. Students find that they need to begin planning for college while in high school.

College gives students a certain amount of freedom and flexibility. All students attending college have to make sure that they have the skills to manage their classes, social life, and sometimes a job. You will have many choices to make in college. You also will have much more freedom to make those choices and to make decisions about what kinds of classes you want to take, when and where you attend classes, and when you need to finish assignments.

Since you have so many choices, you also will have many questions. With help from your high school teachers, guidance counselor, and family you will be taking more and more responsibility for what will happen to you after high school. Asking questions is a good way to make the best decisions that will support you.

Some of the questions that you might have about how to begin thinking about college include:

1. How is college different from high school?
2. As a student with a disability, can I make it in college?
3. What do I need to start doing in high school so that I can go to college?
4. Will I get the same accommodations in college as I did in high school?
5. How do I decide where I should go to college?
6. What other things do I need to consider when thinking about selecting a college is whether you want to attend a big or small school or attend a school in a city, suburban, or rural environment?
7. Where do I get more information about the colleges that I might want to attend?
8. What is the college admissions process?
9. Where do I get an application form?
10. Should I say that I have a disability on my college application?
11. What should I put in my essay?
12. Where do I get a transcript to send to the college?

13. What are college entrance exams and can I use accommodations when I take the tests?
14. What do I do if I do not get into college?

How will college be different from high school?

There are a number of differences between high school and college. One difference is the legislation that mandates certain rights for people with disabilities. Once in college you must self-identify your disability and self-advocate for accommodations. The number of classes you take, the length and frequency of the classes and the location of the courses is unlike high school. Your interactions with teachers will change; you may not have daily interaction with teachers. Exhibit 1 shows some of the differences.

Exhibit 1 Differences Between High School and College		
Type of Difference	High School	College
Right to an Education	Education is a right and must be provided to you	Students must go through an admissions process and meet certain criteria to be admitted to the college
Laws	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) entitles or guarantees disabilities services and accommodations to students with disabilities	Under The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act you must meet criteria to be eligible for the services and accommodations
Self-identification	The school is responsible for identifying a student's disability	The student is responsible for documenting the disability and requesting services
Accommodations	Your Individualized Education Plan (IEP) states the accommodations that you are entitled to receive. The school must provide the accommodations	You must apply and request accommodations. Once the college approves the accommodations, you must self-advocate with professors and arrange for the services with the Disability Services Office
Support	Teachers and parents help you make decisions and ask for help	You must ask for support and assistance from the Disability Services Office
Access to Records and Grades	Until you are 18, your parents can access your school grades and participate in IEP meetings	Your parents can not access your school records or grades without your written permission
Classes Meeting Times	Classes meet every day and are between 45 minutes and 90 minutes long	Classes may meet 1, 2, 3 or 4 times a week and classes are generally from 50 minutes to three hours long
Class Location	Classes usually meet in one or two buildings	Classes meet in many different buildings
Contact with Teachers	You usually see your teachers every day	You will see the teachers only on the days you have classes. If you want to see them

		any other time, you need to make an appointment
Class Size	About 25-30 students are in each class	The number of students in the class can range from 30-300 or more students
Assignments	Teachers will take time to remind you of assignments and due dates	Professors will expect you to check the course outline (or syllabus) for the assignments, grading criteria, and assignment due dates
Costs	If you attend a public school, it is free	The student is responsible for paying the tuition to attend the college and for applying for financial aid

Source: <http://www.thinkcollege.net/students/index.php?page=consider>

As a student with a disability, can I make it in college?

Many high school students with disabilities are successful in college. The number of students with disabilities attending colleges and universities has increased in the last five years. A major reason for this increase is that many students have legal rights that help them attend college and obtain supports to help them be successful in college classes. The most important thing to remember is that as a student with a disability, you will need ALL the same capabilities, abilities and skills, as any other college student. You also will need accommodations, technology, and modifications to help you access the same benefits of college as other students.

Colleges do not admit students based only on grades or college entrance exams. Some colleges have an open admissions policy. The admission committees at each college look at everything about a student and make a decision. The colleges cannot deny you admission just because you have a disability. On the other hand, colleges will not admit you just because you have a disability. You will want to show the colleges how your coursework, grades, ACT/SAT scores, life experiences, personal attitudes, and academic interests show both your strengths and the challenges that you face.

To apply for admission into a college or university means that you must start planning when you begin high school. In high school, your parents, teachers, and counselors help guide your education. However, in college you will assume most of the responsibilities for making self-disclosing your disability and making decisions about the classes you take, completing assignments, and self-advocating for the support and resources that you will need.

