

The College-Choice Process for Students with Special Needs

College & Retirement Solutions
667 Shunpike Rd, Suite 3
Chatham, NJ 07928
(973) 514-2002



www.college-retirement.com

All students—and especially students with a learning disability—need a supportive, understanding environment, one that recognizes interest and skills while remedying weaknesses. Assessing needs and abilities is a crucial first step in getting ready for college. Therefore, students need to ask themselves the following questions:

1. What are my strengths?
2. Where do my interests lie?
3. What are my particular deficiencies and problem areas?
4. What is my learning style, and under what conditions do I learn best?
5. What is my level of independence?
6. What are my coping skills?
7. What academic preparation have I had and what additional preparation will I need?

College Selection

When selecting a college, all students should consider factors such as the following:

- Location
- Cost
- Size
- Student life
- Competitiveness
- Academic preparation
- Housing
- Admissions policies
- Type of college:
 - Two-year
 - Four-year
 - Liberal arts
 - Vocational/technical
 - Private
 - Public

Once you have decided which colleges seem best suited to your interests, needs, and abilities, plan to visit the campuses. Planning these trips may allow you to set up a meeting with the director of the learning disability program in conjunction with your visit. You may also be able to attend a class and talk to a student with a learning disability already taking courses at that college.

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There are a wide variety and range of support services that colleges may offer students with a learning disability. The following are basic services that any college should have:

1. Study skills training
2. Tutoring services
3. Provisions for alternate testing
4. Availability of taped textbooks
5. Course load modifications
6. Pre-registration for courses
7. Taping of lectures
8. Specialized study aids

Some colleges may also offer individual diagnosis, assessment, and testing. In addition, colleges may have a learning center with a learning disabilities specialist present. Peer support groups may also be present. Visiting these resource centers will give you the best feel for the quality of services present at the school. Here are questions to ask about learning centers:

1. Is the center easy to access? Is it bright, cheery, and well lit?
2. How is it staffed? What resources are available?
3. Is the center open to all students or specifically to students with learning disabilities?
4. Is the director of the center a member of the school's faculty or a separate entity?

Source: College Counseling Sourcebook, 4th Edition