



Resource Guide

Office of Academic Accessibility

Adapted from the North Carolina Community College System, June 2013

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INTRODUCTION

*What is a Disability?
The Law*

What is a Disability?

A disability under Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, is described as a mental, or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. Examples of impairments that can have a substantial impact on a major life function are visual impairments and blindness, hearing impairment and deafness, mobility impairment, learning disabilities, or systemic medical conditions.

The definition of a disability and criteria for establishing eligibility for accommodations services under 504 and ADA for post secondary institutions may be different than the definitions and criteria implemented in the public schools, rehabilitation programs, social security, Veterans Administration, or as covered under insurance policies.

The Law

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act:

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that ..."No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States...shall solely by reason of ...disability, be denied the benefits of, be excluded from the participation in, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

A person with a disability includes ..."any person who (1) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities [including walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, caring for oneself, and performing manual tasks], (2) has a record of such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment."

A "qualified person with a disability" is defined as one..."who meets the academic and technical standards as requisite to admission or participation in the educational program or activity."

Section 504 protects the rights of qualified individuals who have disabilities such as, but not limited to:

Blindness/visual impairment	Specific learning disabilities
Cerebral palsy	Speech and language disorder
Deafness/hearing impairment	Spinal cord injury
Epilepsy or seizure disorder	Tourett's syndrome
Orthopedic/mobility impairment	Traumatic brain injury

Section 504 also protects students with chronic illnesses and "treatable disabilities", such as, but not limited to:

AIDS	Diabetes
Arthritis	Multiple sclerosis
Cancer	Muscular dystrophy
Cardiac disease	Psychiatric disability

Under the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ...colleges may not discriminate in the recruitment, educational process, or treatment of students. Students who have self-identified, provided documentation of disability, and requested reasonable accommodations are entitled to receive approved modifications of programs, appropriate academic adjustments, or auxiliary aids that enable them to participate in the benefit from all educational programs and activities.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities. Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in all programs, activities, and services of public entities. It applies to all State and local governments, their departments and agencies, and any other instrumentalities or special purpose districts of State or local governments.

- Requires that people with disabilities not be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination.
- Does not require the institution to receive federal financial assistance.
- Provides clear enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities by ensuring the federal government plays a significant role.

ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA)

On September 25, 2008, the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) was signed into law. It became effective on January 1, 2009. The U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives both unanimously passed the ADAAA.

The ADAAA focuses on the discrimination at issue instead of the individual's disability. It makes important changes to the definition of the term "disability" by rejecting the holdings in several Supreme Court decisions and portions of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) ADA regulations. The Act retains the ADA's basic definition of "disability" as an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. However, it changes the way that the statutory terms should be interpreted. Most significantly, the ADAAA:

- Directs EEOC to revise the portion of its regulations that defines the term "substantially limits";
- Expands the definition of "major life activities" by including two non-exhaustive lists:
 - The first list includes many activities that the EEOC has recognized (e.g., walking) as well as activities that EEOC has not specifically recognized (e.g., reading, bending, and communicating);
 - The second list includes major bodily functions (e.g., "functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, respiratory, neurological, brain, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions");
- States that mitigating measures other than "ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses" shall not be considered in assessing whether an individual has a disability;
- Clarifies that an impairment that is episodic or in remission is a disability if it would substantially limit a major life activity when active;
- Provides that an individual subjected to an action prohibited by the ADA (e.g., failure to hire) because of an actual or perceived impairment will meet the "regarded as" definition of disability, unless the impairment is transitory and minor;
- Provides that individuals covered only under the "regarded as" prong are not entitled to reasonable accommodation; and
- Emphasizes that the definition of "disability" should be interpreted broadly.

RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

College Rights & Responsibilities
Student Rights & Responsibilities

College Rights & Responsibilities

College Rights

- Identify and establish essential functions, abilities, skills, knowledge, and standards for courses, programs, services, jobs, and activities, and to evaluate students on this basis;
- Request and receive current documentation from a qualified professional that supports requests for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services;
- Deny a request for accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services if the documentation does not demonstrate that the request is warranted, or if the individual fails to provide appropriate documentation;
- Select among equally effective accommodations, adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services;
- Refuse to provide an accommodation, adjustment, and/or auxiliary aid and service that impose a fundamental alteration on a program or activity of the college.

College Responsibilities

- Accommodate the known limitations of an otherwise qualified student with a disability;
- Ensure that courses, programs, services, and activities, when viewed in their entirety, are available and usable in the most integrated and appropriate settings;
- Provide or arrange accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services for students with disabilities in courses, programs, services, and activities;
- To maintain appropriate confidentiality of records and communication, except where permitted or required by law;
- To maintain academic standards by providing accommodations without compromising the content, quality, or level of instruction.

Student Rights & Responsibilities

Student Rights

- Equal access to courses, programs, services, jobs, and activities offered by the college;
- Equal opportunity to work, learn, and receive accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services;
- Confidentiality of information regarding their disability as applicable laws allow;
- Information available in accessible formats.

Student Responsibilities

- Meet qualifications and maintain essential institutional standards for the programs, courses, services, and activities;
- Self-identify disability status in a reasonable and timely manner;
- Provide disability documentation from a qualified professional that reflects the student's current disability status, and how their disability limits participation in courses, programs, services, and activities;
- Follow published procedures for obtaining academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids and services.

[new request\2016 studnet request for accommodations - Shortcut.lnk](#)

Suggestions for students

- Some accommodations require extra time so it is imperative to self-identify and request accommodations as soon as possible;
- Attend classes and follow instructions provided in the class syllabus concerning absences, emergency needs, or other information specific to class;
If possible, inform instructor ahead of time of any absences;
- Contact other outside agencies for possible eligibility in additional services;
- Arrange for personal attendants if needed, whether paid for by an agency or family (colleges are not required under ADA to provide personal attendants, tutors, or personal items such as hearing aids, prostheses, individually designed and fitted special extensions or wands for computer or other resource operation).
- Students with disabilities should process their own college business i.e., registration, drop/add, refunds, etc.

DOCUMENTATION

Guidelines

Guidelines

Documentation has two main purposes:

- 1- to establish that an individual has a disability
- 2- to describe and document the functional impact of the disability for use in establishing the need for and design of accommodations

Information below is adapted from Longwood University, "How to Apply: Disability Documentation Requirements" <http://www.longwood.edu/disability/23375.htm>

Documentation will be used to evaluate requests for reasonable accommodations and/or auxiliary aids. The evaluation process will include the impact of the documentation on the goals and standards of the program, course and/or activity. Below are suggested documentation guidelines.

"As appropriate to the disability, the documentation should include the following six elements:

- 1- A diagnostic statement identifying the disability, date of the most current diagnostic evaluation, and the date of the original diagnosis.
- 2- A description of the diagnostic tests, methods, and/or criteria used.
- 3- A description of the current functional impact of the disability which includes specific test results and the examiner's narrative interpretation.
- 4- Treatment, medications, and/or assistive devices/services currently prescribed or in use.
- 5- A description of the expected progression or stability of the impact of the disability over time, particularly the next few years.
- 6- The credentials of the diagnosing professionals if not clear from the letterhead or other forms.

Beyond the six elements expected to be included in documentation; recommendations for accommodations, adaptive devices, assistive services, compensatory strategies and/or collateral support services will be considered.

[new request\doctors Disability Verification Form - Shortcut.Ink](#)

Addendum A: *Recommendations for Consumers*

- 1) For assistance in finding a qualified professional:
 - a) Contact the Office of Academic Accessibility at the institution you attend or plan to attend to discuss documentation needs; and
 - b) Discuss your future plans with the Office of Academic Accessibility. If additional documentation is required, seek assistance in identifying a qualified professional.

