



of Utah

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From LDA of Utah:

We want to thank Dr. Martinelli for contributing this article to our newsletter. For those of you whose children with learning disabilities are considering attending college, he has provided you with a lot of valuable information to help you prepare.

TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE: IMPORTANT CONCEPTS, PRINCIPLES AND TIMELINES

By Edward A. Martinelli, Jr., Ph.D.
Utah Valley University
Director, Accessibility Services
ADA Coordinator

Graduating from high school is an exciting time. One phase of life is ending and another is beginning. It is no accident that the celebrations centered around this event are called commencement, which signals a beginning and not an ending. For students with learning disabilities, it is also a time of beginning; and, in some sense, the beginning of the transition to college should occur well before April and May of the senior year, maybe even as early as the sophomore or junior year.

There are a number of important concepts and principles to understand in this transition. It is as much a transition for the parents as it is for the child. Changing roles, legal requirements, and processes require understanding so that both parents and students successfully navigate the transition to the college setting.

LEGAL MATTERS

Let's start with the more technical aspects first. The legal umbrella a person is covered under changes slightly from the K-12 setting to college. In the K-12 arena, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of

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CALENDAR

AUG. 3

Board Meeting

AUG. 8-9

Special Education Law Conference

Ogden Eccles Conference Center

MARCH 9-10, 2012

LDAU Conference

Weber State

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the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 define disability services and how one qualifies for those services. IDEA defines a "child with a disability" as a "child... with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance..., orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; AND, who... [because of the condition] needs special education and related services." (20 U.S.C. § 1401(3)(A)) In the college setting, The Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 set the standard. In general, ADA defines an individual with a disability as someone who has "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities." (42 U.S.C. § 12102 (1))

The concept of a major life activity is important in the college arena. Issues like test anxiety won't typically meet the standard of major life activity, but Generalized Anxiety Disorder would. One is limited in its scope, the other has broader impact. Students with learning disabilities will likely qualify in both settings as long as the hurdle of "substantially limits" is met. Each school may define this in a different way. As will be noted below, knowing the definition and requirements of the college you plan on attending is important.

Another big difference is the types of accommodations that can be made and the extent to which they alter the course. Under ADA, accommodations can't "fundamentally alter the essential elements" of the course. Consequently, accommodations like less homework, fewer exams and certain accommodations that remove tasks that are a large part of what the course is about may not be approved.

(See <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html> for more assistance)

ROLES

The next important concepts are the roles of the parent, the student and the disability office. In the K-12 setting, the parent takes a very active role in the discourse between disability and accommodation. While the student is often present at IEP and other meetings about services, it's often the parent that takes the driver's seat. Once a student enters college, the burden will largely shift from the parent to the student. The chart below speaks to this.

Issue	Secondary Education	Post-Secondary Education
Disability Identification	School	Student
Assessment	School	Student
Programming	School/Parent	Student/College
Advocacy	School/Parent	Student (partly college)
Decision Making	Placement Team	Student (partly college)
Transition Planning	Placement Team	Student

You will notice that the parent disappears from the picture in the college setting. It's not because they're not welcome or restricted. It's just the simple fact that the school will see the student as the individual they are required to serve, and there is an expectation that the student will manage their own affairs as an adult. Privacy laws play an important part here as well, as there are limitations under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as to what a school can share with anyone without the student's express permission.

Helping the student prepare for this new role is an important step in a successful transition. Helping the student to know how to talk about their disability (how it affects them and to what degree), what has been helpful in the past, and how to ask for help from the campus disability office can assist that transition. If, as a parent, you notice your student having problems related to their disability, encourage your student to contact the disability office. If a parent calls on their own, there will be limitations to how specific the information the school provides.

PROCESS DIFFERENCES

In the K-12 setting, the school often assists in letting those at the school know what's going on with the student and what is needed. In the college setting, that process changes a bit. First of all, the school doesn't know if an incoming student has a disability. These questions are typically asked so that there's no discrimination around admittance to the school. So contact has to be made with the school about being identified as a student with a disability. Part of that contact will be presenting information that will qualify you as an individual with a disability under ADA. Often an intake meeting will take place and the documentation will be reviewed. Depending on that information and the services requested or needed, this can be a very brief interaction, or take quite a bit of time.

