

The Move from High School to College

While there is substantial overlap in many areas; there are significant differences between the accommodation process in high school and college. The major differences are

- A focus on access instead of success
- greater emphasis on personal choice, personal responsibility and self-advocacy
- The college student's need to provide and pay for required documentation

Major Differences Between High School and College

Academic accommodations in high school and earlier grades are designed to maximize the student's potential. In contrast, accommodations at the college level are based on civil rights laws and instead of a primary goal of improving achievement; the focus is on addressing barriers that may prevent students with disabilities from having equal access to the student experience. Put more directly, high school accommodations have a goal of improving achievement; college accommodations have the goal of removing or lessening barriers that limit access so that the student then has a fair and equal chance to succeed or to fail based on more essential factors (effort, ability, experience, etc.).

Identification

In K-12, schools are required to actively seek out and identify students with disabilities. In college, it is the student's choice whether to self-identify and to register with the office responsible for providing accommodations and to make specific accommodation requests. Unlike high school, colleges and universities are not to seek out, screen for, or identify students with disabilities. That would be viewed as a violation of the students' privacy.

Evaluation

Evaluation of students with perceived disabilities is not the responsibility of postsecondary institutions. Students have the responsibility to present documentation of their condition(s) for consideration of accommodations. The evaluations conducted are performed at the student's request and expense.

Documentation

Postsecondary institutions have the right to ask for sufficient documentation to clearly establish:

- The diagnosis
- The functional limitations
- The need for accommodations based on the diagnosis and the functional limitations

Having a diagnosis (e.g., learning disability, ADHD) does not always necessitate accommodations, as there must also be evidence of functional limitations and the need for accommodation. Different learning styles; "relative weaknesses" when the areas of weakness are average level in a profile of otherwise above average skills; or not working up to full potential are not, alone, evidence of disability.

Self-Advocacy

In college, students choose whether to identify concerns and also whether to seek accommodations. It is a valuable time to develop the skills of self-advocacy.