

Part 2: Information and Resources for the ECI College Liaison

Working with early college students who learn differently

When an early college student registers for a college course, there is a clear expectation that the course will be taught at the same level of depth and rigor that any college student would experience. For students with disabilities, the transition to college courses can involve a major shift—from adult-initiated prompting and oversight of academic performance during high school, to independently driven learning on campus. The college liaison plays a significant role in building bridges and preparing early college students to take on the responsibilities of college courses; for students with disabilities, providing additional supports can greatly increase academic success. For a summary of supports, see [Support for Students with Disabilities](#)

Information and links to resources are presented in three sections:

1. Preparing for College Courses
2. Working with the CUNY Campus Office of Disability Services
3. Working with College Instructors

Section 1: Preparing for College Courses

At the elementary and secondary levels, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires school staff to identify and evaluate students with special needs, and the school's staff is responsible for helping a student meet the goals identified in an Individualized Education Program (IEP). At the college level, students are covered by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) legislation, which gives students the responsibility to self-identify to the campus disabilities office. Students must demonstrate eligibility by requesting the services they need and providing appropriate documentation. For students with disabilities in K-12, the objective of legislation is to ensure academic success, but in college, the focus is on access. See the chart, [“Differences between High School and College”](#).

The college liaison can play a pivotal role in ensuring that students with disabilities get the services they need to be successful. The liaison should establish a contact with the Office of Disability Services on campus and establish how that office will support early college students. ECI students with disabilities are entitled to services, even as non-matriculated students; if questions arise, ECI staff are available to help the liaison clarify early college students' rights to access services. Additional time or separate location for tests, access to assistive technology, or class meetings in an accessible location are among the services that the Office of Disability Services can facilitate. Further information about the range of services typically available on college campuses is available at this link:

[“Examples of On-Campus Services for Students with Disabilities”](#)

Before early college students begin taking their first courses on the college campus, the liaison and high school staff can identify which special education students may need services and support from the Office of Disability Services. The liaison should arrange a visit to the Office of Disability Services during new students' tour of campus, so that students are familiar and comfortable with the office before making their personal decisions about whether to request services.

On the college campus, students with disabilities choose for themselves whether or not to self-identify to the Office of Disability Services in order to request services. Unfortunately, college students sometimes choose not to self-disclose, perhaps out of fear of stigma or embarrassment, which means they may not receive supports needed for college success. Unless a student contacts the Office of Disability Services, no services or accommodations can be provided. The Office of Disability Services Office of Disability Services can only get information about a student, directly from the student.

A good resource for students to learn about disability services on campus is <http://www.going-to-college.org/campuslife/index.html>. This website offers clearly presented information, activities, and resources for students considering how and whether to request services from the Office of Disability Services. The liaison or staff at the high school can suggest a student spend time with the activities on this website, or guide students in small groups through the website.

Section 2: Working with the CUNY Campus Office of Disability Services

A student with a disability can request services from the Office of Disability Services at any time, but beginning the process before the start of the semester is best. To support a student who wishes to self-identify to the Office of Disability Services, the liaison can work with the student to prepare for the meeting in which services are discussed. The student needs to be prepared to describe their special learning needs, which services they received in high school, and which supports and accommodations will help them succeed in a given course. Supports and services may differ for each course. By making notes and practicing prior to the meeting, students will be more comfortable and confident advocating for their learning needs.

The liaison may accompany the student to the Office of Disability Services meeting, but the student must speak on his or her own behalf. Office of Disability Services staff may even ask that the liaison refrain from actively participating in the conversation; the liaison can ascertain ahead of time whether staff have preferences about how communication is handled to maintain confidentiality established by federal law. The Office of Disability Services should be made aware that the documentation that early college students will be able to provide is their most recent IEP (although more extensive documentation is often required for matriculated college students).

After the student and the Office of Disability Services staff establish which services will be provided, the liaison can assist the student in initiating services with instructors. At CUNY, the Office of Disability Services will typically provide students with a letter to give each instructor. The student can choose what additional information they would like to share with the instructor. If an instructor has questions about providing the requested accommodations for a student, refer them to the Office of Disability Services for additional information and support.

Students also benefit from explicit preparation for speaking with their instructors. Students should know that they are not required to disclose any specifics about their disability, but are free to do so if they choose. Students can start by making written notes about points they want to make with the professor and practicing or role-playing the conversation ahead of time. The conversation can be guided by an outline that highlights what students are looking forward to in the course, what a few of their academic

strengths are, what challenges they face, and how their accommodations help them to learn and succeed. A template students can use to prepare for conversations with instructors and the Office of Disability Services is provided here: [Talking with Your Professor](#).