What do I need to start doing in high school so that I can go to college?

As a student with disabilities, you will need some of the same skills and abilities as other college students to be successful in college. It is better to start learning those skills in high school rather than to wait until you begin college. Going to a college knowing what you can do and what how to do it may be the most important thing that will help you be successful in college. For example, colleges require that you take a certain number and type of courses while in high school. Many colleges and universities require that you take three to four courses each year in English, mathematics, science, and social studies or history. Your parents, guidance counselor and teachers can help you plan your coursework for college.

Colleges also require that students do well in all high school courses. Colleges do not require that you get all A's and B's in your high school courses, however receiving many low or failing grades shows colleges that you may not be able to be successful in college level courses. The accommodations that you receive in high school help you meet the requirements for reading, writing, taking notes, and participating in class discussion. You will have to decide if you want to self-disclose and self-advocate for accommodations in

college. Most colleges require that a student maintain a 2.0 or “C” average to maintain good standing.

All students in college, even those who do not have a disability, find that they must develop strategies for organizing their day, managing time, problem solving, studying, and interacting with people with all types of personalities. While in high school, you may want to develop strategies to help organize your work, manage your time, learn the required material and develop social skills that will help you become an independent learner in college. These should be part of your IEP.

In your senior year of high school, the school will work with your parents, teachers, counselors and other professionals to gather all relevant information about your disability and the accommodations that you receive. Using this information, school personnel will develop A *Summary of Functional Performance* (SOP) for you. The SOP is a transition bridge between the high school and post-high school environment. The SOP also will provide additional documentation of your disability that all colleges and universities will request. The SOP has five parts:

1. Background information about informal and formal assessments that show your strengths and needs
2. Your goals for what you will do after you leave high school
3. Summary of your academic, cognitive, and functional performance and the accommodations, assistive technology, and modifications that you will need to be successful after you leave high school
4. Recommendations for helping you meet your goals after high school
5. Your ideas about how you understand the impact of your disability on what you want to do after you leave high school

Will I get the same accommodations in college as I did in high school?

In high school your parents, teachers, or other professionals arranged for the accommodations. In college, you will have to advocate for any accommodations. You should think about what accommodations and support you will need to be academically and socially successful in a college environment. Ask yourself the questions in Exhibit 2 to help you decided what accommodations you would need in college.

Exhibit 2: How to Decide the Accommodations Needed in College

Do I:

- Need a quiet place to work?
- Have difficulty giving verbal explanations?
- Have trouble reading if the print is small, blurry, or smudged?
- Have a hard time reading other people's writing?
- Do better if I do not sit at a desk to study?
- Get frustrated when I can't think of a word and call it a 'thingee'?
- Remember things better when I write them down?
- Get tired reading even though there is nothing wrong with my eyes?
- Have a hard time understanding what people are saying if there is noise or music playing?
- Get words and letters mixed up when I read?
- Just start a task, without reading the directions first?
- Enjoy drawing pictures and arrows when I take notes?
- Have to see someone do a task before I begin?
- Have to use my finger as a pointer when I read?
- Like to get new information by hearing it, instead of reading?
- Solve problems just by trying them instead of using a step-by-step method?
- Try to picture something in my head if I need to remember it?
- Need frequent breaks when studying?
- Cross out or erase a lot of words when writing?
- Find it hard to understand a joke that someone tells me?
- Understand how to do something if someone tells me how to do it rather than read the directions myself?
- Get lost easily in a strange place?

You can use these questions to help identify the accommodations, technology, and modifications that you will need thinking about which college to attend. You will need to find out if the college can provide the accommodations that you need once you provide the required documentation. Please note that colleges do not always provide the same accommodations or to the same level you received in high school.

How do I decide where I should go to college?

Students choose a college for many reasons-someone in your family attended the same college, the college is located in a part of the country that you like, size, cost, and reputation. There are three types of colleges for you to consider: (1) community college, (2) two-year college, and (3) four-year college or university. Exhibit 3 shows the characteristics of each type of college.

