The Search for Support



A COLLEGE GUIDE TO FINDING THE APPROPRIATE SUPPORT FOR

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY H.E.L.P. (HIGHER EDUCATION FOR LEARNING PROBLEMS) PROGRAM MYERS HALL - 520 18TH STREET HUNTINGTON, WV 25755 WWW.MARSHALL.EDU/HELP

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Introduction

The search for the right college can be both an exciting and nerve-racking journey for any student, but especially a student with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Though every student must decide what criteria he/she is looking for in a higher education environment, the learning-disabled student must also consider the support that each school offers as critical to one's ultimate success. With greater awareness by students, parents and educators, students are more likely to find the right resource for them.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Discuss the unique needs of a learning-disabled student
- Discuss how the laws and regulations affect learningdisabled students in higher education
- Identify factors that should be considered when selecting a support program
- Present ways to prepare your learning-disabled student for college
- Provide resources to aid in your search for support

Though this guide will provide a general overview, it is important to consider that each student is unique in his or her own goals, strengths, and struggles. This guide is intended to be used exclusively for students with a primary diagnosis of a SLD and/or ADHD. Students and parents are encouraged to do additional research; especially those students who may have one or both of these diagnoses coupled with other diagnosis, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, physical disabilities, or mental health challenges.

H.E.L.P. is Available

Historically, learningdisabled students were discouraged from seeking higher education, and were thought to be better suited for vocational programs. This is largely due to the misconceptions surrounding what is and isn't a learning disability, and the limited support available in higher education. We now know that a diagnosis of a learning disability does not have to limit a student's educational opportunities or goals. Today, there are learningdisabled students excelling in the most rigorous and competitive higher education institutions and professions. With greater awareness and support services like the Marshall University H.E.L.P Program, students no longer have to abandon their dream of earning a college degree due to a learning disability.

What is (and isn't) a learning disability?

Though it may seem like an obvious answer to those of us who work daily with students, or your own children with learning challenges, there is still a major misconception regarding what a Specific Learning Disability is and isn't. According to the Learning Disabilities Association of America, a learning disability is "a neurological condition that interferes with an individual's ability to store, process, or produce information. Learning disabilities can affect one's ability to read, write, speak, spell, compute math, reason and also affect an individual's attention, memory, coordination, social skills and emotional maturity" (LDAA, 2015). Though a majority of people would likely agree on the previous definition, the more challenging aspect of this misconception is defining what a learning disability isn't.

Arguably, the biggest misconception pertains to an individual's intelligence. According to the diagnostic criteria, an individual's IQ, or intelligence quotient, must fall at, or above, average in order to be considered a learning disability. This does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, of motor disabilities, of mental impairments, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

The bottom line is that students with Specific Learning Disabilities are intelligent and capable, but often need extra support to demonstrate their abilities. This realization has been the foundation of many of the laws concerning individuals with disabilities, and the focus of numerous support and advocacy programs around the country and globe.

The College Transition

For many students, the transition to college signals the transition into adulthood and true independence. Regardless of the higher education setting that is ultimately selected, there is an understanding that students in higher education are responsible for their own learning. Students must learn to be their own advocate in higher education, but a comprehensive support program can help to act as liaisons between the students and their professors. Though independence is encouraged, the hope is that through modeling positive communication and advocacy skills, students will grow to acquire such independence. One of the most important factors to consider in this transition is what environment the student is transferring from. Having an understanding of a student's current environment may help pinpoint what he/she should be looking for in a higher education environment. Certainly each student is different, but for the SLD or ADHD student, we have listed some additional questions.

- How did I respond to my class size in high school? Was it too big, too small, or just right?
- In an optimum classroom setting, what would be the class size?
- If I received services in a small resource room or separate classroom, how will I adjust to a college classroom?
- Am I able to block out distractions?
- Do I know strategies to limit distractions?
- Do I need assistive technologies to help with issues such as note-taking, reading comprehension, processing, etc.?
- Did I rely heavily on my high school instructors for extra help?
- Did I feel comfortable communicating with my instructors or did I rely on my parents to do that?
- Do I know how to take effective notes?
- In what program or major do I feel I can be successful?

