

college planning for students with disabilities

a supplement to the College Prep Handbook

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As a student with a disability, you face unique considerations as you complete high school and plan for college. This handbook will make you aware of those considerations – and will guide you through important steps that will help you prepare for college.

***College Planning for Students with Disabilities* is a supplement to EducationQuest Foundation’s *College Prep Handbook*. Refer to the *College Prep Handbook* for general information about planning and paying for college.**

Here’s what you’ll find in *College Planning for Students with Disabilities*:

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About EducationQuest Foundation

EducationQuest Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to improve access to higher education in Nebraska. Headquartered in Lincoln, EducationQuest provides free college planning services; funds need-based scholarship programs; provides grants that help high schools increase their college-going rate; and provides outreach services for community agencies statewide.

This publication was developed through a partnership with EducationQuest and the Department of Special Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

THE IMPORTANCE OF Self-advocacy

Becoming a self-advocate while still in high school will help you succeed in college. At the college level, **you** will be responsible for identifying and requesting support services. Parents aren't automatically involved with your education at the college level, and most colleges prefer working directly with the student.

What is a self-advocate? Self-advocates are those who:

- make choices based on their preferences, beliefs and abilities
- take control and make decisions that impact the quality of their lives
- take risks and assume responsibility for their actions
- advocate on behalf of themselves and others

As a self-advocate, you communicate your needs with logical and positive language. To be an effective self-advocate, you must understand your disability, know how it impacts your learning, and become comfortable with describing your disability and academic-related needs to others.

How can you become a self-advocate? These practices will help you move in that direction:

Review your case file with your parents and Individual Education Plan (IEP) team to better understand your disability and its effect on your learning. Ask for copies of your IEP, summary of performance, and other assessment reports. Ask these questions:

- What is my disability?
- How does it affect how I learn?
- What are my academic strengths?
- How do I learn best?
- What strategies can I use to help me learn?

Consider meeting with the doctor or school psychologist who performed your assessment (testing) for the terms needed to explain your disability.

Take an active part in the discussions at your IEP meetings. Understanding your learning strengths and weaknesses gives you valuable knowledge that can influence your IEP planning and the services you may request in college.

Before each IEP meeting:

- Understand the purpose of the meeting.
- Know who will be there and their role at the meeting.
- Review the report from your last IEP meeting. Understand the goals listed on the report. Practice saying how you accomplished the goals.
- Establish new goals and be prepared to state them.

At the IEP meeting:

- Summarize your past goals and accomplishments.
- State your new goals.
- Ask for ideas and feedback from other members.
- Know what support and help you will need to accomplish your goals — and ask for it. Be prepared with examples of specific types of support that were successful for you.
- Ask questions if you don't understand.



CONSIDERATIONS DURING The Admissions Process

As a student with a disability, you have special considerations as you prepare for college admission.

- What course of study will fit your skills and interests?
- What accommodations might you need for college entrance and placement exams?
- What questions should you ask when visiting colleges?
- How will your disability affect financial aid?

Finding the right course of study

Follow these steps to explore your career options while in high school. This will help you determine a course of study when you get to college.

- STEP 1** Ask your guidance counselor or school transition specialist about career interest inventories and a vocational assessment to help you explore and identify your career interests. Ask how your learning needs may influence these career areas.
- STEP 2** Discuss career options with your parents, friends and people working in jobs that interest you. Look into job shadowing, attend local career fairs, and explore volunteer opportunities in your areas of interest.
- STEP 3** Become involved in extracurricular activities. Volunteer and paid work can teach responsibility, reliability and teamwork. A part-time job is also a good way to earn money for college.

Participating in activities at school and in the community will help you explore and develop your interests and talents. Colleges are often interested in a student's involvement in activities such as school clubs, musical activities, arts, drama, athletics, and volunteer work.

Preparing for college entrance exams

ACT and SAT

The college admissions process typically involves taking the ACT and/or SAT entrance exams in the spring of your junior year and again in the fall of your senior year. When you schedule your exams, you may need to request accommodations that can help maximize your efforts and demonstrate your abilities to their fullest. When requesting accommodations, you must provide documentation of your disability. For details, visit www.actstudent.org and www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student.