Directory and contact information for the Office of Disability Services on each CUNY campus is available at:

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/sa/services/disabilities/directory-to-services.html>

Section 3: Working with College Instructors

CUNY instructors are expected to include a disability statement on every syllabus. College liaisons can encourage early college instructors to do so. Here is a sample disability statement:

Qualified students with disabilities will be provided reasonable academic accommodations if determined eligible by the Office of Disability Services. Prior to granting disability accommodations in this course, the instructor must receive written verification of a student's eligibility from the Office of Disability Services, which is located at (your campus information here). It is the student's responsibility to initiate contact with the Office of Disability Services staff and to follow the established procedures for providing the accommodation notice to the instructor.

CUNY publishes a guidebook for instructors, "Reasonable Accommodations," that provides clear and comprehensive information about working with students with disabilities. The link to the guidebook, updated in 2014, is <http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/2014-Reasonable-Accommodations-Faculty-Guide-to-Teaching-Students-with-Disabilities.pdf>.

Throughout the semester, frequent check-ins with students and instructors can head off potential trouble spots. The liaison can help instructors identify informal approaches to supporting all students, including students with disabilities. An instructional practice that the liaison can recommend to instructors—which benefits all learners—is multiple assessment and feedback opportunities, between midterms and finals, so that students are clear on where they stand in the course.

Some approaches that instructors can use to make instruction and content user-friendly for students include:

- Identifying students who benefit from specific seating arrangements, such as proximity for hearing or visual impairment, or to minimize distractions
- Giving in-class cues to especially important points in lectures/notetaking, and providing a review sheet before examinations
- Identifying specific learning objectives for each class session
- Repeating material, both visually and orally
- Providing visual supports to promote understanding
- Keeping multi-step directions for projects and activities as clear and concise as possible; breaking down complex instructions step-by-step, in writing
- Making electronic copies of slides and lecture notes available online; some instructors might

- also be willing to allow students to make audio recordings of lectures
- Providing options for individual or collaborative learning as needed for students who may prefer to work alone rather than in groups, or who may benefit from working with another student(s)

A brief article that offers simple, practical advice for instructors is available at this link: [2.5 SUD for College Courses](#)].

Additional resources and information about students with disabilities in postsecondary education, which may be of interest to college instructors, are available at the links provided below.

Links to Useful Information and Resources

“Reasonable Accommodations” is a CUNY handbook for faculty, which provides information about accommodations.

<http://www.cuny.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/2014-Reasonable-Accommodations-Faculty-Guide-to-Teaching-Students-with-Disabilities.pdf>

“CUNY’s Disability Resources and Services” provides a list of FAQs for students and faculty.

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/sa/services/disabilities/faqs.html>

“Access College: The Faculty Room” at the University of Washington: Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology (DO-IT), with the support of the U.S. Department of Education, offers a site that provides information, publications, and videos to assist postsecondary faculty and administration in making course materials more accessible to students with disabilities. The site provides resources on Universal Design for Learning, how to design instruction that is accessible for all students, and disability specific interventions that can support students in your course.

<http://www.washington.edu/doi/Faculty/Resources/>

“Universal Design for Learning” (UDL) is an approach to instructional design intended to maximize the learning of all students. UDL can provide a starting point for developing a framework to ensure that lectures, discussions, visual aids, videos, printed materials, labs, and fieldwork are accessible to all students.

<http://www.washington.edu/doi/universal-design-instruction-udi-definition-principles-guidelines-and-examples>

“UDL on Campus” provides information and resources on the Universal Design for Learning framework and how it applies to higher education.

<http://udloncampus.cast.org/home>

“UDL Syllabus” provides information about developing a syllabus and an example of a syllabus highlighting UDL considerations.

http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/planning_syllabus#.VmsJ679FVCF

“A Learner-Centered Syllabus Helps Set the Tone for Learning,” is an article from “Faculty Focus: Higher

Ed Teaching Strategies” which describes ways to develop a learner-centered syllabus.

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/a-learner-centered-syllabus-helps-set-the-tone-for-learning/>

Liaison Checklist: Support for Students with Disabilities

- Make connections on behalf of your early college high school to the Office of Disability Services for students with disabilities, and learn about what the Office of Disability Services requires.
- Work with high school staff to identify students with disabilities who may need supports from the campus while taking college courses.
- Include information about the Office of Disability Services in students' campus orientation, and/or schedule a group visit to the Office of Disability Services for students with disabilities.
- Help each student with disabilities decide on whether to self-identify to the Office of Disability Services.
- Schedule students' meetings with the Office of Disability Services, and help students prepare for that meeting (develop written talking points and role-playing the meeting ahead of time can be helpful).
- Attend the meeting with the Office of Disability Services if the student requests the liaison's participation.
- Assist students in communicating with instructors about the services the Office of Disability Services has authorized.
- Check in with instructors periodically during the semester to see if there are any questions or concerns.
- Check in with students regularly throughout the semester on assignments, key dates and deadlines, academic progress, and utilization of supports.