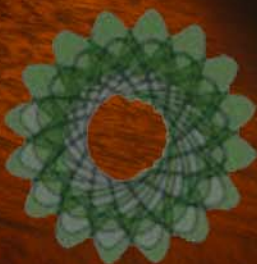


A Practical Guide for People with Disabilities Who Want to Go to College

*Roody McNair, BA,
and Arlene Solomon,
MS, CRC, CPRP*
**Horizon House
Employment
Services**



**Temple University Collaborative on
Community Inclusion of Individuals
with Psychiatric Disabilities**



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Welcome, and congratulations on taking your first step towards a better life. How can going to school help you get a better life? Have you ever applied for a job, only to find out that you didn't have the right level or type of education? Have you ever seen someone working at a job you'd like to have and wondered how you could get there yourself? How can this guide help you achieve the future you want? This guide is all about planning. Remember: those who fail to plan, plan to fail. If you've set yourself the goal of getting a degree or a certificate from a college or a training program, what are the best first steps to take? How can you pay for it? How do you manage your disability while you are in school?

These are all questions you need answers to before you even start looking around at schools. This guide will help you at every turn. You will learn how to plan for picking the right school for you. You will learn how to plan for the type of degree you should pursue to get the jobs you want. You will learn how to pay for school and secure additional funding if necessary, and plan for paying back loans for tuition. Everything you need to know, from planning on how to manage your disability on campus to planning on what to do with your degree once it's in your hands, will be addressed in this guide, with additional resources in the back.

This guide was developed to help people with a limited knowledge of educational opportunities after high school secure the resources and support networks they need to give them the best chance for success. It may contain information that you already knew,

but it also covers some issues that you hadn't considered before. We have tried to put as many of the answers you'll need as we could manage into an easy-to-use document. Every topic covered in this guide could have books written about it, and in many cases, there have been. This guide points you to many other resources, but it is up to you to decide which ones work best for you. Be sure to look in the back of the guide for the lists of Internet resources and other publications that can help you find information on everything from what schools are in your area and what they offer to how to pay for them.

The purpose of this guide is to help you prepare for any potential challenges you may face. College can be stressful for anyone: you are faced with new challenges and ideas, people from many different backgrounds from your own, points of view that you may find fascinating or offensive. The best defense

you have from becoming overwhelmed is to inform yourself as best you can about what kinds of challenges you may face, and what you can do to overcome them.

The topics covered in this guide are drawn from personal experience, observation of the students we have worked with as they have pursued their degrees, and from the best practices being used in a form of academic assistance called Supported Education, a system of supports put in place both on the campus and in the community to help people with physical or psychiatric disabilities receive the same educational opportunities as anyone else, giving people with disabilities an equal standing and presence in their communities.

How can post-secondary education help you later in life? One word: Jobs. We live in a world of “increasing credentials,” where it is becoming harder and harder for people to find work without the specialized training offered in post-secondary college programs. The job market is very competitive today, and it is very difficult for people just starting out in the working world to compete if they only have a high school diploma or a GED. Even just having a Bachelor’s Degree in Liberal Arts will set you head and shoulders above the other applicants who do not have anything beyond high school. A college degree or other certification will also serve you very well while you’re moving up the ladder out of entry-level positions.

Another way a post-secondary degree or certificate can help you has to do with the changing nature of the nation’s workforce. The country has less and less large-scale industrial production and more and more service jobs. Although there are now fewer jobs in production or manufacturing,

the number of semi-skilled, skilled, and professional jobs is actually expanding. A good example of this—and it is only one example—is the fact that jobs in the field of medical transcription are to grow by at least 15% by 2016. What do medical transcriptionists do? They listen to recorded dictation from a doctor or other healthcare professional and enter the data into medical histories, charts, and other administrative or medical documentation—but to be a medical transcriptionist you need the training to familiarize yourself with the various forms you will be completing and a basic knowledge of the medical system to understand the proper information to be entered. This is the kind of training you can get if you go back to school. Similarly, you cannot work as a physician’s assistant—or dozens of other better paying jobs—if you only have a high school diploma. You need the specialized training required by the growth markets to get into them.

In addition to providing a wealth of hints, tips, and tricks, this guide also includes a comprehensive bibliography and list of resources in the back. The bibliography contains various books you can read to flesh out some sections of this guide. This guide also contains a list of websites, checklists, and publications that can help guide you on your way. These resources cover a diverse array of topics—from securing funds to where to look for disability or mental health resources on- and off-campus.

Much of the information in this guide comes from our years of work with the students we support, here at Horizon House, as they return to school. Two Educational Specialists work as guides, tutors, and advocates for those who are just beginning

school or are returning to school, most often meeting students either in community settings or on campus. Horizon House, based in Philadelphia, serves people facing a wide range of challenges, and we also offer vocational training and job coaching, drug and alcohol abuse services, out-patient psychiatric services, and residential services, among others. While working to secure employment for people with disabilities, we realized that one of the biggest barriers to employment is a lack of education. This led us to the realization that one of the most powerful employment tools a person can use is the certificate or diploma they can earn

from a post-secondary college or degree program. People didn't know how best to go about searching for schools and getting the degrees and certificates they needed to get the jobs they wanted. While no diploma or certificate is a guarantee of employment, it most definitely helps your chances of securing a job and then advancing in your field. We have been supporting students who have a disability get 'to and through' college for over eight years. We have seen our students run into some of the barriers presented in this guide, and have helped them overcome them. With the proper planning and the right supports, there is nothing beyond your reach.

*Congratulations on deciding to start your journey
towards post-secondary education.
We wish you all the best of luck.*

Now hit the books!

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Section A: Finding the Right School

All About You

Planning will play a huge part in your college career. Knowing what steps to take will help you keep up with the demands that are being placed on you, and help cut down on unpleasant surprises. In this section, we will look at five major areas to help you plan for success.

College is a time when you can try out new things. You'll be exposed to new people and ideas you never would have considered before. College is a time to find out what is really important to you, whether you're fresh out of high school or coming back to get new training later in life. The decision to go to school or to go back is one of the best you can make. We live in a world of "increasing credentials." It's getting harder to get a good job without specialized training. Going to school to get the degrees you need or picking up a new trade is the first step to a new and better life. To make this process as smooth as possible, you need to be realistic. A good deal of the planning you do should be based around managing existing difficulties in a new setting. Knowing who and what you have in your corner will stand you in good stead as you move forward.

