



Self-Advocacy for College Students on the Autism Spectrum



Introduction and Overview

College attendance used to be an unusual experience in the lives of people on the autism spectrum, but nowadays it is becoming more and more common. Dreaming about and planning for college and other postsecondary educational opportunities is being encouraged as higher education becomes an increasingly viable option.

There are many reasons for this exciting change, among them: the adoption of better teaching methods and higher expectations which have led to greater college-readiness; an increased awareness among institutions of higher learning that they can and must serve more diverse students by providing appropriate aids and services; an appreciation of how college and other post-secondary experiences can be adapted creatively to fit the needs of non-traditional students and non-degree students; and an acknowledgement of the importance of college in building academic and social skills, enhancing opportunities for employment, and fostering independence and self-confidence for ALL students.

Whatever postsecondary educational goals an individual with autism may have, one of the most important factors in achieving success will be their ability to self-advocate. Students on the spectrum must make their needs and interests clear, and problem-solve effectively, to access the many benefits of higher education.

This training and guidebook will provide information and advice that can help you be a better self-advocate as you navigate the world of college or other postsecondary educational experiences. It was designed in partnership with the real experts on self-advocacy: people on the autism spectrum. Their college experiences, and their reflections on what YOU should know, are incorporated into the research base and design of this course.

What does the Guidebook cover?

There are six sections to the guidebook:

1. What is self-advocacy?
2. What are my rights and responsibilities as a college student?
3. How do I get the auxiliary aids and services I need?
4. What other supports and opportunities are available?
5. What everyday living skills will I need to succeed?
6. How can I enjoy a healthy, happy lifestyle during college?

To help you along...

Each section follows the format below:

- Section title
- Objective
- Student Preparation
- Content
- Further Reading

Table of Contents

1. What is self-advocacy?
2. What are my rights and responsibilities as a college student?
3. How do I get the auxiliary aids and services I need?
4. What other supports and opportunities are available?
5. What everyday living skills will I need to succeed?
6. How can I enjoy a healthy, happy lifestyle during college?

1. What is self-advocacy?

OBJECTIVE: Understand **what it means to be a self-advocate** and appreciate the role of self-advocacy within the larger movement for self-determination and disability rights

STUDENT PREPARATION: Read Section 1 of the Guidebook before coming to class. If you currently belong to any autism or self-advocacy groups, bring brief information (such as a brochure or flyer) about them to class.

A. Defining the topic

Students with autism enter college from many different backgrounds and experiences. Some have been included in general education classrooms, and may have already learned a lot about how to succeed in diverse educational settings. Others may have attended school only in the company of students with autism, and may have less experience in defining and explaining their needs to people who are not familiar with autism. Some students may have had the useful experience of helping to create their own Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), while others have not. Older adults with autism may be starting or returning to college after working at a job and gaining important life experiences. Whether you are new to the practice of self-advocacy or whether this course is just a review, you can be sure that **self-advocacy will be a key to your college success.**

What does it mean to advocate?

The word started as legal term meaning “to speak or write in support or defense of a person, cause, etc.” (Random House Dictionary). **“To advocate” still reflects the concepts of justice, fairness, and balance.** We call someone an advocate if they:

- **Seek solutions based on what is fair and right**
- **Seek solutions by problem-solving with others**

What does it mean to self-advocate?

Being one’s own advocate makes the process very personal and very powerful. An effective self-advocate will:

- **Seek solutions based on knowledge of one’s rights and acceptance of one’s responsibilities**
- **Seek solutions based on self-awareness (knowing one’s strengths and needs)**
- **Seek solutions through building skills of self-expression and decision-making**

Self-advocacy does not mean “doing it all yourself” without the help of others.

It should not be a lonely activity! The national organization, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), has defined self-advocacy as an activity in which people support each other and boost each other’s confidence:

"[It] is about independent groups of people with disabilities working together for justice by **helping each other take charge of our lives** and fight discrimination. It teaches us how to make decisions and choices that affect our lives so we can be more

independent. **It also teaches us about our rights, but along with learning about our rights we learn responsibilities.** The way we learn about advocating for ourselves is by **supporting each other and helping each other gain confidence** in ourselves so we can speak out for what we believe in."

As you take this training, think about the other students, friends, support staff, and people in your life who are happy to work with you and want to see you succeed as a self-advocate. **Don't be afraid to ask questions, seek advice, and use all the human resources that are available to you!**

B. Self-Advocacy Strategies: How to Problem-Solve

**Self-advocacy is not about having all the answers.
An effective self-advocate is one who asks the right questions.**

College is all about asking questions: that is how we learn! We ask teachers about course content, about how an assignment should be done, and about the career for which we are preparing. We ask fellow students to explain a math problem, or meet us for lunch, or not play loud music while we're studying. We ask college staff and administrators about when to register, whether we qualify for financial aid, or how to replace a missing ID card. **No one wants to waste time bringing an issue to the attention of the wrong person, or feel frustrated because their communication is misunderstood.** Yet sometimes we need to re-direct or tweak our self-advocacy strategy until we connect with the answers we need. You might remember learning in Language Arts class that a good essay or report will tell the reader **"what, who, when, where, and how."** **You can build your self-advocacy strategies around these same basic questions. When an issue – large or small – needs to be addressed, try asking yourself:**

1. What do I need to know or to receive from others to accomplish my goal?

This could be anything from information about course requirements, to a request for special classroom aids, to better understanding of your sensory needs. **Make sure you are able to name and describe your "ask" clearly.** Be clear in your own mind about what a good solution would be. You might try writing down or typing a statement of the issue until you are sure of the words you want to use. Some students like to rehearse an important interaction, such as requesting that a teacher allow them extra time on tests, just as they might rehearse a job interview.

2. Who is most likely to have what I need, and to have the power, knowledge or ability to provide it for me?

Whether you need less noise in the dorm or help organizing an assignment, identifying and approaching the right person is important. **Take time to find out who is in charge or is most likely to be knowledgeable and helpful. If you are not sure, as someone you trust to direct you to, or introduce you to, the right person.** In most cases, **try the simplest and most direct solution first:** for example, if you don't know how to begin an assignment it may be very useful to ask members of your study group or contact the

professor, but less useful to complain to the head of the department or the person in charge of your dorm.

3. When is it most effective and appropriate to raise an issue? *For example, when is it okay to interrupt someone, and when is it better to wait? When is it acceptable to draw attention to your own feelings and opinions, and when is it considered impolite or disruptive?*

Try to approach people when they are able to give you their full attention, rather than when they are multi-tasking or interacting with someone else. If you are uncertain about the situation, **tell them what you want and ask whether they have time to deal with it now or would prefer to do so later.** Most people appreciate being given a choice.

4. Where is this type of question or need typically addressed? *For example, what issues should be raised in class, in the teacher's office after class, in the dorm or student lounge, etc.? Should a subject be discussed in private, or should it be discussed in public?*

When you are self-advocating, it is usually best to choose a place where the other person will feel comfortable. For example, your professor might not want to have a long talk while standing in a busy hallway, but he or she might offer you a generous amount of time if you visit their office. **If you are not sure, ask:** "Can we discuss this here, or would another place work better for you?"

5. How do college students typically express themselves in different informal and formal situations? *How much detail and background about yourself and your autism should you give when you interact with others?*

It's important to remember that **what is appropriate and fun in the informality of a cafeteria or dorm might be considered rude or disruptive in a classroom setting.** Professors also differ in how formal or informal they expect students to act (for example, some are happy to be addressed by their first names, while others expect to be called Dr. ____). Whether (or how much) to tell others about one's autism is a big question for many self-advocates, and there is no single right answer. Some guidelines about self-disclosure are upcoming in this training.

If you have tried to self-advocate but your need or issue has not been resolved, reconsider what, who, when, where and how. It is possible that the way you are framing the question needs to change before you can connect with the right answer. **Ask someone you trust**, such as a good friend, support person, or counselor, to help you think through and refocus your problem-solving strategy. The rest of this course will go into greater detail about what you need to know in college, but no student will ever be able to know or anticipate everything. Asking good questions and self-advocating for helpful answers will always be the key to success.

C. Characteristics of Self-Advocacy

We have defined self-advocacy as a term with legal roots. Its legal roots remind us that self-advocacy is about fairness and balance. **When we lose our sense of balance, we become much less effective as self-advocates. Remember that self-advocacy IS NOT:**

- Putting yourself in a position that is likely to result in **loss of emotional control or clear thinking** (your own or the other person's)
- **Forgetting to consider other people's ideas**, needs and points of view
- **Believing you cannot be successful or happy unless everything turns out exactly as planned**
- **Insisting that there is only one solution** to a problem, or that only what has worked in the past will work in the present
- **Thinking that you have to do everything by yourself**; feeling that it is embarrassing or "wrong" to ask for the understanding and support to which you are entitled

Self-advocacy IS:

- **Respectful of self and others**
- **Honest and self-reflective**
- **Creative and open-minded**
- **Determined but flexible**
- **Confident and assertive about getting needed supports**

D. Self-Advocacy, Human Rights, and Neurodiversity: Taking pride in your actions

The topics in this training will mainly concern your own personal self-advocacy for the information and support you need to make your college experience successful, both academically and socially. However, it's helpful to know that **self-advocacy is not just a personal skill, it is also the basis of a worldwide human rights movement** founded by people with disabilities. **This movement aims to change:**

- **Laws**
- **Policies**
- **Access**
- **Attitudes**

In the United States, the self-advocacy movement created by people with developmental differences often traces its roots back to Oregon in 1974. Eight men and women living in a large "group home" began to get together to talk about their lives and the attitudes that held them back. They were tired of only being seen and treated as "disabled." Finally one person cried out, "We are people, first!" The group decided that this should become their name, and the "people first movement" was born. Self-advocacy organizations can now be found in almost every state and many countries. Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) is the national organization in the United States; you can visit the web site at <http://www.sabeusa.org/>

People on the autism spectrum have since founded a number of self-advocacy organizations of their own, among them:

- The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)
- The Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership (GRASP)

- The Autism National Committee (AutCom)

These organizations may be of interest to you as a way to meet other self-advocates and to enjoy their advice and support.