DOCUMENTATION

In my experience, the biggest hurdle for students with a learning disability qualifying for services hinges on how old the documentation is and how comprehensive it is. It's important to find out what is needed early. As a general rule for students with a learning disability, colleges tend to be less interested in an IEP, and more interested in any psycho-educational evaluations that were done. Most schools are looking for testing that is no more than 3 years old. Additionally, they will typically want to see a comprehensive evaluation using a good measure of cognitive ability (eg. WAIS III/IV or the WJ-III Tests of Cognitive Ability) and a good measure of achievement (eg. WIAT II/III or the WJ-III Tests of Achievement). They will like to see age-based norms used and adult measures/tests, if possible.

You will want to check with each school you are thinking about applying to about what their requirements are. Many will have this information on the Disability Office's website. You will typically find those offices under "Disability Resource Center" or "Accessibility Office" designations. A simple search of those terms on the college homepage will help. (See also <http://ahead.org/resources/best-practices-resources>)

Consequently, colleges would like to have the student tested by the high school in their junior or senior year. They understand that such retesting may not be needed or feasible by the high school, but a conversation about this early will be helpful. This brings up the other important difference. In the K-12 setting, the school is responsible to

obtain/create the documentation for services. In the college setting, that burden falls to the student. That means that if a new evaluation is needed, the college is not required to do that testing, and it can be expensive.

There are typically a few ways this can occur. First, the college may do this testing at their counseling center or their disability office. This is rare, but does occur. Second, the State offices for Vocational Rehabilitation may provide this testing if you qualify for their services, and if it's seen as necessary for them to have that information. Third, you can get the testing done by a private psychologist. Typically, colleges are going to want to see a learning disability evaluation completed by a licensed professional using the types of tests mentioned above. The costs for these evaluations varies. Vocational Rehabilitation services are free to those who qualify. Colleges often do these for lower fees ranging from \$50 to \$250. Private evaluators can charge from \$450-800 or more for an assessment. Planning ahead and knowing what's needed can assist you in obtaining a good evaluation at the lowest cost possible. Often a list of potential evaluators can be obtained from the disability office. You may also want to check with your insurance carrier to see if they can be of any assistance.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Once the individual has qualified for services, a conversation will likely take place about the types of accommodations that can be provided and how those services are implemented at the school. Letters are typically sent each semester/term to the professors of the classes the student is taking. Many times the letters are delivered by the student so a conversation can take place about any questions or arrangements. Typically the student will have to visit with the disability office each term they want to use accommodations. Most schools don't disclose what the disability is on the letter, and only address the accommodations needed. This protects the privacy of the student, but it may have the instructor not knowing what the actual difficulty is. If there are questions about how to handle this, a conversation about ideas could be had with the campus disability office.

You will want to know the answers to important issues like:

- How are tests adjusted for more time or a quiet room? Do I take them in class or is there a special location that I go to?
- How are note-takers arranged if I qualify for them?
- What happens in lab classes or on in-class quizzes?
- What do I do when a professor has a concern or question about the accommodations listed?
- How far in advance do I need to make a request to get a book in audio format?

To assist in the transition process, I recommend getting with the disability office shortly after the student knows they've been accepted to the school, and perhaps just after they've registered for classes. If a student with a learning disability needs books in an audio format, it is important to give the school time to make this happen. With hundreds of books being used in hundreds of classes each term, it can take up to six weeks to get a book created in an accessible format.

SUMMARY

The transition to the new college setting can be exciting and a bit overwhelming. Getting a handle on a few key elements can be very helpful in making the transition as smooth as possible.

- Starting early to get the information the college needs speeds the process along.
- Knowing about the disability and how it impacts the student in the classroom and outside of class is important information to share with the disability office so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged.
- Having up-to-date documentation moves the process along much faster than trying to get it just before school starts, or having to ask the high school for it during the summer.
- Work with the student on how to advocate for him/herself, how to ask for assistance and how to know when help is needed.
- Understand the differences in roles, responsibilities, and processes to help both parent and child know what to expect and where to get help.

More comprehensive information can also be found at:

<http://www.nclld.org/images/stories/Publications/AdvocacyBriefs/TransitiontoCollege/TransitiontoCollege.pdf>

This article goes into much more detail on much of the information shared here, and also highlights getting accommodations on college-prep tests like the ACT and SAT. Timelines are also shown.

<http://www.dys-add.com/CollegeInfo.pdf>

This article also shares more details and timelines, but also has helpful information on being technology ready before moving to college.