



College Accommodation Planning

Understanding the Differences

College is different from high school in a number of ways. You have more choices, you have to buy your own books, and you will have more control over your daily schedule. Another difference will be how you go about establishing reasonable accommodations for your disability. Understanding and preparing for those differences now will save you no end of trouble.

There are three key differences I want to prepare you for. First, you as the student must initiate the process. Second, you will be asked to provide documentation of your needs. And finally, decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. Case-by-case means you may use different accommodations in different courses or your accommodations may be different from someone else with the same disability. The strengths and needs of each student vary and so do the specific demands and goals of different subjects, class formats, and evaluation methods. In reviewing a student's documentation for reasonable course accommodations the primary consideration is how the impact of the disability interacts with the demands or requirements of the course or program.

Functional Impact

The accommodation review process in college will focus on the functional impact of your disability, not the diagnostic label. Having a particular disability does not automatically entitle you to a specific accommodation. For an accommodation to be appropriate, the impact of the disability must significantly interfere with participation, communication or accurate evaluation.

For example, a student who is blind or has severe dyslexia would not need accommodations for oral presentations, but since both are effectively "print blind" they might reasonably have note-takers, adaptive testing, and books on tape. To continue the example, a student with a reduced writing speed as a result of MS impacting fine motor control or as the result of a learning disability's impact on sensory motor integration might need no accommodations in the classroom but would may need extended time on tests and access to a word processor for essay tests.

Fundamental Goals

Working with your college instructors will be important so that you can select between possible accommodation strategies the ones that will provide you with the maximum opportunity for both learning and demonstrating mastery. Faculty has the right to reject accommodations that undercut a course's fundamental goals. Faculty may also choose between equally effective strategies if one is less intrusive to the course goals.

If in a particular situation an accommodation infringes on a course's fundamental goals, then the student is not entitled to the accommodation in that situation. For example, a student with muscular dystrophy (affecting fine motor control) or a student with a learning disability

(affecting speed of information processing) might be entitled to a fifty percent extension of testing time in most classes (say an introductory history or psychology course where it is the knowledge and not the speed that is critical). If either of these students were to take an emergency medical triage course, where the speed and accuracy of determining who should be given medical care first is a primary goal of the course, extending the test time would be unreasonable. The student would not be entitled to the accommodation of extended test time in this context.

Guidelines For You

Being able to clearly describe your condition, its impact and your needs is important. Practicing this skill will help you to work with your future college counselor to identify needed equipment and services, establish appropriate accommodations, and develop compensatory strategies. The following questions will help you to describe your condition, its impacts and your needs. Review them with your transition team, counselor, parents, and others who can help you anticipate the accommodations and services you will need at college. You may want to write notes to help you present your requests and explain your needs when you meet with your disabilities counselor at college.

How do you describe your condition?

How do you describe your condition and how do you want it described to others? You may choose to keep information about your disability confidential. The disability services office will need to have enough information to evaluate the need for accommodations and services. Instructors need considerably less information and may be told as little as what accommodations are appropriate. Even if your disability is not visible or obvious it is likely that at some point a few of your new friends and classmates will notice an accommodation; how will you describe your situation to them?

What is the impact of your condition?

It is helpful to think about how your condition has impacted you in various situations in the past; then to consider how it is likely to impact the typical activities you can expect to encounter at college. You may want to pay particular attention to the following contexts:

1. Classes (lectures, laboratory, physical activity, web based);
2. Assignments (reading, writing, calculating, keyboarding, library work);
3. Communication (speaking, listening, using phones, using e-mail);
4. Evaluation (tests, papers, oral reports group presentations/projects);
5. Time Constraints (timed tests, college deadline, assignment due dates);
6. Attendance (class, required activities out of class, residential requirements);
7. Campus (mobility; orientation/navigation, transportation);
8. Residence Halls (room mates, food issues, climate control);
9. Co-Curricular (clubs, organizations, events, athletics,)

What have you tried in the past?

What accommodations, auxiliary aids, adaptive equipment, modifications and services have been provided in the past? Which ones work well? Which ones did not?

What do you anticipate needing at college?

General Guidelines For Documentation Providers

A diagnostic statement identifying the condition(s).

As appropriate include ICD or DSM codes, the date of the most recent evaluation, or the dates of evaluation performed by referring professionals. If the most recent evaluation was not a full evaluation indicate when the last full evaluation conducted.

Current functional impact of the condition(s).

The current functional impact on physical (including mobility dexterity, and endurance), perceptual, cognitive (including attention, distractibility and communication), and behavioral abilities should be described as clinical narrative and/or through the provision of specific results from the diagnostic procedures. Descriptions should provide a sense of severity, information on variability over time or circumstance and potential environmental triggers.

Treatments, medications, assistive devices/services currently prescribed or in use.

A description of treatments, medications, assistive devices, accommodations and/or assistive services in current use and their estimated effectiveness in ameliorating the impact of the condition(s). Include any significant side effects that may impact physical, perceptual, behavioral or cognitive performance.

The expected progression or stability of the impacts described over time.

This description should provide an estimate of the change in the functional impacts of the condition(s) over time and/or recommendations concerning the predictable needs for reevaluation of the condition(s). If the condition is variable (based on known cycles or environmental triggers) are they under self-care for flare-ups or episodes?

Recommended accommodations and services.

Recommendations should be logically connected to the impact of the condition. When connections are not obvious they should be explained. Recommendations will be deferred to whenever possible but will be evaluated in the context of the course or program.

Also of interest: The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights has issued a new pamphlet "[Students with Disabilities: Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities](http://ada.osu.edu/resources/college_accomodation.htm2)".(2) http://ada.osu.edu/resources/college_accomodation.htm2)