The **neurodiversity movement** is closely related to self-advocacy in its aims and values. It holds that **different ways of thinking and learning should be valued** for their present and potential future contributions to the human race. Neurodiversity is a relatively new term. This citation may be its earliest published use:

“Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment? Cybernetics and computer culture, for example, may favor a somewhat autistic cast of mind.” -- 1998, Harvey Blume, “Neurodiversity”, *The Atlantic*

Colleges and universities should be especially appreciative of diverse learners and thinkers, and be eager to foster their development. As a self-advocate, you should be proud to take part in this valuable social and educational movement.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Along with the people-first movement came the use of what is called “people first language.” Self-advocates asked to be called “people with (Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, autism, ASD, etc.)” rather than referred to as if they were their diagnosis. In more recent years, some self-advocates on the autism spectrum have expressed a preference for being called “aspies,” “auties,” “autistics,” or similar terms. This is a matter for individual self-advocates to decide and to explain to others. This training module will follow people-first usage because it remains the widely-accepted product of a disability rights movement that found such language to be respectful. Its use is not meant to imply that there is only one way, or one best way, for self-advocates to refer to themselves. Language always deserves careful reflection and continues to evolve.

FOR FURTHER READING:

This useful essay by a college student with autism is available through the online publication Disability Scoop:

Speak Up: Your Guide To Self-Advocacy (July 21, 2009)

A Neurodiversity web site may be found at <http://www.neurodiversity.com/main.html>

A self-advocate’s guide to personal empowerment:

Newport, G. (2001). *Your life is not a label: A guide to living fully with autism and Asperger’s Syndrome*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons

This work of self-advocacy can be a useful tool for teaching others:

Shore, S. & Rastelli, L. (2006). *Understanding autism for dummies*. New York: Wiley and Sons.

2. What are my rights and responsibilities as a college student?

OBJECTIVE: Learn about the **rights of college students with disabilities under the ADA and Section 504**, how their responsibilities differ from those of high school students, and the importance of self-disclosure

STUDENT PREPARATION: Read Section 2 of the Guidebook before coming to class.

A. Comparing High School and College

In high school you probably received special education services under a federal law called the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA**. This law provides that:

1. You have the right to a “free and appropriate public education.” **Public education is an entitlement for all children and youth with disabilities, and there can be no rejection of a student** based on disability, academic performance, or behavior.
2. **The public school system has to figure out whether you have a disability, what it is, how you learn, and how to teach you.** Testing is done to determine your need for auxiliary aids and services, and the public schools bear the cost of these psychoeducational evaluations.
3. **An IEP team is assigned to make education plans** for you and to assure your progress.
4. **Therapies (e.g. Speech-Language, Occupational Therapy) are selected and provided for you** at no charge.
5. **Your parents are part of your IEP team**, and can share information about your progress with your teachers and school at any time.

In college, this familiar picture will change in many important ways:

1. **There is no overall entitlement to a college education;** colleges may set prerequisites, reject applicants, or dismiss students who do not succeed.
2. **You are responsible for self-disclosing the existence of a disability, and for providing diagnostic testing to verify your disability.** The college will not provide or pay for testing to create this documentation. Based on the information you provide, the college will decide whether you are eligible for services and supports under the definition of disability found in the **Americans with Disabilities Act and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**.
3. **You are responsible for knowing which auxiliary aids and services you need, and asking for them.** If you cut class, skip assignments, or experience difficulty, **no one is required to find you, investigate the problem, or assure that you progress.**
4. **Therapies such as Speech-Language or Occupational Therapy are not provided.** If you wish to receive them, you must arrange for them on your own or through the agency that provides your support services.
5. **There is no IEP Team. Your college and teachers are not permitted to disclose your college records to your parents.**

The chart below summarizes these important differences:

Area	High School	College
Education	Education is an entitlement.	There is no overall entitlement.
Identification of and Support for Needs	School is responsible for assessing needs and providing services.	You are responsible for self-disclosing and providing diagnostic evidence.
Auxiliary Services and Aids	IEP Team is assigned to plan and provide auxiliary aids and services.	You are responsible for knowing which auxiliary aids and services you need, and sharing this information.
Therapies	Therapies are selected and provided for you.	Therapies are not provided; you must seek and pay for them on your own.
Parental/Guardian Involvement	Your parents/guardians are on your IEP Team, and are part of planning process and aware of progress.	There is no IEP Team; school cannot disclose your records to parents/guardians without your permission.

NOTE: Some students with autism are EXCEPTIONS to the above rules.

Some students on the autism spectrum – although still a small minority -- attend college with their IDEA rights still in place. That is because **they are between the ages of 18 and 22, have not graduated from high school, and their school districts have entered into arrangements to address part or all of their IEP goals through their attendance at local colleges or other postsecondary schools.** If they are able to access the college curriculum without substantial modifications of content, they can receive college credits; if content must be significantly modified they will be evaluated in other ways by school district educators. While this possibility is gaining support, at this time most college students on the spectrum will have graduated from high school and/or aged out of IDEA entitlements. If they are in a typical college program they will have non-discrimination rights under ADA and Section 504, just as students with other types of disabilities do. **Some adults with autism whose IDEA entitlement has expired also attend college as non-matriculated students, taking college classes (and being evaluated by alternative methods) to pursue their interests and enhance their job skills. They may be supported by adult service providers and vocational rehabilitation agencies to utilize typical college settings.** Such “non-traditional” students will be covered by a combination of rules and rights reflecting the resources and missions of both the service-

providing agency and the college: for example, therapies and 1:1 personal support may be provided by a human services agency, and parents may be part of the team that creates the adult's Individualized Habilitation Plan (IHP).

You and your parents: changing roles

(NOTE: If you are an older adult entering or returning to college, this section might not be relevant and can be skipped.)

Through elementary, middle and high school, your parents (or other family members who raised you) had a leading role in planning and directing your education. While they are still important to your success, their day-to-day role changes as you enter college:

- **Before college, your teachers and parents could contact each other at any time** for an update on how you were doing.
- **Your IEP team included your parents, had regular meetings, and was automatically informed** if any concerns arose.

Now the communication system will be very different:

- **In college, your teachers cannot discuss your progress or needs with family members unless you have specifically given permission** for them to be included in a meeting or discussion.
- **The college cannot disclose to your parents your grades or any other records** created when you use the college's services, such as counseling or medical records. You are considered an adult now, and the decision to share this information with family members can only be made by you.

When students are used to having teachers and parents working together as an IEP team to oversee their education, it can be hard to remember that this structure no longer exists in college. However, **college gives you the important opportunity to take charge of creating the meetings and communication strategies you want.**

Advice about changing roles

1. **Your parents are probably as nervous about this change in roles and responsibilities as you are!** It is new for them too.
2. If you sometimes find it difficult to communicate with them, or are not sure what information they need in order to help you succeed, **consider setting up a reporting system and a regular time to update them** on your college progress and experiences. This is especially helpful if you are living on campus rather than at home.
3. **If support staff are helping you attend college, be clear about what you do and don't want them to do in that job. It is not their role to act like parents** or to interact with teachers (unless you direct them to). However, if there are ways they can help communication to flow efficiently between you and your parents or teachers, be sure to tell them exactly what you expect.
4. **While teachers on an IEP team often have "parent-like" roles in a young student's life, teachers in college do not.** Before college, your teachers were responsible for making sure you showed up for class, were reasonably happy and healthy, and made progress. College teachers are not required to perform these services, and you

cannot assume that they will take a parental interest in your wellbeing. This requires a big shift in thinking for many new college students.

B. Two Important Laws: The ADA and Section 504

Your rights as a college student with a disability are set out in two important pieces of federal civil rights legislation designed to prevent discrimination. It is important to know what they do (and don't) say.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

- Section 504 requires all higher education schools that receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education to provide educational auxiliary aids to qualified students with disabilities.
- Section 504 can apply to colleges, universities, and postsecondary vocational education and adult education programs. (Some students with disabilities are also covered under section 504 in their public school districts, and may have “504 Plans” instead of or in addition to IEPs.)
- The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights enforces Section 504 regulation. Failure to provide auxiliary aids to students with disabilities that results in a denial of a program benefit is prohibited as discriminatory.
- Section 504 also prohibits colleges from: limiting the number of students with disabilities admitted; excluding a qualified student with a disability from any course of study or counseling them toward a more restrictive career; discriminating in giving out financial assistance, scholarships, internships, or assistantships; failing to provide accessible campus housing, or establishing any policies that have an adverse effect on students with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

- The ADA prohibits state and local governments (i.e. public entities) from discriminating on the basis of disability. It applies to these aspects of public colleges and universities: buildings and facilities, which must be accessible; campus housing, which must accommodate students with disabilities yet be comparable to and priced no higher than that provided for students without disabilities; programs and their benefits, which cannot be denied through failure to provide needed aids and services; and employment policies, including student jobs, which cannot discriminate against people with disabilities.
- The Department of Education enforces Title II of the ADA in public colleges, universities, and graduate and professional schools. Under Title II, failure to provide auxiliary aids to students with disabilities that results in a denial of a program benefit is prohibited as discriminatory.
- Private colleges are not covered by the ADA; however, since almost all private colleges receive some forms of federal funding they are covered by Section 504.