For many students, another major transition to consider pertains to their living situation. Not only does a student need to take into account the physical environment changes, but must also consider the independence that living away from home will bring. As is true with academics, the SLD or ADHD student must think about additional factors when selecting the right college environment. Some considerations are listed below:

- Am I ready to live independent from my parents?
- Am I comfortable sharing with my roommates that I have learning or attentional difficulties, which may require understanding on their part?
- What will happen when I don't have a curfew?
- Have I ever been responsible for my own laundry or cleaning?
- If I take medication, who is going to remind me to take it?
- Where am I going to eat?

- Do I have dietary or medical issues for which I will need to be responsible?
- Will I be able to handle my money on my own?

Statistics show that many students diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability or ADHD also have additional disorders, such as anxiety and/or depression. If these issues have been identified and addressed during primary/secondary education, special care and consideration should be taken to secure similar support in college. Though most colleges offer counseling services in some form, this too is another aspect of the college transition that should be carefully considered. Some addition considerations are listed below:

Did I receive counseling or therapy in high school? What are my medical/emotional needs? What support does this college have for mental health? Do the living situations that are available align with my mental health needs? If I struggle with the adjustment to college, what support is offered?

Though many college freshman have these thoughts, they become especially important to the SLD or ADHD student seeking the right college fit. It is imperative that these students find support that will not only provide assistance and encouragement for their academic struggles, but also understand how to identify and remediate executive functioning issues.

Know the Laws

If you ask parents with students who fall under the umbrella of special education about the laws, you may get a response from many that they know something about their child's legal rights. But for those who are well-versed on special education law, it's likely that their understanding of how the laws will affect a student after they turn 18 is often not as clear.

While a student is in primary and secondary education, they are generally protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004.

Under IDEA, educational institutions who receive federal funding are provided with financial assistance from the government, which can be used to ensure students with disabilities are provided with a free and appropriate public education. IDEA also outlines the use of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and promotes placement in the least restrictive environment possible. Though an IEP can provide some guidance as to what support a student may need in higher education, the law supporting the enforcement of the IEP ends upon high school completion.

In post-secondary education, students with disabilities are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1992, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (ADAAA) of 2008, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These laws are in place to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to public services and programs. In the post-secondary setting, colleges and universities must "level the playing field," but are not required to guarantee that students will reach his/her potential or achieve academic success. Disability-related procedures at the college level, therefore, can present quite a change for incoming students.

In order for a student to receive any type of disability support, he or she must furnish the appropriate office on campus with documentation of their disability. For a student diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, a recent psychological evaluation including a stated diagnosis, recommendations for classroom accommodations, and how the student will be impacted academically by the diagnosis must be provided. Typically, evaluations must be no more than 3 years old to be considered current. IEPs or 504 Plans for high school are not customarily accepted as documentation.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, students are entitled to reasonable accommodations, or appropriate adjustments or modifications with regard to the student's educational setting. This may include, but are not limited to: extended time and isolation for exams, a scribe or reader for exams, and course substitutions. Though the exact process for determining a student's specific accommodations depends upon the university, many times the accommodations approved rely heavily on the recommendations contained in the psychoeducational evaluation, though this is not always the case.

The Differences in Disability Support Programs

By law, every college must have a department that oversees issues pertaining to students with disabilities. It is this office's responsibility to ensure that the appropriate laws are followed, and students with disabilities receive fair and equal treatment and access to programs and services. However, with regard to comprehensive academic support, many of these offices are limited, mainly because they must oversee disability compliance and resources for students with all types of disabilities. In many cases, this prohibits them from being able to provide comprehensive, targeted support for students with Specific Learning Disabilities and/or ADHD. In the post-secondary setting, this office generally oversees the testing and learning accommodations for students enrolled in the university, and some schools may offer limited tutoring or note-takers. If a student is only in need of testing accommodations, receiving services through this office may be sufficient; however, for many students with learning struggles, this support is simply not enough.