You may find it useful to have someone you trust or someone who supports you, such as a case manager, go over this guide with you to give you feedback or ideas as you go along. If you are a staff person you may want to use this guide—with either one person or in a group—to help them begin thinking about and planning for going back to school: you could go over each of the four sections of the guide one at a time in weekly sessions. At the end of this guide are additional resources—suggestions, and links to websites with checklists and worksheets—as well.

● Develop Your Support System

- Your support system consists of people you know who will help you in times of need. They can be a mix of friends, family members, counselors, and anyone you trust who is helpful and knowledgeable.
 - The people in your support system do exactly that—they support you. For example, if you are having trouble completing assignments, people in your support system can help you manage your time or keep track of deadlines. They can help point you to the right resources on or off-campus to help you with difficulties you are having. Or they can be a positive force to help you stay on course.
- Keep in mind as you think of people who can make up your support system that no one person in it can necessarily do everything you need at all times.
- Also keep in mind that the people who make up your support system may change as you progress through school. That's okay. Add people to your list of supports as you find them.

● **Assess Your Skills and Abilities**

- Be honest with yourself (but do not beat yourself up) about the skills you have or don't have, or about what things you're good at and not-so-good at. Ask yourself, "What skills do I have that I enjoy using?" If you answered "Nothing," it would be a good idea to talk this through with a member of your support system who knows you well.
- The other side of looking at your skills and abilities is identifying things that you have trouble with so that you'll already know in what areas you might think about asking for help.
 - For instance, if you take medication that makes it hard for you to get out of bed, you'll know that you might want to stay away from classes that meet early in the morning, or you can talk to your care provider about changing your medications or modifying your medication schedule.
- Taking stock of your skills and abilities will help you in two ways:
 - It will help you look for colleges that offer classes you will find interesting, or in a subject you feel passionately about.
 - It will help you to identify possible obstacles you may face as you go through college before the obstacles become problems.

● **Set Your Goals**

- Everyone has dreams and hopes for the future. What are yours? What schools offer classes/programs that will help you reach your goals? Try to identify goals that are as concrete as possible.
 - For example: If your goal is to find work after college, what kind of work? Do you want to work in an office or outside? Do you want to work with computers or with your hands?
 - These types of questions will help guide your thinking and also help you to identify a college program that is a good "fit." For instance, if you want to work with your hands, you may not want to enter into an office administrative program, but rather a program that teaches you about working outdoors, like forestry.
- If you don't have any concrete goals, that's okay. Not everyone knows "what they want to be when they grow up." But everyone has an idea of what they would like out of life. Picking the right school for you will help you get those things.
- There are many places on the Internet that can help you determine your skills, likes, and dislikes, and how they relate to different jobs. One such site is O*Net Online. This website asks a series of questions about your learning style, work condition preferences, your personality, and other aspects about you as a person and employee, and then makes suggestions about what careers might be a good match for you. The full web address is <http://online.onetcenter.org>.

Pick the Right School for You

Now that you've identified some possible goals for your college career and skills you have that may be able to help you, you need to think about what *type* of college you want to attend. The type of school you choose may affect what (if any) accommodations (a modification or support—see Section B under “Locating Supports While in School”) you may be eligible to receive. The type of school you choose will also depend on the goals you have. Do you want to learn a trade, or do you want to learn something artistic? Do you want to be in school for a long or a short period of time? If you want to learn a trade, then a proprietary school would be a better choice than a 4-year college. Think about the time you have available to pursue your college career.

A great resource for finding schools and training programs, if you live in Pennsylvania, where we do, is the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Educational Names and Addresses (EdNA) database (<http://www.edna.ed.state.pa.us>). This database includes contact information for school directors as well as links to the institution's website. All the programs and schools listed in the EdNA database are accredited and licensed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This will help you avoid educational scammers who promise quick training and jobs while taking your money.

Nationally, a good resource for people with disabilities is the Disability Friendly College Guide (<http://www.disabilityfriendlycolleges.com>), which has a listing of 75 colleges around the country that go above and beyond the legal requirement that colleges have to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. While this list shouldn't dictate your decision, it can definitely help you find the colleges with the most resources available to people with disabilities. The above website also has a great side-by-side comparison of high schools and post-secondary schools (in general terms) so that you can know what administrators and teachers are looking for in terms of social, academic, and accommodative expectations. Post-secondary students can choose among several different types of schools.

● Community colleges

- Community colleges offer many programs that are job-focused.
 - Like 4-year colleges and universities, they will also offer a wider range of humanities, social sciences, or liberal arts classes.
 - Community colleges have a diverse student body. While they often attract traditional college students—those coming directly out of high school—they also serve many non-traditional students, who may be older and experienced but looking to increase their skills and competitiveness.
 - Community colleges do have an Office for Disability Support Services and generally a Counseling Office as well—and both can be important sources of support for the student with disability-related special needs.
- Community colleges sometimes have arrangements with 4-year colleges and universities in the area that will allow you to begin a certain course of study at the community college, and then complete your degree at a different institution.

- Because of arrangements like these, some programs at community colleges are considered 2-year programs or offer the first 2 years of a 4-year degree program, as opposed to granting an Associate’s Degree or certificate.
- Community colleges receive money from the government to offset some of their costs. This keeps tuition lower than some other types of schools.
 - The affordability of community colleges is not to be underestimated. The flexibility of their schedules makes it easy to take one or two classes at a time (if you want) for two reasons. First of all, most colleges will charge by the credit, so if time is not a factor, you can spread earning (and paying for) the required credits and classes for the degree program you choose over a longer period of time than other private or for-profit schools.
 - You can also take advantage of the flexibility in payment and scheduling by only taking one specific course. Unlike 4-year colleges or universities, community colleges don’t tend to have distribution requirements for graduation. This means that if you’re only interested in seeking certification as an electrician, for example, you won’t need to take an art history class to satisfy requirements. You can be as focused as you want to be.
- A great source of funding for people going to community colleges and short-term training programs is the Pell Grant (it can also be used to pay for 4-year colleges or universities). See “Paying for School,” below, for more information on the Pell Grant.