- 2) In selecting a qualified professional:
 - a) Ask what his/her credentials are;
 - b) Ask what experiences he/she has had working with adults with learning disabilities; and
 - c) Ask if he/she has ever worked with the service provider at your institution or with the agency to which you are sending material.

- 3) In working with the professional:
 - a) Take a copy of the Disability Verification Form to the professional;
[new request\doctors Disability Verification Form - Shortcut.Ink](#)
 - b) Encourage him/her to clarify questions with the person who provided you with this form
 - c) Be prepared to be forthcoming, thorough and honest with requested information; and
 - d) Know that professionals must maintain confidentiality with respect to your records and testing information.
 - e) Greensboro College may need you to sign a release of information from you professional to the Office of Academic Accessibility

- 4) As follow-up to the assessment by the professional:
 - a) Request a copy of the assessment report;
 - b) Request the opportunity to discuss the results and recommendations;
 - c) Request additional resources if you need them; and
 - d) Maintain a personal file of your records and reports.

Addendum B: *Tests for Assessing Adolescents and Adults*

When selecting a battery of tests, it is critical to consider the technical adequacy of instruments including their reliability, validity and standardization on an appropriate norm group. The professional judgement of an evaluator in choosing tests is important.

The following list is provided as a helpful resource, but it is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive.

Aptitude

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale - Revised (WAIS-R)
- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery _ Revised: Tests of Cognitive Ability
- Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (4th ed.)

(The Slosson Intelligence Test - Revised and the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test are primarily screening devices which are not comprehensive enough to provide the kinds of information necessary to make accommodation decisions.)

Academic Achievement

- Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)
- Stanford Test of Academic Skills
- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery - Revised: Tests of Achievement
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)

Other specific achievement tests

- Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test
- Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test
- Test of Written Language - 3 (TOWL-3)
- Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests - Revised

(Specific achievement tests are useful instruments when administered under standardized conditions and interpreted within the context of other diagnostic information. The Wide Range Achievement Test - 3 (WRAT -3) is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore is not useful if used as the sole measure of achievement.)

Information Processing

Acceptable instruments include the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude -3 (DTLA-3), the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude - Adult (DTLA-A), information from subtests on WAIS-R, Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery - Revised: Tests of Cognitive Ability, as well as other relevant instruments.

Temporary Impairments

Some disabilities are temporary and may require accommodations for a limited time. Each case is considered individually. The following documentation is required:

- Letter on letterhead from a qualified professional stating diagnosis, functional limitations necessitating the accommodations and estimated length services will be needed.

Services will be provided for *(to be filled in by the college)* number of working days pending receipt of documentation. If documentation is not received by that time, services will be cancelled.

Post-Secondary Transition

*Major Differences between High School and Postsecondary
Office of Academic Accessibility*

*Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights
and Responsibilities*

Learning Disabilities in the College Setting: A Different Ball Game than High School

MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND POSTSECONDARY

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC ACCESSIBILITY

<i>High School</i>	<i>Post Secondary</i>
Applicable Laws	
I.D.E.A Section 504, Rehabilitation Act	A.D.A. Section 504, Rehabilitation Act
Required Documentation	
I.E.P. School provides evaluation at no cost to student. School retests over time.	Varies depending on the disability, and must include testing documentation. Student provides evaluation at own expense. Student provides retesting.
Student Role	
Student is identified by school. School sets up accommodations.	Student self-identifies to Office of Academic Accessibility Office. Student is responsible for securing accommodations.
Parental Role	
Access to student records. Participation in accommodations Mandatory involvement.	No access to student records without the student's written consent. Student requests accommodations Student is self advocates
Instructors	
Modification of curriculum. Use of multi-sensory approach. Weekly testing, mid-term, final, and graded assignments Attendance taken and reported.	Not required to modify Not required. Lecture is predominant May test once or twice with few assignments. Attendance often not taken but student can be dropped after missing 10% (1 class)
Grades	
Grades modified based on curriculum	Grades reflect the quality of work submitted

Conduct

Disruptive conduct may be accepted.