Some universities have fee-based support programs, which allow them to offer more comprehensive services to their targeted audience. So, what should you be looking for in a support program? A great deal depends on the individual student. Just because two students may have a seemingly identical diagnosis does not mean that the support they will require will address the student's specific needs. First and foremost, carefully examine programs which claim to be comprehensive. An all-inclusive program will have trained staff who provide academic support for the student's course work, as well as identify and remediate weaknesses including time management, organization;, study skills, encoding and decoding, reading comprehension, math, and written language. Targeted these skills not only gives the student opportunity for academic success, but also helps the student achieve the ultimate goal of finding a successful career.

To aid in your search for the right program, we have compiled both a list of criteria for evaluating programs, as well as a list of corresponding questions to ask when visiting the school.

10 Things to Look for in a Support Program

1. A comprehensive package

For most students with learning challenges, academic tutoring just isn't enough. Make sure the program offers targeted remediation in deficit areas such as time management, organization, study skills, mathematics, reading comprehension, and written expression.

2. Services provided by trained staff

A qualified and trained staff is an essential part of a support program. Though peer tutors can be beneficial to some students, they rarely have a mastery of the subject area, or have any working knowledge of assisting students with learning difficulties.

3. A commitment to continued education

A quality support program will mandate weekly training sessions and will show a commitment to continued education for staff by participating in professional organizations and national conferences.

4. Longevity within the college or university community

Collaboration is a vital component in student success. Finding a support program that is well-established within the university or college helps facilitate collaboration and promotes student success.

5. Testing accommodations coordinated by the tutoring staff

Ideally, a support program will both coordinate the notification of accommodations with professors and have the ability to provide the accommodations on-site.

6. Assistive technologies available to students

Keeping up with new technology can be difficult and expensive, but a quality support program will offer a variety of assistive technologies aimed at making learning easier for struggling students.

7. One-on-one tutoring in private offices

As distractibility is often a common thread among struggling students, engaging in one-on-one tutoring in private tutoring rooms is a necessity. This environment is also ideal for providing testing accommodations.

8. Scheduled weekly tutoring appointments

Having scheduled, weekly appointments helps to support positive time management skills by establishing a schedule and routine.

9. Priority registration with the college or university

This is a tremendous benefit when registering for classes, as students are able to select times and instructors that will best suit their learning needs.

10. A transitional program for freshmen or transfer students

Look for a program that offers transitional support for incoming freshmen or transfer students to assist in the critical, yet sometimes difficult, transition to college. A summer program, or freshman orientation workshop, is ideal.

Questions to Ask When Evaluating a Support Program

Services Offered:

- What support do you offer for students' academic courses?
- Who provides the tutoring services?
- What are the qualifications of the tutors?
- How are tutoring appointments scheduled?
- Do you provide remediation in a student's deficit areas?
- How do you determine in what areas a student will receive support?
- Who oversees the student's progress?
- Do you have an attendance policy?
- Do you provide testing accommodations on-site?
- What type of training do your employees receive?
- What assistive technologies do you offer and is there an additional fee?
- Do you offer transitional programs or support?

Admission Criteria:

- What are the admission criteria for the program?
- Is there a limit on how many new students are accepted each year?
- If I am denied admission or "wait-listed" by the university, is there anything the program can do?
- If I am accepted, what are my responsibilities as a student?
- How can I pay for the services?

Facilities:

- Where are your services offered?
- Does tutoring take place in private offices or open locations?
- Are students able to study in the facility outside of tutoring sessions?
- What are your operating hours?

Relationship with University/College:

- How long has your program been a part of the university?
- Who at the university level oversees your program?
- Do professors work well with students in your program?
- Do students receive support from the university with regard to advising or early registration?

University Environment

- How many students attend the university?
- What is an average class size?
- Is there on-campus housing?
- Are students required to live on-campus?
- What degree programs do you offer?
- Are your degree programs accredited?

Marshall University H.E.L.P. (Higher Education for Learning Problems) Program Myers Hall – 520 18th Street, Huntington, WV 25755 www.marshall.edu/help

Parents: How You Can Help

Though independence grows as a student enters college, parental support can be a major factor in finding the right college and support program. Below are a few tips on ways parents can help their child navigate this time of change.