● Two-year colleges

- 2-year colleges will allow you to complete a specific degree in two years. They offer training in a specific field that is usually job-focused.
- Some 2-year colleges specialize in one specific trade. For instance, some only train mechanics, while others only train for positions in the business world. This means that each and every 2-year college is unique. Do your research and make sure the school you’re applying to offers the program(s) that you want.
- Because of the nature of 2-year schools, most of them do not offer housing on their campuses. Be sure to ask about housing as part of your admission process. They may have arrangements with local housing agencies to provide off-campus housing for their students.

● Proprietary schools

- Proprietary schools are for-profit schools that provide specialized training and offer certification in many different areas. Be sure the program you want is offered by the school you’re looking at!
- Proprietary schools are focused on career training and will have job placement offices to help you find employment in your field of study.
- Different proprietary schools specialize in different areas. Think about what you want to do after you graduate to help you pick the school and the specific program you want to attend.

- Proprietary schools vary in their quality. In the past, there was little government oversight to make sure that these programs were providing a quality education that genuinely helped students move forward in their careers. Today, states are more active in licensing schools that meet at least minimum standards set for graduating students and job placement rates. Researching the schools or programs that look interesting will still be a critical part of planning your college career.
 - Both proprietary schools (and many community colleges) offer training in a wide range of skilled and semi-skilled jobs, such as:
 - Electrician
 - Medical Assistant
 - Medical Billing & Coding
 - Automotive Technician (Mechanic)
 - Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration (HVAC/R)
 - Veterinary Assistant
 - Commercial Truck Driving
 - Legal Secretary
 - Administrative Assistant
- Most proprietary schools do not have dormitories.
 - Many proprietary schools have offices or people assigned to help new students from outside the area find affordable housing in the area. Some make housing suggestions on their websites. Ask about the availability of housing in the area when you inquire about enrollment, but most of the students at proprietary schools commute to and from school each day.
- While they may not have all the services of larger colleges, proprietary schools do have Career Counseling or Placement Offices to help you find employment in your field when you graduate.
- Proprietary schools still must make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities just like the larger colleges and universities because of the Americans with Disabilities Act that guarantees, under the law, standard accommodations for students with a disability. They do not tend, however, to have Offices for Disability Support Services that offer the breadth of services like the larger schools.

● Four-year Colleges or Universities

- 4-year colleges and universities generally offer more academic or humanities-focused classes, rather than those focused on a specific vocation.
- Whatever your chosen major or degree type, the classes you take will not all be in your major area of study. Most 4-year colleges and universities have what are called “distribution requirements,” so that you can get a more varied education. If you decide to get a B.A. in Art History, you may still have to take a science class or two.

- If you want a jobs-focused education, look at community colleges, proprietary schools, or 2-year colleges.
- 4-year colleges and universities, in general, have fully operating systems in place to support all of their students' needs. This includes Offices for Disability Support Services, Counseling Offices, Health Services Offices, Student Life Services, and Housing Services.
- On the whole, traditional 4-year colleges and universities tend to be more expensive than most proprietary schools and community colleges. In addition, if you go to school away from home, room and board (dorms and meals) are an added expense.
 - Some schools are partially funded by the state, and state colleges in particular tend to be less expensive than their privately owned counterparts. This is because state schools are at least partially government-funded, and don't only rely on tuition and donations.
- Because we live in a world of increasing credentials, many people are choosing to go to school or return to school later in life, and many of these people work full-time. This has led a number of 4-year colleges and universities to increase their flexibility in terms of scheduling.
 - An increasing number of 4-year colleges are offering courses at night or on the weekends tailored to the schedules of working individuals or courses/degrees available online. Some colleges offer degree programs by attending a full day of classes on Saturday, for example.

Paying for School

Now that you've identified the type of school you want to attend, it is important to come up with a plan for paying for it. The cost of attending school can run from affordable to very expensive (\$40,000 + per year). Possible sources of money are scholarships, grants, or loans. Any source of money, in addition to what you are able to pay on your own, is called "financial aid." Most sources of financial aid *will not* cover your entire tuition and all your school expenses. This leads many students to utilize multiple forms of financial aid together. For instance, a person may have been awarded a scholarship and a grant, both of which can be used to pay for school. This is the reason you will often hear people talking about "financial aid packages."

A great resource on the Internet is <http://studentaid.ed.gov>. This is a site run by the US Department of Education and contains a wealth of information about financial aid of many different types. Another great source of information is <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. This site has a great deal of information about federal student assistance programs, and even includes a version of the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Assistance) form on the website. If you apply for any type of financial aid, including work-study jobs, you must complete a FAFSA form.

As you begin to look for different sources of financial aid, keep in mind that each scholarship, grant, or loan will come with its own set of requirements and deadlines. Make sure you keep on track with the required steps for everything you apply for.

Here are some of the most common funding sources for students:

● Scholarships

- Scholarships can be a great way to pay for school. They can come directly from the school itself, or from an outside organization.
- While it is not always true, most of the time you need to qualify for a scholarship. This could take the form of writing an essay or creating something for the organization granting the scholarship to tell them why you need it and how it would be used.
- Other scholarship opportunities can be skills-based. For example, some colleges will give scholarships to gifted athletes, artists, or musicians with the understanding that whatever skill the scholarship was granted for will continue to be pursued while the individual attends college. This means that if someone has a scholarship for basketball, it is understood that that person will play basketball for the school during his or her college career.
- Scholarships can be used to pay for all or some of your tuition and do not need to be paid back.
- Look around online for scholarships that you think may apply to you.
 - Some scholarships are intended for people who come from or who live in certain geographic regions, for people with certain ethnicities or socio-economic standing, or other things you may not have thought relate to you. Some scholarships apply to the children of parents from certain regions, or children of people with certain ethnicities or socio-economic standing. Think of your family and yourself as you look through grants.
 - For example, the “Six Meter Club of Chicago Scholarship” is awarded to undergraduate students enrolled in a college in Illinois who are FCC licensed amateur radio operators.
 - Another example is the “Marbles Champions Scholarship,” which is awarded to winners of the Akron Marbles Championship who would like to attend college.
 - Look around on <http://www.nextstudent.com>. This site hosts a wealth of information on scholarships, grants, and student loans.

● Grants

- Grants act much like scholarships, and generally come from large organizations or from the government.
- Grants must be applied for, and the things you need to do will be different for every grant. It may include writing an essay, providing proof of income, proving that you need the grant, or reporting back to the granting agency to show that you’re in school and working.