ASSET and COMPASS

Test-taking accommodations also apply to the ASSET (Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry and Transfer) or COMPASS (Computer Adaptive Placement Assessment and Support System) tests – a series of short placement exams often required by community colleges. These exams are designed to help identify your strengths and needs. For more information about these exams, visit www.act.org/compass or www.act.org/asset.

Accommodations for the SAT, ACT, ASSET and COMPASS may include:

- individual administration of the test
- audiocassette tape or large print test editions
- special answer sheets
- extended testing time and breaks
- an interpreter
- Braille editions



Selecting a college

Most colleges have an office that provides services to students with disabilities. If not, the school will have a person who coordinates these services. The office of disability services coordinator is usually located in the college's counseling center or in student services.

Once you narrow your college choices, it's important that you meet with the disability services coordinator at each college to determine services and accommodations that may be available. This may help determine the college that will best meet your needs.

Questions to ask the disability services coordinator

- What educational/medical documentation must I bring to identify myself as a student with a disability entitled to reasonable accommodations? How current must it be?
- How is confidential information handled?
- Who decides if I qualify for accommodations and are the accommodations I need available?
- How much advance notice is needed to have textbooks recorded on tape?
- Is tutoring provided? What is the cost?
- Are waivers or substitutions granted to students who, because of their disabilities, cannot pass certain courses, such as foreign languages or statistics?
- Are courses in basic skills or study skills offered? Are they available for credit? Can they be counted as hours toward full-time status? What is the cost?
- Is there a support group on campus for students with disabilities?
- Is there an adaptive technology lab on campus?



Questions you may be asked

The disability services coordinator may ask you these questions. Prepare your answers and review them with your IEP manager, a teacher, school counselor, or parent.

- What is your disability?
- How does it interfere with your learning?
- How comfortable are you in discussing your disability with teachers?
- What are your academic strengths?
- In what areas do you have difficulty or problems?
- What accommodations will you need?
- What kind of support services have you used in high school?
- What was most helpful?
- Are you willing to work harder than other students to be successful in college?
- How do you manage your time?

For additional information about college selection, visit *Educational Opportunities Beyond High School in Nebraska* at <http://edweblab.unl.edu/edopportunities/intro.html>. This online database provides options for postsecondary education in Nebraska. It contains information for students with disabilities including accommodations and support services.

For general college selection information, see EducationQuest's *College Prep Handbook*.

Applying for admission and financial aid

As you visit or correspond with colleges that interest you, ask about deadlines and the process for applying for admission, financial aid and college-based scholarships. Ask about scholarship funds that may be available for students with disabilities.

How disability-related expenses may affect financial aid

As a student with a disability, you may face expenses that other students do not encounter. When you apply for financial aid, inform the financial aid administrator of your disability-related expenses keeping in mind that financial aid will not cover expenses already covered by assisting agencies.

Possible disability-related expenses include:

- services for personal care attendants
- special education equipment related to your disability and its maintenance
- special transportation
- medical expenses relating directly to your disability not covered by insurance

Seek help

The financial aid process can be overwhelming and frustrating at times so ask for help. EducationQuest Foundation and the college financial aid staff will answer your questions and help you complete this process.



STEPS TO FOLLOW Once You Select a College

Once you select a college, it's important to take certain steps to ensure a successful start to your college career. Keep in mind that you will receive services related to a disability only if you:

- contact the disability services coordinator shortly after you're accepted
- provide the required documentation
- request services each term or semester

STEP 1 Gather required documentation.

All colleges require documentation of a student's disability to determine eligibility for specific services that are needed. To ensure you have the most recent documentation:

- **Request a copy of your high school IEP.** If you had an IEP in high school, that means you were tested by the school psychologist or a medical doctor. A copy of that assessment may be sufficient documentation of your disability. Before you graduate, request a copy of your last IEP and a copy of an updated assessment (performed by the school psychologist or medical doctor). Most high schools only retain student records for five years.
- **Update your tests.** Some colleges have a time limit on accepting certain documentation, particularly if you have a learning disability or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). If you received testing in high school, ask your school to update your tests the last year you receive special education services. Disability testing after high school graduation can be expensive.

