



## Advocating for your ADA Students Transitioning from High School to College

by Julianna Olsen

Transitioning from high school to college can seem like a daunting task. It is scary, unknown, and completely different from high school; but with a little pre-planning and preparation, you can make the transition smooth and easy for your student(s).

### • Don't be afraid

Encourage your student(s) to speak up and not be afraid of talking to someone in the Disability Resources Office (DRO). The DRO is a non-judgement zone. They have seen and heard it all!

### • Make an appointment

Contact the Disability Resource Office and have the student make an appointment. Ask the office what paperwork he/she will need to bring along with them. Find out where the office is located. Ask the DRO to send you a campus map or print off a campus map from the website. Knowing exactly where to go will reduce the stress the student will feel when that appointment day comes.

### • Bring correct paperwork

Students will need to bring a copy of their current IEP (Individualized Education Plan) or 504 plan, a copy of their psychological exam report, or a copy of psychologist/psychiatrist reports. The college/university will probably also have their own intake paperwork. If the college/university has not sent that paperwork to the student ahead of time, they will need to complete these forms once they get to their appointment. Colleges/universities can also help with short term disabilities such as broken arms, broken legs, injured backs, etc. Have the student inquire if they are in that situation.

When the time comes for the student's appointment, meet with him/her ahead of time. Let them know what to expect. Tell them not to be nervous, tell them to be a self-advocate, and tell them to speak up for themselves. If they feel that they are not getting the accommodations he/she needs, they need to speak up so they can be successful in the long run. Going through college without accommodations or without the correct accommodations only accounts for failure in the long run. I have had students attempt to get through classes without using those accommodations and nine times out of ten the student either barely makes it through the class or does not succeed in the class.

During the Intake Appointment, the DRO Counselor will have the student complete paperwork (if they have not already completed it), talk to them and get to know them a bit and then talk about what accommodations will best help that student get through classes. Some students are great at self-advocating and some are not. Encourage them to bring someone with them. It is always helpful to have someone with a student to listen to and ask questions the student may not ask or hear.

Once classes begin, different colleges handle things differently. Some colleges will give a student copies of an accommodation letter for the student to give to his/her professors. Some colleges will send the letters to the student's professors for them. In either case, students should always speak to their professors within the first week of class in order to talk about their accommodations and what will work best for the student and the professor. Students who have anxiety issues can ask for help with this from the DRO. The DRO will be happy

to speak to the professor and the student to make sure all accommodations are being made and what works for everyone.

If a student finds that accommodations are not working or accommodations are not being given to him/her, that student should go to the DRO. The DRO does not know that something is or is not happening unless the student lets them know. If a professor is not making accommodations, the DRO will address this directly with the professor and make sure those accommodations are given from that point on and possibly backtrack a bit. Accommodations are not normally retroactive but if it is a case that a professor is not giving a student the agreed upon accommodations, the professor will have to go back to the point that the accommodations were not given.

There are several key differences between high school and college. The student and his/her parents/guardian need to understand the differences because that will make their transition to college easier.

High School	College/University
High schools are required to identify students with disabilities.	Students are required to be self-advocates and colleges/universities are not permitted by law to ask students if they have a disability.
High Schools are required by law to provide testing of students if a learning disability is possible.	Colleges/universities do not provide testing (although some universities that have PSY programs may provide some testing at reduced costs). Most colleges/universities will refer to an outside agency.
High Schools are required to involve parents/guardians in IEP/504 plan decisions.	Colleges/universities are not permitted to speak to anyone about a student's disability except that student. If a student has a FERPA (Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act of 1974) form on file the college/university may speak to those people only.
High Schools will modify a class or classes.	Colleges/universities will not modify a class but will make an accommodation to help that student be on a level playing field as is everyone else in that class(es).

If a high school Counselor or Teacher has any questions about how to help a student transfer to a college or university, do not hesitate to contact the DRO in the school that the student is thinking about attending. They will be happy to talk to you and further assist you in helping your student. The more prepared they are when they come to the College/University, the better they will be once classes begin.

*Julianna Olsen is the Disability Resources & Student Life Director at Brunswick Community College since 1999. She was named Staff Member of the Year for the year 2018 by her peers. That same year she battled and won her fight against Breast Cancer!*