- Grants, like scholarships, do not need to be paid back.
- Some grants are for specific kinds of schools or specific types of training. Be sure to check online for grants that apply to your situation and your goals.
- An example of a federal grant is the Pell Grant, which provides needs-based grants for low-income undergraduate students.
- By completing the FAFSA form, you are automatically entered into consideration for Pell Grants as well as state grants like PHEAA (see “Loans” section for FAFSA and PHEAA information).
 - Pell Grants can be especially helpful in securing funds for your education. Pell Grants are federal, needs-based grants for low-income students and future workers.
 - To quote the US Department of Education: “Undergraduate and vocational students enrolled or accepted for enrollment in participating schools may apply. Pell Grants are awarded usually only to students who have not earned a bachelor’s or a professional degree. To be eligible for a Pell Grant, you must also meet the general federal student aid eligibility requirements” (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/fpg/eligibility.html>).
 - The basics of the “general federal student aid eligibility requirements” mentioned above are outlined with the FAFSA information in the “Loans” section of this guide.

● **Work-Study**

- Work-Study is a program available at most colleges and universities. It is a form of financial aid where you are employed by the school in addition to being enrolled as a student.
- The federal government pays a percentage of the wage you earn as an employee of the school. The money you earn can be used to pay for tuition, books, housing, or other necessities.
- Some typical campus jobs include:
 - Answering telephones
 - Working in the cafeteria
 - Guiding tours
- Since you are working for the money you’re earning, any money you get through work-study does not need to be paid back. This money represents your wages.

● **Loans**

- Loans are borrowed money. This means that nine times out of ten loans need to be paid back within a certain amount of time, usually with interest. Because of this, loans should be your last resort.
 - Failure to pay back loans can have negative consequences for your financial situation and your credit. Be sure you’ll be able to pay back the loan within the time limit set by the terms of the loan!
- Student loans come directly from the government.

- Many people take advantage of the Federal Student Aid service from the federal government. These loans have low interest rates and you don't need to start repaying them until six months after you graduate. You do need to meet certain requirements as a student to receive this aid. Make sure you know what is required of you and that you keep up with the requirements.
- A great resource to help you find low-interest student loans is your state Department of Education: in Pennsylvania, it's the Pennsylvania Higher Education Access Agency (PHEAA). They have a large amount of information and guides to help you find the money you need (<http://www.pheaa.org>).
- If you have outstanding student loans but still want to go back to school, you *must* repay them before re-enrolling, set up a payment plan, or make a "good faith" payment where you repay a set amount of your loan to show that you are willing and able to pay your money back. Schools may require you to repay the loan in full before you may return. Failure to repay outstanding student loans will make you ineligible for any additional financial aid. Don't hesitate to talk to someone in the Financial Aid Office at the school you want to attend.
- For information on the FAFSA form, type "<http://studentaid.ed.gov>" in your Internet browser bar, and you will be directed to the proper website. If you click on the "Applying for Financial Aid" link on the left side, and select "Funding your Education," you will be taken to a page with not only the form itself, but a point-by-point breakdown of eligibility for federal aid.
- Certain things will render you ineligible for federal aid (certain criminal convictions, for example), but you should still fill out the FAFSA because you may be eligible for non-federal or private aid.

● **Your State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation**

Every state has an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (called by different names in different states) that is specifically designed to assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for and find competitive employment. Your state office may be willing to provide funding for your education if your vocational goal requires you to have some type of credential or college degree. Simply requesting that they pay for college is not the way it works. You will need to discuss your vocational goals first and then discuss how you can go about getting the required credential. You may be asked to take some tests or evaluations to establish your disability, at their expense. Because going to school is so expensive, they will want to see if you have the potential to complete work at the college level or whatever is required of a training program. At any rate, the office of Vocational Rehabilitation is certainly a viable source for funding your education. You can find a listing of VR offices nationally at: http://www.workworld.org/wwwwebhelp/state_vocational_rehabilitation_vr_agencies.htm.

● **Deciding What’s Best for You**

- All of the funding sources mentioned above are perfectly good ways to finance your educational pursuits. It is important, however, to make sure that you don’t get in over your head.
 - Remember: The more loans you take out to pay for school, the more money you will have to pay back once you graduate.
 - Do your research and make sure that the career field in which you’re interested can support loan repayments if you have to take a loan.
- Many people use a variety of funding sources to pay for their education. Talk to someone you trust, perhaps a case manager, who can help you find the resources you need.

Section B: Locating Supports While at School

What Can Your School Do for You?

Now that you’ve identified who and what you already have going for you, you can begin to look at what school you want to go to. No matter what college or university you choose, they will be required by law to provide what are known as “Standard Accommodations.” An accommodation is a modification or support that gives a student with a disability an equal opportunity to participate and benefit from school. Some of these accommodations (special services) may apply to you; others may not. It is up to you to decide what accommodations you want to use, if you want to use any. The staff in the Disability Support Services Office will be able to tell you for what accommodations you are eligible.

Accommodations are offered through the campus’s Office for Disability Support Services. Not every campus calls their Office for Disability Support Services the same thing. Further, the smaller schools may have a single person, a “point-person,” or coordinator, designated to provide the accommodations to students with disabilities. Look at the college or university’s web site for full information regarding the Office for Disability Support Services to see what is and is not available.

● **Standard Accommodations**

- According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), colleges and universities are required to provide accommodations in order to help people with physical or psychiatric disabilities have the most normal college experience as possible.
- Some examples of standard accommodations offered are:

- Extended time for tests.
- A note taker (a person who takes notes for you in class if you have difficulty writing quickly enough to keep up).
- Alternative formats for class texts (books on tape, Braille copies of texts and handouts, etc).
- Taking exams orally instead of writing them.
- Taking exams in a distraction-free environment away from other people.
- Standard Accommodations *do not* lower class expectations for you. You will be accountable for the same work as every other student. It may be in a different format than your classmates' work, but it will be the same level of work that your peers are doing.

Before you decide what accommodations work for you, there is a very important decision you have to make: whether or not to disclose to the college or university that you have a disability. In order to take advantage of the accommodations provided by your school, you must disclose your disability.

