
Self-Advocates and Continuing Education

October 2009

by
Jessica Bacon
Florida Self-Advocacy Grassroots Project
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY

Self-Advocates and Continuing Education



- Many self-advocates after finishing high school, or as they enter the work field have, expressed an interest in taking higher education courses, and going to college.
- Each year there are only an estimated 2,000-3,000 students who are transitioning from high school with significant disabilities eligible for post secondary schooling (Hart et al., 2006).¹
- There is much advocating to be done around acceptance of people with developmental and other disabilities into post-secondary programs.
- Self-advocates can also take classes in community colleges, or can attend more specific trade schools.
- Self-advocates can advocate for themselves to get into the door of universities, and once they are in, many more self-advocacy skills are useful during higher education.
- Self-advocacy groups can work towards getting more inclusive post-secondary opportunities available for people with developmental disabilities.
- Self-advocates can work with colleges and universities to increase accessibility, and raise awareness.
- Universities can be excellent resources for self-advocates to learn and grow about parts of their lives they are interested in.

About Going to College one person's story:



Last year, Wade Screpnek had a dream that changed his life. He dreamed of going to university. The catch—Wade has a developmental disability.

"In the dream I am a new man," says the 24-year-old. "I dream about doing school work."

This year, Wade is a student in the College Connection Pilot project at Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton, Canada and he's living his dream.

"After graduation I plan to find a job and work hard at working with kids. I feel this school makes me feel happiness and gives me energy".

From Steps Forward: Information on inclusive college or university for adults with an intellectual/ developmental disability <http://www.steps-forward.org>

Important Laws Affecting Higher Education:



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

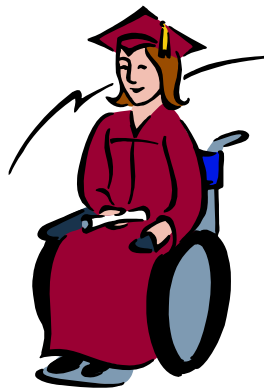


- The 1990 enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides motivation for students with disabilities, at least after the age of 14, to be involved in their own future planning for high school and beyond. This aspect of IDEA encourages students to learn to be self-advocates and take control over their own future planning and be an integral part of the decision making for their future.
- Pursuing higher education becomes an important avenue for students with disabilities to consider when doing futures planning, and more students with developmental disabilities are seeking such options every year.
- As students choose pathways that are geared towards higher education, IDEA provides funding and legal support for students to

work towards goals of higher education, while they are still in middle and high school (if this is a path they choose).

- The student with a disability thus has a transition plan as part of their individualized education plan (IEP), which is geared toward preparing a student for post-secondary education.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973



- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability for any programs receiving federal funds.
- Colleges and Universities usually receive some sort of federal funding under this law, even if they are a private university. Therefore, the law has helped to increase the number of students with disabilities attending postsecondary school.
- The law makes it certain that people aren't discriminated against by assuring that a person can get into buildings, and makes sure entrance requirements do not discriminate against disability.
- Although the law helps students with disabilities have the opportunity to go to college, self-advocacy skills are still essential, and often students will have to fight against discrimination, under this law.

Information adapted from: Brown, Holly (1999). Self-Advocacy Training from High School Students with Disabilities: A Literature Review. Published in the proceedings of the annual conference Browning, P. & Rabren, K. (Eds.) *Transition VII & VIII in Alabama: A profile of commitment*. Auburn, AL: Department of Rehabilitation and Special Education, Auburn University.

Ways to be successful in seeking post-secondary education



Thoroughly research what programs are available:

- Universities must not discriminate against students based on disability; however, there are some universities which offer more specific opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Some universities may be right for you based simply upon your skills and interests.
- Thoroughly researching what you are interested in studying can help you find a place that may fit your personal interests.
- Community colleges often have open enrollment and students can take classes specific to their interests.

Self-advocates planning for higher education:

- Make sure when you are going through transition you are given the opportunities to consider options in higher education, if that is what you are interested in.
- Working to be sure you are on the correct diploma track, and taking classes and developing skills that will be necessary in higher education, are essential.

- Also seek the advice and help of guidance counselors and others to help search for schools, find out necessary entrance exams, and how to navigate entrance applications.

Understand your disability:

- Be aware of what skills you have that will help you be successful in continued education and what aspects about your disability might require you to acquire extra support.
- Learn about what environments and methods you learn best in, and seek those environments.

Checklist to prepare yourself for higher education



Know Yourself and Your Disability

Before you can advocate for yourself, you need to identify your:

- Strengths—the skills you do well right now and things you have always been good at (use these to your advantage!).

My strengths are: _____

- Areas to improve—the skills you need to improve that will help you realize success, think about what skills you need when you go to college (research this if you do not know)

The areas I need to improve are:

- Interests—the career areas you may want to explore and things you have always enjoyed.

My interests are: _____

- Preferences—the ways you like to learn.

The ways I learn best are (for more information think about Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences): _____

You also need to know how to talk about your disability in a way that other people will understand. Do you know what your disability is and how it affects you (looking to “official” documentation can help here)? How might you explain this to people who don’t know you well?

