

Transitioning to College

The Situation and the Challenge

Transitioning from high school to a postsecondary educational environment is exciting but challenging. There are new places, new faces, and new ways of doing things. Students now must advocate for themselves instead of having programs and services planned for them. These adjustments can at times be overwhelming. Minimize the challenges by planning in advance - learning about the difference between the IEP, Section 504, and IDEA, and the importance of students being able to self-advocate for themselves to get their needs met.

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing face different and greater challenges than typical students. They often are not yet “caught up” with everyday knowledge in society. Appropriate career/academic counseling from high school can be given to assist specific transitioning issues.

Typical Issues Facing Students

How do I decide on my career goal?

How do I choose the right college?

How do I apply to college?

What types of accommodations do I need and how do I get them?

What types of financial aid loans are available and where can I learn about them?

When should I see a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor?

Self Assessment and Career Choice

To determine his/her wants and needs, students must go through a process of self-analysis. Career assessments, interest inventory tests, and aptitude tests can all help students and are available through school counselors, vocational rehabilitation (VR), or from private testing agencies. If a career planning course isn't available in your school, see if a nearby college or university offers career assessments. Most importantly, IEPs should include career planning and assessment plans, as both are considered part of transition planning.

Decisions on choosing a career should not be made without consultation from high school guidance counselors and teachers. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors also may have up-to-date information. And, of course, the student's parents and family are good sources of opinion, guidance, and information. To understand the nature of

possible careers, students should check out books such as the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) (<http://www.occupationalinfo.org/>) that list jobs and their requirements.

Choosing a College

Choosing a college is a job in itself, and is not accomplished overnight. Good planning can begin as early as freshman year in high school.

If a preferred career is determined, college choice must start with finding colleges that offer programs tailored to that career. Browse through catalogs at high school and college libraries to get a general idea about a particular institution. The College Guide website can also be a valuable resource in selecting a college. (<http://www.pepnet.org/rescolguide.asp>)

Once the necessary research has been done and a college selected, the student should visit the campus to see the environment firsthand, meet counselors and academic advisors, talk with other students in the chosen major, and learn about available support services. Does the college have a program and services for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, and when was the program established? Are there interpreters, free tutors, notetakers, and assistive devices? How are notetakers and tutors selected and trained? Are interpreters state-screened or nationally certified? How many deaf students are currently enrolled at the college, or have attended in the past? How many deaf students graduated and what degrees did they obtain? These are some examples of questions that should be asked of the college's representative when visiting the campus.

If the college doesn't have a program for deaf students but is the student's top choice, the student will need to be prepared to deal with the additional challenges of educating everyone about his/her needs and accommodations. The student may need to seek out qualified support services such as interpreters, tutors, and notetakers. Good advocacy skills on the part of the student will ensure that qualified services are sought and obtained.

Applying to College

Students must be aware of the requirements for admission to their college of choice. What is the minimum GPA (Grade Point Average) that must be achieved in high school? Are tests such as the SAT or ACT required? Does the college require a high school diploma or completed GED? Keep in mind that deaf students can obtain a variety of high school diplomas (IEP, "local", and regents diplomas), some which may not be accepted by the college as a true high school diploma. Almost all colleges require a high school transcript, the college's own application form, and an application fee. What is the deadline for applications? The best way to find out exactly what the college requires is to meet with a college counselor.

College Finances

Before making the final decision to attend college, the student must know what it's all going to cost. Tuition isn't the only expense. The student must figure on books and supplies, living expenses (whether in a dormitory or apartment), and transportation. Apartment living tends to be more expensive because of additional utility and food bills.

Who will pay for school, books, and other expenses? What is the expected parent contribution? Can the student help with SSI or savings? Will VR be funding part or all of the student's education? Most students need help in one form or another. Many apply for financial aid in the form of loans or grants. Sometimes it's possible to earn a scholarship. And, of course, many students work part-time or full-time jobs.

Apply for scholarships, loans, and grants as soon as possible. The student who waits until the last minute will have a hard time getting financial aid because the money will already have been distributed to other qualified students who applied early. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is available from college registrars or from financial institutions. The most important thing to remember is to apply early. Normally, the financial aid application has to be submitted online by February or March prior to fall enrollment. Contact financial aid services at the college where the student will be attending for help.

Accommodations - What and How?

What type of accommodations does the student need to request? Will a sign language interpreter, notetaker, tutor, or assistive listening devices be needed? Even if a college has these services already in place, the student should talk with a college counselor or contact the college's disabilities service center. Any of these places would be a good starting point.

Remember: It is the student's responsibility to ask for accommodations.

1. Try to know in advance what will be needed.
2. Research, investigate, and gather information before you arrive at school.
3. Visit the college before the semester begins.
4. Fill out all the necessary forms.

These materials were developed in the course of agreement between the Research to Practice Division, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education and the PEPNet-Northeast Regional Center at the Rochester Institute of Technology under grant #H326D060004. Additional information about current pepnet 2 project activities and resources can be found at www.pepnet.org.
Year of publication: 2000.



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