● Disclosure

- When you were in high school and middle school, if you had a disability of any kind the law required that the schools had to provide special services to you, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). An Individual Educational Plan (IEP) was developed to identify any special services you may have needed due to your disability. In many cases, it was the job of the school administrators to identify those needs.
- Colleges and universities don't have to come up with an IEP for you. It is *your* job to identify *yourself* as having a disability in order to access the services offered by the Office for Disability Support Services.
 - If you choose to disclose that you have a disability, you will need to provide the proper documentation. Having an IEP from high school *does not* count as proper documentation. You will need records from a medical professional outlining the condition and how it affects your ability to function in a school setting. The requirements for documentation may be different at each school. Be sure to find out what you need. This information is generally available on the college or university's website.
 - If you choose *not* to disclose that you have a disability, then you will not be able to take advantage of the accommodations provided through the Office for Disability Support Services. You will have the same campus resources available to you as your peers without disabilities.
- If you choose to disclose that you have a disability, it does not mean that you immediately need to take advantage of the services they offer. You may feel confident enough to try to make a go of it by yourself. It's your decision. But be sure you're on file with the Office for Disability Support Services early as a "just in case" measure.

- If you did not disclose to the Office for Disability Support Services, but then realize in April that you need extended time for your exams in May, it may be too late to get it.
- The issue of whether or not to disclose your disability can be a sensitive one, especially if you have a “hidden” disability (such as mental illness or heart disease, as opposed to something people can see, like a physical disability that requires the use of a wheelchair). The decision to disclose the specifics of your disability to friends, teachers, etc. is yours to make, and yours alone. If you are unsure of whether or not to disclose to the people around you, the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) has a good deal of information on the pros and cons of disclosure. They have a very informative and insightful PowerPoint—at [www.ahead.org/aff/orahead/documents/Invisible Disabilities.ppt](http://www.ahead.org/aff/orahead/documents/Invisible_Disabilities.ppt)—that is free.
- Another good source of information is the website of the National Center on Workforce Disability—website <http://www.onestops.info>. There is a section on the homepage called “Access for All,” and, while it applies specifically to disclosure of hidden disabilities in the workplace, the same types of concerns (and solutions) are present in your day-to-day life as a student.

● Privacy

- The staff in the Office for Disability Support Services is bound by the same confidentiality laws as your doctor’s office. This means that if you disclose to the Office for Disability Support Services, they cannot, by law, give anyone your information without your written permission.
- If you choose to take advantage of the accommodations, the Office for Disability Support Services *will* give you the paperwork to notify the teachers of the classes for which you’re seeking accommodations. They *will not* tell your teacher what your disability is, just that you qualify for a given accommodation.
 - For example, if a student named Johnny needs to take his exams orally rather than writing them, the Office for Disability Support Services will let Johnny notify his teachers that he needs to take his exams orally. They will not tell his teachers that Johnny needs to take his exams orally because he has dyslexia.
- Your information belongs to you. You are in control of who knows what. If you feel comfortable enough with one of your teachers to tell them about your disability, consider the consequences. Sometimes, people do not react the way you would hope they would. It is wise to be cautious.
- According to federal law, teachers are not allowed to ask you specifically what your disability is. If one of your teachers should ask you, calmly and respectfully remind them of your rights to privacy and ask them to respect your person and the law. Before you make the decision to disclose to an instructor, check out the websites mentioned above under “Disclosure.”

● Self -Advocacy

- Advocacy means actively supporting someone or something and working towards making it better.
 - Your strongest advocate is you. It is helpful to learn as much as possible about your disability as well as the rights you have as a person with a disability. One resource is the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law (<http://www.bazelon.org>). Their website contains free-to-download PDF files of their major releases that can help you navigate a variety of issues regarding advocacy and your rights both on and off campus.
- At the end of the day, you are the person who has the most to gain from fighting for your rights. They are *your* rights, after all.
 - There are several places on the Internet where you can find resources to help you learn to better advocate for yourself. Some of them include the National Mental Health Consumer's Self-Help Clearinghouse (<http://mhselfhelp.org>), and the "links" page of the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) website (<http://www.sabeusa.org>). Two other sources are Active Minds and NAMI. Active Minds was founded as a suicide prevention support group but now functions as an advocacy group as well. Many colleges across the country have student-led groups on campus. Their website, <http://www.activeminds.org>, has listings of all the chapters. NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, does a great deal of advocacy for people with psychiatric disabilities, and also publishes a large amount of material to help you educate yourself about being a self-advocate. Their website is www.nami.org.
 - These resources will help you to learn what you need to do to become an effective self-advocate. They encompass everything from helping you choose the most effective inroads to your particular project (be it advocating for yourself or others), to how best to present your arguments.
 - One of the best things you can do while advocating for yourself or others is to remain calm and respectful. If someone says something that upsets you, don't fly off the handle immediately. Remind them of your rights, and, if the situation is appropriate for it, their responsibilities to maintain your rights. This kind of "grace under fire" will serve you well throughout your life, not just when you're working to improve your lot.
 - It will also help to maintain your train of thought if you can keep a level head, regardless of the opposition you may be facing. Calm persistence changes a lot more minds than blind rage.

● On-Campus Resources

- Four-year colleges and universities will have a Counseling Office where you can go if you have mental health needs. More often than not, the school's Counseling Office offers a limited number of mental health appointments, and they are often quite busy so they should *not* be your main source of on-going, long-term therapy. If you feel you need more

sessions than the school can provide, ask for a referral to a resource in the community. If you plan to attend a school away from home it's a good idea to find mental health resources in the community before you start school in case you need them.

- Another thing to be aware of is that many colleges that offer advanced psychology degrees have counseling services provided by doctoral students. This means that there is a steady turnover among the therapists.
- Don't wait until you're already in a crisis (or feel like you're just about to be) to go to the Counseling Office for the first time. The minute you think you might like to talk to someone, go down to the Counseling Office and sign up for services. This will help you stay in school in good standing.
- If you are frustrated by the length of time that you need to wait to see a counselor, ask for a referral to someone outside the school in the community.
 - Make sure you keep your health insurance up-to-date because seeing a therapist in the community will require payment. Having insurance, which may be available through your school, will help keep your out-of-pocket expenses down.
 - If you need insurance and can work even a few hours a week, you may be able to obtain insurance through state programs designed to cover workers with disabilities. In Pennsylvania, for instance, the program is called MAWD (Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities), and covers disabled workers' costs (<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us>).
- Community colleges will also have a Counseling Office and an Office for Disability Support Services that operate in much the same way as those at 4-year colleges and universities. Proprietary schools will, in general, not have offices like this. This is where research ahead of time is very important to you as you choose the best school to meet all your needs.