I describe my disability as:

What supports do I need in order to be successful in jobs, and in school?

Adapted from: Sean Lancaster and Daryl Mellard, University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning, Division of Adult Studies. <http://das.kucrl.org/iam/studentadv.html>

Tips for being successful in higher education



Learn computer skills: Often the use of computers is essential to completing a variety of tasks in post-secondary education environments. Learning these skills may be necessary to being successful. Also there are often a variety of assistive technologies that are tied to computers that may be useful to completing expected tasks for post-secondary education.

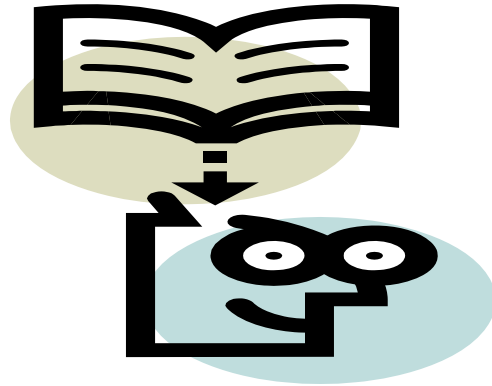
Seek appropriate accommodations and help from Disability Services Offices: Each institution of higher education is required to have an office where disability supports and services are offered. Seeking help from this office will provide you with necessary help and accommodations.

Get involved on campus: Self-advocates can be an important and integral part of their college campus. Making friends and joining non-academic activities may make the experience more meaningful. Even if you choose not to live on campus, there may be a variety of ways to get involved in campus life beyond academics.

Know what your rights are: Laws such as IDEA, the ADA, and 504 give you rights against being discriminated on based on your disability. Learning about these rights can help you!

Adapted from: Keys to Success: Attitude, Self-Advocacy LD Online: www.ldonline.org

Know Your Rights and Responsibilities



Colleges cannot close their doors to you because you have a disability. Your school must provide services that will allow you an equal opportunity to succeed in school.

My rights are (what kind of services do I have the right to receive):

My responsibilities are (what should I do to assure that I receive the services I need):

Adapted from: Sean Lancaster and Daryl Mellard ,University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning, Division of Adult Studies. <http://das.kucri.org/iam/studentadv.html>

Alternative options for transition age students in post-secondary college environments:



- Some local school systems nationwide partner with two- and four-year public and private colleges to offer education options to students with intellectual disabilities, age 18 and over, who are still receiving services from their school system under IDEA.
- There is an estimated 2,000-3,000 student's with developmental disabilities annually who are eligible for post secondary education options. Parents and local school systems typically initiate interest in pursuing these options, while local school system personnel coordinate student services. Some colleges also help organize these options.
- Options are wide from taking classes for credit, to spending time on campus that is more specific to reaching future transition goals and not receiving college credit.
- Often, these options end when the student ages out of public school, most often at age 21 or 22.

From: Hart, D., et. al (2006). Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. *Institute for Community Inclusion*.
http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=178

What can self-advocacy groups do to promote more inclusive education opportunities?



- Work with local universities to build relationships. Teach universities about self-advocacy.
- Teach local universities about the importance of having post-secondary inclusive education opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.
- Talk with students at local high schools and promote self-advocacy. Teach students how to advocate for themselves and for opportunities for post-secondary education.
- Support fellow self-advocates in seeking post-secondary education if they are interested.
- Talk with legislators regarding funding for people with disabilities in post-secondary education.
- Work to keep laws and legislation moving in a direction of individualized choices after school graduation.
- Learn and research all options for higher education in your area, and share it with the people in your area.
- Learn about your needs and strengths and ways you can benefit from higher education.
- Network with other self-advocates across the state and country on these issues.

Resources:

On Campus Outreach: www.education.umd.edu/oco

Supporting transition best practices in post-secondary settings for students with significant disabilities.

Steps Forward: <http://www.steps-forward.org>

Inclusive Post-Secondary Society.

Taishoff Center: <http://www.inclusioninstitutes.org/taishoffcenter/>

Syracuse University's School of Education, in collaboration with the entire university community, has built on its experience in creating higher education opportunities for students with developmental disabilities to establish a national center of excellence for providing leadership for inclusive higher education

Think College: www.ThinkCollege.net

Doors to colleges are opening for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in many different ways all over the country. This website is designed for both youth and adults to share what is currently going on, provide resources and strategies, let you know about training events, and give you ways to talk to others.

Transition to College: www.transitiontocollege.net

Information and resources on college options for students with intellectual disabilities

Transition Coalition: www.transitioncoalition.org

Providing online information, support and professional development on topics related to the transition from school to life for youth with disabilities.

The HEATH Resource Center www.heath.gwu.edu

An online clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities.

¹ Hart, D., Mele-McCarthy, J., Pasternack, R.H., Zimbrich, K. & Parker, D.R. (2004). Community College: A Pathway to success for youth with learning, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities in secondary settings. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities* 39(1), 54-66.