

Tips for College Students with Visual Impairments: Questions to Ask about Disability Services

The key to a successful college experience is often finding the school that is the best match for you. Exploring options online is helpful, but an in-person tour of your top choices is highly recommended. Plan ahead to visit the disability services office, which will likely be an important resource for you in college. This office may also have a different name, such as the “access services department” or “office for students with disabilities.”

The level of support as well as the types of accommodations readily available to students who are blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind varies greatly by campus. Talking with staff from disability services about the accommodations you need and finding out what kinds of resources they provide can help you decide if the school is right for you. The information you gain from the conversation will also help you prepare for a positive start to your college experience.

Use these questions as a guide to your conversation with disability services staff.

Admission and registration

- How much information do I need to share about my vision loss with the disability services office? How recent does my documentation need to be?
- How is confidential information handled? What is shared with my professors?
- Are there any other students on campus who have a visual impairment? Is there any way that I can connect with them?
- What is the role of the disability services office? What level of services does it provide?
- What is my role in accessing disability services? What role, if any, will my parents play?
- What accommodations for applying to the school and registering for classes are available to me?

Accommodations or academic adjustments

- How do I inform professors and other faculty and staff of my need for accommodations? What are the steps I need to take?
- What type of note-taking accommodations are available to me?
- How will technical information be made accessible to me (e.g. science or math content)?
- How will labs and clinical placement settings be accommodated?
- Can a professor refuse to provide an accommodation approved by the disability services office? What happens if this occurs?

- If I need assistive technology or a reader for an exam, where will I take my exam? Will I receive extra time for my exams?
- Is there a tutoring service for students with disabilities? Is there a fee for this service?

Assistive technology

- What type of assistive technology is available? In high school, I used a particular computer program as an accommodation. Is the computer program available at this school?
- How much advance notice is needed to convert my course materials into an alternate format? What happens if I receive my materials late due to the speed of conversion or due to my professor picking the course materials right before class starts?
- How are textbooks delivered to me once they have been converted to an electronic readable format?
- Does the college use online course management software such as Moodle or Schoology? Is the software accessible using a screen reader?
- Is there an assistive technology lab on campus? Will it be equipped with the software that I need and use?

Campus accessibility

- Will the disability services office provide orientation services when I enroll as a student? Will they provide the service again when I begin new classes?
- Are buildings equipped with Braille descriptions, including Braille room numbers?
- Is specialized transportation available on campus?
- Is the cafeteria accessible for students who have a visual impairment?
- Are dorm rooms accessible?

Additional information and resources

For in-depth information, see the American Federation of the Blind's Transition to College Guide, Lesson 18: Requesting Academic Accommodations in College As a Student with Vision Loss afb.org/info/living-with-vision-loss/for-job-seekers/lesson-plans-for-teachers-and-professionals/transition-to-college-program-activity-guide/lesson-18-requesting-academic-accommodations/12345 (also available as an electronic Braille file)

Other PACER resources available:

- Going to College: Tips for Students with Visual Impairments, NPC-38
PACER.org/transition/resource-library/publications/NPC-38.pdf
- Going to College: Tips for Parents of Students with Visual Impairments, NPC-39
PACER.org/transition/resource-library/publications/NPC-39.pdf
- The ADA, Section 504 & Postsecondary Education, NPC-42
PACER.org/transition/resource-library/publications/NPC-42.pdf
- PACER's State Services for the Blind Partnership Project
PACER.org/about/programs/state-services-for-the-blind.asp