

Tips & Pointers for Parents & Students to Manage Disability in Higher Education

Legal Guidelines for Higher Education

- **Federal Laws**- ADA, Section 504, Education and Civil Rights Act of 1964, Fair Housing Act
- *IDEA does not apply to students with disabilities (SWDs) after high school.*
- Laws are meant to...
 - o Level the playing field
 - o Provide access to education where disability causes barriers
 - o Apply to architectural access, aids and services for effective communication, and result in non-discriminatory policies, practices and procedures¹
- Laws are not meant to...
 - o Provide an unfair advantage for disabled students
 - o Fundamentally alter an academic program
 - o Create an undue financial burden on the university
 - o Cause a burdensome administrative process

Necessity of Parental Delegation and Release of Responsibility to Student

- Guiding Principles
 - o *Initiate students into ownership of everything related to their disability over time as they grow in their ability to understand.*
 - This is an ongoing process which...
 - Removes barriers to their success
 - Gives them confidence in their ability to manage themselves
 - Helps build resilience for future challenges
 - o *The time to act is now*
 - Laws will eventually sever your ability to be legally involved.
 - SWDs will eventually have to do it on their own.
 - o Grow through the continuum of dependence to independence.
 - Parents do it for the student.
 - They do it together.
 - Parents test student independence.
 - Students do and parents consult.
 - Students are autonomous.
- **Student Ownership, Self-Advocacy, and Understanding**
 - o Student Ownership
 - Federal laws giving parents control of student information during K-12 change in college denying access to everyone else but the student.
 - By law, SWDs starting college **MUST be the initiators** of the accommodations process rather than parents.
 - SWDs must learn to be comfortable dialoguing with disability service staff and faculty about their needs **on their own**.

- SWD ***MUST take the lead***, parents are supporters in this process
- According to federal law, once in higher education...
 1. The parent cannot even be in the room during the conversation unless the student signs a waiver.
 2. The parent will not have access to information about academics, accommodations, ETC. without a student-signed waiver.
 3. The waiver gives “read-only” access to parents. They have no power to act on the student’s behalf.
- Self-Advocacy and Understanding
 - Your student will likely have to meet with faculty/staff to discuss accommodations other than when you are present.
 1. During the semester accommodations issues in a class will arise.
 2. They will have questions about the accommodations process.
 3. It is at these times that it will be most evident which students have ownership of their needs and those who do not.
 4. A student’s willingness to self-advocate at these moments many times is the determining factor for a successful semester.
 - Goals for Self Advocacy and Understanding
 1. Student attends IEP/504 meetings, starting in 6th grade or now on
 - Student knows how their disabilities affect their academics.
 - Student understands what accommodations work for them.
 - Student develops questions ahead of time and asks them.
 - Student understands the IEP/504 process.
 2. Student reads/watches material related to disorder(s) and gets connected to peers with shared experiences.
 3. Student becomes familiar with their rights under disability law and learns socially acceptable ways of ensuring they receive the support they need.
 4. Student meets & discusses accommodations with teachers.
 - Plan with school counselor to attend first few meetings.
 - Work towards 1-on-1 meetings by sophomore year.
 - Doing it on their own now means they ***will*** do it in college.
- **Disability Records**
 - Organize all disability documentation into a physical file with a digital backup.
 - ARD and Section 504 Committee Reports are helpful but usually contain insufficient information to receive comprehensive accommodations.
 - Request for a copy of your student’s Full and Independent Evaluations (FIE’s) to provide with the accommodations request to the university.
 - Get your student’s evaluations updated during their last year of high school.
 - Request a full evaluation not just an update.
 1. University many times require complete and current evaluations.

2. Full evaluation is all-inclusive. It involves re-administering all tests.
3. Updates many times uses lesser measures and do not provide comprehensive measure of current abilities and deficits.
 - Many schools require professional documentation within the last 3 years.
 - Schools do not pay for evaluations after graduation so getting a full, psycho-educational evaluation can cost thousands of dollars if done after high school.
 - Health insurance does not pay for psychological evaluations for education.
 - All universities require documentation.
 - Allows for smoother accommodations request process and results that are personalized and of a higher quality.
- Goals for Management of Disability and Accommodations Records.
 - Parents learn and teach students the purpose of different disability documents (504 plan, IEP, FIE, Evaluation Reviews, Summary of Student Performance, ETC).
 - Student develops a system to maintain these records as paper and digital files and continues to update them during college and after.
 - Student includes letters and emails as part of the documentation file.