Students who are disruptive and unable to abide by the Institution's code of conduct are deemed "not qualified" and can be dismissed

Most Important Differences in Summary

I.D.E.A. is about **Success**.

A.D.A. is about **Access**.

High School is mandatory and free.

Postsecondary is voluntary and costs

A Word about the A.D.A.

The ADA extends civil rights protection to persons with disabilities. A "person with a disability" is anyone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (public institutions are covered under Title II), students with documented disabilities may request accommodations that will enable them to participate in postsecondary educational programs. A "qualified person with a disability" is defined as one who meets the requisite academic and technical standards required for admission or participation in the postsecondary institution's programs.

Institutions are expected to give "reasonable accommodations". Among the accommodations which postsecondary institutions can make are:

- Removal of architectural barriers
- Interpreters
- A least distracting testing environment
- Assistive Technology
- Extra time on tests and assignments (Time and a half in most cases).
- Tape recorders

The emphasis of the ADA is on accessibility for those who wish to pursue education at the postsecondary level. There is no obligation on the part of a college to make fundamental changes in its courses for students with disabilities.

**Students with disabilities who complete high school will enter either the work force or a postsecondary educational environment. Having attained the age of legal majority, they will be expected to exhibit self-advocacy and to communicate their own needs for reasonable accommodations in work or educational environments.*

(Blue Ridge Community College, revised 7/12/02)

U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights
Washington, D.C. 20202

September 2007

More and more high school students with disabilities are planning to continue their education in postsecondary schools, including vocational and career schools, two- and four- year colleges, and universities. As a student with a disability, you need to be well informed about your rights and responsibilities as well as the responsibilities postsecondary schools have toward you. Being well informed will help ensure you have a full opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the postsecondary education experience without confusion or delay.

The information in this pamphlet, provided by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U. S. Department of Education, explains the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities who are preparing to attend postsecondary schools. This pamphlet also explains the obligations of a postsecondary school to provide academic adjustments, including auxiliary aids and services, to ensure the school does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

OCR enforces Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II), which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. Practically every school district and postsecondary school in the United States is subject to one or both of these laws, which have similar requirements.*[/](#)

Although both school districts and postsecondary schools must comply with these same laws, the responsibilities of postsecondary schools are significantly different from those of school districts.

Moreover, you will have responsibilities as a postsecondary student that you do not have as a high school student. OCR strongly encourages you to know your responsibilities and those of postsecondary schools under Section 504 and Title II. Doing so will improve your opportunity to succeed as you enter postsecondary education.

The following questions and answers provide more specific information to help you succeed.

As a student with a disability leaving high school and entering postsecondary education, will I see differences in my rights and how they are addressed?

Yes. Section 504 and Title II protect elementary, secondary and postsecondary students from discrimination. Nevertheless, several of the requirements that apply through high school are different from the requirements that apply beyond high school. For instance, Section 504 requires a school district to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to each child with a disability in the district's jurisdiction. Whatever the disability, a school district must identify an individual's education needs and provide any regular or special education and related aids and services necessary to meet those needs as well as it is meeting the needs of students without disabilities.



Unlike your high school, your postsecondary school is not required to provide FAPE. Rather, your postsecondary school is required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that it does not discriminate on the basis of disability. In addition, if your postsecondary school provides housing to nondisabled students, it must provide comparable, convenient and accessible housing to students with disabilities at the same cost.

Other important differences you need to know, even before you arrive at your postsecondary school, are addressed in the remaining questions.

May a postsecondary school deny my admission because I have a disability?

No. If you meet the essential requirements for admission, a postsecondary school may not deny your admission simply because you have a disability.

Do I have to inform a postsecondary school that I have a disability?

No. However, if you want the school to provide an academic adjustment, you must identify yourself as having a disability. Likewise, you should let the school know about your disability if you want to ensure that you are assigned to accessible facilities. In any event, your disclosure of a disability is always voluntary.

