

TRANSITIONS

College Planning and Advising for Students with Special Needs

By Stephani Fried, M.A., LPC

There is a “right fit” college for every student who chooses to attend. Colleges and universities are increasingly sensitizing and appropriately accommodating to the special needs of every student desiring to further their education on a college campus.

As an independent college advisor/counselor, I work with special needs teens and their parents to support college readiness. Students deserve guidance and support with college selection both for their academic interests and for accommodations and needs. Some High school guidance counselors have the expertise necessary to direct special needs students, but not all. The more informed the student and parents are regarding the college search process, the more successful the outcome.

The task of preparing for college and choosing your child’s college is daunting for all families. Many more issues must be resolved for students who have special medical and learning differences prior to beginning college. Ensuring your child’s safety, clarifying campus access to solid medical and academic resources, and understanding the institution’s pledge to provide respectful education to all students are important factors to discern for students and their parents.

Reducing the stress of the college planning years begins in the freshman or sophomore years of high school. Students and their parents are often learning the ropes towards self advocacy during their high school tenure. When special needs students can identify and communicate their own needs effectively, along with parental support and advocacy, administrative and classroom response increases. Learning and honing these skills initiates the student’s path of success and readies the student for college.

Students often need help to tease out their career goals and interests. They also require support to complete all aspects of the college admissions process, from choosing the right courses while still in high school, to preparing for standardized tests, gaining accommodations for taking SAT’s, obtaining solid letters of recommendation, writing a personalized essay and nailing the interview.

Structuring the college visit with a clear agenda in hand is most helpful. College visits are fun and exciting. Information sessions and college tours give a glimpse into the “feel and fit” of the campus. Looking further into the school’s disability programs, academic tutoring centers and special needs mentoring programs help to determine the college’s fit for you.

Often, the IEP accommodations that were most supportive to the student’s learning style in high school are the same resources that we request from the college’s disability support team. It is important to keep documentation current and up to date for a smooth transition into the school’s accommodation programs.

Becoming one’s own best advocate is essential for the student’s ease and success while transitioning to college. Understanding one’s needs and abilities, becoming comfortable articulating and educating others to your requirements are helpful and empowering tools for success from high school into college.

For more information about choosing the right college, contact Stephanie Fried at SFriedLPC@gmail.com or 732-821-1448. You can also visit her website at <http://www.yourcollegeadvisor.co.cc>

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