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Responses to Questions of Families Investigating College for Students with Disabilities

When should parents and students begin considering options for college/career/job training?
Parents and students should begin considering options for college/career/job training starting at least by junior year of high school. The student should visit any college that he/she is considering attending and he/she should meet with the disability officer at that college.

What does the law say about students with disabilities in college?

The need for equal access to education on college campuses was mandated by the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 states that reasonable adjustments in post-secondary programs must be made in order for persons with disabilities to fulfill academic requirements. In 1990, ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed by President George Bush. This law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. Every postsecondary school in the United Sates is governed by both of these laws.

What documentation will students need to present to the admissions department or other college personnel?

If you wish to receive accommodations in your classes, you must identify yourself as having a disability. Unlike high school, it is your responsibility to provide documentation and to identify yourself.
At the Academic Support Center for Students with Learning Differences at Notre Dame College, we request a Multi-Factored Evaluation or a Psycho-educational Evaluation that is recent, within 3 years. This would be a part of the student's IEP from high school. The Academic Support Center provides enhanced Level II services which are above those required by the law.

What student services are available for students with disabilities?

Students with a documented learning disability are provided accommodations by law. An accommodation is a reasonable adjustment in an academic program in order that a person with a disability will be able to compete equally with a non-disabled person. The appropriate accommodations are determined by your disability and your individual needs.
These accommodations may include extended time on tests or exams, a distraction free environment, a note taker, and the use of tape recorder in class.
A student with a learning disability should consider attending a college that offers a supportive, comprehensive program. The support program should include individualized tutoring with professional specialists, the use of adaptive equipment, and workshops on organizational techniques, study skills, and reading comprehension. These kinds of services are considered Level II and locally can be found at Notre Dame College at the Academic Support Center for Students with Learning Differences.

What modifications can a student have on college entrance exams?

With documentation of a learning disability, a student can be provided accommodations on the college entrance tests. These accommodations can include a reader, a scribe, extended time, or additional breaks as needed. Students can be assured that they will not be discriminated against during the admissions process because they took the test with accommodations.

Self-advocacy is an important skill. Why? How can students become effective advocates for their own learning?

Self-advocacy is the ability to understand one's learning needs and to articulate these needs to another. Students should first learn about themselves through diagnostic testing that would include an aptitude test and achievement test. If you receive a formal diagnosis of a learning difference then learn how it affects your school work and social interactions. Next, learn how to communicate these needs to your professors or teachers. The more you know about yourself and your learning style, the better you can become at being your own self-advocate.