STEP 2 Meet with the disability services coordinator.

Meet with the disability services coordinator at your college to review the documentation and discuss accommodations. After meeting with you and evaluating your documentation, the disability services coordinator will understand how your disability impacts your learning and can determine possible accommodations. Federal guidelines do NOT state that all students with a disability must receive ALL accommodations.

STEP 3 Request accommodations.

It's important to know what accommodations work for you. You may not need the same accommodations for each class. For example, a history class may require a different accommodation than a math class.

Partner with the disability services coordinator and the course instructor to find accommodations that work best for you. Although the college may not always agree to your request for a specific accommodation, they are required by law to provide an effective accommodation. Determining effective accommodations may involve experimenting and making adjustments. **Contact the disability services coordinator as soon as possible to make accommodations.**

Potential accommodations include:

- notetakers, tutoring, proofreaders, and editing services
- textbooks and other educational materials in alternative form, such as Braille, large print and audiotapes
- access to educational materials in advance, such as class syllabus and study guides
- sign language, oral interpreting and real-time captioning services
- test-taking alternatives, such as extended time, taped tests, oral tests, alternate test site, elimination of computer scored answer sheets, and use of a computer or spell-checking device for quizzes and exams
- access to adaptive equipment such as closed caption devices, amplified telephone receivers, low vision reading aids, tape recorders, Brailleing devices and computer enhancements
- equal access to classes, activities and services
- opportunity to make up quizzes, exams or assignments if the absence was disability-related
- preferential seating in classroom
- extension of timelines for completion of specific courses

- extension of timelines to complete certification or degree requirements
- permission to take less than full-time credit and still be eligible to receive financial aid. *Ask your health insurance agent about eligibility on your parents' policy for part-time students*
- foreign language course substitutions, for example, option to take foreign culture class instead of foreign language
- early registration

You must request services from the disability services office each term or semester. You will not receive services unless you make the request.



STEP 4 **Become familiar with the campus environment.**

Register for campus orientation. The disability services coordinator may also provide a special campus orientation.

Determine where to go and who to contact in case of an emergency. If you have special needs (especially medical needs), inform appropriate college personnel of any advance preparation that should be in place.

Ask the admissions office if a summer transition program is offered.

Obtain a copy of your class schedule and visit all buildings where your classes will be held to become familiar with locations and layout.

If you are commuting and will drive yourself, become familiar with parking facilities and procedures.

Consider signing a release of information so the school has permission to share information with parents.

Additional resources to help you succeed

TRIO Student Support Services

If you have a documented disability, you may qualify for this federally-funded program that is available on many Nebraska college campuses. Services may include:

- tutoring and mentoring services
- help applying for and managing financial aid
- career exploration and job shadowing
- educational and cultural off-campus activities
- classes and workshops in areas such as study skills, leadership and time management
- a lending library where you can check out textbooks and educational equipment such as computers and other electronic devices

For more information, contact your college and ask for the TRIO Student Support Services office.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Voc Rehab services may include, but are not limited to:

- vocational assessment, counseling and planning
- telecommunications, sensory and other technological aids and devices
- postsecondary training – if a student's financial aid package does not meet the student's financial needs, Voc Rehab may provide a training allowance
- rehabilitation technology
- job placement



To find the Voc Rehab office nearest you, call 877-637-3422 or visit www.vocrehab.state.ne.us.

WIN-AHEAD (Western Iowa and Nebraska Association for Higher Education and Disabilities)

This organization works directly with students with disabilities to ensure equal access to higher education. For more information, visit www.ahead.org/affiliates/western-iowa-and-nebraska.

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

The services provided by this organization include:

- training in non-visual (or “low vision”) skills that allow full participation in life
- educational assistance such as tuition, books, equipment and readers
- vocational counseling and assistance in securing or maintaining employment
- occupational equipment, tools and supplies

For more information, call 877-809-2419 or visit www.ncbvi.ne.gov/services.