Exhibit 3: Characteristics of Three Types of Colleges

Type of College	Characteristics
Community College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers experience in a college environment while living at home. Some may have residential offerings or dorms • Has few admissions requirements • Provides the chance to increase academic skills through developmental or remedial classes • Is an opportunity to try out one or two college courses • Offers a chance to build a good academic record before you transfer to a four-year college • Has lower tuition and costs than a four-year college • Has services to support students with disabilities
Technical College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has small classes in which teachers provide individualized attention • Usually have open admissions but require a HS diploma or GED • Offers classes to work on improving reading, writing, and math skills • Offers hands-on training for a variety of careers • Has services to support students with disabilities
Four-Year College or University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has services to support students with disabilities • Offers many different classes to develop talents or knowledge in one subject • Offers the chance to live away from home in a dorm or apartment and to develop independent living skills

Adapted from: Taymans, J. M., West, L., and Sullivan, M. (2000). Unlocking potential: College and other choices for people with LD and AD/HD. Bethesda, MD. Woodbine House.

What other things do I need to consider when thinking about selecting a college is whether you want to attend a big or small school or attend a school in a city, suburban, or rural environment?

Another option is to take continuing education or non-credit courses classes at a college or university. To take continuing education classes, you do not have to go through an application or admission process. You sign up for the course, pay the fee, and attend the class(es). Taking continuing education courses will provide you a chance to take courses without worrying about grades, while strengthening study skills.

Where do I get more information about the college that I might want to attend?

Once you have selected five colleges that you would like to attend, you will need to get more information about each college. You can get this additional information several ways: Visit the guidance or admissions office at your school and pick up a college catalogue that contains this information. Contact the financial aid office for grants/scholarships. Google the college on the Internet and find the college's website.

To keep all this information organized and in one place, keep a file box with a folder for each college, or you can set up a folder on your computer for the information. In addition to the folder, you may find it helpful to develop a fact sheet for each college so that you can record important information. Exhibit 4 is a sample fact sheet you can use for each college.

Exhibit 4: Sample Fact Sheet for Each College

College Name

Contact Information

- URL
- Address
- Admission Phone Number

College Characteristics

- Two-year or four-year school
- Number of students
- Number of students with disabilities
- Urban, suburban, or rural environment
- Large, medium, small school

Yearly Costs

- Tuition and Fees
- Room and Board if applicable
- Books

Admission Requirements

- Standardized admission tests
- High school courses and grades
- Admission deadlines
- Interview for some schools

Disability Support Services

- Is there an Office of Disability Support Services?
- How many disability support counselors are available?
- How many students with disabilities attend the college?
- Documentation needed to receive support and accommodations
- Type of support and accommodations most often provided by the college

After you and your family have read the catalogues, decide if these colleges are a 'fit' for you. Together you can identify about five colleges that you may want to get more information or visit before you begin the admission process. If the colleges are close by, you and your family may want to visit the college. If you visit the school, ask the admissions office to arrange a tour of classes while they are in session. If you decide to self-disclose your disability, try to visit a class that includes a student with disabilities who uses accommodations. You also can ask if you can speak to other students with disabilities. .

What is the college admissions process?

The admissions process requires that you provide the college with a series of documents so that the college can decide if you meet the requirements to attend the college. You must submit the following materials by January of your senior year so that the college staff can make an admission decision:

- Application form/Application Fee
- High school transcripts that will show the grades you received in each course and indicate your date of graduation. Some colleges will review your grades, while others will not.
- Scores that you received on college entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT
- Some colleges will ask that you take a placement test such as the COMPASS or ASSET in place of SAT or ACT scores. SAT/ACT scores are usually good for 5 years.

Should I say that I have a disability on my college application?

There are laws that do not allow colleges to ask you if you have a disability. It is **your choice** whether to disclose the fact that you have a disability. These same laws say that colleges cannot deny or reject your admission *only* because you have a disability. Students with disabilities, like all students applying to a college, must meet the admissions criteria of each college. Disclosing your disability will not guarantee admission to the college. However, if you disclose your disability, the admissions committee may understand how your disability meshes with your grades and test scores and your activities and interests.

Most application forms, due to discrimination laws will not ask if you have a disability. Instead, you will disclose the disability with the disability staff or counselor at the college. It is a separate process. If you do not disclose, you will not be eligible to receive accommodations. Disclosing also may help you and your instructors communicate and learn from each other. If you are unsure about whether to disclose, call a Disability Support Services at a college you are interested in attending. Ask a counselor for guidance. Vignette 1 illustrates what can happen if a student does not disclose and assumes that she can use the accommodations in college. Vignette 2 shows what can happen when a student decides to disclose after experiencing some challenges in a college course.