What academic adjustments must a postsecondary school provide?

The appropriate academic adjustment must be determined based on your disability and individual needs. Academic adjustments may include auxiliary aids and modifications to academic requirements as are necessary to ensure equal educational opportunity. Examples of such adjustments are arranging for priority registration; reducing a course load; substituting one course for another; providing note takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, extended time for testing and, if telephones are provided in dorm rooms, a TTY in your dorm room; and equipping school computers with screen-reading, voice recognition or other adaptive software or hardware.

In providing an academic adjustment, your postsecondary school is not required to lower or effect substantial modifications to essential requirements. For example, although your school may be required to provide extended testing time, it is not required to change the substantive content of the test. In addition, your postsecondary school does not have to make modifications that would fundamentally alter the nature of a service, program or activity or would result in undue financial or administrative burdens. Finally, your postsecondary school does not have to provide personal attendants, individually prescribed devices, readers for personal use or study, or other devices or services of a personal nature, such as tutoring and typing.

If I want an academic adjustment, what must I do?

You must inform the school that you have a disability and need an academic adjustment. Unlike your school district, your postsecondary school is not required to identify you as having a disability or assess your needs.

Your postsecondary school may require you to follow reasonable procedures to request an academic adjustment. You are responsible for knowing and following these procedures. Postsecondary schools usually include, in their publications providing general information, information on the procedures and contacts for requesting an academic adjustment. Such publications include recruitment materials, catalogs and student handbooks, and are often available on school Web sites. Many schools also have staff whose purpose is to assist students with disabilities. If you are unable to locate the procedures, ask a school official, such as an admissions officer or counselor.

When should I request an academic adjustment?

Although you may request an academic adjustment from your postsecondary school at any time, you should request it as early as possible. Some academic adjustments may take more time to provide than

others. You should follow your school's procedures to ensure that your school has enough time to review your request and provide an appropriate academic adjustment.

Do I have to prove that I have a disability to obtain an academic adjustment?

Generally, yes. Your school will probably require you to provide documentation that shows you have a current disability and need an academic adjustment.

What documentation should I provide?

Schools may set reasonable standards for documentation. Some schools require more documentation than others. They may require you to provide documentation prepared by an appropriate professional, such as a medical doctor, psychologist or other qualified diagnostician. The required documentation may include one or more of the following: a diagnosis of your current disability; the date of the diagnosis; how the diagnosis was reached; the credentials of the professional; how your disability affects a major life activity; and how the disability affects your academic performance. The documentation should provide enough information for you and your school to decide what is an appropriate academic adjustment.

Although an individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan, if you have one, may help identify services that have been effective for you, it generally is not sufficient documentation. This is because postsecondary education presents different demands than high school education, and what you need to meet these new demands may be different. Also in some cases, the nature of a disability may change.

If the documentation that you have does not meet the postsecondary school's requirements, a school official should tell you in a timely manner what additional documentation you need to provide. You may need a new evaluation in order to provide the required documentation.

Who has to pay for a new evaluation?

Neither your high school nor your postsecondary school is required to conduct or pay for a new evaluation to document your disability and need for an academic adjustment. This may mean that you have to pay or find funding to pay an appropriate professional for an evaluation. If you are eligible for services through your state vocational rehabilitation agency, you may qualify for an evaluation at no cost to you. You may locate your state vocational rehabilitation agency through the following Web page:

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/cgi-win/TypeQuery.exe?902>

Once the school has received the necessary documentation from me, what should I expect?

The school will review your request in light of the essential requirements for the relevant program to help determine an appropriate academic adjustment. It is important to remember that the school is not required to lower or waive essential requirements. If you have requested a specific academic adjustment, the school may offer that academic adjustment or an alternative one if the alternative would also be effective. The school may also conduct its own evaluation of your disability and needs at its own expense.