- Start Early the earlier you can start this process, the more time you will have to ensure the right fit for your child. It is never too early to see what is out there, and starting early may help to motivate students who need an extra push.
- Encourage independence As difficult as it can be to motivate some students to take the "college plunge," encourage your student to take responsibility for finding the right college for him or her. Encourage and provide guidance, but resist doing all of the work yourself.
- Talk Engage in routine conversations with your student about what he or she is looking for in a college environment. Discuss every aspect from enrollment, to possible majors, to athletic teams. Also discuss what your child feels he/she needs, as well as what support you feel they need.
- Make a List Encourage your child to make a list of "must-have" components of a college environment, including academic support.
- **Research** Help your child research potential schools with support programs that fit at least most of the criteria on their list. Compile all of the information into a workable spreadsheet or document.
- Visit Schools For schools that seem to be most promising, schedule a visit. Make sure to schedule an appointment with the support program and make time for a campus tour. Come prepared with a list of questions or concerns, and don't leave until you have exhausted that list.
- **Encourage Journaling** While your child is on a visit or immediately following one, encourage them to journal their reactions to the college.

Financial Resources for Students with Learning Disabilities

One of the primary factors to consider when planning for college is the expense, especially when considering the additional cost of a support program. Many times, when faced with financial constraints, it is the "extras" that are cut, and sometimes those extras include an academic support program. The reality is that numerous students fail or withdraw from college because they didn't have the right support in place. Though "extra" programs such as an academic support program often come with an additional expense, in the majority of cases, it is the difference between success and failure in college.

Instead of forgoing participating participation in an academic support program for financial reasons, there are options available to help lessen the financial burden.

- 1. Contact the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation/Rehabilitation Services in your state. This government agency may provide financial support based on an individual's disability, and if accepted as a client, may help pay for tuition, technology, and even academic support services.
- 2. Scholarships or Grants. Search for scholarships or grant funding available at the local, state, and even national levels for students with Specific Learning Disabilities and/or ADHD. Here are a few:

• Anne Ford Scholarship

The Anne Ford Scholarship is a \$10,000 scholarship awarded by the National Center for Learning Disabilities to a high school senior with a learning disability who can act as a role model for others who are faced with learning disabilities and who has the potential of contributing to society in a way that increases opportunities for all people with learning disabilities.

• P. Buckley Moss Society Harbison Scholarship

The Anne and Matt Harbison Scholarship is awarded by the P. Buckley Moss Society to high school seniors with language-related learning disabilities for college education.

• Shire ADHD Scholarship Program

Shire, a global specialty biopharmaceutical company, provides 50 scholarships for legal residents of the United States or the District of Columbia who have been diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

• Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities Youth Achievement Award

The Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities Youth Achievement Award provides a \$1,000 scholarship to recognize students with a learning disability or ADHD age 19 or younger who have demonstrated initiative, talent and determination resulting in a notable accomplishment in any field, including art, music, academics, athletics and community service.

- 3. **Financial Aid.** Students can often calculate the fees of academic support programs into their financial aid package.
- 4. **Professional Organizations.** Many state and national professional organizations will either provide scholarships and/or provide help in finding scholarships. A few of these organizations are listed below:
 - Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
 - Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)
 - International Dyslexia Association (IDA)
 - National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
- 5. **Ask about tuition waivers.** Some academic support programs offer tuition fee waivers for their services. These waivers may be need-based, or merit-based. Contact potential support programs for more specific information.

Scholarship information provided by FinAid.org

Resources

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (Pub. L. No. 101-336, 104 Stat. 328) Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008 (Pub. L. No. 110–

325)

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) -

www.chadd.org

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (Pub. L. No. 101-476, 104

Stat. 1142) and related amendments in 1991 (Pub. L. No. 102-119, 105 Stat. 587) and 1997 (Pub. L. No. 105-17, 111 Stat. 37).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 (Pub. L.

No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647)

International Dyslexia Association (IDA) - eida.org

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) - Idaamerica.org

Marshall University H.E.L.P. Program – www.marshall.edu/help

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Pub. L. No. 93-112, 87 Stat. 394) U

United States Department of Education – www.ed.gov

Vocational Rehabilitation Offices by State -

http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/