

## Questions that students with special needs should ask and questions that the college might ask

### General

1. Is there a specific office that serves students with disabilities?
2. Do full-time professionals staff the program?
3. What documentation must I bring to document my disability? How current must it be?
4. Who decides if I qualify for accommodations?
5. Who should or would be notified of my disability?
6. Who is responsible for arranging accommodations?
7. What is the advisement system for students with special needs? Will advisers help with course selection and course load options?
8. What are my responsibilities for making sure I receive the services I need?
9. Is there an active support group on campus for students with disabilities?
10. How well-informed are faculty members regarding students with disabilities? Are they willing to work with these students?
11. Are the classrooms/buildings physically accessible?
12. How many accessible dorm rooms are available?

### Specific

1. What accommodations are available—for example, tape recorders, taped texts, note takers?
2. What is the procedure for getting textbooks recorded on tape?
3. Are waivers or substitutions granted to students who, because of a disability, cannot pass certain courses such as foreign language or statistics?
4. Does the college provide adaptive equipment for student use?
5. Where do students go to take tests with modifications? How is this service arranged?
6. How is the need for class notes met for qualifying students? Are note takers trained? Paid?
7. Does the college provide printed materials in alternative format?
8. What kind of tutoring is available? Are the tutors peers or staff? Is tutoring available in all subjects? Is there a limit to the amount of tutoring I may receive? Is there a fee?
9. Does the college offer courses or workshops in study skills or writing skills?
10. Is adaptive software such as voice recognition software or writing support software available on campus? Is training in the use of the software provided?
11. May students with disabilities take a reduced course load and still be considered full-time? Will this affect their financial aid?

# Questions that students with special needs should ask and questions that the college might ask (page 2)

## Questions the college might ask you

The college disabilities office may ask these questions. Write down your answers and review them with someone familiar with your academic strengths and difficulties, such as your IEP manager, a teacher, or a school counselor, before you visit the campus.

1. What is your disability?
2. How does it interfere with your learning?
3. How comfortable are you in discussing your disability with teachers?
4. What are your academic strengths?
5. In what areas do you have difficulty or problems?
6. What accommodations will you need?
7. What kind of support services have you used in high school?
8. Which were the most helpful?
9. Are you willing to work harder than other students to be successful in college?
10. How do you manage your time?

*Sources: University of Southern Maine, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, University of Washington*

## Questions to ask college representatives

College reps, as well as college students, admissions counselors, and faculty, genuinely enjoy talking to high school students. They like to share their ideas about their college, and they all appreciate students who have thought about the college and want to know more than is in the course catalog, in the viewbook, or on the Web site. They like thoughtful questions, and their answers can help you make a good college match. Ask questions of interest to you in the following categories:

### Students

- How would you characterize the majority of students?
- From what economic background are the majority of students?
- Are there clubs, activities, or housing that are minority related?
- What do students like most about the college? Like least?
- Has the student government made any real contribution to the school? How do you get into student government?
- What political, social, or academic issues concerned students last year? How did the administration react? What was the resolution?

### Social life and campus activities

- What do students do for fun?
- What is the role of fraternities and sororities on campus? If I didn't want to join, could I have a satisfactory social life?
- What are the dominant social groups on campus? Do the groups get along with one another? Have there been any problems?
- What role do team sports play in the social life of the college? What happens on football or basketball weekends? If I didn't want to join in, would I find kindred spirits?
- Is there a good balance of academics, social life, and extracurricular activities?
- What were the social or cultural highlights last year?
- What is the role of the campus newspaper?
- Is there an alcohol problem and, if so, how is the college handling it? What is the incidence of binge drinking? Do students feel safe on campus?

### Campus facilities

#### *Housing and dining*

- Is there something I should know about housing that would help me in my choice?
- What are the types of food plans? All you can eat? Vegetarian? Kosher?

# Questions to ask college representatives

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### *Activity centers and athletic and recreational facilities*

- What kinds of facilities does the student center have? Is it a magnet for student activities? Are there other hangouts?
- Do you think the college pays attention to its appearance?
- How would you rate the fitness center?

### *Health, career counseling, special student services, and security*

- Is there a doctor, nurse, psychologist, or career counselor on campus? What is the waiting period for appointments?
- Is the office for special services adequate to the demand?
- How good is the security on campus?

### *Library*

- What have been students' experiences with the library? Have there been complaints?
- Is the library well equipped with computers and copy machines?

### **The community off campus**

- What is there to do in town? How would I get there?