You should expect your school to work with you in an interactive process to identify an appropriate academic adjustment. Unlike the experience you may have had in high school, however, do not expect your postsecondary school to invite your parents to participate in the process or to develop an IEP for you.

What if the academic adjustment we identified is not working?

Let the school know as soon as you become aware that the results are not what you expected. It may be too late to correct the problem if you wait until the course or activity is completed. You and your school should work together to resolve the problem.

May a postsecondary school charge me for providing an academic adjustment?

No. Furthermore, it may not charge students with disabilities more for participating in its programs or activities than it charges students who do not have disabilities.

What can I do if I believe the school is discriminating against me?

Practically every postsecondary school must have a person—frequently called the Section 504 Coordinator, ADA Coordinator, or Office of Academic Accessibility Director—who coordinates the school’s compliance with Section 504 or Title II or both laws. You may contact this person for information about how to address your concerns.

The school must also have grievance procedures. These procedures are not the same as the due process procedures with which you may be familiar from high school. However, the postsecondary school’s grievance procedures must include steps to ensure that you may raise your concerns fully and fairly and must provide for the prompt and equitable resolution of complaints.

School publications, such as student handbooks and catalogs, usually describe the steps you must take to start the grievance process. Often, schools have both formal and informal processes. If you decide to use a grievance process, you should be prepared to present all the reasons that support your request.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome from using the school’s grievance procedures or you wish to pursue an alternative to using the grievance procedures, you may [file a complaint](#) against the school with OCR or in a court. You may learn more about the OCR complaint process from the brochure *How to File a Discrimination Complaint with the Office for Civil Rights*, which you may obtain by contacting us at the addresses and phone numbers below, or at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/docs/howto.html>.

If you would like more information about the responsibilities of postsecondary schools to students with disabilities, read the OCR brochure *Auxiliary Aids and Services for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Higher Education’s Obligations Under Section 504 and Title II of the ADA*. You may obtain a copy by contacting us at the address and phone numbers below, or at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/docs/auxaids.html>.

Students with disabilities who know their rights and responsibilities are much better equipped to succeed in postsecondary school. We encourage you to work with the staff at your school because they, too, want you to succeed. Seek the support of family, friends and fellow students, including those with disabilities. Know your talents and capitalize on them, and believe in yourself as you embrace new challenges in your education.

To receive more information about the civil rights of students with disabilities in education institutions, you may contact us at:

Customer Service Team
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C. 20202-1100
Phone: 1-800-421-3481
TDD: 1- 877-521-2172
Email: ocr@ed.gov
Web site: www.ed.gov/ocr

*You may be familiar with another federal law that applies to the education of students with disabilities—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). That law is administered by the Office of Special Education Programs in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the U.S. Department of Education. **The IDEA and its Individualized Education Program (IEP) provisions do not apply to postsecondary schools.** This pamphlet does not discuss the IDEA or state and local laws that may apply.

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LEARNING DISABILITIES IN THE COLLEGE SETTING: A DIFFERENT BALL GAME THAN HIGH SCHOOL

By Stephen Strichart

I am frequently surprised to find how many high school students with learning disabilities, and their parents, think that college is just a slightly more difficult version of high school. From this perspective, the major challenge is to get accepted into college. I don't agree with this perspective. I've found that given a little persistence, and in some cases a lot of money, most LD students can get into a college somewhere, albeit not always one of their first choices. The major challenge is not that of being accepted, but of being successful. Unfortunately, LD students are often poorly prepared for the increased demands of college.

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

1. Public Law 94-142 no longer applies.

In high school, PL 94-142 mandates a free and appropriate education delineated in an IEP that spells out specific services. LD students receive these; they don't have to seek them out. This law does not apply at the college level. Instead, there is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a far reaching, but rather nonspecific law. To gain access to accommodations and services through this law, LD students must document and make their disability known, and in many cases, identify the assistance they need to succeed in college, and then self-advocate to get this assistance.

