DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

College is different than high school. There is more independence, expectations are greater, and the adjustments to a new environment can be difficult for any first-year student but students with LDs can find it even more of a challenge. Although this may be the case, with proper planning and support, success can be achieved.

Many students arrive at college without a true understanding of their learning challenges and learning disabilities.

Ask yourself the following:

• Does your student understand his or her test results?
• Has it been explained to your student?
• Does your student understand his or her strengths and challenges?
• Is your student embarrassed about or does he or she have trouble accepting the learning disability?

Students who understand their disabilities and accept them will be more likely to seek appropriate help and use learning strategies.

Differences

• College requires students to become more independent.
• Professors expect students to read the syllabus and check their email and course website on a daily basis. This can be exceptionally difficult for students with memory and executive functioning issues. In addition, some high schools unknowingly enable students by providing “too much help.”
• Procrastination is one of the leading roadblocks to college success; to a student with an LD it can really set them back. Have your student select a time of day to check email, the college website, etc. Encourage your student to put due dates in his or her planner and schedule study time.
• Colleges are governed by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In some case, this may mean you worked with or even fought with the your child’s high school to create an IEP that would provide the necessary and reasonable accommodations for your child, only to realize now in college it will not be used. It is important to understand that accommodations in college are often different than high school and determined by the Disability Student Services office/coordinaotr at the institution.
Important Items to Consider as a Dean Student

Academic planning

• Academic planning is crucial to a student’s success.
• Have your student consider what strategies have worked in the past to help your student compensate for his or her learning disability, for example, flashcards, whiteboard, etc. Have your student make a list. Send your student to school with what he or she needs: highlighters, sticky notes, etc. The first few weeks will be easier if they have these supplies at their fingertips.
• Do not let your student leave home without a planner. Whether it is on paper, in Outlook, on a laptop or in a phone app, it does not matter — as long as your student uses it.

Academic support

• How much and what type of academic support will your student need?
• Have your student think about systems he or she used before. Does he or she have success when seeking help from teachers, peer tutors? Does your student need academic coaching, tutoring or both? What additional support programs or technology does the college offer that he or she can use?
• Consider how much help your student has had in the past. If finances allow, in the first semester it is better to have more support than not enough.

Advocacy

• The most successful students are usually the ones who advocate for themselves.
• Encourage your student to advocate for her or his own learning needs.
• It is often helpful if students can find a “go to” person at the college for advice. This is a life skill that will serve them tremendously in college and their future.

Living away from home

• Have your student think about community living and what concerns she or he has about living with others.
• If the disability leaves your student easily distracted, have him or her make a plan to go to the library or another quiet place to study.
• If your student’s disability creates social concerns or he or she struggles with communication, discuss this as well as strategies to address this.
• Importantly, research tells us that students who are involved and connected on campus tend to be more successful. Encourage your student to get involved outside of the classroom. If your student is struggling in this area, residence life and student activities staff members can be exceptionally helpful in getting students connected.

Emotional support

• Many students work with counselors at home, only to go to college and discontinue that support. If possible, have your student continue with the counselor from home.
• If your student is not able to continue with the counselor from home, it might be helpful to connect with the college’s counseling services, which are usually free of charge.
• Times of transition can add stress to any student but even more so to a student with learning challenges. Having emotional support available for students is imperative.

Medication

• Before you send your student off to college, evaluate any medications prescribed to the students for ADHD, anxiety, etc., and visit your physician.
• Medication may work differently at school than at home with the new environmental changes.
• Have a plan to contact the physician if medication is not working.
• Decide on which local pharmacy you will work with to get prescriptions.

The above serves only as a guide and offers suggestions but hopefully you will find it helpful as you prepare to send your student to Dean College.

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