

PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Students with learning disabilities who require and are eligible to receive accommodations from colleges have an additional task in the college admission process. In addition to researching and selecting colleges that they would like to attend, students with learning disabilities must also evaluate colleges on the basis on what types of services the particular college can offer them in order to accommodate their learning needs. It is essential to understand that services for students with learning differences can vary greatly from college to college and that services available in high school may not be available at the post secondary level. Services for students with learning disabilities generally fall into three broad categories: (1) colleges which provide basic services as required by law but do not necessarily have specialized staff, monitoring services, and are largely dependent on student advocacy; (2) colleges with “Self Directed/Decentralized Programs or Coordinated Services” have services that rely on students having the skills to self advocate, generally have at least one certified learning specialist with a staff knowledgeable in assisting students develop learning strategies, can provide specific skill or remedial courses, offer tutorial assistance, and allow test accommodations; (3) colleges with “Structured or Proactive Services” generally offer far more comprehensive and structured services for students with learning disabilities. These programs are administrated by director and staff that are usually certified learning specialists and are actively involved with the student in establishing a program to meet the student’s educational needs including individualized or modified course work, tutorial assistance, academic monitoring, note-takers, test accommodations, skill classes, etc. There is usually a fee associated with this type of program.

In addition to understanding the differences between the types of programs offered to students with learning disabilities and thinking about questions to ask colleges regarding the services they offer, it is important to consider what educational/organizational assistance has been provided by the home during high school. Tasks routinely monitored by parents such as assignment due dates, organizing student binders and/or backpacks, assuring that student get to school on time, reviewing homework and assisting in preparation for tests, etc. will not necessarily be available at most colleges. If the assistance that families have provided has been essential to the student’s success in high school, this factor must be taken into consideration when evaluating a college’s program for student with learning differences.

In order to help students and families evaluate a college’s program for students with learning disabilities the following list of questions that should be asked of each college should be helpful in selecting a college where a student can be successful

- Is there a fee for services?
- Does the disability program have any connection to the admission process?

- Should a student disclose his/her disability on the admission application?
- What are the professional qualifications of the disability program staff?
- Are subject matter tutors available; in what subject areas?
- Are there any special housing options for students with disabilities?
- What is the minimum numbers of units a student with disabilities must take in order to keep full time status?
- What documentation is required for acceptance into the program?
- Are enrichment course such as career planning, college survival skills, learning strategies, stress management, study skills, test taking, time management, self-advocacy, etc. available?
- How is a student's accommodation plan articulated to the student's instructors?
- What services are specifically offered to students with learning disabilities: orientation, summer school program, diagnostic testing, basic skill remediation, assisted technology, extended time on tests, note takers?