If a school or college is both a recipient of Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education and also a public entity, the institution is covered by both laws. Most colleges

are covered by one or both laws, but **if a college is both private and receives no federal funds it will not be covered by either law.**

What does the law say?

Compare the language of these two important laws:

Section 504: “A recipient . . . shall take such steps as are necessary to ensure that no handicapped student is denied the benefits of, excluded from participation in, or otherwise subjected to discrimination under the education program or activity operated by the recipient because of the absence of educational auxiliary aids for students with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills.”

ADA: “A public entity shall furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to afford an individual with a disability an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a service, program, or activity conducted by a public entity.”

C. Self-Disclosure

- **A requirement for ADA and Section 504**
- **A personal choice for other areas of college life**

Successful self-advocacy often involves an amount of disclosure about oneself that carries some degree of risk, in order to reach that subsequent goal of better mutual understanding (Stephen Shore, 2004).

Self-disclosure means **sharing some amount of personal information about yourself in a way that will help you reach your goals.** It should be a **positive process** that enables others to understand you better, and that gives you more – not less – control over your situation.

All people, with and without disabilities, self-disclose in a variety of situations. For example, a job applicant might disclose in an interview that he has a child whose medical needs will occasionally cause him to arrive late for work. Disclosing this information will allow the job applicant to negotiate a more flexible schedule, and avoid getting a bad reputation as a lazy and unreliable employee. Most people on the autism spectrum will find it to their benefit to self-disclose information about their diagnosis and needs at various times during their college careers. While some students find this easy to do, others feel uncomfortable talking about themselves and their autism. Self-advocates must understand that **their college and their teachers are not required to provide any aids and services unless they have self-disclosed the existence of a disability, and provided diagnostic testing to verify that disability.** The more clearly they can explain their needs, the more likely they are to be supported and successful.

Many young people on the autism spectrum who are entering college learned about and began to practice self-disclosure skills while receiving special education services in elementary, middle, and high school. They **may have participated in IEP meetings and become accustomed to talking about their sensory and learning differences**. Others, however, might not have been given this opportunity and **may feel very shy or afraid of self-disclosure**. Still others **may have autism symptoms that were deeply hidden or even undiagnosed** during their earlier years. This is the case for many older adults with Asperger's diagnoses, who may enter or return to college without much previous experience of self-disclosure.

Last but not least, **there are many college students with autism whose sensory and learning differences are not hidden** – for example, those who use assistive and augmentative communication devices and supports, and those with significant movement challenges. Due to their daily support needs, these students do not have much choice about whether to disclose the existence of a developmental difference to their college. They also do not have much choice about whether to disclose the existence of a difference to their fellow students; for them, disclosure will focus on creating awareness of what that difference does and does not *mean*. Their goal as self-advocates will be to assure that their fellow students and their teachers recognize them as capable and treat them as equals.

The challenges of self-disclosure will vary according to past experiences, practice, age, and the individual manifestation of a person's autism. They will also vary according to the person to whom you are considering supplying information about yourself. Author and self-advocate Lianne Holiday Willey advises people on the spectrum **to think of self-disclosure as involving three different groups of people: those who need to know a lot about your diagnosis in order to support you, those who interact with you but don't need in-depth knowledge about autism to do so, and those who don't need to know anything at all about your diagnosis.** In the adult world of college, these are some of the people who might fall into Willey's three groups:

1. Close family members and close friends, the appropriate college administrators, and many or all of your teachers may need to have in-depth information about your diagnosis and what it means. They are likely to need this information because they are in close and frequent contact with you in ways that may be significantly affected by their understanding of autism and its impact on the way you learn.
2. Classmates (other than close friends) and most of your neighbors (at home or in the dorm) generally do not need personal or in-depth information about you and your autism. Even though they are in frequent contact with you, your interactions with them are predictable and routine. Autism may never emerge as an issue. However, only you can decide whether a relationship that is important to you – either personally or professionally -- is being harmed by a lack of understanding of the autism spectrum, and whether greater self-disclosure is likely to improve that relationship.
3. Sales clerks in the campus store, the cafeteria staff, the bus drivers, and similar people on campus usually do not need to know anything about your diagnosis and

your experiences with autism. Their contact with you is limited and is not close. However, situations might arise in which it does become useful to disclose some information about your autism to people who are not close to you, so that they can relate to you and serve you better.

Author and self-advocate Stephen Shore describes self-disclosure as being either “hard” or “soft.” **A “hard” disclosure means talking about your diagnostic label and going into detail about what it means to be on the autism spectrum.** That is the type of information you will need to provide to the college’s Disability or Diversity Office to establish your right to auxiliary aids and services. **A “soft” disclosure limits the information you give to your immediate, relevant need.** For example, if you are hyper-sensitive to noise you might tell that to your study group and ask that they pick a quiet place to meet; it probably is not necessary to give them an explanation of autism or of your diagnostic history.

It can be useful to decide which category is appropriate for different people you meet in college. Remember that not everyone needs or wants to know everything about you or about autism. It is vitally important to let the college and your teachers know about your needs so that they can accommodate them, but it is not necessary to disclose personal information to casual acquaintances. **Beyond the mandatory self-disclosure needed to acquire aids and services there are no definite rules,** and you are free to make the choices that work best – and feel most comfortable – for you.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Shore, S. (2004) "Using the IEP to Build Skills in Self-Advocacy and Disclosure" in Stephen Shore. *Ask and tell: Self-advocacy and disclosure for people on the autism spectrum.* Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Sibley, K. (2004) "Help Me Help Myself: Teaching and Learning" in Stephen Shore. *Ask and tell: Self-advocacy and disclosure for people on the autism spectrum.* Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Willy, L. (1999). *Pretending to Be Normal: Living with Asperger's Syndrome.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

3. How do I get the auxiliary aids and services I need?

OBJECTIVE: Identify and consider appropriate **auxiliary aids and services** that might be used by students on the autism spectrum, and how to secure them

STUDENT PREPARATION: Read Section 3 of the Guidebook before coming to class. If you have an IEP from high school, (re)read it and list (for your personal use and for purposes of class discussion) the aids and services you received.

A. I will need auxiliary aids and services in college. How do I get started?

Step 1: Start early. Although you may request auxiliary aids and services at any time, you will want to make sure the college has enough time to thoroughly review your request and make plans to provide what you need. **All postsecondary educational institutions covered by the ADA, Section 504 or both will have an office to approve and coordinate these services.** Some schools call it the “Office of Student Diversity”; others use names such as “Office of Disability Services.” (For ease of reference, this document will refer to it as the Office of Student Diversity.) This is where you need to check in as soon as possible. In fact, it is a good idea to **check out this section of a college’s web site even before you apply, and to visit this office when you visit a campus.** Some schools are much more excited about and interested in promoting student diversity than others. You can tell a lot about a school by seeing whether this office is proactive, has a can-do attitude, and offers counseling, tutoring services, mentoring programs, and other useful supports. As a self-advocate you will want to have a good relationship with your school’s ADA and/or Section 504 Coordinator, because they are the people who will be helping you through the process of securing auxiliary aids and services – as we will discuss in this section of the course.

Step 2: Document thoroughly. The college will need, at a minimum, your most recent evaluation report with your diagnosis and your Individual Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan. (If you did not receive special services in school, or if you are an older adult returning to school, you may need to present a recent evaluation from a licensed medical or psychological professional.) Remember that **the ADA and Section 504 define disability as any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, or working. Not everyone with a disability meets those criteria** and is protected.

Step 3: Know your choices. Acquaint yourself with the range of aids and services that might be implemented. Remember that **you are responsible for knowing what aids and services you want, and specifically requesting them.** Ask yourself: what aids and services have I used before (in the high school classroom, in a job setting, at home or elsewhere) that helped me to overcome barriers and to learn? Were certain aids and services listed on my IEP, or provided by my employer? Have I ever received an evaluation from a psychologist, occupational therapist, or other professional who recommended certain support services? If you are not sure whether or what services you might need in college, now is the time to get a thorough evaluation and discuss the results

with the evaluator. There are many potentially useful aids and services. In general, **colleges and universities will agree to an aid or service as long as it does not lower or substantially alter the content of a course or the fundamental nature of a program of study.**

B. What kinds of auxiliary aids and services might students receive?

Below are some examples of the **technologies, accommodations, and other supports that students with different types of learning and communication needs might require** to benefit from attending college:

1. Tape recorder/recording devices for lectures
2. Note taker
3. Textbooks on tape
4. Lecture transcriptions
5. Sign language interpreters
6. Preferential seating
7. Assistants for laboratory course work
8. Accessible work station
9. Enlargement of handouts
10. Copies of handouts before class meeting
11. Use of spell checker/word processor/dictionary/calculator or talking calculator for in-class assignments
12. Assistive or augmentative communication technology, voice synthesizers
13. Open and closed captioning, closed caption decoders
14. Braille calculators, printers, or typewriters
15. Television enlargers
16. Specialized gym equipment
17. Videotext displays
18. Reaching device for library use
19. Calculators or keyboards with large buttons
20. Raised-line drawing kits
21. Assisted listening devices
22. Telecommunications devices designed for deaf persons (if telephones are provided in dorm rooms, a TTY in the dorm room)
23. Equipping school computers with screen-reading, voice recognition or other adaptive software or hardware
24. Arranging for priority registration
25. Reducing a course load
26. Substituting one course for another, provided that this does not substantially alter the required content of the program

Auxiliary Aids and Services for Testing

1. Extended time for tests
2. Reader for tests
3. Oral response to test questions
4. Scribe to record test responses
5. Alternate test setting

6. Alternative test formats
7. Test enlargement
8. Use of spell checker/word processor/dictionary/calculator
9. Substitute measure for verbal class participation
10. Take-home written assignments as a substitute for in-class writing

These lists are **not exhaustive; there may be other supports** that a student requires. It should be very encouraging to see such a **wide range of possibilities!** Self-advocates who helped to develop this training most frequently cited the importance of a reduced course load, extra time for testing or assignments, alternative testing formats, differentiated instruction (i.e. having materials presented in a variety of ways to suit different learning styles), tutoring (including help with time management and study skills), and environmental adjustments (such as being provided with a quiet study carrel and special lighting).

