Self-Advocacy: How Students Can Help Themselves

Successful college students with disabilities, college advisors, and campus disability support services staff agree that using self-advocacy skills is vital to success in college. The responsibility for provision of support services changes after high school. Throughout elementary and high school years, it is the school system’s role to identify students and initiate special education services under the IDEA. However, once in college and under Section 504 and the ADA, it is the student’s responsibility to self-identify and provide documentation of a disability.

College students need to know that they have a legal right to appropriate accommodations; these are not favors to be granted or denied, but requirements under the law. But since the students alone hold the responsibility to reveal that they have a disability, it is necessary for them to learn and practice self-advocacy while in high school.

Self-advocates are people who speak up in logical, assertive and positive language to communicate their needs. To be good at this, students need to understand themselves, their needs, and their responsibilities. The following are essential to self-advocacy:

- Know the requirements for the documentation of your disability. Bring the information with you to college when you enroll.
- Contact the office that handles disability issues right at the start of the school year.
- Learn the specific arrangements for accessing accommodations or support services. Have a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses. Understand your psycho-educational evaluations and be able to articulate what accommodations you will need in specific areas.
- Ask for help in analyzing the college courses you will select. Some questions to ask are:
  1. What materials are used in the class?
  2. What format is used in class sessions (lecture, discussions, etc.)?

Connecticut State Department of Education/Bureau of Special Education Transition Task Force/Transition Training Manual
3. What instructional techniques are used in the course?

4. What tasks are the students required to perform in class and out of class?

5. How are students evaluated in the course; what types of tests are used?

6. How can students receive feedback to improve their performance?

7. What course-related support systems are available, such as instructor access, teaching assistant tutorials, web-based resources, mailing list or list serves, special study sessions, etc.?

- After consultation with the disability service office, inform your professors of your accommodation needs. Do not expect the professor to know or figure out your accommodation needs. This conversation should occur as early in the semester as possible. If you wait until just before an exam, the accommodation may not be available.
Resources

ACT Test Administration
P.O. Box 4028
Iowa City, IA  52243-4028
(319) 337-1332; TTY (319) 337-1701
www.act.org

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
P.O. Box 540666
Waltham, MA  02454
(781) 788-0003 Voice/TTY
www.ahead.org

College Board Services for Students with Disabilities
P.O. Box 6226
Princeton, NJ  08541-6226
(609) 771-7137; TTY (609) 882-4118

Council for Exceptional Children, Career Development and Transition Division
1110 North Glebe Rd.
Arlington, VA  22201
(703) 620-3660; TTY (703) 264-9446
www.cec.sped.org

HEATH Resource Center
George Washington University
2121 K Street N.W. Suite 220
Washington, DC 20037
(800) 544-3284; Voice/TTY (202) 973-0904
www.heath.gwu.edu

The K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled
Edited by Marybeth Kravets and Imy Wax
Educators Publishing Service, Inc.
31 Smith Place
Cambridge, MA  02138-1000
(800) 225-5750

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition E-News
www.nscet.org

Connecticut State Department of Education/Bureau of Special Education
Transition Task Force/Transition Training Manual
**Office for Civil Rights, Boston Office**
U.S. Department Of Education
J. W. McCormack Post Office and Courthouse
Room 707, 01-0061
Boston, MA 02109-4557
(617) 223-9662; FAX (617) 223-9669; TDD (617) 223-9695
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition

**Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities (7th ed.)**
Edited by Charles T. Mangrum and Stephen S. Strichart
Peterson's Guides
P.O. Box 2123
Princeton, NJ 08543-2123
(800) 338-3282
www.petersons.com

**Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFBD)**
20 Roszel Rd.
Princeton, NJ 08540
(800) 221-4792
www.rfbd.org

**Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability (CPED)**
University of Connecticut
Department of Educational Psychology
Neag School of Education
Hall Building, Ground Floor
362 Fairfield Road, Unit 2064
Storrs, CT 06269-2064
http://vm.uconn.edu/~wwwcped/tac-resc.htm

**Wisconsin Department of Education**
www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/een/pdf/transpndrs.pdf