

Top Mistakes Parents Make During the Transition to College

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Mistake #1:

Not Knowing What Types of
Institutions are Here Tonight

Three main types here tonight

1. Life Skills Programs
2. Accommodation Based Colleges
3. Enhanced Programs

1. Life Skills Programs

These programs are typically residential in nature and usually provide some type of 24 hour availability of staff. Degree or Non-degree in nature, they usually contain components of independent living and vocational development. They may or may not provide a “typical” campus experience.

2. Accommodation Based

By far the most common. All colleges and universities are required by federal law to provide routine accommodations such as extended time for exams, note taking assistance, electronic textbooks, sign language interpreters, etc.

Usually there is a centralized office to coordinate these. Either a Disability Professional or a College Rep (or both) will staff these tables.

Know who you are talking to tonight!

Accommodation Definitions High School vs. College

In high school there are many accommodations and services available to students with disabilities. They may all be grouped together under the descriptor “accommodations” and include everything from extended time for exams, reduced number of exam questions, deadline extensions, tutoring, and the availability of a resource room.

In college this changes significantly due to differences in legislation between K-12 and the Post-Secondary world. In the Post-Secondary world tutoring is a service, not an accommodation, work loads are not decreased, and there may not be a resource professional available on a routine basis. Tutoring, academic coaching, and homework review are considered “services” and are not required by law.

3. Enhanced programs

These are programs that combine traditional accommodations such as extended time for exams with services such as tutoring, academic coaching, resource professionals, etc.

As the service component is not required by law there is typically an additional charge for the service components which are rolled into a single package price. Often these programs are expected to generate the revenue they need to pay for the overhead they use.

Fees can range from \$4337-\$6400 per year in addition to regular tuition.

Determine first what best meets your child's needs

Life skills programs are for students who are unlikely to succeed in college without a great deal of support, including life skills and independent living skills.

Some of these program grant a certificate of completion, some offer hybrid experience, taking life skills coursework with their smaller cohort and cross enrolling for traditional credit bearing coursework. Others provide comprehensive support and partner with traditional colleges and universities.

Choosing between a school with traditional accommodations and a school with an enhanced program depends on the level of executive functioning and independence your son or daughter has. The more self-starting and willing to advocate for themselves the better the experience will be at a school without an enhanced program.

Also check if the services you may want are available a la carte.

Mistake #2:

Not transferring as many executive functions as possible to your son or daughter by the end of high school.

Mistake #3:

Not scheduling a meeting with the DS
office during a college visit

Mistake #4:

Assuming accommodations will
“transfer” from high school to college.

Accommodations do not “transfer”

Many parents assume that if they send copies of an IEP or a Summary Report to the college or university that this is all the college needs and that everything on the IEP will automatically apply at college. This is not typically the case.

Many colleges will need “primary verification” of the disability which ranges from a letter from a licensed care provider to, for learning disabilities, a copy of the comprehensive testing report. This information is sometimes in what the high school sends over, but not usually!

Mistake #5:

Not checking in a timely enough manner what the DS office needs for disability verification while there is enough time to arrange it.

Mistake #6:

Failing to follow exact instructions to apply for accommodations at the college or university of choice. Instructions should be on the DS office webpage.

Most require some type of application form in addition to the documentation.

Mistake #7:

Assuming that a smaller campus will automatically be better for a student with a disability

Regardless of the size of the institution the available supports for students needs to be comprehensive. In any college choice you ideally look for a balance of support for the first two years and “bench strength” for the last two.

Mistake #8:

Not making sure that your son or daughter has actually followed through with the DS office procedure.

Under FERPA the “ownership” of school records transfers from the parent to the student on Day 1 of their first semester of enrollment.

There are exceptions to this but make sure your student signs a release form at the DS office!

Mistake #9:

Assuming that the DS office will routinely reach out to your son or daughter during the semester if they have not heard from them.

Mistake #10:

Assuming that if your son or daughter is struggling in a class that there must be something wrong/ineffective about the accommodation process.

A final thought ...

Add one more question to the ones you were planning to ask.

“Who would your college or program not be a good fit for?”

Audience Questions?
Thank you!