VIGNETTE 1: It is the first exam of a freshman history course, fall semester. During the exam, Dr. Moore sees that Sally, is using notes to take the exam. He calls Sally up to the front to ask her to turn in the test because she is cheating. Sally becomes upset because she needs the notes to get through. When the professor refuses to let her use the notes, Sally tells Dr. Moore that in high school, she used notes or had someone read the test because she has a learning disability. Dr. Moore asks Sally if she is registered with Disability Support Services (DSS). Sally replies that she has not. Dr. Moore does not assume that the Sally is automatically entitled to an accommodation just because she received it in high school. Since the academic impact of Sally's *disability* is not obvious, Dr. Moore refers her to *Disability Support Services* (DSS) for determination of appropriate *accommodations*. He also gives Sally two options: (1) complete the exam without the notes, or (2) make up the test with approved accommodations, assuming Sally has made an honest mistake in not understanding the differences in laws and policies surrounding accommodations in high school versus college environments.

Adapted from: Murray, A. (Ed.). (2003). Universal Design for Learning, The Faculty & Administrator Modules in Higher Education (FAME) Project. 03).

VIGNETTE 2: Mike is sitting in a parked car in front of a classroom building. He is dressed in sweats and has a messy appearance. He is struggling with going into the classroom, or calling the professor and leaving a message saying he will not be in class. Finally, he leaves the following message:

Professor Brown, this is Mike Whittier from your Psychology 101 class. Um, I cannot make class today. I'm sorry I didn't make it last week either. I will try to come to your office hours tomorrow.

The next day, Mike approaches his professor slowly, once again looking confused and disinterested. He asks the professor if she will please tell him what he missed in class yesterday and last week. He said that he knew there was an assignment due the day before, and he was hoping that he could turn it in now, along with another assignment that was due last week. He told Professor Brown that he knows the syllabus says that she does not accept late papers, but that he just could not make it to class. He did the assignments on time, he was in the building, but he just could not come into the class. When the professor heard this, she sighed loudly, saying: "I've noticed you have been having trouble lately. You appear very disinterested in class. I am not sure if I can help you. You need to show an active interest in my class for me to exercise an interest in you beyond the classroom."

When Mike heard this, he told Professor Brown that he understood what she was saying and that he should have told her about his depression issue at the beginning of the semester. However, he thought that he would try to make it through the quarter without making his depression known. He told the professor, "I try. Every day, I try. But it's hard. This visit is my attempt at showing interest. You sent out grades last week, and I want to know if there's any way the grades can be improved? I did the work."

Dr. Brown thought about what Mike said and determined that the visit was a sign of his interest. She told Mike that she would like to see him in class more because that is the best way for him to improve his grades. She was willing to accept his papers, late, just this once. She also told Mike that she thought it was only fair that she deduct five points for turning them in late; that is what she does with all students when she accepts late work. She suggested that they both contact Disability Support Services to help them work together so that Mike can benefit from the class while making the class requirements fair to the other students. By working with DSS, Professor Brown hoped that together, they could establish clear procedures for attendance and grading for the remainder of the course.

Adapted from: Murray, A. (Ed.). (2003). *The Rights & Responsibilities of Faculty, Students, and Disability Service Providers in Accommodating and Teaching College Students with Disabilities.*

Where do I get a transcript?

A transcript shows the courses that you took in high schools and the grades that you received in those courses. You should send transcripts only to those colleges that you send an application. Colleges will not accept a transcript from the student so you must ask your school's guidance office to send each college a transcript. States and school districts have different practices about whether the high school transcripts state your disability, special education courses, accommodations, or that you have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a Summary of Functional Performance (SOP). You should ask your guidance counselor if disability-related information is on your transcript.

What are college entrance exams and can I use accommodations when I take the tests?

There are two college entrance exams - the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT). The SAT has a practice test that you may take before your senior year. Colleges use these exams as *one* way to predict your ability to do college course work. It is best to take these exams several times. Colleges understand that you will take the tests several times to get a better score each time.

Both the SAT and ACT will allow you to use accommodations when you take the exams. To use

accommodations, you must submit the required documentation of your disability and other forms. You should do this as soon as you enter high school because the process can take approximately two months. Your guidance counselors will help you with those forms. The College Board allows four types of accommodations:

1. Presentation (e.g., large print, reader, Braille, oral presentation)
2. Responding: (e.g., dictation, tape recorder, large block answer sheet)
3. Timing (e.g., extended time, frequent breaks)
4. Setting (e.g., small group setting, provide room, adaptive equipment)

It is important to remember that when the ACT and SAT report your scores to the colleges there is no indication that you received accommodations to take the tests. You may also get accommodations on the placement tests offered at the college. Inquire about this option if you do not take the ACT or SAT.

