

COLLABORATION AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

The passage of special education and civil rights legislation have made college an attainable goal for thousands of students with disabilities. However students with disabilities may face barriers to post secondary education that their peers without disabilities may not. These barriers may include the lack of a standard high school diploma, not including college pre-requisites in their high school coursework (including basic study skills), having low expectations for academic achievement, and needing but not accessing assistive technology for studies and future employment. Each of these challenges can be addressed before a student leaves high school.

Many college-bound students with disabilities are not aware of the differences between high school and post-secondary study. In high school, a student's supports and services are put in place even if she or he took no active role in requesting them. At the post-secondary level, students must disclose that they have a disability and request accommodations before they will receive them. Students are also expected to advocate for themselves at the post-secondary level; in high school their advocates could have included their parents and various school personnel. Modifications to course work are a fairly standard practice in high school; at the post-secondary level all students are expected to do the same work with or without accommodations. High school and post secondary students pursue different goals; high school students pursue one primary goal—the completion of coursework to achieve a diploma. Post-secondary students can pursue a wide variety of goals and have access to many more choices in course work and field of study.

Collaboration between agencies and accessing natural and specialized supports have contributed to the success of many post-secondary bound students with disabilities. Collaboration and supports can take many forms:

Students who are receiving special education services from their high school may receive supports from their school district to attend college classes, including transportation, career planning, and academic support;

Vocational Rehabilitation, a federally funded program, is mandated to provide services that assist people with disabilities in obtaining employment including attending post-secondary institutions in pursuit of an employment goal;

Agencies that support adults with disabilities may provide assistance to post-secondary students through additional tutoring support, transportation, assistance with advocacy, and on-campus support;

The post-secondary institution the student selects makes a central contribution to student success by providing accommodations for students with disabilities. Accommodations can include the provision of tutors, interpreters, note takers, equipment, and alternative formats and extended time for testing;

Natural supports available on campus include student organizations, study groups, and social events providing assistance with academics as well as social needs;

Assistive technology may be crucial for the success for many students with disabilities. Vocational rehabilitation counselors can assist with assistive technology assessments or Assistive Technology Centers;

Finally, many post-secondary students find that their families are an invaluable resource in the pursuit of further education. Families may be able to assist with applying for financial aid or paying for tuition, assisting with transportation, or being part of a support network.

Post-secondary study has become attainable for many students with disabilities who have used their time in high school to prepare, who are aware of the differences between high and post-secondary, and who coordinate the natural and specialized supports that are available to them at the post-secondary level.

References:

Institute on Disability/UAP, University of New Hampshire. "Postsecondary Education: A Choice for Everyone." <http://iod.unh.edu/publications/pdf/tips-PostSecondaryEd.pdf>

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