Preparing for College: An Online Tutorial

A guide for high school students and their advocates
by Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

The transition from high school to college is a big step for everyone. Students with disabilities have even more things to consider than their nondisabled peers.

College-bound youth should begin preparing for postsecondary education and beyond while they are still in high school by selecting appropriate classes and earning good grades. In addition, they can begin to prepare for and to explore college options online. This publication shares a few Internet resources for college-bound teens with disabilities. If you use the online version of this brochure at *www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/cprep. html*, you can simply click on each website address rather than type it into your web browser.

To be cautious, parents and teachers should always check out websites before recommending them to a child. Keep in mind that the content of a website may change over time; even if it was once a great resource for a teenager it may no longer be appropriate. Parents and teachers should also consider exploring websites side-by-side with a child.

If you find sites that are inaccessible to you or to someone else who has a disability (for example, they include video clips without captioning for individuals who are deaf), do something about it. Send email to the website sponsors requesting that they make their pages accessible to everyone. These situations provide opportunities for young people to practice skills in self-advocacy, as well as advocacy for others.

The following sections give advice to college-bound teens and resources for further exploration.

Plan steps you will take to prepare for college.
Think about all of the steps you will need to take to get ready for college studies, select a school, apply for acceptance, and succeed in postsecondary studies. Read the publication and view the video presentation at the following website:

College: You Can DO IT!
www.uw.edu/doit/Video/college.html

Find reasons to attend college and issues involved in getting there at the following website:

Preparing for Postsecondary Education
www.ncset.org/topics/preparing/

Know your learning style.
Are you a visual, auditory, or tactile learner? Are you an extrovert or an introvert? Are you a concrete thinker or an intuitive thinker? As you set college and career goals, it is helpful to know your learning style so that you can adjust your study habits to be most productive and build on your strengths. At the following website, you can read about learning styles in general and take short tests to discover your own learning style:

The Paragon Learning Style Inventory
www.oswego.edu/plsi/

Become academically prepared for college.
Take classes that will prepare you for college entrance requirements and earn good grades. Develop study skills that work for you. Also, prepare for standardized tests you might need to take, and, if necessary, arrange for disability-related testing accommodations. Consult the following website for more guidance regarding preparation for college studies:

> Preparing Academically for College
> *mappingyourfuture.org/successincollege/academicprep.htm*

Assess your skills, interests, and personality as you consider potential academic fields of study to pursue.
Selecting a college, a major field of study, and courses is easier if you have career areas in mind. It is also important, however, to keep your mind open to new areas of study and employment as you learn new things. It is common for people to wind up in careers that are perfectly suited to them that they hadn't even considered before they entered college. Besides seeking advice from family members, teachers, and career guidance counselors, you can expand your ideas about career options at following website:

> Access Your Skills and Interests
> *mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/skills.htm*

Based on the Birkman Method, the twenty-four question, color-coded test at the following website can help you zero in on your ideal career:

> The Princeton Review
> *www.princetonreview.com/careers-after-college.aspx*

You can assess your skills and learn about careers at the following website:

> ISEEK Skills Assessment
> *www.iseek.org/careers/skillsAssessment*

At the following site, take a humorous quiz to reveal what medieval occupation suits you best:

> The Kingdomality Personal Preference Profile
> *www.cmi-lmi.com/enterppp.html*

At the following website, enter skills you have or hope to acquire, and see what occupations best match your skill set:

> Skills Search
> *online.onetcenter.org/skills/*

Enter a job title to see which skills you'll need at the following website:

> Skills Analysis and Training
> *my.monster.com/cmi/JobSkillsAnalysis.aspx*

Consider different types of degrees and schools.
Find out about all of your postsecondary academic options and decide which type of school is best for you, given your academic preparation, career interests, and personal preferences. Consider technical schools, community colleges, four-year universities, and other postsecondary options. Explore the following website:

> Select a School
> *mappingyourfuture.org/CollegePrep/selectcollege.htm*

At the following website, see what occupations are listed when you select the average worker education level required—on-the-job training or an associate's, a bachelor's, or a higher degree:

> Career OneStop
> *www.careerintonet.org*

Consider challenges in transitioning from a two-year to a four-year college by reading the publication and viewing, if possible, the video presentation at the following website:

> *Moving On: The Two-Four Step (the two-year to four-year college transition)*
> *www.uw.edu/doit/Video/24_step.html*

Consider what accommodations you might need and learn what typical accommodations are provided on college campuses.
Colleges and universities are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. What is considered "reasonable" varies from campus to campus. Each school either has an office (sometimes called Disabled Student Services or Disability Services) or a designated individual to whom you provide documentation and with whom you arrange for accommodations. The following resources include lists of typical accommodations provided by institutions of higher education:

> *Accommodation Strategies*
> *www.uw.edu/doit/Faculty/Strategies/*

> Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities
> *www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html*

> *Typical Policies and Procedures*
> *www.uw.edu/doit/Faculty/Rights/Policies/*

Explore colleges and universities.
You can learn a lot about colleges you hope to attend by exploring their websites. You can find out about entrance requirements, degrees offered, size, tuition, student services, and campus life. The following sites provide a good place to begin exploring postsecondary campuses:

> Brain Track
> *www.braintrack.com*

> CollegeNET
> *www.collegenet.com*

> Colleges, College Scholarships, and Online Degrees
> *www.college-scholarships.com*

> Community College Web
> *www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/cc/*

> Index of American Universities
> *www.clas.ufl.edu/au/*

> Peterson's Education Portal
> *www.petersons.com*

Consider funding options.
Life in college is full of expenses, expected and unexpected. There are financial resources to assist with and, in some cases, fully cover costs such as tuition, books, rent, lab fees, assistive technology, and application fees. Options include grants, loans, work-study, and scholarships. Talk to teachers, high school counselors, and staff in postsecondary disabled student services and financial aid offices, and explore the following websites.