Remember that not all aspects of a course can be adapted; you may want to “shop around” before signing up. It is okay to speak with a professor and find out what the basic requirements will be before deciding whether or not to enroll. As self-advocate and author Yvona Fast suggests, “Try to figure out in advance which professors/classes are good. I tended toward classes where a major part of the grade was a term paper because I’m a fairly good writer and I like term papers. I avoided classes with lots of hands-on stuff (like science lab) because I’m a klutz.” Most students, whether or not they are on the spectrum, make these kinds of calculations.

C. What must I do to convince the college to grant my request for a particular aid or service?

When you request auxiliary aids and services, there are four important points to remember:

1. Auxiliary aids and services **must be based on your disability and individual needs, and backed up by appropriate evaluations** and documentation.
2. You might see an aid or service that you would like to have because it would make life simpler. However, **you will need to demonstrate that it is necessary** due to your disability – that is, that you would not be able to successfully attend college without it.
3. Your request for auxiliary aids and services **must be renewed each semester**. In most colleges, the ADA or 504 Coordinator will give you letters indicating your classroom and testing needs, which you will be responsible for supplying to your teachers.
4. Your postsecondary school **does not have to provide** personal attendants, individually prescribed devices, readers for personal use or study, or other **devices or services of a personal nature**, such as tutoring and typing.

D. Suppose my college or my teachers don't agree about the supports I have requested?

Public or publicly-funded institutions of higher education are responsible for having a **clearly established grievance procedure** for people with disabilities who feel their rights have been violated under the ADA or Section 504:

- **If an aid or service approved by the college's Office of Student Diversity has been denied by a faculty member or other staff, the student should contact that Office.** The ADA or Section 504 Coordinator will then contact the people involved to gather information and seek a resolution. A meeting may be set up help reach a voluntary solution.
- If the college Office of Student Diversity denies an aid or service which you have documented and feel that you need, or if the Office is unable to resolve the denial of an approved service by faculty, **you have the right to file a complaint against the college** with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) or to go to court.
- To learn more about the OCR complaint process, download the brochure "**How to File a Discrimination Complaint with the Office for Civil Rights**":
<http://www.ed.gov/ocr/docs/howto.html>
- If you would like more information about the responsibilities of postsecondary schools to students with disabilities, read the **OCR brochure "Auxiliary Aids and Services for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Higher Education's Obligations Under Section 504 and Title II of the ADA."** You may obtain a copy at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/docs/auxaids.html>

FOR FURTHER READING: These first-hand accounts can be helpful in thinking about the types of supports students with autism may need:

Prince-Hughes, Dawn, ed. (2002). *Aquamarine Blue 5: Personal Stories of College Students With Autism*. Swallow Press.

Grandin, T. (1995). *Thinking in Pictures: And other reports from my life with autism*. New York: Doubleday.

For further information about your rights, the Office of Civil Rights offers: "Auxiliary Aids and Services for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Higher Education's Obligations Under Section 504 and Title II of the ADA." You may obtain a copy at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/docs/auxaids.html>

4. What other supports and opportunities are available on campus?

OBJECTIVE: Identify **where, how, and why to access academic, vocational, social, and health-related supports and opportunities** on a college campus

STUDENT PREPARATION: Read Section 4 of the Guidebook before coming to class. Read the sections of your college's web site or catalog that describe services for students with disabilities, and campus services that are provided to all students.

A. Supports and Opportunities for Students with Disabilities

We have discussed the basic services that the Office of Student Diversity (OSD) must make available to students with disabilities. Many of these offices offer much more:

- While you will not be assigned a formal planning team like the IEP team in high school, you can often **obtain a counselor** through that Office. A counselor can help you stay on track and answer questions about how college works, but it will be up to you to make and keep counseling appointments.
- The OSD **may offer helpful speakers and workshops** on topics like “Study Skills” or “Time Management.”
- **Some Offices have developed free tutoring services and peer mentoring services.**
- **Some Offices organize social events and support groups** to help students get acquainted with each other and find companionship on campus.
- Some Offices have made a commitment to **help students develop their self-advocacy skills** – they may even be offering this course!

B. Supports and Opportunities for All Students

Campuses also have a variety of supports, opportunities, and resources that typically are available to ALL students, including:

Academic supports

- Academic advisors, to whom all students are assigned
- Study groups and study labs
- Student-to-student tutoring programs
- Clubs based on departmental major (e.g. the Math Club, the Marine Biology Club), which may sponsor speakers, events, and discussion groups
- Career services, to help students find employment
- Internship, “co-op” and practicum experiences (which may be required as part of a field of study)

Health supports

- Campus care and counseling services for students with psychological or health care needs
- Exercise groups (many campuses offer free use of gym equipment, a pool, etc.)
- Organized sports, including noncompetitive activities such as dance or yoga

Social supports

Most college campuses are “activity-rich” environments. As one self-advocate recalls, “Extra-curricular activities were my salvation. They were the best part of my college experience.” Consider what you can join, attend, or even start yourself:

- Clubs and interest groups (e.g. that meet to play video games or go hiking)
- Support groups (e.g. a group for self-advocates on the autism spectrum). If no support group exists, try asking the Office of Student Diversity for help in starting one. Some self-advocates have suggested that participating in such a group during their college years would have significantly enhanced their experience.
- Opportunities to perform (music, drama, poetry recitals, etc.) or attend performances
- Campus faith communities (organized worship, discussion groups, activities)
- Service clubs and volunteer activities (your efforts will be appreciated, and the experience will look great on your resume). Some self-advocates have stated that tutoring others in their own favorite subjects was a very rewarding activity.
- Campus political groups (young Democrats, Republicans, Independents, Greens, etc.)
- Regular activities organized by the college to provide ways for students to socialize and network, such as a “Fall Festival” or a weekly movie series

It is very important to use services and participate in activities that can support your academics, health, and social life. Most of them are free to join. Most colleges display information and answer questions about campus activities:

- At the start of the school year, when students arrive on campus to register
- During the school year, through an information office in the Student Center

If you are not sure what to try, ask the Office of Student Diversity for suggestions about activities and clubs that you might enjoy. You can also conduct an investigation of your own: Observe where and when students seem to congregate in their free time, and note what they seem to enjoy doing. Self-advocates who contributed to this training have suggested joining a film society, playing table tennis, playing chess, doing photography, joining the International Club, joining a foreign language club, attending football games, eating out with friends, participating in student government and in political activities and rallies on campus, volunteering at a radio station, working on a campus newspaper, and participating in music groups. This is only a small sample of the potential activities available.

Words of Advice:

Even if you have not had much interest in clubs and related activities during high school, remember that **your relationship with your fellow students is changing** now. In college you probably will be around more students who are very serious about their educations and their future careers. They are not there because they *have* to be but because they *want* to be. If you have strong interests in certain topics, **in college you may have a better chance of finding peers who share those interests.**

C. Vocational Opportunities: internships, “co-ops,” practicums

At many colleges, real-life job experiences – often called an internship, co-op (because it involves a cooperative arrangement between a college or university department and a local employer) or a practicum (as when a “student teacher” practices new skills in a real classroom, with supervision) – are required or strongly encouraged to help a student get ready for the job world. If employment that matches your special interests can be found, these experiences can even help you make connections with a potential future employer. As Jessica Mullaney, a graduate on the spectrum, urges, “Try to make time to find a good internship, especially if you aren’t working. Do as much as you can to make yourself competitive after graduation. It’s a tough job market.” The department in which you are majoring will inform you about the need or option for an internship, co-op, or practicum, and help you to arrange it.

Some students with autism find it daunting to leave the relative safety of the campus for a supervised job experience, but many self-advocates stress that there are **huge benefits to getting this experience while you still have the oversight and support of your teacher and faculty advisor.** Here are some pointers to remember:

- **Talk candidly with your teacher, faculty advisor, or whoever will oversee your job experience. Make sure that you self-disclose enough information** about your autism for them to help you. Check in with the Office of Student Diversity and ask them for any support and counseling they can provide. **Seek advice about what type of information to supply to supervisors at the organization or company where you will be working.** If you need job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act offers you certain protections, but these need to be considered before your job begins.
- Remember that this experience **counts toward your grades and your graduation.** If you will be tested and graded while on the job, any **auxiliary aids and services to which you are entitled should be supplied.**
- If you will be undergoing an interview to obtain this job experience, remember that all students can **benefit from practicing “mock” interviews with potential employers.** If practice in interviewing is not scheduled as part of your training, ask your teacher or a counselor for the Office of Student Diversity to hold an interview practice session.

