

A Message to Parents

At the Office of Disability Services, we know that parents of students with disabilities have more and different concerns than the parent of a typical college student. We also know that you are accustomed to playing a very active role in your student's education. The change in services and responsibility in the college environment can be frightening to parents and to students, and we are aware that most high schools do not prepare students and their parents for the differences they will encounter at college. We hope that this message will help you to become familiar with the post-secondary disability services world so that you can support your son or daughter in navigating this new environment.

Many students find it difficult to understand how different disability laws affect the provision of services at college. There are two important laws that concern education, but they apply in different ways at the post-secondary level.

The first thing that a student needs to know is that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides for the creation of an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for a student with a disability, does not apply at college. Although it covers students through the age of 21, it only does so for students remaining in the K-12 system. **This is why an IEP does not carry over to the post-secondary setting.**

While Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act does cover students at college, it does so in a different way than it typically does in the K-12 setting. **The 504 plan that a high school may draw up (much like an IEP) does not apply to the college setting.** A university can grant accommodations to a student and provide other forms of support, but the law does not provide for any sort of formal paperwork like the kind that a 504 plan provides at the K-12 level. Section 504 is designed to prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities at the post-secondary level. This means that the college must provide access to curriculum and services. Access can be provided through various methods, such as making sure that classrooms can accommodate students with physical needs, or providing copies of texts in alternative formats when appropriate.

As parents of a student with a disability, you may have worked closely with the child study team to make sure that your son or daughter received accommodations. At college, the service model changes tremendously. While we do have an office for disability support services, there is no equivalent to the team approach to which you may be accustomed. What this means is that the disability services staff and the faculty of Nyack College are not responsible for identifying students with disabilities and connecting them with the Office of Disability Services. **Students must identify themselves to the office,** and because your son or daughter is at least 18 (or, if younger, is attending college), he or she is viewed as an adult in the eyes of the law and is the only one who can initiate and participate in the process of applying for accommodations. Your role, at this point, is to encourage your student to apply for the necessary accommodations, and then step back and let your student take on the responsibility.

We understand that it can be very difficult for you to take on this new and very different

role, especially if you are worried that your son or daughter will not initiate the process. We encourage you to take a new view of the disability accommodations situation. Your son or daughter may be in the last environment where the disability laws and accommodations are well understood by people he or she will encounter. After college, your student will have to be able to articulate the nature of his or her disability and assert the right to accommodations. Now is the time for your student to begin to take on this responsibility and learn to self-advocate.

Most disabilities are lifelong conditions, which will affect a person throughout his or her lifespan. This is why we believe that college is the place for students with disabilities to take responsibility for explaining their needs and for seeking accommodations by themselves. We want our students with disabilities to leave Nyack College ready to articulate their condition and needs to employers. College is the place for them to learn to do this with the "safety net" that the Office of Disability Services can provide if they encounter difficulties. In our experience with providing services to students with disabilities, we have found that many of them enter college with little idea of what their diagnosis is and little understanding of why various accommodations have been recommended for them. In many cases, students ask for accommodations that they have not even used in high school simply because they were written into their IEP or 504 plan. When asked why they think such accommodations will help, many don't have an answer. This is the time for students to be responsible for learning what truly helps them, as they will need this information as they move into the workforce. Such self-knowledge will serve students in good stead as they earn their degree and move into the work world. Your role as parents is crucially important, but it is different at this level. Part of the independence your student will gain by going to college includes making the choice about whether or not to pursue disability accommodations. But before your student leaves for Nyack College, there are several things you can do together to give him or her information to help with the decision-making process and to prepare for the process of requesting accommodations.

You can help your student by:

- ▶ Looking over the Nyack College Office of Disability Services web page together:
<http://www.nyackcollege.edu/?page=DSS>
- ▶ Going over the student's IEP or 504 plan and making sure your student knows what the diagnosis says and can explain what accommodations have been helpful.
- ▶ Having your student schedule a meeting at the Office of Disability Services:
NYC campus = Cynthia.Raines@nyack.edu
Rockland campus = Elona.Collins@nyack.edu
- ▶ Making sure that any test results are current (no older than 5 years) and having your student sign waivers with the professionals who have performed testing in order to expedite the process for pursuing follow-up information (which in many cases will not be necessary)

We hope that gaining familiarity with the services and procedures at Nyack College will reduce anxiety, help students in their decision to pursue accommodations, and assist them

in gathering the necessary materials to make the process go smoothly.

As parents, you have helped your student get to this educational goal - enrollment in college. This is a great accomplishment! It is now your student's responsibility to develop the self-knowledge and self-advocacy skills that are essential to the success of any individual with a disability. We know that the change in your role can be frightening, but remember that college is the launching pad for your student's career and adult life. If you follow our suggestions above, you will know that you sent your student to Nyack College with the tools to begin this new phase in his or her life. What happens after that is up to your student.