



COLLEGE CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

This document will introduce you to some of the basic information and considerations for students with disabilities who are applying to or attending college, including legal protections and tips for success.

For questions about college or other disability related services contact The Arc of King County Information and Resource team at 206-829-7053 or ask@arcofkingcounty.org

What legal responsibilities do colleges have?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 state that colleges and universities cannot discriminate against a student because of their disability. Colleges are required to ensure students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to access all education, programs, and other supports available to non-disabled students. Colleges must provide "Reasonable Accommodations" to ensure students with disabilities have the supports needed to equally engage.

It is important to understand the types of support students with disabilities can and cannot receive in college, and how that differs from high school. Students in college DO NOT have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) like they may have had in K-12. In college, students with disabilities may have a 504 Plan that provides reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to education.

What are Reasonable Accommodations?

Reasonable Accommodations are legal mandated supports with tasks or the environment that provides students with disabilities have equal opportunity to participate fully and learn. Colleges are not required to adjust the essential curriculum or course requirements to accommodate students. For example, they can approve an accommodation for longer time for tests but cannot change the test content or required scores for passing.

Examples of Reasonable Accommodations:

- ✓ Note-taker/scribe present with the person, in class.
- ✓ Sign-Language Interpreter in class.
- ✓ Extended time for testing.
- ✓ Substituting foreign language classes with specific cultural or other courses.
- ✓ Reducing course load and extending time on degree requirements.
- ✓ Auxiliary aids and services (e-textbooks, software, etc.).
- ✓ Built in breaks for medication, water, fidget, etc.
- ✓ Modify classroom activities if needed.
- ✓ Minimize strobing in PowerPoint decks for individuals with epilepsy
- ✓ Large print/text for vision impairments.
- ✓ Housing accommodations (adjusting rooms/furniture, accessible to buildings, etc.).

Examples of Accommodations Colleges are NOT Required to Provide:

- ✓ Personal devices that are otherwise covered by health insurance.
- ✓ Assistance for personal care needs (feeding, transferring, personal hygiene, etc).

- ✓ Modifying academic or program standards.
- ✓ Burdensome, as defined by the university.

Online Class

Reasonable Accommodations are legal required supports with tasks or the environment supports that provides a student with disabilities equal access to learning. This also applies to online or virtual learning settings. Accommodations will look different when they are provided in an online classroom setting. The environment will be different than meeting in-person. Also, note that online classes have limited interactions with professors. However, your professor may offer their office hours online.

Some accommodations that could be available to students taking classes online include:

- ✓ Note-taker.
- ✓ Text-to Speech for visual impairments.
- ✓ Reader/scribe online during testing.
- ✓ Sign-Language Interpreter.
- ✓ Captioning/transcription.
- ✓ Extended time for testing.
- ✓ Extending time on assignment.
- ✓ Auxiliary aids and services (e-textbooks, software, etc.).
- ✓ Minimize strobing in PowerPoint decks for individuals with epilepsy.
- ✓ Large print/text for vision impairments.
- ✓ Built in breaks for medication, water, fidget, etc. (student may leave the camera).
- ✓ Modify class discussion if needed.
- ✓ Laptop/tablet loaner (from the college with a special permission).

What should I be thinking about in the college search and application process?

Not all colleges are alike. Finding the right “fit” is important to ensuring a successful college experience. Some colleges are more inclusive and supportive of students with disabilities than others, even though all colleges must abide by ADA and Section 504 laws. Some colleges have programs and services designed to support the unique learning and social needs of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), while others do not. While a college cannot deny you admission because of your disability, they can determine how much or how little support they will provide.

For a summary of college programs designed to support students with I/DD in King County, see our online Resource Guide at www.arcofkingcounty.org. Below are some tips and considerations as you begin thinking about college.

Things to Consider when Deciding on a College:

- ✓ Is the college physically accessible to you?
- ✓ Will the school provide you with appropriate accommodations/services that meet your needs?
- ✓ What type of college will best fit your needs (large, small, public, private, religious, etc.)?
- ✓ Would I benefit from starting at a local Community College then transferring to a 4-year program?
- ✓ How easy is it to get in touch with professors and administration?
- ✓ Will you live at home, on campus, or somewhere else?
- ✓ How will tuition and other expenses be paid?
- ✓ How will you handle your transportation?
- ✓ How will you handle personal care assistance?

Community College

- SAT or other exams not required
- Requires a high school diploma or GED
- Requires proof of residency
- Smaller class size
- Smaller campus
- Doesn't offer a bachelor's degree
- Two years to complete an associate degree or to get a certificate
- Slower pace in the class
- More interaction with the professor

4-year College

- Requires minimum score on SAT or other exams (varies by colleges)
- Requires a high school diploma/GED and a GPA
- Requires certain coursework from high school
- Larger class size
- Large campus
- Offers a bachelor's degree
- Four years to complete a program
- Faster pace in the class
- Less interaction with the professor

The above bullets can vary between colleges.

Tips when Applying for College:

- ✓ Know what your rights are as a student.
- ✓ Know what you want and need.
- ✓ Know where you can go to get support.
- ✓ Visit the schools, in person.
- ✓ Contact the School's Disability Resources/Service Office or visit their website to see what accommodations/services they have already.
- ✓ Make sure that you explore all the schools that are available to you.
- ✓ As soon as you are accepted, contact the Disability Resources/Services Office and submit an application. Expect to have an intake meeting to discuss your accommodation needs.
- ✓ Prepare your questions and concerns before your intake meeting with the Disability Resources/Services Office.
- ✓ Advocate for your needs.
- ✓ Consider participating in the DO-IT program? For more information, visit: <https://www.washington.edu/doiit/>.
- ✓ Check out available scholarships for people with disabilities.
- ✓ Reach out to The Arc of King County if you need support!

Will my financial aid affect my Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits?

Under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) or under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), student financial aid doesn't count as income and resource, and should not impact your SSI benefits. This exemption doesn't require a time limit to increase the benefits. It is excluded from resources and it wouldn't affect the SSI eligibility criteria regardless of how long the individual receives the assistance. Any Title IV HEA or BIA assistance also doesn't count as income. Examples include Federal Work-Study, Direct Loan, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and Academic Competitiveness Grant.

Also, other types of assistance like scholarships, grants, and fellowships aren't counted as the person's countable income as long as they use the resources to pay their tuition or educational expenses. Any unused resource that is saved for future is excluded from their income in the month of receipt. Unused aids will be counted as income in the month of receipt and remaining funds will be covered as a resource in the next month. If the remaining aid isn't being used for educational purposes, it will be counted as income in the month the aid is spent for other purposes.

If a student with a disability goes to a regular college or course of vocational or technical training, they are able to have limited earnings that doesn't affect their SSI benefits. In 2025³, the maximum amount of income that

the student can have increased by 2.5 percent to \$2,350 per month, and not more than \$9,460 in a year.

For further assistance or questions about financial aid and SSI benefits, please visit:

<https://www.ssa.gov/agency/contact/>

What can I do if I'm not getting the support or accommodations I need?

- ✓ Talk to your coordinator at the Disability Resources/Services and explain how your needs are not being met.
- ✓ Contact your university's Complain/Resolution Resource Offices about your concerns.
- ✓ Contact your local Office of Civil Rights. King County Civil Rights – 206-263-2446
- ✓ Contact organizations like The Arc of King County 206-829-7053 or ask@arcofkingcounty.org