2. There is much less structure.

Programs for LD students at the high school level are extremely structured and supportive. Students take a specific schedule of classes that is the same each day. The same group of peers are in most of their classes. Teachers consistently review their expectations and monitor student progress. This is not the case in college, where each day's schedule can vary widely, and each class consists of a different group of students. College professors rarely take attendance, check to see if reading assignments are being done, or concern themselves with the quality of the notes being taken by students. Students have to analyze each class and professor to determine what will be required for success. This varies from class to class.

3. There is greater academic competition.

Unlike going to high school, going to college is a voluntary matter. Poor achievers and unmotivated students rarely reach the college campus. Consequently, students moving on to college find themselves in a "bigger pond" where peers have higher abilities and drive, and teachers have higher expectations. Memorization may have carried the day in high school, but high levels of analysis and synthesis is what is needed now. In terms of both the quality and the quantity of their work, LD students must be more productive than they have ever been before.

4. There is a need for greater independence.

The nature of high school LD programs tends to foster dependence in students. This presents a major problem in the college setting, where students are required to function in a relatively independent manner. High school students don't have to declare a major, and for the most part, their course of study is prescribed. This, of course, changes dramatically in college. College students must make important career choices, and must carefully plan their sequence of courses, to include selecting from an array of elective courses. They must make good use of the many hours they are not in class and learn to fully utilize the many learning resources available on campus. Further, students must learn to establish and maintain work and study schedules, while balancing their academic and social lives. Decision-making and problem-solving skills become paramount.

MAKING THE ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

Many of the recommendations that I offer may seem obvious and almost trivial. This may be true in the case of typical college students, but not for LD students. One thing my experience working with LD students has taught me is to never assume anything. With this proviso, I offer the following recommendations for college LD students.

1. Make your needs known.

Colleges are not required to seek out and identify LD students. What they are required to do is to respond to the needs of those students once they are identified. Consequently, LD students should make their needs known right from the beginning. They can do this by registering with the appropriate academic unit, and by discussing their needs with their professors in an open and positive manner. Once they understand the nature of an LD student's problem, most professors will do everything reasonable to assist the student to succeed in their class.

No one knows the needs of LD students better than the students themselves. Experience is the best teacher, and LD students have had much experience coping with the problems posed by their disability. Consequently, it is the students who are in the best position to articulate their special needs. While various support personnel on campus are willing and able to advocate for students with their professors, this is best done by the students. Professors may be leery of official forms apprising them of accommodations to offer to a given student. They may feel put upon or even intimidated when apprised that they are required by law to provide various accommodations. This is generally not a problem where a student personally makes his or her needs known in a non-threatening manner, offering suggestions as to how they can easily be met by the professor. Where necessary, LD students should stand behind their rights in an insistent, but reasonable manner.

2. Provide your own structure.

LD students must realize the importance of shifting from a reactive to a proactive student style. They must quickly determine the expectations of each of their professors and how best to meet these expectations. Ideally, students will meet with their professors before the semester begins. At this time they can obtain reading lists and course requirements, enabling them to prepare for the beginning of classes and get a good head start on some of the work. Once they have determined what each course requires, students must establish priorities for the use of their study time, devoting more time to difficult subjects. They must gather and organize the materials and resources they need for each course.

Planning and consistency become crucial. Students must develop and stick to an individualized study plan for each of their courses. This plan must be responsive to the academic calendar and the due dates for all exams and assignments. Students must plan ahead to allow sufficient time to complete all work as and when required.

3. Increase your effort.

College requirements are both quantitatively and qualitatively greater than those experienced by students in high school. Consequently, LD students must apply themselves in a concerted and efficient manner if they are to succeed. Students used to an hour or so of homework each night must now be committed to spending two to three hours in preparation for each hour of class. While memorizing and repeating information in written or spoken form may have sufficed in high school, most college professors require students to demonstrate the ability to analyze, synthesize, and apply information to solve problems.

