

# **WHAT PARENTS CAN DO**

## **TO HELP STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

### **PREPARE FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION**

- Help the student learn about the different laws that govern the postsecondary school's response in serving students with disabilities and help them develop realistic expectations about the services provided. (i.e., IEP is no longer valid at the postsecondary level)
- Help student realistically examine whether postsecondary education is a suitable option.
- Begin the process of exploring and choosing postsecondary options with a comprehensive educational and vocational assessment of student's abilities and limitations.
- Assist student in preparation activities (see appropriate handouts).
- Promote development of student responsibility and control by increasing opportunities for students to advocate for him/herself.
- Teach decision-making skills.
- Foster student independence through increased responsibility and opportunity for self-management.
- Determine financial requirements and ensure that financial aid deadlines are met.
- Collect packet of materials to document student's secondary school program and to facilitate service delivery in the postsecondary setting. This packet should include an evaluation that is based on an adult assessment. This should be done after the age of 16.
- Help student select and apply to postsecondary institutions that will offer both the curriculum and the necessary level of disability related support services.
- Assist student in selecting appropriate campus housing, if planning to live away from home. A small residence hall may be more conducive to studying and developing friendships than a large residence hall or apartment.
- Encourage student to ask questions, register with the services for students with disabilities office and meet with an academic advisor early to plan class schedule and to arrange for accommodations.
- Provide as much support as needed for student during the adjustment phase.
- Communicate confidence in student's ability to be successful in a postsecondary setting.
- Encourage student to develop maximum independence in learning, study, and living skills critical to success in postsecondary settings.
- Assist student in contacting support services such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Commission for the Blind, Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic, etc.
- Help student be proactive in developing a support network and seeking help and guidance when needed. Caution student to resist becoming overly dependent on support systems.

- Prepare student to meet the variety of challenges at the postsecondary level such as:
  - the difference between the laws governing postsecondary and secondary schools (i.e., IEP is no longer valid at the postsecondary level);
  - less teacher contact and time in class;
  - more time studying independently;
  - fewer tests covering a broader base of knowledge, making it more difficult for student and teacher to monitor progress;
  - increased freedom, requiring self-discipline and self-management (e.g. going to class, completing assignments, scheduling time);
  - adjustment to new social expectations and a different personal support network (Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler, & McGuire, 1991).

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*Secondary to Postsecondary Education Transition Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities. A technical report prepared by the National Joint committee on Learning Disabilities, Jan. 1994, published in LDA Newsbriefs, March/April 1994.*

*Gregory, M., Graham, J., Hughes, C., (Spring 1995). Preparing Students With Learning Disabilities for Success in Postsecondary Education, TransitionLinc.*

*Virginia Department of Education. (June 1993) . A College Selection Guidebook for Students with Disabilities, Their Parents, and High School Staff;*

*Western Carolina University. (1989). The Postsecondary Learning Disabilities Primer, Learning Disabilities Training Project.*

*Wren, C., Adelman, P., Pike, M.B., and Wilson, J.L. (1987) . College and the High School Student with Learning Disabilities: The Student's Perspective. Chicago, DePaul University.*

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## ABOUT THE LAWS

Two laws mandate that Colleges provide equal access to students with disabilities: (1) the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and (2) the Americans with Disability Act. The following is a synopsis of both laws as they affect College.

### DEFINITIONS OF DISABILITY

A "disability" with respect to students is:

1. a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the **major life activities** of an individual (caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, sitting, standing, lifting, reaching, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working),
2. a record of such an impairment, or
3. being regarded as having such an impairment.

Individuals with disabilities may include persons who have: mobility, sensory or speech impairments; cosmetic disfigurements, mental illness, mental retardation or learning disabilities. Individuals with disabilities may also include persons who have neurological, psychological, or physical disabilities.

Documentation of disability is required and must be certified by a licensed professional ( i.e., doctor, psychiatrist, licensed psychologist, etc.).

### QUALIFIED INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY

With respect to educational opportunities: a person with a disability *who meets the academic and technical standards required* for admission or participation in an education program or activity.

With respect to public adult educational services: a person with a disability can be of any age during which non-disabled individuals are provided such services.

With respect to other services: a person is "otherwise qualified": if qualified for receipt of educational opportunities, public adult education, or other services because he/she meets the academic/technical standards, essential eligibility requirements and the other fundamental selection criteria.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

### **WHAT IS REASONABLE---WHAT IS NOT REASONABLE**

**Reasonable accommodation** does not negate requirements for successful completion of a program, course, service and/or activity, adherence to generally acceptable standards of behavior and a college's general and academic student rights and responsibilities, and adherence to administrative and faculty/staff directions and instructions. In determining the college's ability to offer reasonable accommodation to an otherwise qualified student with a disability, each request for an accommodation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the DSO staff. Factors to be examined include, among others:

- the academic and technical standards required for admission or participation in an education program or service;
- the purpose and nature of the program, course, and/or service;
- the precise education-related abilities and functional limitations of the student and how those limitations could be overcome with reasonable accommodation;
- the nature and cost of the accommodation required in relation to the college's financial resources;
- the consequences of such an accommodation upon the operation and educational mission of the college, course, program, service and/or activity;
- other federal, state and local regulatory requirements.