What do I do if I do not get into to college?

If the colleges that you selected do not accept you, you must decide the next step. Once you receive the letter from the college saying that you are not admitted, you may want to contact the admissions office and talk to them about what would enhance your chances of being admitted to the college for the next semester. If you decide not to attend a two-or four-year college, there are many options open to you for a postsecondary education to include **technical colleges**. Many of the options provide you an opportunity to learn skills that you can use to obtain a job. These jobs can be helpful in maintaining an independent and productive life. Exhibit 5 shows some of those options.

Exhibit 5: Options for a Postsecondary Education	
Option	Description
Vocational or Technical Schools	These schools help you learn a skill that will help you get a specific job, such as automotive maintenance, food services, nursing, graphic communications, animal health, and plumbing. You will not earn a college degree, but may receive an associate degree.
Apprenticeship Programs	You are hired at an entry level by a business and learn a trade or skills from an experienced supervisor. This is usually a 40 hour-a-week job. The training can last as long as four years.
Military Service	You may enroll in the military and will benefit from the highly structured, repetitive, and active activities. In the military, you may learn skills that you can use to get a job after military service.
Adult Education	Many school districts and community colleges have courses designed for adults who would like to learn new skills. For example you can receive a certificate as child care provider or nursing assistant through many adult education programs.

REVIEW OF TOPICS:

This module has discussed several topics related to going to college. The module provides suggestions for getting ready for the college admissions process. Important things to remember about getting ready to go to college are the following:

1. You must start planning for going to college in your first or second year of high school.

2. Work to develop and increase your communication, social, and time-management skills in high school. This will prepare you for life as a college student.
3. The rights that you have as a high school student will not be the same in college.
4. There are several different types of colleges and universities. You need to pick one that will fit your academic, social, work, and mobility skills.
5. A self-assessment of your own skills and experiences can be very helpful as you think about going to college.
6. You will need to decide whether you want to self-disclose your disability on your college applications.
7. You must complete an application that includes writing an essay for each college that you would like to attend.
8. You must take College Board exams. You may take the tests several times if you like. You can use accommodations when taking the college boards.
9. If you do not get into a college, there are other options for a postsecondary education.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Below are several online resources will help you plan for college.

[Access America for Students](#) has many resources for information from the Federal government including how to plan and pay for college.

[DOIT](#) provides resources for increasing the participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers. It promotes the use of computer and networking technologies to increase independence, productivity, and participation in education and employment.

The [GW HEATH Resource Center](#) with disabilities. The HEATH Resource Center Clearinghouse has information for students with disabilities on educational disability support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, obtaining financial aid, accessing college or university campuses, career-technical schools, and other postsecondary training entities. We have information on financial assistance, scholarships, and materials that help students with disabilities transition into college, university, career-technical schools, or other postsecondary programs.

[People with Disabilities & Postsecondary Education](#) provides information on issues related to student preparation and access to postsecondary education, such as participation and persistence toward degree completion, financial aid barriers, interagency collaboration, and personnel preparation.

[Postsecondary Educational Resources for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities](#) offers information for students, family members and educators on postsecondary education programs that support youth with intellectual disabilities.

[ThinkCollege](#) is a website for youth with intellectual disabilities, their families, and the professional who provide them services. The site provides resources of opportunities for these youth to reap the benefits of postsecondary education.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION:

- Now that you read this module, use the following steps to develop a plan of action for choosing a college starting in your sophomore year of high school.
- Talk with friends about how college is different from high school.
- Discuss with your family, teachers, and guidance counselor about how what you can do in high school to be successful in college.
- Find out what tests or college boards you must have to go to college

- Start getting information about colleges that you might want to attend from the guidance office or the internet.
- List five or six colleges that you might want to attend.
- Find out what you must do to submit an application for admissions to each college.
- Decide if you want to disclose your disability to the college and your professors to receive accommodations.
- Talk with your family, teachers, and guidance counselor about other options for what you will do after high school if you do not want to attend college.

WRAP-UP:

Your family, teachers, and guidance counselors will help you prepare for college during high school. The courses you take, your grades, and your extra-curricular activities in high school will help you prepare for getting into college and to do well in college-level courses. You will have to decide if you to disclose your disability to receive accommodations on college entrance exams and in college courses. Once you get into college, only you can make decisions about disclosing your disability and receiving accommodations.

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