LD students should strive to improve their skills in a number of areas. They will need to develop an effective textbook reading strategy, devise effective study routines, and become more effective test takers. They will need to make full use of the library as a learning resource and become adept in the use of resources such as the dictionary, thesaurus, and encyclopedia. Certainly, they will benefit by developing word processing skills. Overall, LD students must become "active" students who rewrite their lecture notes, take written notes from their texts in their own words, and integrate information from a variety of sources. Further, LD students should seek help from their peers as appropriate. Teaming with a student who is doing well in a course can be very helpful when reviewing notes, writing and editing papers, and preparing for tests.

4. Become interdependent.

The college experience involves far more than just continued academic preparation. It is a time when LD young adults must make important personal decisions about their career and life goals. At first, LD students should not attempt to make decisions completely on their own.

Seeking the advice of a faculty advisor and utilizing career counseling services can help students to begin to identify the appropriate bases for the important decisions they must make. As they begin to make choices about a major and course of study, LD students initiate the process of becoming full independent adults. Each time they make decisions regarding which electives to take, how to manage time between classes, and with which groups and organizations to become involved, these students move further toward independence. LD students must become increasingly willing to make decisions on their own, ultimately claiming full ownership and responsibility for their decisions. LD students will undoubtedly find college to be more difficult than high school. But by being prepared for the differences between high school and college, and taking steps to accommodate to these differences, LD students can not only succeed in college—they can excel.

Stephen S. Strichart, PH.D., is Professor of Education in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education at Florida International University. He is co-author with Charles T. Mangum, Ed.D, of Peterson's Guide to Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities, now in its third edition.



Disability Verification Form

Student Name: _____

Student ID Number: _____

1. Diagnosis: _____

2. Level of Severity (circle one): Mild Moderate Severe

3. Date of Diagnosis: _____

Date of Last Contact with Student: _____

4. What measures were used to assess the following (Attach Diagnostic Report):

Aptitude: _____

Achievement: _____

Information Processing: _____

Social-Emotional: _____

Other: _____

5. Provide a summary of the student's educational, medical and family history that may relate to the learning disability (must demonstrate that difficulties are not the result of sensory impairment, serious emotional disturbance, cultural differences, or insufficient instruction):

6. Describe the symptoms which meet the criteria for diagnosis with the approximate date of onset:

7. Describe the student's functional limitations in an educational setting:

8. What recommendations do you have regarding necessary and appropriate auxiliary aids or services, academic adjustments or other accommodations to equalize the student's educational opportunities? Describe necessary and appropriate auxiliary aids:

9. In addition to the diagnostic report, **please attach documentation** and describe other information relevant to this student's academic adjustment:

Completed By

Qualified Professional's Signature: _____

Printed Name and Title: _____

Daytime Contact Number: _____

Contact Address: _____

Date: _____

Return Form To:
Greensboro College
Office for Office of Academic Accessibility
815 West Market Street
Greensboro, NC 27401
336.271.6634 Fax
georgieann.bogdan@greensboro.edu



Office of Academic Accessibility
Request for Accommodations

The Office of Academic Accessibility arranges academic, residential, and dining services accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please note that Greensboro College requires documentation of your disability. Once the appropriate documentation is received, your request will be reviewed to determine eligibility for the requested accommodations. If you have questions about documentation guidelines, please contact the Office of Academic Accessibility 336-272-7102, Ext. 5591, or email: georgieann.bogdan@greensboro.edu

Student Name _____ **Date** _____
GC Email Address: _____ **Cell:** _____
Type of Accommodation Requested (please check all that apply):
 Academic Housing Dining

Briefly explain diagnosis and limitations:
- _____

Please describe the kind of accommodations you are requesting:

By checking the box, I certify that I am registered with the Office of Academic Accessibility and all of my supporting documentation is on file. I understand that if my documentation is not on file my request will be delayed.

By checking this box, I authorize the Office of Academic Accessibility to provide verification of my disability to offices and departments at Greensboro College involved with coordinating my accommodations.

Student's Signature _____