

COLLEGE AND THE LEARNING DISABLED STUDENT

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the federal legislation having the most direct impact on college opportunities for LD students. The provisions of Section 504 were reinforced with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Although Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require that all colleges and universities receiving federal funds take action to meet the needs of students with disabilities, many institutions comply with these laws but lack the resources and/or philosophical commitment to go beyond only compliance. However, there are approximately 1,000 of 3,500+ colleges and universities in the United States which go far beyond compliance and offer LD students a broad range of services to help them succeed. Therefore, all two-year and four-year post secondary institutions across the country can be divided into the following three categories:

- 1) Colleges with Comprehensive Programs
- 2) Colleges with Coordinated Services
- 3) Colleges with Services.

COLLEGES WITH COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMS

Colleges and universities with comprehensive programs offer the most services for students with learning disabilities. The director and/or staff of the program are certified in learning disabilities or related areas. The director is actively involved in the admission decision and often, the criteria for admission may be more flexible than general admission requirements. Services are highly structured and include diagnostic and prescriptive planning; advisement; counseling; remediation; tutoring; special courses; and an array of auxiliary aids (tape recorders, taped textbooks, note-takers, alternative examination arrangements, advocacy, pre-college programs). Students are involved in developing plans to meet their particular learning styles. There can be a fee for some of these enhanced services. Generally, students whose learning disabilities were diagnosed early and who spent much of their school career in special classes or resource programs might benefit from a comprehensive program.

COLLEGES WITH COORDINATED SERVICES

Colleges and universities with coordinated services differ from comprehensive programs in that services are provided by at least one certified learning disability specialist. The staff is knowledgeable and trained to provide assistance to students to develop strategies for their individual needs. The director of the program may or may not be involved in the admission decision. Students voluntarily request accommodations in the coordinated services category, and there may be specific skills courses or remedial classes available or required for LD students who are admitted probationally or conditionally. High school students who may have enrolled in some modified courses, utilized testing accommodations, required tutorial

assistance but who typically requested services only as needed, might benefit from exploring colleges with coordinated services.

COLLEGES WITH SERVICES

Services is the least comprehensive of the three categories. Colleges and universities offering services generally are complying with the federal mandate requiring reasonable accommodations to all students with appropriate and current documentation. Staff and faculty actively support students by providing basic services to meet their needs. Services are requested on a voluntary basis, and there may be some limitations as to what is reasonable and the degree of services available. High school students who require minimum accommodations, but who would find comfort in knowing that services are available, knowing who the contact person is, and knowing that this person is sensitive to LD students might benefit from exploring colleges providing services.

DISCLOSURE

Colleges which offer comprehensive programs often have separate admission procedures for LD students and require documentation of the disability at the time of application. However, if you are not applying to such a formal program and will be evaluated by regular admission criteria, you will need to decide whether to disclose your disability. By law, colleges cannot ask an applicant if they are learning disabled. If disclosed by the student, this information cannot be used in and of itself to deny admission. Conversely, being learning disabled does not guarantee admissions. Colleges and universities are under no obligation to alter their admission requirements.

Although the choice to self-identify at the time of application is strictly personal, there are advantages. By disclosing your disability either through a required essay, personal letter or interview, you can provide the Admission Committee with valuable insight into your academic performance. A clear explanation of the nature of your disability and the compensatory strategies you have used to overcome it are always seen in a positive light.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with learning disabilities need to understand that the level of responsibility regarding the provision of services changes after high school. Throughout the elementary and secondary years, it is the responsibility of the school system to identify students with disabilities and to initiate the delivery of special education services. However, while Section 504 and the Americans Disabilities Act (1990) require post secondary institutions to provide accommodative services with disabilities, **it is the student's responsibility to self-identify and provide documentation of the disability once admitted to the college.** The college or university will not provide any accommodations until the student does the following:

1. Self-identify with the Office of Disability Support Services and specifically request services.
2. Provide current documentation of your learning disability completed within the last three years. The documentation typically includes a copy of your testing report and your IEP (individualized Education Plan), which then guides the college in providing appropriate accommodations. Be aware that federal law does not obligate a college to conduct assessments. Therefore, a student should consider that his/her high school updates LD documentation prior to graduation consistent with the requirements of the college in which the student seeks to enroll.

At a minimum, an LD student should be able to expect the following accommodations if the nature of the disability requires such adjustments and is supported by documentation: reduced course load; extended time to complete tests and assignments; extended time to complete degree requirements; a note-taker; books on tape; the right to record classes. The law does not obligate an institution of higher education to provide all recommended accommodations, but rather effective accommodations. A student should therefore not presume that what he or she received in high school will necessarily be provided at the college level.

Finally, be aware that each campus has its own unique system for providing students with disability-related accommodations. Many give the student a letter detailing recommended accommodations with instructions to the student to approach the professors in each case so that classroom accommodations are provided in a timely fashion. Some colleges send the letter directly to the students' professors. The former approach is the more popular, as it promotes important self-advocacy skills.

Below is a link to a directory of post-secondary schools in New Jersey which lists and describes support services for students with disabilities. Also attached is a copy of the directory which can be printed for future reference.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Association on Higher Education and Disability
P.O. Box 21192
Columbus, Ohio 43221-0192

Attention Deficit Disorder Association
P.O. Box 972
West Newbury, Massachusetts 01985

Learning Disabilities Association of America
4156 Lily Road
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15234-1349
<http://www.danat.org/>

National Center for Learning Disabilities
381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1420
New York, New York 10016

SAT Services for Student with Disabilities
College Board
P.O. Box 6226
Princeton, New Jersey 08541-6226

RESOURCEFUL BOOKS

College Guide for Students with Learning Disabilities
Annette Joy Sclafani & Michael J. Lynch, Lauren Publications, New Jersey

K & W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorders
Marybeth Kravets & Imy Wax, Random House, New York

Peterson's College with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders
Charles T. Mangrum II & Stephen S. Strichard, Peterson's Guides, New Jersey

LINKS

 [New Jersey Higher Education Disability Support Directory](#)

<http://adaptivetech.tcnj.edu/directory.html>

This site links to the New Jersey Higher Education Disability Support Directory. The directory lists all the NJ colleges and provides names and addresses of the support services available for students with disabilities.