

College Accommodations and Services for Students with Special Needs

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Colleges are not required to follow an IEP or high school 504 plan. Colleges draw a distinction between accommodations and personal services and yet there is a fine line between them. Accommodations are guaranteed under Section 504 and the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). Their purpose is to place a student with disabilities on a level playing field—to have the opportunity to compete with students who do not have disabilities.

Personal services are not guaranteed or mandatory. Services are special procedures or devices that a college may provide to help students. Some services are accommodative, such as note taking. Others are considered personal services, such as typing or personal care assistance. Many colleges do not provide personal services because of the extra expense, staffing, and administrative burdens involved and because they are not required to do so.

Students may have to negotiate with the coordinator or director of accommodative services or the 504 coordinator to arrange for what they feel is needed. Colleges have no legal obligation for students with disabilities to “do better.” However they *do* have an obligation to level the playing field and to provide students with accommodations so they will have equal access to an education.

You can ask for anything if it is reasonable and if it is justified because of the effect the disability has on you. It is not the disability—it is its effect—that determines your eligibility for assistance. In other words, a deficient reading skill would not automatically qualify a student for extended time for tests. Extended time would be allowed because the disability has a definite, strong effect on the student’s ability to take the test in the same amount of time as students without the disability.

Points to remember

1. A college does not have to provide any accommodation or service that would fundamentally alter the nature of a course or core academic requirements.
2. A college does not have to provide any accommodation or service if it would place an administrative or financial burden on the institution.
3. A college does not have to provide any accommodation or service of a personal use nature.
4. A college has the right to offer an accommodation in place of the one requested. Although colleges generally try to honor the preferences for a specific accommodation requested by a student, a college may provide an accommodation other than the one preferred by the student if the institution can show that its choice is just as effective.
5. A college is not required to follow an IEP or high school 504 plan.

Source: College Counseling Sourcebook, 4th Edition