Colleges, College Scholarships, and Online Degrees
www.college-scholarships.com

College Funding for Students with Disabilities
www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/financial-aid.html

Explore Financial Aid Options
mappingyourfuture.org/paying/financialaid.htm

FinAid: The SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid
www.finaid.org

Get Money for College
studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/funding.jsp?tab=funding

Resources for Students with Disabilities in Need of Financial Assistance
www.icdri.org/Financial%20Aid/finaid.htm

Saving and Budgeting
money.msn.com/budgeting-savings/

Use technology to maximize your participation, productivity, and independence in learning.
Computer and network resources are essential in many college and work settings. Computer-related assistive technology makes it possible for people with a variety of disabilities to use these powerful tools. Take advantage of opportunities in high school and college to learn about and use computer and network technologies. Read the publications and, if possible, view the following video presentations:

Working Together: Computers and People with Learning Disabilities
www.uw.edu/doit/Video/wt_learn.html

Working Together: Computers and People with Mobility Impairments
www.uw.edu/doit/Video/wt_mobility.html

Working Together: Computers and People with Sensory Impairments
www.uw.edu/doit/Video/wt_sensory.html

Working Together: People with Disabilities and Computer Technology
www.uw.edu/doit/Video/wt_dis.html

Consult the following websites for more information about technology:

Assistivetech.net
www.assistivetech.net

Closing the Gap
www.closingthegap.com

Find role models and mentors.
Engage in interactions with peers and adults during the process of preparing for college, attending college, and finding a career. Networking can occur through professional organizations, friends, and family, online and in person. Contacts with individuals who have disabilities can provide mutual assistance and support. Potential role models with disabilities can be found at the following websites:

DO-IT Snapshots
www.uw.edu/doit/Snapshots/

Famous People and Disabilities
www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/general/FAMOUS.HTML

Famous (and not-so-famous) People with Disabilities
www.disabilityhistory.org/people.html

Famous People with Disabilities
*www.iidc.indiana.edu/cedir/kidsweb/
fpwdinfo.html*

Famous People with Disabilities
*independenceinc.org/
SiteResources/Data/Templates/
t1.asp?docid=694&DocName=Famous%20
People%20with%20Disabilities*

An example of a community of teens with disabilities preparing for college studies and linked to peers and adult mentors is *DO-IT Pals*. Information about how to join *DO-IT Pals* can be found at *www.uw.edu/doit/ Programs/pals.html.* As an example of the value of networking, participants in the DO-IT electronic community offer the following advice to you as you prepare for college. Their suggestions reflect their personal experiences.

- Know yourself. Conduct an in-depth evaluation of your strengths, abilities, skills, and values.

- Research all of your different options for colleges.

- Work with the school you plan on attending ahead of time.

- Plan, organize, and evaluate your needs so that support service units can work together to make sure there are no gaps in assistance.

- Seek assistance from student service offices, such as Disabled Student Services, Career Services, and Cooperative Education.

- Be wise about the number of credits you take, especially the first quarter (when it is easy to be overwhelmed).

- Take some courses that look like fun, as well as more challenging courses.

- Request aid from your professors. Don't be intimidated by them. They are there to help.

- Take some time to enjoy the social life on campus—it is a good way to meet new people and make friends.

Pursuing postsecondary study is an appropriate goal for many young people, including those with disabilities. Finding the right program match requires academic preparation and research. Much of this work can take place on the Internet:

Resources
Parents, teachers, and students with disabilities can consult the following resources for additional information on activities for college preparation.

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology)
www.uw.edu/doit/

HEATH Resource Center
www.heath.gwu.edu

Mapping Your Future
www.mappingyourfuture.org

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition
www.ncset.org

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

For further information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, request materials in an alternate format, or to make comments or suggestions about DO-IT publications or web pages, contact:

DO-IT
University of Washington
Box 354842
Seattle, WA 98195-4842
doit@uw.edu
www.uw.edu/doit/
206-685-DOIT (3648) (voice/TTY)
888-972-DOIT (3648) (toll free voice/TTY)
509-328-9331 (voice/TTY) Spokane
206-221-4171 (fax)
Founder and Director: Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

An earlier version of this content appeared in: Burgstahler, S. (2004). Preparing for college… on the internet. *Closing the Gap, 23* (1).

Grants and gifts fund DO-IT publications, videos, and programs to support the academic and career success of people with disabilities. Contribute today by sending a check to DO-IT, Box 354842, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-4842.

Your gift is tax deductible as specified in IRS regulations. Pursuant to RCW 19.09, the University of Washington is registered as a charitable organization with the Secretary of State, State of Washington. For more information, call the Office of the Secretary of State, 800-322-4483.

University of Washington
College of Engineering
UW Information Technology
College of Education

04/23/12