



Advice for the College Student

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Planning for college can trigger a spectrum of emotions from excitement to fear or for some, just “more of the same.” The point to be made is that college will be different from high school and different in a number of ways. Parents and their sons and daughters do not always realize that the law that governs the special accommodations provided in high school (IDEA) does not continue to represent the college student. There are no more IEP’s (Individual Education Plans) and 504 plans. Where the high school informed all instructors of the student’s disability and required accommodations, the college, while providing accommodations, seeks to protect the student’s profile and does not reveal the disability unless accommodations are required and in those circumstances, only reveals the needed accommodation, not the disability. In other words, those that “need to know” are minimized in college and without the student’s written consent, the college cannot specify the disability to instructors.

**When attending college, the student isn’t required** to identify him or herself as having a learning disability. If you don’t, you won’t qualify for any accommodations. In high school, you probably don’t remember needing to seek out support services. They were already programmed into your school life by the school. Your history of having a learning disability traveled with you from year to year. With college, this stops.

The college doesn't know you have a learning disability and it's up to you to report it. It is against the law for the school to ask about disability in the admissions application process and even if you chose to self-reveal the information in your application, it cannot be assumed that this information will be shared outside of the admissions office. In many schools, you will need to actively report to someone at the beginning of each semester that you need support services and/or accommodations.

If, in high school, you found it was really important to be permitted extra time on tests, tutoring, reading support and/or writing support, you can bet your needs are not going to end in college.

**When you look at schools to attend**, the most practical formula is to choose the college(s) you wish to attend first. Then, check out the services for students with disabilities. This can be done with a phone call, an e-mail or if possible, a visit with the person who or department which is responsible to arrange the accommodations. How do you find the right point of contact? Google or search for a point of contact within the school's website with a search word: "disability." Make contact. Get a feel for what can and cannot happen. Does it work for you? Or not? In high school, you probably did not have a choice of where you went. Now you do. And, it can be a most important choice for lots of reasons.

If you have unlimited time on tests in high school, don't be surprised if there is a time limit when you go to college. A college "day" does not have the same time frame as one in high school. When you do go to high school, your day often ends late in the afternoon. In college, classes can begin at 8 or 8:30 and extend to 10 p.m. at night. "Unlimited time" in high school has an unspoken deadline of time when school closes in the afternoon. You can see that college time is different. Don't be surprised if you are put on a time schedule for time on tests, maybe similar to the SAT's if you had extensions.

**Another notable difference in college** may be the absence of your parents' influence in your academic supports. While some may think this is great, others find the adjustment difficult. Once you turn 18 and have graduated from high school, laws come in to play that make life pretty different. One major difference is that your parents may not have the right to speak for you. You now speak for yourself. That's pretty important. Are you ready?

Some colleges won't speak with parents at all if you are 18 years or older when you begin college. Some will offer courtesy conversations with parents initially to help you transition. When you are picking a college and are talking to the disability coordinator, this may be something you want to talk about then if it's important to you. *(NOTE: At ERAU, students may grant parents "auxiliary access" according to FERPA, or access to their academic information. You initiate this in ERNIE. This granted access also lets staff know that we can speak to your parent regarding your academic pursuit here.)*

**O.k., now you have picked your college** and are ready to go. What do you need to do? It's a good thing to contact the disability contact person/office of the school you will attend in the fall. The summer before you begin is a good time to make the contact and is much better than the first week of school when everyone is trying to get appointments with everyone everywhere. You may soon realize that school personnel, like the disabilities coordinator, can be "shell shocked" with the volume of activity in the beginning of school, just as you feel! Remember...you and the disabilities office/person need to develop a relationship to work well together and your parents are no longer there helping you. Please know that it does not need to be scary. The disability/office person is waiting to hear from you. Their existence depends on you! And remember, if you choose not to identify yourself, as they will not know you and your needs. If you have trouble with coursework and have not identified yourself having a learning disability, you will be treated like any other student, no matter how much time and effort you have given to the class. How frustrating can that be?

**Another common difference in college you may notice** is the amount of reading and writing that's expected of you as compared to high school. The reality is you're in college and it's supposed to be different. College can challenge every aspect of a learning disability in a way that will never be challenged again in a job or a career.

If you go to college and expect to graduate, regardless of grades from A to D, or a GPA from 4.0 to 2.0 or less, you must accept that as you have always needed to do, you will continue to do. That is, work longer and harder than your peers. It's not an encouraging statement but it's practical. This can be particularly frustrating if you go to college expecting it to be easier or less demanding than your high school experience. Best chance, it won't be and in the worst case, it could seem insurmountable.

**You can make your college experience at least somewhat easier** if you work with the school's disability program. You will need to bring evidence of your diagnosis, and while schools can differ in what they require, most demand (*ERAU "requests" ☺*) a comprehensive report prepared by a licensed psychologist or doctor that indicates the tests administered to you that determined your learning disability and the scores you achieved. You can call ahead to see what is necessary when you set up your first appointment.

As mentioned earlier, the disabilities office may help arrange reading and writing supports and exam accommodations and you now must play an active role in ensuring you get what is needed. The disability office will not always know what the requirements are in each of your classes, so it will be very helpful to bring a copy of the course syllabus that lists the reading and writing assignments for the semester and exam information.

If you have a need for reading supports, the school may offer a reading service where you will listen to books on tape or have people read aloud to you. Some schools provide special software that can read out loud word-processing documents, PDF files and websites. Knowing your reading assignments is key to taking full advantage of such services. And yes, you need to put in a lot of extra effort to get this done.

**Many students feel overwhelmed** with the reading required of them in college. Understand that the feelings are common and people with learning disabilities have managed for years to get through a degree program. The real challenge is finding enough time in a day or a week or a semester to get the work done. It may mean that you stay in on a weekend when others are going away. It may mean that you find yourself walking to the library to get into a quiet environment to concentrate on your work. Whatever it takes, you may want to remember that this is time limited. There is a reasonable expectation that, once you graduate, the challenge of your learning disability will be more manageable because there will be more of a routine and perhaps less reading or at least the reading will be focused in a general subject area so you have the opportunity to master the vocabulary and speed up the process.

Test taking is a stressful experience for everyone and tests can be much longer in college than in high school, especially finals that can be 3-4 hours. If you add the extended time you need, you can expect to be very tired by the end. You may not be able to break to eat

a meal during these times but we have no reports yet of students who have starved to death in the process. Perhaps you can bring snacks and eat while you work. Ask about these things in advance so you're not left with surprises that can be unsettling on such an important day.

**It was mentioned before that** it is likely that no one will proactively tell your instructors of your learning disability in college. It will be your choice if you want people to know. It can be especially helpful at times to speak with instructors but it's impossible to know what their reaction will be. Hopefully it's always positive and that your efforts will be recognized and supported. Some disability offices will ask you to bring the instructors a form or letter from their office that speaks to the accommodations (*NOTE: At ERAU, this is called a Faculty Notification Form or FNF*). This may be an ice breaker, providing a starting point to begin the conversation. If you do this, always plan for privacy. It's not a good idea to walk up after class and expect a good conversation when other students are waiting their turn for the instructor's attention. A much better plan is to try to get an appointment or see an instructor during his or her posted office hours.

**Most people go to college with a goal and perhaps a dream. If this is you, never lose sight of the goal or dream. It will help you work your way through the long hours and the extra work you will need to accomplish. It can happen with your diligent effort.**

Good luck!