### **UNREASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS**

An otherwise qualified student who requires attendant care services must arrange to provide for his/her own attendant care service. The college does not assume coordination or financial responsibilities for attendant care services. The college is not required to offer or provide an accommodation to admit or to continue to admit an individual with a disability to any particular program, course, service, and/or activity or to provide educational opportunities and other services when:

- the educational standards or mission of the college would be substantially altered;
  - the nature of the program, course, service and/or activity would be fundamentally altered;
  - the student is not otherwise qualified (with or without accommodations) to meet the academic and technical standards required for admission or participation in an education program, course, service and/or activity;
  - the effects of the disability cannot be overcome even with reasonable accommodations;
  - the individual would not be able to complete a program, course, service and/or activity; even with reasonable accommodations;
  - an undue financial or administrative hardship (college-wide) would be caused by the accommodation;
  - if the individual would still pose a direct threat to the health or safety of himself/herself or others.
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## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines accessible as "capable of being reached." Services for Students with Disability (SSWD) Offices exist on postsecondary campuses for that reason - to ensure equal access to programs and activities. The goal and the effort must come from the student. The campus DSO provides support.

### WHAT A DISABILITY SERVICES OFFICES DOES

- Part of the DSO's role is to empower students. The goal is always to help students be independent and take control of their own lives.
- While it is the student's right and responsibility to work with faculty to set up academic adjustments/auxiliary aids, it is the DSO's responsibility to assure that the appropriate academic adjustments/auxiliary aids are provided for students who register with the DSO. Student requests need to be made in a timely manner and must be reasonable, i.e. do not give an advantage but only an equal chance at success.
- It is important to remember that academic adjustments/auxiliary aids cannot: result in fundamental alterations or cause undue administrative burden or substantially modify program requirements cause undue administrative burden
- The DSO exists to ensure that no student is discriminated against by the institution on the basis of disability. It is the institution's legal obligation and mission to determine and to provide, upon request by the student with appropriate backup documentation, appropriate academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to ensure that the student has an equal chance at success.
- The DSO's role is to ensure that other campus offices are prepared to serve students with disabilities.
- It is the DSO's role to protect the student's right to confidentiality. Specific information about student's disability will not be given out by the DSO without a written consent for release by the student.
- Clear procedures are established through the DSO for documentation of disabilities and arrangement of academic adjustments/auxiliary aids. Students may choose not to access these services.

*"Students who choose not to access these established channels may be able to negotiate their academic adjustments/auxiliary aids needs on an individual basis, but may not bring a complaint for lack of accommodation if arrangements so negotiated prove to be unsatisfactory." (Jarrow, 1993)*

Jarrow, Jane E. (1993), Subpart E: The Impact of Section 504 on Post-secondary Education, AHEAD, Columbus, OH.

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## HOW DO I ACQUIRE DOCUMENTATION?

### WHAT IS DOCUMENTATION OF DISABILITY?

- Documentation of disability is written proof that a disability exists. This is especially important with invisible disabilities such as ADHD, LD, etc. Even with obvious disabilities such as physical disabilities that are obvious to the naked eye, documentation is necessary because it provides the basis for which the DSO determines appropriate accommodations.
- A qualified professional must sign documentation, and it must be mailed or faxed by the qualified professional. Information sent must be on professional letterhead. The DSO reserves the right to refuse documentation that is hand-carried to the office.

### WHERE DO I GET DOCUMENTATION?

- Documentation can come from a variety of sources. Some common sources are:
  - The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
  - School District or School Counseling Office
  - Private physicians; licensed psychologists
  - Veterans Administration
  - Other offices serving students with disabilities at other colleges/universities where you have received services.

### HOW OLD CAN MY DOCUMENTATION BE?

It depends on the disability. Ask the DSO for documentation criteria for your specific disability.

### WHAT DOES THE ACCESS OFFICE DO WITH THE DOCUMENTATION?

- Determines if the documentation certifies that a disability is present.
- Determines if the documentation shows that the disability causes a substantial limitation to a major life activity such as learning.
- Determines eligibility for specific accommodations that will allow you an even playing field with your non-disabled peers.
- Determines, with your input, what accommodations you will need for each class, and how those accommodations will be provided.

### CAN ACCOMMODATIONS BE PROVIDED WITHOUT WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION?

- Yes, on a very temporary basis when the disability is clearly evident (e.g. a person using a wheelchair; a person who is blind; a student with a broken limb).
- The DSO reserves the right to ask for documentation of all disabilities before providing accommodations.