● Off-Campus Resources

- Sometimes the help you need isn't available through the Office for Disability Support Services. Know what is available in the community. This knowledge could take the form of a referral from the Office for Disability Support Services. Be aware of the community surrounding your campus and keep yourself informed of the services provided there. You can search the Internet to see if there are any Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in the area. Ask staff members from the Office for Disability Support Services. A CIL is an organization that is made up of people with and without disabilities who work primarily to improve the lives of people with physical disabilities through advocacy, independent living skills training, peer mentoring, as well as making appropriate referrals to outside agencies if the CIL does not have the resources itself to provide what you need. A state-by-state index of CILs can be found at <http://www.ncil.org>.
- Some schools have relationships with off-campus support agencies. This will make your transition to off-campus resources easier.
- Some schools are not knowledgeable about the resources in the surrounding community.

Do an Internet search on the type of resource you think you'll need and schedule a referral meeting with the Office for Disability Support Services. This will help you make that transition to off-campus resources as smooth as possible.

- Some places to look for information regarding disability resources are the Mental Health Office of the county where your school is, and the Blue Pages in the phone book. This is like the government version of the Yellow Pages.
- Regardless of how helpful and efficient the Office for Disability Support Services on the campus may be, *you* are still your strongest advocate. Remember that the more you know, the better equipped you'll be to advocate for yourself.

Section C: Managing Your Disability at School

Managing Your Disability at School

One of the best things you can do for yourself is be aware of the best ways you can manage your disability. While you will already know how your disability can impact your day-to-day life, you should be aware that going to school might create some additional difficulties. When taking inventory of your skills and abilities, it would be helpful to think about some of the things that are hard for you. This, in turn, will help you plan strategies to overcome these difficulties and incorporate them into your new college routine.

One way to do this is to develop a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) with the help of healthcare providers and people who know you well. Included in a WRAP are things like a description of how you behave while feeling alright, early warning signs of a crisis, your preferred medications, and people who should and should not be contacted in case of an emergency (see http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/dmh/PDFs/cfa_WRAPworkbook-adults.pdf). Having a WRAP will be one more tool you have to help you stay in school and in good academic standing.

An excellent resource for planning for the transition from high school to college for people with physical or psychiatric disabilities can be found here: <http://www.heath.gwu.edu/assets/33/toolkit.pdf>. This file is the full text of the manual produced by George Washington University's guide for college and career counselors aiding students in transition. However, it also includes a lengthy section for the students themselves, as well as tips for college interviews and skills assessments.

● Side Effects of Medication

- There are a whole range of medications that can help you better manage the symptoms of illness or disability. However, the help that these medicines provide can be offset by less desirable effects on your body and mind. While every medicine carries some side effects, some are less severe than others, and even if two people are on the same dose of the same medication, they may experience completely different side effects.
 - Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider before you go through any sort of major life change (like going to college) to make a plan for managing your medication and continuing your recovery as smoothly as possible.

● Attendant Care

- If you have a physical disability that requires you to have an attendant or aide, be sure you ask the school you're applying to about their rules regarding attendants.
 - Some schools may even have systems in place to make sure that they are available to you whenever you need them. Other schools have strict visitor policies that may make it more difficult for your attendant to reach you. These are questions to ask your admissions officer while you're applying.

● Physical Mobility

- Every school has a different physical layout and often campuses have a mix of new and old construction. Other campuses have old buildings that have been redesigned, restored, or retrofitted.
 - New additions to old buildings that put them in compliance with new laws or make them more modern are called "retrofitted." An example of retrofitting would be putting a fire escape on a building built in 1832, before public fire safety codes were put in place. Another example of retrofitting would be installing central air conditioning in that same building built in 1832.
- Schools will have a campus map available. Some schools may put this online; others may require you to pick it up at the school itself.
 - When looking at a campus map, look for symbols that will tell you about accessibility. This could take the form of the handicap symbol like you see on parking signs next to certain buildings meaning that they are accessible by people with physical disabilities.
- If you find yourself in need of special or adaptive equipment but unable to pay for the technologies or the training you need to use them, your state Vocational Rehabilitation agency (see "Paying for School," Section A) may be able to provide funding. Since their focus is assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain employment, that may include funds for training or education. The Office for Disability Support Services also may offer a variety of technologies to help you complete your school work such as special computer software. If you need funding for this, you may be able to turn to the VR office. Some campus Disability Support Services work in conjunction with the local VR office.

- Be sure to get a good idea of the layout of the campus. Ask yourself if you're going to be able to get around easily.
 - If you see something in the layout of the campus that you think could interfere with your day-to-day life, don't hesitate to ask about it. Getting as much information up front as you possibly can from the school will serve you very well, both in choosing a school and also completing your degree.
 - *Again, it is most important for you to contact the school before you even apply to discuss your needs.* If possible, you should try to visit the school.

● Support Groups

- There are a huge number of support groups on college campuses. These provide opportunities for people with the same or similar issues to come together and share good experiences and help one another overcome obstacles.
- Many campuses have a chapter of an organization called Active Minds. While this organization started out focused on suicide prevention, they have expanded their mission. According to their website, "By developing and supporting chapters of a student-run mental health awareness, education, and advocacy group on campuses, the organization works to increase students' awareness of mental health issues, provide information and resources regarding mental health and mental illness, encourage students to seek help as soon as it is needed, and serve as liaison between students and the mental health community." Their website address is www.activeminds.org. As of this writing, they have 329 chapters across the country.
- Finding a support group that you like can be a great help in managing your disability on campus. You will find people who face the same or similar difficulties as you, and you can use these new relationships to draw strength from during difficult times.

● Withdrawing from School Properly

- If you find yourself in a situation where you have to withdraw from school, there are correct and incorrect ways to do so, particularly when you are receiving financial aid.
- Many schools will allow students to withdraw before a certain date in the school year and will refund the tuition. This means that if you have to leave school early enough in the semester, you can still get at least a percentage of the tuition you paid for that semester back. If you have to withdraw after that date, you may not be entitled to any refund of tuition.
 - The date for withdrawal with a tuition refund is usually listed in your school's Student Handbook. If the information is not there, ask your admissions officer about their policy.
- One of the requirements for many types of financial aid is that you maintain a certain grade point average (GPA).

