

# How to Support Students with Learning Disabilities and Autism

Peggy Hock, PhD and Lara Sandora, MA, PPS



# Overview

- Introductions
- Supporting students with college entrance examinations
- Executive function skills for college success
- Types of college support programs
- Determining appropriate level of support
- Closing thoughts



# Definition

- A mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity
- Assessed by a licensed professional
- Comprehensive evaluation
- Diagnosis as per DSM...
- Specific accommodations requested must address the substantial functional limitation(s) measured by the assessments



# High School versus College

- Difference in Laws
- Parental Support vs School/Private
- Difference in Documentation Requirements
- Self-Advocacy
- Understanding Individual Learning Disability to Compare Options in College Supplemental Programming

# College Selection

- Determine the Necessary Level of Support
- Find the Right Match
- Use the Internet and Guidebooks
- Talk with Parents, Teachers, Friends and, Especially Counselors
- Participate in College Visits at Your High School
- Attend College Fairs and Visit LD Support Programs When Visiting College Campuses

# College Success Means:

- Understanding and Being Able to Discuss Your Disability Without Parental Support
- Realizing that learning Programs will Communicate only with Students, Not Parents
- Students Must Advocate for the Support They Need
- Appropriate Documentation is Essential
- The Resources Utilized Freshman Year Should Not Be the Same Resources Utilized Senior Year (Gradual Self-Reliance)

# With SAT or ACT Testing

## ■ Eligibility

- ◆ IEP
- ◆ 504 Plan
- ◆ Plan based on current Psycho-Educational Evaluation
- ◆ Accommodations Must Already Take Place in School
- ◆ School Testing Required for Some Accommodations
- ◆ Accommodations Available Once During Testing Period for School Testing
- ◆ Allow time for requests to be evaluated and appealed if necessary



# Can the student achieve academic success independently?

- Enrolled in a standard college prep curriculum?
- Modified classes necessary?
- Any areas of subject deficiencies?
- Grade point average of 2.4 or above?
- Upward trend in grade point average?
- Self-Advocacy Skills?
- Executive Function?





# Executive Function skills are Key to Success

- Planning, time management/awareness
- Flexibility of thinking
- Sequencing, prioritization
- Organization, managing tasks and space
- Verbal & nonverbal reasoning
- Activation and maintenance of attention
- Verbal and nonverbal working memory

# Executive Function Impairments

What disabilities involve executive function?

- ADD - both inattentive and hyperactive subtypes
- Autistic Spectrum Disorders
- Brain Injury
- Cognitive Immaturity
- Psychological

# Executive Function Skills Required to Succeed in College

## Academics:

- Long term assignments
- Greater volume of work (reading & writing)
- Planning/Organization: Keeping track of deadlines
- Reading not covered in class
- Required to self-advocate for accommodations
- Quarter system – no time to waste



# Executive Function Skills Required to Succeed in College

## Daily Living:

- Lots of unscheduled time
- Minimal supervision
- Making new friends
- Roommates/Living in Communal Housing
- Managing own finances
- Making choices in new social situations
- Self Regulation- especially re: sleep, food, hygiene, etc.



# College: A Test of Executive Function for Everyone

- The impact of the “helicopter parent” and “snowplow parent” on student independence
- Family lacks realistic knowledge of level of support in place
- Student lacks realistic knowledge of level of support they are receiving and independence required in college setting



# Building Readiness

- Realistic Assessment of Current Support at Home and at School
- Step-by-Step Program to Reduce Support and Build Independence (including going to camp or similar)
- Tool to Assess – Scale of Executive Function
- Practice Student Ownership of Learning Needs
- The Elevator Speech



# Types of College Support Programs

- **Structured Programs**
- **Autism Support Programs**
- **Coordinated Services**
- **Basic Service Programs**



# Structured Programs

- Comprehensive – significant support
- Students may be required to sign contract
- Usually, substantial program participation fee
- Some programs have a separate admission process





# Services may include:

- Staff Trained in Learning Disabilities
- Special Orientation Programs
- Curriculum Modifications
- Assistance with Advocacy
- Academic Monitoring and Counseling



# Some Colleges With Structured Programs

- Curry College
- American University
- Landmark College
- Marist College
- Lynn University
- Fairleigh Dickinson University
- University of Arizona
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- Mitchell College, CT
- University of Denver



# Fee-Based Autism Support Programs

## Services May Include:

- Specially trained staff
- Academic support and monitoring
- Support for social skills
- Support for daily living/life skills
- Career counseling