- Remember that the **rules on how to act, speak, and dress are stricter on most jobs than the rules of classroom etiquette.** You will want to demonstrate to your boss or supervisor that you are paying attention and that you respect the job opportunity you have been given, so this is not a good time to joke around, complain, attend to personal business (e.g. texting friends) or lounge as if you were in the dorm.
- If the agency or company at which you will be working has **written rules about the dress code and conduct expected, be sure to read them carefully. If there are no or few written rules, ask the teacher** overseeing your work experience to identify the “hidden rules.” Make a list, study it, and follow it.
- Remember that, unlike your college professors (who will teach their course and earn their salary whether or not you show up for class), the agency or organization at which you are training suffers a loss of productivity when employees are not there. **Showing up, and being on time, is NOT optional!**
- Internship, co-op, and practicum experiences **take time and energy, and involve a lot of sensory stimulation. Be sure to budget for them** by taking a lighter course load. Give yourself plenty of opportunities to decompress so that you get the best experience with the least stress.

FOR FURTHER READING: General information about navigating the college environment and adult life:

Harpur, J., Lawlor, M., and Fitzgerald, M. (2005). *Succeeding in College with Asperger’s Syndrome: A Student Guide*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Lawson, W. (2003). *Build Your Own Life: A Self-Help Guide for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Useful information for making vocational plans and choices:

Grandin, T., Duffy, K., and Attwood, T. (2004). *Developing Talents: Careers for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

5. What everyday living skills will I need to succeed?

OBJECTIVE: Enhance understanding of **daily living skills** that are vital to college success: effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies; awareness and care of personal appearance; study skills; time and money management; personal safety and security

STUDENT PREPARATION: Read Section 5 of the Guidebook before coming to class.

A. Effective Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Whether you speak by making sound waves with your vocal apparatus, or speak by using an assistive or augmentative device or other support techniques, the college environment will call for ongoing attention to communication skills. People with autism have different degrees of comfort and proficiency in this area, but the following are some general tips:

1. **Observe the behavior of other students** to determine what is expected. For example, do they raise their hands and wait to ask questions during a certain class, or does the teacher expect them to just speak up? Do students use their cell phones in some parts of the library but not in others?
2. If you are unsure what is appropriate or expected, **ask a trusted peer specific questions about the “hidden curriculum”** (i.e. the unwritten social “rules” that govern how people behave in a particular class or place). You could also ask these questions of a counselor at the Office of Student Diversity.
3. **Try role playing social interactions** that you find difficult. Ask a friend, mentor, or counselor to help you.
4. Remember that other **people won’t necessarily know what you are thinking until you tell them**. Some people with autism have said that they frequently have to remind themselves to stop and put their rapidly-moving thoughts into words.
5. Remember to **communicate “the good stuff”** and not just the stuff you need to complain about or correct. For example, be sure to compliment your classmate on solving a tough math problem, or tell your teacher when you have really enjoyed a class.
6. **Try using visual reminders of social skills**. For example, you might post a reminder in the front of your notebook if you want to monitor the volume of your speech.
7. **Monitor your stress level**, and try to avoid too many social interactions when your stress is high.
8. **Locate quiet, safe places on campus** where you can go to decompress before returning to interactive situations.
9. Keep track of how many times you offer input or ask questions in class or study group; **limit yourself so that others get a turn**.
10. **Don’t interrupt** while others are communicating, unless it is an emergency.
11. **Remember basic good manners:** simple words like “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me” become especially important in crowded situations where people who don’t know each other well must get along.
12. If the interaction is important and you are having difficulty communicating, **consider whether to self-disclose**, i.e. to tell the person with whom you are having difficulty that you are on the autism spectrum. You might ask them to

accommodate you in a certain way, such as by slowing down or not using slang terms.

Body language can be important in communicating to “neurotypical” peers and teachers. While body language may not be an interesting or obvious form of communication to many people on the autism spectrum, self-advocates have suggested various ways to adapt:

1. When conversing, **make eye contact if possible; fix your eyes at a point near the person’s head or on their forehead if eye contact is uncomfortable.** Some people remind themselves to smile now and then to reassure the speaker that they are listening, while others find it easier to nod their head. Remember that the point of this body language is to **let your teacher or peer know that you care about what they are saying** and that you are paying attention.
2. **Be aware of where your body is and what message it might be sending** to others. For example, slouching in a chair may feel comfortable, but it may communicate boredom and disrespect to a teacher or communicate a wish to be left alone to a fellow student with whom you would like to spend time.
3. **Be aware of the space** between you and those with whom you are communicating. Getting too close can make people nervous; for typical conversations, try to keep about an arm’s length of distance between you.
4. If you feel your body may be sending the wrong messages due to self-regulatory needs (e.g. you are doing a lot of rocking or other movements in class, and would prefer not to) **consider scheduling classes with breaks between them**, and use the breaks for physical exercise, deep pressure, or other activities that are calming. Students with autism have noted that the option of scheduling a break between classes was one of the big advantages of college over high school.

B. Care of Personal Appearance

The way you attend to your **personal appearance affects not only your comfort and health, but is also a form of body language.** Although it is not a good idea to judge someone by their appearance without getting to know the person inside, clean and appropriate clothing and good grooming send a positive message that can make your life easier and encourage your fellow students and teachers to take you seriously. Here is some simple advice:

- ✓ Your everyday college **clothes should be comfortable and low maintenance.** Many students who live on campus don’t bring anything that needs ironing; check the labels and ask for advice.
- ✓ If you are not familiar with how to do laundry, be sure to **have someone in your family give you a laundry tutorial:** for example, it really IS true that you should wash light and dark clothes separately. The money you save by throwing them all in together is more than lost when you have to replace ruined clothes that have turned weird colors when fabric dyes got into the wash water.

- ✓ Most college activities are informal. For classroom and studying, **think T-shirts, sweats, and cozy jeans or slacks (or casual skirts)**. If you will be living in the dorm, bring comfortable things to sleep in that won't embarrass you in front of your room-mate or dorm-mates.
- ✓ **If you depend on the comfort of a favorite outfit, try to buy more than one of each item that you favor.** That way you can put one or two outfits in the laundry and still have a fresh one to wear. If possible, buy these favorite items in more than one color; that way others will not think you are wearing the same clothes every day!
- ✓ Be sure you **have at least one “professional-style” outfit** (with jacket and skirt or slacks for women; with button down shirt, tie, and suit jacket for men). You will need it if you participate in a work experience or practicum, and for the occasional campus activity that requires a more polished appearance.
- ✓ **Wear comfortable walking shoes.** A lot of campus life involves walking!
- ✓ **Bring weather appropriate clothes.** Many students keep a small foldable umbrella and rain poncho in the bottom of their backpack, as well as a plastic covering for their books. It's no fun to spend the day damp, or to find your important papers are too wet to read.
- ✓ **Don't go to class dressed in extreme fashions**, e.g. like a rock star or a fashion model might wear. You want your teachers and peers to take you seriously, not to see you as entertainment. If you enjoy wearing costume-type clothes, save them for evenings and weekends.
- ✓ **Feel free to discuss clothing choices** with the other students you meet! This is an appropriate topic of conversation when students are relaxing together. Try to notice what others are wearing, and compliment them on items you like. Ask them what they think would look good on you, and take advantage of the free advice!

Good hygiene is especially important when you are learning, studying, and living close to others:

- ✓ **Set up a regular schedule for showering, shampooing, and brushing your teeth, and stick to it.** Otherwise students tend to postpone their routines until they are too tired, and then fall asleep before carrying them out. If they have to jump up the next morning and rush off to class, they may go for days on end without a shower or even a change of clothes! This sends a message to others that you don't care enough about yourself OR about them, which is not the image you want to project.
- ✓ **Try organizing your self-care products all in one easy-to-see place, such as a totebox on your dresser.** Have soap, shampoo, deodorant, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a comb or brush, and your razor all together and in easy reach. If necessary, keep a checklist or other visual reminder to use them regularly.

C. Study Skills

A big part of college self-advocacy is taking charge of your study time and balancing it in a healthy way with time for other outlets, such as social activities, recreation, and personal interests and hobbies. You will need to consider how to budget your time, and how to deal with distractions, including people. Below are some frequently asked questions about time management, and some tips to think about:

1. What common studying mistake should students avoid?

One of the **most common mistakes of new college students is to postpone studying** and working on assignments. They may feel very free because no one is checking their assignment book, monitoring them in a study hall, or checking up on them every day. They are not getting the usual prompts and reminders to study, so they don't study! They plan to catch up with the work later, closer to the test or exam. *This never works.* Such students usually find that the more the work piles up, the harder it becomes to get started. Eventually they may become panicked, and need to drop the course or ask the teacher for an "incomplete." Even if they do manage to catch up later, they probably will be disappointed in their grade.

2. How much time do I need to study?

A well-prepared self-advocate foresees these problems and **starts off right by creating a study schedule.** If necessary, he or she asks support staff, a counselor from the Office of Student Diversity, a tutor, or a more experienced friend for help in deciding how much time to spend on different subjects, and how to use that time best. New college students are often surprised at how little time they spend in the classroom. Compared to the 6 or 7 hours a day that they spent in high school classrooms, they might only be in college classes for 3 or 4 hours a day. However, the college day is not supposed to end after 3 or 4 hours! It is **usually recommended that students spend about 2 hours of study time daily for each hour spent in the classroom,** and that this study time should increase when a test or major assignment is almost due. That is only a general rule, and will depend on how difficult a subject is for you, how fast you read, and your skills of organizing and memorizing.