- If your grant says that you need to keep at least a 3.0 GPA (the average of the grades you've received in all your classes must be 3.0 or higher according to the terms of your grant), and you fall below that, your grant may be revoked.
 - Many sources of financial aid also require you to take a minimum number of courses or credits each semester (usually the number of classes required by the school to consider you a “full-time” student, as opposed to a “part-time” student).
 - Similar GPA requirements are also in place for different types of loans.
 - Make sure that the classes you've chosen allow you enough time to complete the work at high enough quality to maintain your GPA so that you can maintain your financial aid.
- If you find yourself in academic trouble, or in danger of losing your financial aid due to performance, just dropping out is the worst thing you can do for yourself at this point. If you simply drop out mid-semester, without formally withdrawing in the correct way, you'll lose the tuition you paid and will still be responsible for paying back any loans you took out. In addition, you will not be eligible for any credit you would have received for the time and effort you put into your classes.
- Since at this point you will no longer be a student, you will have to repay your loans within six months, rather than waiting until after you graduate.
 - It is possible to ask for a deferment of payment. Talk to your loan officer and your financial aid officer to find out about deferred payments.
 - Talk to your teachers to see if they would be willing to grant you a grade of Incomplete. This will allow you to take a leave of absence without destroying your GPA.
 - If you simply drop out without notifying your teachers, they are obligated to grade you on the work that you've done, while still holding you accountable for the rest of the semester's work. This means that if you had to withdraw halfway through the semester, you will receive a 0 for all assignments after the last thing you handed in.
 - Talk to a counselor in the Disability Support Office to see if you might be eligible for a “medical withdrawal.” You will need some type of documentation from a healthcare professional. This type of withdrawal will change the terms of your loans and academic standing.

Living while Learning

Another thing you need to plan out is where you will be living throughout your college career. Many colleges and universities have dorms on the campus for the students to live and work in. Some of these colleges have enough space for all of their students to live in the dorms for all four years. Other colleges only guarantee housing for one or two years.

● Housing

Private colleges and universities as well as state-run colleges and universities generally have dormitories. Students are generally assigned roommates their first year of college.

- It *may* be possible to apply for a single room your freshman year because of certain circumstances having to do with your disability. This will be different from campus to campus, and should be one of the questions you ask while applying.
- Dormitories will generally have at least one resident advisor (RA) per dormitory who oversees the students of a particular dormitory.
 - The RA's job consists of making sure that the students s/he supervises are safe and healthy, in addition to planning activities for the students living in the same dormitory to get to know one another.
 - You can go to the RA if you're having personal problems. S/He is *not* your therapist, however. They will have lists of contact information to help get you pointed in the right direction.
- Community colleges and proprietary schools generally do not have dormitories. Students attending community colleges must find housing off-campus in the community

The College Life

While a good deal of your time will be spent studying, attending classes, and perhaps working, you will have time when you have nothing scheduled. This time belongs to you and you can fill it however you choose. Look around for clubs or groups that have the same interests as you. Clubs and groups are great ways to make friends and meet people that like the same things you do. Other opportunities to meet people outside of class include concerts or dances that the school sponsors. Everything that the college or university offers to its students to make their downtime more enjoyable is called Student Life.

● Student Life

- College and university campuses are full of things to do. Keep an eye out for events that appeal to you.
 - If you like the outdoors, try to find a Hiking Club or an Outdoors Club.
 - If you like computers, try to find a Computer Club.
- Involve yourself with extracurricular activities (things you do outside of class) as much or as little as you feel comfortable.
- Student life will be different on every single college campus. Some schools are highly structured and most of the extracurricular activities are educational, like guest speakers giving a lecture. Other schools are less structured and most of the extracurricular activities will be centered on meeting people or having a good time. It is up to you to decide your level of involvement.
 - While extracurricular activities are generally not required for you to attend, they are a great way to meet people and generally enhance your overall college experience.
- If you are anxious about engaging in student life and extracurricular activities, try to familiarize yourself as much as possible with your surroundings and the people around you.

- For example, if you are anxious about attending the first meeting of a Book Club, have a friend come with you the first time or two you attend so that you can get used to where the Book Club meets and who else is in it.
- You can also ask to sit in on a meeting or two as an observer before officially joining the club. This will give you a better sense of what the club has to offer and whether or not it suits you. It will also help you to familiarize yourself with the members of the club and whether or not they suit you.
- Many colleges and universities allow fraternities and sororities on their campuses. This is often referred to as Greek Life. These organizations are generally more organized than clubs or other groups on campus, and are usually centered around one particular house per fraternity or sorority.
 - Some fraternities or sororities put a lot of time and effort into partying, which can include drinking large amounts of alcohol. If you think this could create a problem for you or you just aren't interested in alcohol, but still want to join a fraternity or sorority, pick one that doesn't have such a "party hardy" attitude.

● **Develop Your Exit Strategy**

- As you get closer and closer to graduation, you should stop by your school's Career Counseling Office. They will have resources available to you to help you find gainful employment after graduation.
 - Much like your school's Office of Disability Support Services, the Career Counseling Office is staffed with people who are there only to help you.
 - More than likely, you will have to register with the Career Counseling Office to utilize their services, but they do not require the same level of documentation as the Office of Disability Support Services in order to work with students. Most often, you simply need to be enrolled as a student (or recent graduate) to take advantage of the Career Counseling Office.
- The staff in the Career Counseling Office will be able to assist you in finding the right career to go with your degree.
 - Career Counseling Offices' staff is not there just to put warm bodies in open jobs. They will not simply say, "Congratulations on your electrician's certification. Here's a secretarial job because it's open." They will work with you to find the best employment fit for your education.
- Be patient with them! As the saying goes, "times are tough all over," and there may not be as many jobs available as there are qualified applicants. You may not get a job immediately, and it's possible that finding employment could take time. Keep working with the Career Counseling Office at your school, and pay close attention to the next section.
- Proprietary schools, in particular, are very focused on placing their graduates into jobs. Many of them are connected to local employers. Their reputations, and in Pennsylvania, their state licensing is dependent, in part, upon their successful placement rate.