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The services provided by this organization include:

- hearing aid bank for those who qualify
- amplified phone and TTY for those who qualify
- interpreter services – if not already available through your college
- awareness training for your employer

For more information, call 800-545-6244 v/tty or visit www.ncdhh.ne.gov.



YOUR LEGAL Rights and Responsibilities

By understanding rights and responsibilities, you will know what you need to do, and what the college is required to do for you to have an equal opportunity for success in college.

Federal laws

Following is a description of laws and how they pertain to you as a college student with a disability. Terms in bold face are explained on page 15.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

This civil rights statute is designed to prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities. It provides that:

No **otherwise qualified** individual with disabilities in the United States shall, solely by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

This law requires that postsecondary schools be prepared to make **appropriate accommodations** and **reasonable modifications** to their college's procedures and practices, so that you can fully participate in the same programs and activities that are available to students without disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is also a civil rights law. It helps to implement and enforce Section 504, and also outlines additional protections. While Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states that public institutions cannot discriminate on the basis of disability if they receive federal funds, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that with or without federal funds, public institutions cannot discriminate on the basis of disability. Private colleges and universities are covered under the ADA, unless they are completely owned and operated by religious organizations.

Important Terms

Otherwise Qualified

As a student with a disability, you are “otherwise qualified” when you meet the same academic requirements and standards as non-disabled students. These requirements and standards must be considered necessary to maintain the integrity of a course, program or college policy. For example, some colleges require students to maintain a GPA of 2.5 to maintain eligibility for a certain program or to remain enrolled as a student. You would also be required to meet this qualification. You are also required to meet an instructor’s expectations for students in regards to class participation, work standards, attendance, and ability to demonstrate acquired knowledge.

Appropriate Accommodations

These are changes that are made in the delivery of course material and/or in the assessment of your knowledge that will help you meet the standards of the course. Examples include notetakers, recorded textbooks, time extensions on course assignments, extended test time, sign language interpreter, assistive technology during class and exams, etc. Section 504 and the ADA states that students with disabilities may need appropriate accommodations or reasonable modifications in order to meet the academic requirements and standards.

Reasonable Modifications

Examples of modifications that may be offered include the extension of time permitted to complete a degree program (possibly due to carrying less than the required full-time credit load); or the substitution or waiver of courses that are part of the degree requirements. If a college refuses to modify academic requirements, the school must be able to prove that the change would be considerable and that the area requested to be altered is essential or necessary as offered. The college must prove the change would jeopardize the integrity of the course or program.

Discrimination complaints

Some individual instructors are not familiar with ADA or Section 504 requirements, or with the purpose of accommodating students with disabilities. The disability services coordinator can serve as a liaison between you and the instructor, and can advocate for reasonable accommodations.

Some colleges have an appeals committee that conducts informal hearings related to alleged violations of student rights.

If you cannot resolve your situation informally, follow the school's internal grievance procedure. All colleges are required to have complaint or grievance procedures related to discrimination. The procedures are formal steps outlined to resolve the issue.

- The formal process usually begins with the faculty or staff member most directly involved, the student and a mediator. If satisfactory resolution is not reached, the process may continue with the person's supervisor, then the department head, a Dean, and possibly members of the college's Board of Education.
- All colleges are required by law to designate at least one staff person to coordinate compliance with Section 504 and the ADA. That person may be located in the Disability Services Office. If not, inquire there to find out who to contact. If you believe you were discriminated against on the basis of disability, you can receive help from the Section 504/ADA compliance coordinator.
- You also have the right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights for investigation. You must submit the complaint within 180 days of the alleged discrimination. You can contact the region representing Nebraska at:

Office for Civil Rights, Kansas City Office Phone: 816-268-0550
U.S. Department of Education
8930 Ward Parkway Suite 2037
Kansas City, MO 64114-3302

Come and see us!

EducationQuest Foundation is open

**Monday through Friday,
8:30 am to 5:00 pm.**

To schedule an appointment, call the location nearest you.

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EducationQuest Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to improve access to higher education in Nebraska – and proud sponsor of the KnowHow2GONebraska campaign.