3. Where should I study?

Psychologists suggest that **studying in situations similar to a classroom will help you to recall what you learned.** The setting itself may act as a cue that helps remind you of what the teacher said. Students should also recall that trying to "cram" large amounts of information at one time – usually just before a test -- is not an effective strategy for most people. Studies show that the **amount of information a person can recall usually increases when study is spread over time.** Many students on the spectrum feel that they study well alone and prefer this option; however, group work and group study can be an important part of college life. Often college teachers will assign projects that need to be tackled in groups. Students usually find that it is **advantageous to study together at least some of the time.** They may want to share lecture notes to make sure nothing that happened in class is missed, and may want to take turns quizzing each other.

4. Is it possible to self-advocate for study support?

It's okay to ask for help in keeping to your study schedule! If you know you are likely to put things off, **ask someone who works with you – your support staff, a peer mentor, or a campus counselor – to set up regular check-in times and to prompt you** about maintaining your study schedule. Be completely honest with them if you have been “off task” or started to fall behind, and follow their advice. **Study habits are like any other habit:** hard to build at first, but much easier as time goes by. Some students find that they can “incentivize” themselves to study by setting a goal of studying or writing for a reasonable length of time, and then planning to reward themselves with a favorite activity when the time is up. By making a game of it, they are able to complete tasks that they would otherwise avoid. If your time still seems to slip away with too little accomplished, try being a detective: keep a record of a typical day in your life, or ask someone to help you do this. Note where you go, what you do, and for how long. Bill M., a college graduate on the spectrum, reflected that he “could have used counseling to give priority to homework, instead of staying at the student union building until it closed.” You may be surprised to discover unnecessary and time-wasting habits that have crept into your day and that would never be missed if you dropped them.

5. What classroom strategies will make studying easier?

Be on time to hear the introduction and priorities for each class session. You can miss very important information even if you are only a few minutes late. **Take notes** (or employ any record-keeping aid specified in your ADA or Section 504 plan), **keep records of the class together** in a binder or other organizer, and compare with other students' notes during study groups. **Review** this information soon after class to reinforce it in your memory. **Listen for the most important words or topics**, and pay attention to what the teacher emphasizes and repeats. If it is on the blackboard, whiteboard, overhead, or PowerPoint, it is probably important – so get it on record! **Stay to the very end of class** so that you hear the summary. **Check and review the priorities of the lecture before you read the assignments**, because this will help you focus and not waste time on unimportant details. **Know the rules of the class about asking questions** (for example, should you save your questions until the end of class? Or raise your hand instead of calling out?). Create some reminders of the questions you want to ask, but take turns with other students and don't monopolize the teacher. If your questions are too long to ask in class, make an appointment for an office visit. When visiting during office hours, ask how much time you may have and watch the clock. Remember that many or even most questions about a course can be answered by reading the materials, by asking other students in study groups, or by asking a tutor; **don't expect the teacher to act as your tutor!**

D. Time Management

Most students struggle to manage their time wisely. College is so full of activities, and there is so much personal freedom, that it is easy to get distracted. If you often find yourself thinking “Where did my day go? I haven't even started on the things I wanted to accomplish!” then it is time to get help with time management. **It is almost impossible to remember your entire day's activities in your head – you need a system!**

1. Tools and methods for being on time

Fortunately, there are **many types of clocks and alarms** that can be programmed to alert you or wake you in time for class and other scheduled activities. **Visual Timers** are available in a variety of lights, displays, and sound effects. Alarms on clocks, blackberries, or computers can often be customized for maximum effect. Some people report that analog clocks work better than digital because they can visualize the units of time involved and respond to a perception of their “size.” Other students report that they have found ways to successfully outsmart themselves and prevent returning to bed; for example, they may set several alarm clocks in places far away from their bed. By the time they have gotten on their feet and walked around to turn them all off, they are fully awake.

2. Reminders of deadlines, classes, obligations

Many students lose track of their class schedule, especially at the beginning of the semester, and miss important sessions. **Try making multiple copies of your schedule and putting them in prominent places:** over your desk, taped inside your binder, even in your wallet. Many students also **program reminders into their computer, PDA, or Blackberry.** A low-tech **desk calendar, DayTimer, or weekly planner** will also work well. Self-advocates have suggested purchasing the best daily organizer you can find. Use it to record ALL your obligations, including classes, study groups, appointments, clubs and activities, test dates, and deadlines for papers and projects.

As soon as you become aware of a deadline, record it in your organizer of choice, and be sure to check upcoming dates frequently. When a large assignment is announced, **work backward in your calendar by planning how much time you will need for writing, for researching, and for picking a topic and creating an outline. Give yourself a due date for EACH STEP of the project,** not just for the entire project. If this seems difficult at first, ask a counselor from the Office of Student Diversity or other support person to help you create this step by step plan. Once you get used to doing it, it will seem easy and you will feel much less anxiety about completing work on time.

Remember that **your schedule should not be too tight.** For example, you don't want your schedule to depend on your ability to work on a project right up until the morning it is due. Unexpected events, such as getting sick or having a computer crash, can upset your plans. Leave enough time so that, even if a problem arises, you will still have the flexibility you need to get the work done.

You might also try methods that worked for you in the past: if color coding, pictures, or other organizational devices worked for you in high school or elsewhere, why not use them now? **Look over the accommodations and supports you received in your IEP, and carry over any that worked well** into college.

D. Personal Safety

College can present **new challenges to personal safety and security**, especially if you come from a small, protective high school environment where safety was seldom an issue. If you will be living on campus, there will be even more good safety habits to learn. Here are a few basic reminders that can keep you secure:

1. Beware of computer theft. Your laptop is probably the most valuable thing you will be carrying. **Get a locking device**, such as a physical lock or electronic tracking or locking device. **Invest in a comfortable carrying case** that you will not be tempted to put down and forget. If possible, get a case in a bright color and customize it in ways that are likely to attract your attention and remind you not to leave it behind.

2. Watch your belongings in the library or wherever you are working. Don't leave your laptop, iPod, or other belongings unattended if you must get to the rest room or the coffee machine. It is annoying, but either take them with you or ask someone you trust to guard them until you return.

3. Find the safest place to carry your wallet. Make sure it cannot fall out of your pocket or be easily removed by a pickpocket. Be sure that you **only carry what you need**; for example, you probably only need one credit card. Carrying multiple cards gives a thief multiple chances to run up multiple bills.

4. Be sure that all emergency numbers are in your cell phone. Keep your cell phone in a carrying case that attaches inside your backpack or pocketbook. In case your wallet is stolen, make sure you know what phone number to call to cancel your credit cards. Keep the number of campus security on your phone, just in case you need help.

5. Use the campus escort service at night, or go with a friend. Even if your campus is considered very safe and you are only walking to the library, after dark it is always best to travel with others.

6. Make sure someone knows where you are at all times. Whether you are living on campus or at home, be sure that someone knows where you're going and what time you expect to get back.

7. Driving to campus, alone or with a support person? **Lock the car.**

8. Living on campus? **Make sure the door to your residence hall is locked at all times, and don't let in anyone you don't know.** If someone is outside asking you to open the door because they lost their keys, or offering some other excuse, tell them you will go and get the person in charge (such as the dorm's Resident Assistant) to help them.

9. Make sure the door and windows of your room are locked at all times. Even if you have good, trustful feelings about your dorm-mates, you never know who is visiting. Dorm rooms are a favorite with many thieves because there are valuables within easy reach.

10. Be careful with your keys. Many students like to keep them hooked to a carrier around their neck or snapped to their belt loop. If you lose your keys, report this right away and pay the fine for a new set.

FOR FURTHER READING:

A helpful site for information about college life: www.collegelife.about.com

For more about time management and study skills:

http://studyskills.suite101.com/article.cfm/time_management_for_students#ixzz0KUy82hRx&C

The University of Minnesota Duluth has an extensive online handbook devoted to Study Strategies: <http://www.d.umn.edu/kmc/student/loon/acad/strat/>

The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University has a very useful online Study Skills Guide: <http://www.csbsju.edu/academicadvising/helpist.htm>

6. How can I enjoy a healthy, happy lifestyle during college?

OBJECTIVE: Enhance understanding of **quality of life issues** that are vital to college success: navigating friendships; maintaining mental and physical health; coping with peer pressure; taking advantage of opportunities for personal growth

STUDENT PREPARATION: Read Section 6 of the Guidebook before coming to class.

Self-advocates have suggested some **simple rules that can help assure personal satisfaction and a high quality of life** for college students on the autism spectrum:

- **Take care of yourself!** Make mental and physical wellbeing a top priority, because no one can do well when they feel bad.
- **Know yourself** and set social goals that will make you happy.
- **Give yourself the chance to try new things** that look interesting, but “just say no” to activities that make you feel pressured or uncomfortable.

