

Parents' Role When College Students Have Disabilities



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1. Background



A young adult (with learning disabilities) is--or is not--successful after high school is primarily driven by three factors:

- A supportive home life
- Connection to friends and community
- Self-confidence

What does a supportive home life look like?

- My parents always made me feel that I would be successful
- I had at least one parent/adult who was able to help me with and understood my learning or attention issues
- Relative ease with family issues
- I liked spending time with my family

2. The Numbers Are Growing



- 60% of young adults with learning disabilities enroll in postsecondary education within 8 years of high school graduation*
- 11% of undergraduates have disabilities (2011-2012)**
- The majority of students with disabilities begin at community colleges
 - Most are living with family; family influences college attendance
 - Students with disabilities, at 4-year colleges, may need to transition twice; to community college and to 4-year school

*<http://www.ies.ed.gov/ncser/pubs/20113005/pdf/20113005.pdf>

**<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=60>

3 ■ College Is Different than K-12



- No guaranteed admission (entry requirements are not adjusted)
- Services for disabled students are different at the college level
 - Pre-K to 12: For any disability, schools must identify a student's educational needs and provide any aids and services necessary to meet those needs as well as it is meeting the needs of students without disabilities.
 - College: Required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that it does not discriminate on the basis of disability, but is NOT required to lower or substantially modify essential requirements.
- No guaranteed success/completion
 - May be required to provide extended testing time, but not required to change the content of the test
 - No requirement to make adjustments that fundamentally alter the nature of a service or program, or that cause an undue financial/administrative burden
 - No requirement to provide personal attendants, individually prescribed devices, readers for personal use or study, or other personal services (e.g. tutoring/typing)

U.S. Department of Education

4. IEP's Don't Go to College



- Families expect to be partners in advocating for their student's education
 - Family participation is mandated for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) at pre-K to 12 levels
- Colleges don't develop IEP's
- Still, parents matter
 - Key contributor to a successful transition to young adulthood is the parent's optimistic view of child's learning and attention issues; positive relations with school, community, and other family members

5 ■ Students Choose Not to Disclose



- Disclosure is required in order for students to receive support and accommodations
- Disclosure is not a one-time thing; student must be assertive enough to talk to each instructor about his/her condition
- Youth with disabilities often choose not to disclose their condition
 - Looking for “fresh start;” don’t want to be labelled
 - Just 25% of those who received learning assistance in high school disclose at the college level*

*<http://hechingerreport.org/colleges-respond-to-growing-ranks-of-learning-disabled/>

6 ■ DSS Works with *Students*



- Since the 1960s, colleges and universities have not involved families in student's decisions without student's approval
- Disabled Student Services offices frequently have small numbers of staff to work with the number of students they must serve
 - Working with parents is an extra responsibility; not part of job description
 - Staff want to *do* their jobs, not *explain* their jobs
- Intersection of disability with FERPA, HIPAA is based on school's interpretation, not hard-and-fast rules

7 ■ Disabilities All Look Different!



National Study: 705 parents of college students reported their students had the following disabilities

- 29.5% asthma
- 22.6% anxiety problems
- 20.6% ADD or ADHD
- 19.1% depression
- 11.3% bone, joint, or muscle problem
- 11.1% brain injury or concussion
- 10.8% developmental delay affecting learning
- 10.2% stuttering, stammering, or another speech problem
- 7.8% vision problem not corrected with glasses
- 6.0% hearing disability

<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/projects/parent20/>

8 ■ Opportunities: Admissions



Transparency about disability accommodations can be a positive admissions talking point

- Parents are involved with the college decision; they're looking for clear information about the services their student will need
- Students will be more inclined to ask questions about their potential needs if they know this is a topic that's openly addressed
- "All things being equal," transparency can be the tipping point for the college decision

9 ■ Opportunities: Retention



Universal Design: When parents/family members know the campus resources, they can guide their student at the appropriate times

- Before entering college, students (and families) don't know what they don't know; timely information and messaging can make a difference in retention
- A four-year plan often won't work for all students; retention can be a longer struggle for students with disabilities, and parents need to support the path to graduation
- If students are struggling and access to assistance is not clear, another institution may look like a better option

10. Parent/Family Programs



Collaborate with DSS to provide information for families of students

- Help distribute information about differences between K-12 and college
- Break-out sessions at Orientation, Parent/Family weekend
- Tips for families about steps that students can take at critical points during the year, throughout the college career
- Timely reinforcement of talking points from DSS
- Seek information from other faculty, key offices on issues that may impact students with disabilities (career services, study skills center, counseling, etc.)
- Normalize the presence on campus of students with disabilities; let *all* parents know that services are available to support learning



Discussion

Your institution has identified parents/families as a constituency to work with.

- What's different about working with families of students with disabilities?
- What benefits are there to your university in welcoming students with disabilities?
- What are some ideas for your office to work with families of students with disabilities?
- How can you work with other offices, faculty to support students and families when disabilities are involved?

Resources



Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)

<http://ahead.org/>

National Center for Learning Disabilities

<http://www.ncld.org/>

Pacer Center

www.PACER.org

U.S. Department of Education,

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>