# Some Colleges With Autism Support Programs

- University of Idaho
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- Adelphi University
- Michigan State University
- Drexel University
- University of Montana
- The Ohio State University
- Manhattanville
- CSU East Bay
- Xavier University
- Mercyhurst
- St. Josephs

# Transition/Independent Living Options

The following are programs for students who have LD/ADHD/ or other disabilities, and need help with independent living skills and/or socialization issues

# Independent Living Options

- College Living Experience (multiple sites)  
<http://experiencecle.com/>
- College Excel, Bend Oregon <http://www.collegeexcel.com/>
- AHEADDD, <http://www.aheadd.org/>
- The Brevard Center, Melbourne, FL (specific for NVLD)
- College Internship Program [www.cipworldwide.org](http://www.cipworldwide.org)

# Coordinated Services

Moderate levels of Support provided with access to a Learning Disabilities Specialist (at Least part-time) who assists students in coordinating academic adjustments. Faculty trained to be receptive to accommodations.

Services May Include:

- Learning Strategies Instruction
- Counseling
- Tutoring
- Assistance With Advocacy



# Colleges With Coordinated Services

- All UC and CSU and CC Campuses (if staffing is preserved)
- Boston College
- Brown University
- Cornell University
- University of San Francisco
- Santa Clara University
- Stanford University





# Basic Service Programs

**These Programs Provide the Minimum  
Amount of Support Necessary in Order to  
Comply With the Law**



# Colleges With Basic Service Programs

- Oregon State University
- University of Redlands
- Loyola Marymount University
- University of the Pacific
- Emory University
- Marquette University
- Oberlin College
- Whittier College



# The Right Match?

- Structured Programs Work Best for Students Who Need Close Monitoring and High Levels of Support.
- Coordinated Programs Work Best for Students Who Want to Be “Mainstreamed” but Know They Will Need Support.
- Basic Service Programs Work Best for the Highly Motivated, Independent Self-Advocators.
- Autism support programs work for students who need support for daily living as well as academics



# Using data to find a fit

- Survey to assess executive function skills
- Completed by parent, student and any resource teacher and/or tutors
- Consider academics and daily living
- Student and family set goals and objectives
- Student works to increase executive functioning skills
- Reassess student's functioning

# College Research

- Family needs to Visit College Campuses
- College needs to be a fit beyond the support services
- Meet With the Disabled Students Services Office During Campus Visits
- Be realistic About the Level of Support Needed and Be Certain the Level of Support Provided Meets Students Needs



# Application Issues

- Can help to explain relative weaknesses
- Can help to explain low test scores
- Can show persistence in overcoming adversity
- Should not be the defining part of the application.



# Special Application Issues

If college has a PROGRAM to which LD students must apply:

- A separate application may be required, in addition to regular application
- Documentation must be sent to program
- Program director MAY be involved in admission of student to college & program



# Preparing Students for Transition to College

- Student needs to attend and understand IEP meeting
- Must understand and be able to discuss disability without parental support
- Realize that Learning Programs will communicate only with students, not parents
- Students must advocate for the support they need
- Appropriate documentation is essential
- Accommodations should be requested before beginning of school





# Prepare Student to Access Support

- Students should practice self disclosing their diagnosis or challenges
- Student should set up meeting with service coordinator before or during orientation
- Student should be able to read and understand documentation and must provide documentation before or during this meeting, to see if adequate
- Students need to know what services & accommodations they can access including tutorial services, etc. available to all students
- Program coordinator may give them letter to self advocate with faculty

# Which Students are Successful?

(without fee-based programs)

- Understand and can articulate their LD
- Began advocating for self in high school
- Can study on their own
- Know how to get help when they need it
- Resourceful-can figure ways to get around problems
- Resilient-know how to recover from failure



# Resources

- [www.Collegeboard.com](http://www.Collegeboard.com)
- *The K & W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities* by Kravets and Wax
- *College Guide for Students with Learning Disabilities* by Sclafani and Lynch
- *Colleges That Change Lives* by Loren Pope
- *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* by Frank Bruni
- *How to Raise an Adult* by Julie Lythcott Haims



# Closing Thoughts

- Make Sure Students Have Appropriate, Timely Testing
- Students Need to Understand Their Test Results
- Students Need to Practice Self-Advocacy
- During application process students should communicate With College Learning Support