Sometimes the simple things are the most important:

A. Take care of yourself!

The college environment can be very exciting and stimulating; in addition, the daily structures that were put in place for you during high school, such as lunch at a certain time, and regularly scheduled exercise, will no longer be required. Students can eat -- or not eat -- when and what they wish. Students also discover that they have a much greater choice about when to sleep or be active. Unfortunately, some of these experiments can have a bad impact on a student's health. If eating in the college cafeteria means you get more of your favorite healthy foods – great! But if it means a daily diet of ice cream for dinner -- not so great. Some students start switching their days and nights: they might schedule all their classes in the afternoon, and then stay up all night and try to go to sleep in the morning. **Disrupting your natural sleep cycle or replacing it with short naps at odd times, and skipping meals or replacing them with non-nutritious snack foods, are two common ways in which new college students can develop health problems.** Soon they “don't feel right,” become grouchy or tired, and wonder why. On top of this, the dense human environment of college life means that **there will be lots of germs that are easily transmitted. A run-down body with a depleted immune system is the perfect host.**

Set yourself up with a sleep, meal, and exercise schedule that is comfortable, and stick with it! If the main cafeteria is noisy or overwhelming, see whether there are other campus options (like a food court), or go at a time of day when it is least crowded. Wear your headphones and sit in a far corner – but don't miss meals, or try to replace them with snack foods from vending machines. If your sleep is easily interrupted, **ask whether there is a “quiet dorm” or the option of a single room. Try to keep to a sleep schedule that allows for a long period of uninterrupted sleep.** Short naps, even if they

add up to the same number of hours as “a good night’s sleep,” do not give you equal benefit because the brain chemicals needed to restore optimal functioning cannot complete their job during naps. However, some self-advocates report that they are better able to cope with college stress when they enjoy both longer periods of rest AND occasional short naps.

If you feel too bad to go to class, that is a message from your body that something is wrong. Check in with the campus health services; they can treat you if you are ill, or recommend counseling and other services if the root of the problem is stress or unhealthy habits.

Stress Management

Managing stress and maintaining good emotional health are vital to a satisfying college experience. Stress isn’t always a bad thing. **A little stress can help motivate and focus you. But when everything feels like an emergency, your mind and body pay a heavy price.** Too much stress can lead to cognitive problems (such as difficulty thinking clearly or concentrating) and physical problems (such as gastrointestinal problems and overall tiredness) that disrupt students’ emotional lives, leaving them feeling moody and depressed. Once these symptoms set in they can be hard to get rid of, so it is important to be proactive about managing stress. Here are some tips:

1. **Practice your self-advocacy skills!** Self-assertiveness is a stress reducer: we beat stress by taking charge of our lives!
2. **Maintain a regular schedule** that will minimize last-minute surprises.
3. **Find your ideal course load** and stick with it, even if it is a lighter load that will require a longer wait until graduation.
4. **Schedule “down times”** throughout the day for relaxation.
5. **Locate a variety of peaceful places** on campus to which you can retreat and decompress.
6. **Enroll in and practice soothing activities** that build body awareness, such as yoga.
7. **Learn deep-breathing techniques** for self-calming, and use them daily.
8. **Use calming techniques that have worked for you in the past**, such as brushing or wearing a weighted vest or lap pad.
9. **Surround yourself with positive messages**, positive images, and positive self-talk.
10. **Communicate regularly with those people in your life who really make you feel good!**
11. **What makes you laugh?** Whatever it is, get more of it in your life.
12. **Identify music that is soothing to you**, and make it a part of your daily routine.
13. **Identify and try to avoid people, situations, and topics that stress you out.**
Some people become agitated if they listen to the evening news, shop in a crowded store, or get involved in a discussion of politics – so why not avoid those triggers?
14. **Try to avoid perfectionism**, which is a major source of unnecessary stress. Try to look at the big picture by asking yourself, “How important will this seem next month or next year?” Practice saying the magic words “That’s good enough!”
15. **Remind yourself that we all learn by experimenting and making mistakes.**
Practice saying those other magic words, “No big deal!”

If feelings of anxiety and depression start to take over your life, most college campuses offer mental health services and counseling. Many students take advantage of these services, and no one should ever feel shy or embarrassed about doing so. It takes an intelligent, decisive person to identify a problem and seek a solution.

B. Know yourself

In addition to academic success, most people would agree that experiencing social success is a big part of the college experience. However, **definitions of what social success should look like differ greatly from person to person.** They differ not only according to whether people are on the autism spectrum, but according to:

- Personality
- Family and background
- Culture
- Age and maturity
- Interests and favorite activities
- Sensory “comfort zone”
- ...and many other factors

Social success comes in many different shapes and sizes:

- Some college students hope to **make one or two close friends** to hang out with.
- Some would like to **become student leaders who are widely known** on campus.
- Some dream of **dating and finding romance.**
- Some define social success as **being respected and taken seriously** by their teachers and peers.

Many students with autism have found that college is **an easier place to get along with one’s peers** than high school was. This may be because many college students are more serious and more mature. As self-advocate Xenia Grant put it, “College was the first time people accepted me as I was. It was a Godsend for me.” With most campuses featuring a wide variety of courses, clubs, and activities, **it is also more likely that a college student who has special interests will find others who share them.** Some self-advocates report that acceptance alone was all they wanted during their college years. They were satisfied to be admired for their academic success and chose not to seek out nonacademic opportunities for social interaction. Other self-advocates made different decisions and cultivated different degrees of social involvement.

CONSIDER: What is YOUR definition of social success? What kind of interactions with other people would make you happiest and most comfortable? There is no single right answer for everyone!

Nurturing friendships and romance: Some students with autism report that they would like to have close friends or “best friends,” but find these very personal social relationships to be a challenge. One student who gave input for this training felt that he needed to be more patient about letting relationships develop slowly, and wondered whether he

appeared too intense or intrusive in repeatedly seeking out people he wished to befriend. Another self-advocate offered very precise advice: “Don’t keep knocking in student doors over and over if they don’t answer, you can scare them.” Self-advocates repeatedly emphasized that it is a good idea to **approach people you like “indirectly” by relating to them through your mutual interests.** For example, your brain may be saying “I want to be your best friend!” but it is less overwhelming to the person if you actually say something like, “Can I join your study group before the science test?” **Keep it simple, start out slow, and focus on the things you both enjoy.**

Social networking online is another way that students meet and friendships can form. Some students like to use FaceBook, MySpace, and other online networks to tell others about themselves and connect with likeminded peers. This can be a pleasant and low pressure way to meet other students, but if your only friends are online friends there won’t be anyone to hang out or go to class with. Try thinking of social networking as a way to start friendships and practice interactions, but limit your time online if it is keeping you from real-world interactions.

Searching for romantic relationships is an important part of college life for many students. Fortunately, the complicated “dating scene” that once existed on college campuses is much more relaxed now. **Students can get to know each other informally, often by getting together in groups, and can enjoy typical, low pressure, inexpensive activities** such as having lunch together in the cafeteria or attending a free movie in the student center. **The same considerations that apply to making friends apply to finding romance: take it slowly and give the relationship time to form and grow.** As self-advocate Phoebe Murer puts it, “Respect boundaries.” If you find that you are often seeking a person out, but they seldom seem to return your interest, turn down the intensity. And **don’t panic: remember that most people will seek out and spend time with many potential partners before finding “the right one.”** People who are self-confident, are enjoying learning new things, and have high expectations for their futures are naturally attractive to others. **The more you relax and “be yourself” the more likely it is that you will meet people who appreciate you for who you are.**

C. Give yourself the chance to try new things

College can be a wonderful time to experiment and try new things, academically and in other areas. Most colleges have “general education requirements” to encourage students to explore new subjects and ideas. Even if you are sure of what you want as a major, try **to pick a few “gen ed” courses in areas that are new to you and approach them with an open mind.** You might be pleasantly surprised! Many students on the autism spectrum have reported that taking college courses in psychology and sociology helped them to understand themselves and other people better. Knowing what research has discovered about “why people act the way they do” has helped many people with autism to gain insight into the lives of their peers and into the roots of puzzling social customs. Students on the spectrum have also reported enjoying courses in such diverse subjects as film studies, foreign languages, and political science, even when they originally had little interest in these areas.

College also gives you opportunities to join new clubs and activities, meet people from different backgrounds and cultures, visit new places, experiment with new styles

and clothing, expand your cultural awareness and tastes (e.g. in music, movies, performing arts), and try new foods. Some students on the autism spectrum report that college seems more diverse than high school, and perhaps for that reason they find it easier to fit in. Several college graduates on the spectrum have cited the presence of students from different countries and cultures as one of the most positive aspects of their college experience, feeling that they were especially well-accepted by these students and were able to reach out and help them (e.g. proofreading their assignments) in ways that were appreciated.

Some students, however, report that they are being exposed to too many new things at once. If that is how you feel, **try staying within your comfort zone for most things (e.g. wear your favorite clothes and listen to your favorite music) while trying just one new thing each week or two (e.g. attend a college basketball game, even though you've never paid attention to basketball before; try a new cuisine at the food court).** Share these experiences with your friends or fellow "social networkers" online; you might be surprised to find you like them, but even if you don't the knowledge you gain will be valuable.

"Just say no" if you are made to feel pressured or uncomfortable.