### **Academics and faculty**

- What is distinctive about education here? What is the educational philosophy of the college? Has it changed much in recent years?
- Is the honor code working? How widespread is cheating?
- What is the most popular major on campus? Why?
- Do you think that students are generally enthusiastic about their classes? Do people talk about their courses outside of class?
- How would you characterize the academic pressure and workload?
- Are there research possibilities with the faculty? In what areas?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the advising system?
- What is the quality of student and faculty relationships? Is the faculty interested in and accessible to students after class? Do faculty members participate in student activities?
- Are curriculum changes in the works? How will that affect my college years?
- Are any departments being cut back or discontinued? If so, why?
- Are any new programs scheduled for the next four years?

**Source:** Adapted from *Campus Visits & College Interviews* by Zola Dincin Schneider (College Board, 2002). This book has many more questions you might ask of college representatives, plus chapters on every aspect of the interview and campus visit.

## The college-choice process for students with special needs

All students—and especially students with a learning disability—need a supportive, understanding environment, one that recognizes interest and skills while remedying weaknesses. Assessing needs and abilities is a crucial first step in getting ready for college. Therefore, students need to ask themselves the following questions:

1. What are my strengths?
2. Where do my interests lie?
3. What are my particular deficiencies and problem areas?
4. What is my learning style, and under what conditions do I learn best?
5. What is my level of independence?
6. What are my coping skills?
7. What academic preparation have I had and what additional preparation will I need?

### College Selection

When selecting a college, all students should consider factors such as the following:

- Location
- Cost
- Size
- Student life
- Competitiveness
- Academic preparation
- Housing
- Admissions policies
- Type of college:
  - Two-year
  - Four-year
  - Liberal arts
  - Vocational/technical
  - Private
  - Public

Once you have decided which colleges seem best suited to your interests, needs, and abilities, plan to visit the campuses. Planning these trips may allow you to set up a meeting with the director of

# The college-choice process for students with special needs (page 2)

the learning disability program in conjunction with your visit. You may also be able to attend a class and talk to a student with a learning disability already taking courses at that college.

There are a wide variety and range of support services that colleges may offer students with a learning disability. The following are basic services that any college should have:

1. Study skills training
2. Tutoring services
3. Provisions for alternate testing
4. Availability of taped textbooks
5. Course load modifications
6. Preregistration for courses
7. Taping of lectures
8. Specialized study aids

Some colleges may also offer individual diagnosis, assessment, and testing. In addition, colleges may have a learning center with a learning disabilities specialist present. Peer support groups may also be present. Visiting these resource centers will give you the best feel for the quality of services present at the school. Here are questions to ask about learning centers:

1. Is the center easy to access? Is it bright, cheery, and well lit?
2. How is it staffed? What resources are available?
3. Is the center open to all students or specifically to students with learning disabilities?
4. Is the director of the center a member of the school's faculty or a separate entity?

**Source:** Linda Sturm, South Portland High School, Maine

## Transition tips for parents of students with special needs

Encourage your child to attend his or her Pupil Evaluation or 504 meetings. Make sure your son or daughter understands the Pupil Evaluation/504 process and is an active participant in the discussions, particularly when transition plans are being developed.

- Review your child's documentation with him or her. Colleges frequently have specific guidelines for documenting different types of disabilities. Make sure your child's documentation meets these guidelines.
- Assist your child in understanding what his or her disability is and how it impacts on learning. Parents and students should have a strong working knowledge of the nature of the disability. Students must be able to articulate the information in the college setting.
- Encourage your child to advocate for himself or herself. It's time for you to step back and let your son or daughter speak up for his or her own needs.
- Start the admissions process early. Some of the anxiety will be diminished if the process is unhurried and well researched.
- Make contact with the college's disability support office prior to graduation. The office will be a great resource. Starting the disability registration and accommodation process early allows any problems with documentation to be resolved in a timely manner. It also helps to ensure that complex accommodation requests, such as print materials in alternative formats, can be arranged before classes begin.
- Support your child's desire for independence while encouraging the use of any necessary accommodations. Some students with disabilities do not want "special" services and would prefer to try on their own. Some students, having felt stigmatized by "special education" in high school, may resist registering for disability services at college.
- Use your influence wisely. If your child experiences academic difficulty, your first instinct may be to call the college. Students should be encouraged to avail themselves of the supports and services readily available on most campuses, such as learning assistance, tutoring, and counseling. Colleges want students to succeed, and students need to initiate contact with the available services. Talk with your child about any difficulties and encourage him or her to problem solve solutions and resources.
- Understand that this is a significant transition for you as a parent as well as for your child. Talk to other parents of students with disabilities. Be good to yourself. Pat yourself on the back and be proud of the work and success of your child's high school graduation.

*Source: University of Southern Maine*

### Handout 11G