Preparing for and Navigating the Admissions Process

- **Accommodations are available for SWDs on the ACT and SAT**
 - There is a request process on their websites.
 - Test results do not disclose when accommodations are used.
- **By law the admissions process must not consider disability when considering students**
 - Do NOT submit disability documentation through the Admissions Office.
 - Accommodation requests are done through the disability services office (DSO).
- **Contact and Visit the Disability Services Office**
 - Usually called the “Disability Services Office” (DSO) but this is not standard.
 - Usually this is a stand-alone office, but sometimes grouped with another office.
 - Usually it is organized under Student Affairs/Academic Services.
 - Contact this office separately so that the admissions office is not involved.
 - Do this during January/February of your senior year.
 - Find out what services they provide and what other services are available elsewhere on-campus and in the community (Study help, Tutoring, Support groups, Writing center, Transportation assistance, Counseling center, ETC.).
 - Learn about the university’s accommodations request process ahead of time.
 - What are the steps of the process?
 - Documentation Requirements
 1. Age & Format
 2. What questions does it need to answer?

3. Are there any specific requirements for the SWDs disorders?
 - What forms have to be signed?
 - How long does the process typically take?
 - Who is the contact person?
 - How is the faculty informed of a student's accommodations?
 - What are the SWDs responsibilities?
- Visit the DSO as well when you visit the campus.
- Ask if they have an orientation specifically for SWDs.

What to Know & Expect about the Accommodations Request Process

- **Timeframe**- The process of receiving accommodations (ALWAYS) takes longer than expected. Begin as soon as possible (usually after acceptance). DO NOT WAIT!
- **Accommodations are different in Higher Ed. than K – 12**
 - Students must initiate the accommodations process.
 - By self-identifying disability and requesting accommodation from the DSO.
 - By discussing with their professors how accommodations will be applied once accommodations are approved.
 - By continuing in an ongoing collaboration with the university about accommodations.
 - Universities are not mandated to use all accommodations. They will evaluate requested accommodations to ensure that they are appropriate for the SWDs program and supported by documentation.
 - Universities must provide appropriate accommodations for everything relating to instruction & content of a course (i.e., exams, notes, textbooks in class, ETC.).
 - Universities do not have to provide devices or services related to personal academic activities such as study or personal use (Example: Sign language interpretation in-class but not in the library).
 - Universities do not have to provide services related personal care.
 - **Delegation of Responsibility**- Some universities divide the accommodations process among several offices. Make sure you know where to apply for each kind of accommodation you need (Academic, Student Housing, Dietary, ETC.).
 - Classroom- location, lighting, special desk, ETC.
- **Student Housing**
 - Students who have a disability requiring them to have a single-occupancy room are not required to pay additional fees for this accommodation.
 - If a single-occupancy room is not available in their requested dorm and a double room is available, the university must provide the double room with no roommate and charge the single-occupancy price.
 - If the SWD must be moved to a more expensive dorm to provide the single-occupancy accommodation, the university must not charge the higher rate. The

student cannot be “penalized” for this shortfall since the university was unable to accommodate at the original site and is requiring the move.

Things to Do Now

- Get familiar with what assistive technology, apps, ETC. are available and work for you.
- Start using them in high school so that you already know how to...
 - o Write a paper using voice-to-text
 - o Use a screen reader to read textbooks, websites, email, and other documents
 - o Scan a document and convert it to OCR (digital) text to use for screen readers
 - o Make, use, and organize recorded lectures for your classes
 - o Use digital flashcards such as Quizlet or Study Blue to aid in studying
 - o Use smartpens for recording lectures while taking notes (i.e., Livescribe)
 - o Include digital planners in your time management and for ongoing reminders
 - o Do any other task in which technology supports your disability right now
- Talk with your content mastery or other professional at your school who provides supportive technology. Ask them what other more portable products they recommend.
- Students with print disabilities...
 - o Consider purchasing a learning and literacy tool such as Kurzweil or Claro.
 - o Find accessible textbooks and get familiar with screen readers.
 - o Request an alternative format for any textbook that is not available electronically from the DSO in order to be accessible to screen readers.
 - Ask the DSO about this process.
 - Proof-of-Purchase is required.
 - Since the alternate format request process depends on the publisher to respond, make every attempt to purchase their textbooks in electronic format to use the included read-aloud option.
 - This process can take several weeks, so look into getting the books before the semester and submit the request as soon as possible.
- Develop and start creating a routine for how, when, and where you will...
 - o Organize notes, syllabi, handouts, ETC for each class (binder, folder, ETC?).
 - o Organize, save, and backup the assignments and projects created for courses (laptop hard drive, hard copies, cloud drive such as Google Drive).
 - o Setup **DAILY** study time
 - Choose a location ideal for method of study and learning style.
 - Schedule as close to the same time every day to help set a routine.
 - Prepare all needed resources in a bag and carry it with you until done studying (Technology, Textbooks, Binder/Folder/Notebook, Writing tools, Earbuds, Snack/Drink).

ⁱ <http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c51g.pdf>