In college you might also meet people who encourage you try bigger and more personal changes than just a new rock group or a new hairstyle. **Campuses can be home to political and religious organizations, social movements, and advocacy groups that try to recruit new volunteers or members. Some of these groups or movements may do good, responsible work, while others may be of questionable ethics or value. Some of the ones that do good work may provide you with a valuable new experience, while others may not be a good fit for your strengths and needs.**

How can a student tell the difference? Unfortunately, this is one of those areas of adult life where there are no easy answers. Self-advocates have expressed concern over the possibility that others may try to take advantage of them, and over their difficulty in determining the sincerity of others. If a person or group is encouraging you to make a major change in your plans or lifestyle, try asking yourself these questions:

1. **Do I understand clearly** what I am being asked to commit to, and why?
2. **Does it make sense to me? Are my questions welcomed** and answered fully? **Or do I feel pressured to agree** and afraid to say no?
3. **Does it make me feel good, or do I feel very anxious or panicked?**
4. If a person or group is urging me to make an important commitment or change in my life, **are they encouraging me to talk it over first with family, friends, and trusted advisors?** Or are they discouraging me from communicating with or trusting my family, friends, and advisors?
5. **What do I want to be doing in my life** in 1 year? In 5 years? **Will this commitment or change help me get there,** or make it harder for me to get there?

Whether you are asked to join the Peace Corps or a picket line, a new religion or a political campaign, it has to make sense for your life and your plans. If you are being asked to consider a significant change in plans or lifestyle, or join an activity that you are unsure of, **take your time and communicate with those people in your life whom you**

have always trusted. College is full of new choices, but no one should ever feel pressured into making any of them.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Understanding Stress, Stress Management, and Stress relief:
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm

Grandin, T., and Barron, S. (2005). *The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Ledgin, N. (2002). *Asperger Syndrome and Self-Esteem: Insight and hope through famous role models*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

SPECIAL SECTION: Selecting the Right College for YOU

If you have not yet made a choice of college, this module can help you focus on what will be important. Clearly the **attitude and awareness of the Office of Student Diversity** or Disability Services will be a very important factor in your success. The **attitudes and values of the faculty and students**, although somewhat intangible and hard to measure, will also be vitally important. Perhaps it comes down to this simple observation: Some schools do a better job of honoring and valuing diversity, while others seem to prefer and reward conformity to a more narrow image of what a student should be.

Finding a college or university that can meet your needs will take careful investigation. While few colleges currently advertise an ability to provide services for students on the autism spectrum, there are many guidebooks listing **colleges that pride themselves on serving students with learning disabilities**. If a college is known to do a good job of supporting these students, they may be more likely to do well with students on the autism spectrum as well. The willingness of a college to be creative and to work as a team with school districts, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and adult service providers will be a deciding factor for many students on the autism spectrum.

When searching for a post-secondary school that is right for you, consider the following:

- **Your interests and plans:** Does this college or university offer the courses and program you want? Does it offer internships and work experiences that can lead to a job?
- **Alternative or nontraditional enrollment options:** Does this college or other post-secondary program work with school districts, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and/or adult service providers to offer individually-tailored courses of study for nontraditional students? Are these options provided in inclusive settings, or in segregated or “hybrid” programs on campus?
- **Student activities:** Are there clubs and organizations you might like to join?
- **Course load:** How many semesters does it typically take to complete the degree or certificate you are seeking? If you will need a lighter course load spread over a longer time period, can that be arranged?
- **Student services:** Does the Office of Student Diversity answer your questions with understanding and respect? Is it active in providing information to students who learn differently? Is its web site thorough and helpful? Are there active programs for tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and for helping graduating students find jobs?
- **Student housing:** If you will be living in the dorm, are the living conditions suitable to your needs? Is there a “quiet dorm” in which residents voluntarily agree to keep noise levels down? Are there single rooms available for students who prefer not to have a roommate? Is fraternity or sorority housing an appropriate option?
- **Size of campus:** Are you more comfortable in a large or small setting?
- **Rural or urban:** Where do you feel more at home? Where will you be likely to find the internship, practicum, or other off-campus experiences you want?
- **Size and focus of department in which you plan to major:** Does the department have a good reputation for serving undergraduates? Will too

many students – including graduate students – be competing with you for the professors’ attention? Will graduate students rather than professors be teaching many of your classes?

- **Private or public:** Is this a public college that must provide aids and services under the ADA? If private but receiving federal funds, is the college fully committed to supporting students with disabilities under Section 504? If you are considering a private college that does not receive federal funds, does the college recognize any self-imposed responsibility to serve diverse learners? Are there significant differences in the costs or amount of student aid available at the various colleges you are considering?

In considering these factors, **try to let go of preconceived ideas about what is best for people on the autism spectrum.** For example, it has generally been assumed that a small and/or rural campus would be best for people on the spectrum because it would be more peaceful and the students would get to know each other better. Some self-advocates report that they felt comfortable attending small colleges and cautioned that students might “slip through the cracks” at large universities. On the other hand, other self-advocates have said that they were unhappy at small, rural colleges and did better when they transferred to larger or more urban settings. One self-advocate interviewed for this module explained that he thrived on the campus of a huge state university, whereas the small rural campus where he began college reminded him of the worst of high school: everyone seemed to be observing him. He explained that at the large campus there were so many people who looked and acted different that no one paid unwanted attention at him, leading to a decrease in his anxiety. He also reported making more friends because he was “fishing” in a larger pool of people. Another self-advocate reflected that she felt less self-conscious in a larger setting because she did not have to interact with the same people every day. **The question “Where will I blend in comfortably?” may turn out to be more important than simply asking “Large or small?” or “Rural or urban?”**

Try to start the college planning process early enough to **attend “open houses” and schedule campus tours** at a variety of colleges in which you are interested. **Write down a list of the questions that are most important to you, and compare the answers you receive.** Always remember that your decision to attend a particular college is not irrevocable. If your plans change or the college does not turn out to be a good fit, it is usually possible to transfer the credits you have earned to a different college.

Community colleges are another good option for many students. Tuition is usually less than a 4-year college and they may be closer to home. Students who are unsure about whether college is the right choice can experiment by trying this option, and may earn an “associate’s degree” if they decide not to continue with a lengthier program.

Don’t rule any course of study in or out based solely on a student’s diagnosis of autism. People on the spectrum are highly varied in their interests and strengths. Among self-advocates surveyed for this training, successful courses of study have included philosophy, mathematics, communication, law, general liberal arts, English, psychology, architecture, political science, and creative arts.

Alternative and nontraditional enrollment options

Last but definitely not least, **college is increasingly becoming an option for adults with autism who want to access appropriate educational experiences without necessarily enrolling in a full, traditional degree program.** Sometimes this means auditing courses – with a support person, if necessary -- or creating a portfolio of job-related experiences based on the content of college courses. For example, a person who aspires to work in a veterinary practice might enroll in animal science courses but, instead of completing all the projects and exams required for the degree, would be responsible for specially-adapted projects developed by the college, by their service provider, or (if they have not yet graduated and are being sponsored in this activity by their school district) specified in their IEP. **A small but increasing number of local school districts partner with public and private colleges to offer dual enrollment to students with disabilities such as autism who are aged 18 to 22.** The school district generally coordinates needed services for these students, while the host college may enlist students as mentors or tutors to support these nontraditional students.

At some colleges, these alternative programs – including a few created only for people with autism -- are kept largely separate from the rest of the college's activities. In such programs, young adults are enrolled in **“transition” classes and activities where they participate only with other students with autism (or developmental disabilities),** although they may receive some social and vocational activities in more inclusive settings. Other **“hybrid” models may offer greater social and classroom inclusion** but continue to rely on a separate program base on campus. **Fully inclusive models maximize self-determination, participation with typical peers, individualized services, and natural supports (such as peer mentors), and may involve an adult's service provider or supports coordinator working as a team with the college's Office of Student Diversity/Disability Services to identify and share services and costs.** These new options are being pioneered across the country, and have resulted in a growing number of innovations and ideas. For more information and a large bibliography, see the Institute for Community Inclusion's Research to Practice Brief on Post-Secondary Education Options: <http://www.communityinclusion.org/pdf/rp45.pdf>

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) (PL 110-315) was enacted in 2008, reauthorizing the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. This law contains a number of important new provisions that will improve access to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities by addressing financial aid, creating new demonstration programs, and setting up a national coordinating center for postsecondary students with intellectual disabilities. For the first time, students with intellectual disabilities can be eligible for Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and the Federal Work-Study Program. In the past, such students were usually not eligible for financial aid because they did not meet certain criteria, such as having a regular high school diploma or a General Educational Development (G.E.D.) equivalency, and often did not meet an “ability to benefit” test. The new law greatly encourages the enrollment of these students in comprehensive transition and postsecondary education programs. The “Think College!” web site contains valuable information on the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and on strategies and resources that can allow students with intellectual disabilities to

access a college education: <http://www.thinkcollege.net/for-professionals/higher-education-opportunity-act-of-2008>

Whether college is approached from a traditional or non-traditional point of view, there is a growing belief that ALL students with autism can benefit from and should have access to the college experience. **College can help people on the spectrum build not only their academic but their social skills, increase their opportunities for employment in jobs that are interesting and challenging, enhance their inclusion in age-appropriate community activities, and become more independent and self-confident.**

FOR FURTHER READING:

The Government Accounting Office (GAO) issued the October 2009 report “Higher Education and Disability: Education Needs a Coordinated Approach in its Assistance to Schools in Supporting Students.” Many findings are relevant to students making a college selection: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1033.pdf>

Baker, J. (2005). *Preparing for Life: The Complete Guide for Transitioning to Adulthood for Those with Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Breakey, C. (2006). *The Autism Spectrum and Further Education: A Guide to Good Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Palmer, A. (2006). *Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome: A Parent’s Guide to Student Success*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The web site for North Carolina’s TEACCH program offers useful ideas: *Preparing for College: Tips for Students with HFA/Asperger’s Syndrome*
<http://www.teacch.com/college.html>

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