



## Getting Ready for College

Consider the following when thinking about going to college

### STUDENTS NEED TO DEVELOP THEIR “OWN VOICE”:

Once you enroll in college:

- Federal law prohibits the college faculty/staff from releasing educational information to anyone without your consent, even your parents.
- You will need to voice your needs, ideas, and concerns as a college student.

*Solution:* Start practicing your advocacy and communication skills before you get to college so that you become comfortable advocating for your accommodation needs.

### KNOW ABOUT YOUR DISABILITY/LEARNING NEEDS:

- Students need to be know about their disability or accommodation needs.
- In college there is no Special Education Teacher, Case Manager, or Counselor to “find you and take you to the services you need.”
- In college, students must self-identify, or in other words, let the college know you have a disability, how the disability impacts you in the learning environment, and what accommodations and auxiliary aids you will need to reduce/remove the barriers to learning caused by the functional impact of your disability or condition.

*Solution:* Use your high school years to become the expert about you! Actively participate in your IEP meetings; know what your disability is, how it impacts you, and what specific accommodations work for you.

### BE AWARE OF ACCOMMODATIONS YOU’VE USED:

Due to the nature of the learning environment, accommodations at the college level may be quite different from those you were able to receive in high school.

- High school focuses on ‘**success**’ of the student (i.e. graduation), because of the free and appropriate education legal requirements.
- College focuses on **access** to all programs, services, and activities through reasonable and appropriate accommodations.
- College accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis with the college disability services or disability resources office staff.
- Understand that college accommodations may be different than high school accommodations and may not modify the essential learning requirements.
  - Colleges do not have to reduce the number of test questions a disabled student has on their test or reduce the number of pages an essay requires for a student with a disability.

*Solution:* Understand the accommodations you are using and why you are receiving those accommodations. For example, if you have a print disability (learning disability; dyslexia; or visual impairment) you will need to explain what accommodations you have used and what

works for you. In college there is often significantly more reading for students than in high school.

### **KEEP COPIES OF YOUR DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION:**

Colleges are required to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations for students who request services for a documented disability.

- Students may have to present documentation of the disability.
- Each college may vary in what they will accept as documentation.
- Check out what the college requires for documentation on the college website.
- The college may accept the high school IEP/504 Plan.
- An updated evaluation or documentation may be required by the college.
- Keep a copy of these documents and any other evaluations.
- Don't have a high school IEP/504 Plan? Review the college's documentation requirements and share with your clinicians or medical professionals so they provide the necessary documentation / evaluation reports for you to request accommodations from the college.
- Licensing, Board, or certifying state or national exams (for some majors like nursing, physical therapy, IT, etc.) will have their own requirements for documentation and procedures for requesting accommodations for the exams separate from the college disability services.

*Solution:* Ask your high school for a copy of your IEP/504 Plan or your medical provider for a letter outlining the diagnosis and functional limitations or impacts you experience. Make a copy for your records for any future needs.

### **SHOP AROUND:**

Begin your college search early in your high school career, NOT the end of your senior year!

- Like any student considering college, investigate the majors or degrees offered.
- Confirm the schools you are interested in offer the major you are seeking.
- Identify if the size and environment of the college is a good 'fit' for you.
- Take a campus tour during the school year when classes are in session.
- There are many options for colleges (4-year universities/colleges, public, private, and 2-year colleges) and many sizes from 500 enrolled students to 50,000 enrolled students.

*Solution:* Have a list of questions ready and use the answers you get as a beginning tool for deciding which college to meet with in more detail. Compare the schools for majors, size, campus activities, approachability of the faculty and staff, look at the layout of the campus.

### **WHO TO TALK TO FIRST:**

The Admissions Office is usually the first stop for students interested in the college. This is where you will get information about the campus, the majors, the admissions process, and get a campus tour or connect with faculty in your major. After being admitted, or while working with the Admissions office, you can research and connect with the college Disability Services office.

- Most colleges and universities have specific offices that work with students with disabilities/special needs to determine and approve accommodations.
- You can check the NCCSD CeDaR Website for the contact information for the colleges in which you are interested: <https://www.cedardatabase.org/>

- You can also search the college website for the term “Disability Services”, “Disability Resources”, or “Disability Accommodations”.
- Or you can contact the college’s general information number and let them know you want to speak with the office that works with students with disabilities.
- You will want to review the college’s Disability Services web page to get a better idea of the services that college may be able to provide and what they require for documentation of the disability.

*Solution:* Learn more about the college (majors offered, types of learning experiences, or student resources). Talk with the college Admissions Office and visit the campus. Ask for any accommodations when you set up the visit (such as a sign language interpreter or ask about the amount of walking on the tour if you have a mobility disability). You can even inquire if you can arrange for an informational meeting with a staff member of the Disability Services Office during your visit to learn more about the services.

## **TALK TO OTHER PEOPLE**

While everyone’s experience of what accommodations are approved, how the process works, etc. will vary, it may help you think of questions to ask or things to consider as you select your college.

- Talk to other students who have disabilities and have attended college, ask them what they learned about disability accommodations that will help you in going to college.
- Ask people what they wished they had known before they started college with a disability.
- Remember that reasonable and appropriate accommodations are provided on a case-by-case basis determined through an interactive process with the student, the Disability Services Office and institution, based on the functional limitations/impacts of the disability/ condition.

## **Bonus suggestion for high school students:**

If the college you are interested in attending hosts a summer camp of interest (some colleges, universities, and community colleges host summer camps for high school students in music, engineering, science, creative writing, etc.) – check it out – see if you can attend and be on campus for a week or two to really get a feel for the campus, the staff, and the community you are considering for your next step in your educational journey.

Hopefully this list has given you some things to think about as you prepare for your college experience; remember, it is never “dumb” to ask questions.

The better prepared you are for this exciting new experience, the better choice you will make when you select your college or university. Good Luck!