Section D: Getting a Job

Life After College

Congratulations on your new degree or certificate! You've worked hard to get this far, and you've certainly earned it. Life after college takes just as much planning ahead as preparing to enroll. You know better than anyone that you didn't go to school to get an education for education's sake. So now comes the tricky part: securing a job. You've taken the past two or so years to better your education, improve your attractiveness to employers, and discover who you are and what you want out of life. But what comes now? Getting a job is a lot like getting into college: you need to plan and you need to sell yourself to potential employers as best you can. There are places in the community that can help you.

● A New Support Network

- Much like when you were planning to go to school and you built a support network of people you know and trust who have experience in different parts of post-secondary education, you should start to build an employment support network.
 - Talk to people you know who are working currently or were recently hired. They will have the experience of writing a resume, interviewing, and the logistics of finding a job fresh in their minds. They may have advice they can give you (or perhaps even know of an opening in their company before it's posted publicly). Networking is a major avenue for finding jobs.
 - Talk to the folks in your school's Career Counseling Office. They can help you build or refine your resume, write cover letters, find job fairs or job postings, and a myriad of other things that will help you look for work, and look your best to potential employers. One great thing about the Career Counseling Office is that they don't charge fees for current students or alumni. The service they provide is included in your college tuition and fees.
- If you incurred any debt to pay for school (from loans, etc.), one of the people in your new employment support network should be someone who can help you budget your money so that you can repay your loans while still covering the expenses of living.
 - Be sure to repay your loans! Defaulting on a loan of any kind can have a disastrous impact on your credit rating, which in turn, will make it far more difficult to secure future loans, like a mortgage when you buy a house. The other side of having bad credit is that it actually makes your debts harder to repay because the interest rates (the rate at which you pay your loan back) skyrocket, making your installment payments much higher. Make sure you have someone who can help you avoid this.

● **Employment and Vocational Programs in the Community**

- Managing your disability in the workplace is very similar to managing your disability on campus. You will face the same issues as you did while at school. That's okay! You're an expert at managing your disability.
- It is wise for you to do a plan that identifies where you might need help and where and how to get it. You may want to include this as part of your WRAP or you may need to write a new one incorporating the new challenges you face being employed. For example, if you are receiving income from social security, you need to know how your benefits will be affected by income you earn from a job. This includes not only financial benefits but health insurance as well. Each state is funded by the federal government to provide counseling services to social security beneficiaries. You can find this information on the federal government's website: www.socialsecurity.gov.
 - If your school had lots of sophisticated supports in place for their students with disabilities, you may need to look around a little more for services than you've had to at school. In the community, supports for people with physical or psychiatric disabilities are far more decentralized than they were at school.
- Looking for a job is a daunting task that can be frustrating, particularly in a down economy. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Look around for behavioral health programs or other agencies that provide vocational services to people with disabilities. These programs will vary widely from place to place in terms of the range and quality of their services. It is a good idea to do research before you enroll in one of these programs.
 - Some organizations, like Horizon House in Philadelphia, for example, have a wealth of services in addition to vocational including psychiatric, outpatient, and substance abuse.
- Look around for Supported Employment programs. These types of programs function in a similar fashion to Supported Education programs, but have a vocational focus.
- You will have a support person, often called an Employment Specialist, to help you build a resume, find jobs, practice interviews, accompany you on interviews, and provide support to help you stay on the job. Services vary widely but generally include the above. Some agencies offer job clubs or other group support while looking for employment.
- If you have a physical disability, remember to look around for Centers for Independent Living. These organizations can help you to achieve the maximum level of independence, including strategies and assistive technology to get around obstacles in the workplace.
- If you need a paycheck more than you need a career, you may want to look at different staffing or Temporary (Temp) job agencies.
 - Be aware that if you start working for a Temp agency, your work will be temporary, and may have nothing to do with your degree. You will probably not receive benefits from your employer (such as medical or dental insurance) that full-time permanent employees get.
- The federal government funds a national network of 'One-Stop Centers' designed to assist workers of all kinds—people with and without a disability, displaced workers or

the long-term unemployed—to find work. You may want to turn to them for assistance. You can find general information on One-Stop Centers at <http://www.onestop.info>. In Pennsylvania, the one-stop programs are called ‘CareerLink’—and it’s a great program for job seekers with or without disabilities. They have a website (<http://www.careerlink.com>) where you can browse through job postings by work type (Hospitality vs. Administrative, for example), location, pay rate, and other factors to help you find the job you want.

- Your state VR office may also be helpful in your job search. They may provide you assistance in finding a job directly or may sponsor you for services through another agency for supported employment services.

● Job Searching in the Digital Age

- The Internet has many websites that can help you find work. Each one is different, but there are similarities that run through all of them, like searching by location or job type. Some let you customize the geographical area in which you want to look, and others will let you choose to look only for part-time or full-time work.
 - Craigslist (<http://www.craigslist.org>) is a website that functions as an expanded Classified Section of your local newspaper. People buy, sell, trade, and donate pretty much anything and everything through craigslist. This is one of the places where employers will post job listings.
- As with any website, craigslist has its share of scammers. An employer will never ask you for any information regarding your bank accounts or credit card numbers. If the posting mentions sending either of these things to a potential “employer,” this is most likely a scam, and they may try to steal your money or identity.
 - This website will let you search by keywords (all of them must match the posting), geographical area, and job type.
 - Indeed.com (<http://www.indeed.com>) only does jobs. Unlike craigslist, you will only be able to find job postings on this website, not a new (or used) futon.
 - The website will let you search by geographical area, job type, full-time vs. part-time, pay scale, and keyword (does not have to be exact).
 - This website links to many other career websites so you may find yourself on Indeed.com one minute and on Monster.com or Careerbuilder.com the next.
- These are only two examples of the countless websites on the Internet that can help you look for jobs. Find the one that you find easiest to use, or jump on several different sites a day. The One-Stop Centers mentioned above will have many listings for both these large, national websites in addition to websites for local companies.
- If your interests remain broad even after you’ve completed your education and training, that’s perfectly fine. Head back over to the O*Net (<http://www.onetonline.org>), and use the skills, abilities, and interests indices. You have been changed by your education, even if it’s not a deep personal change. Your education or certification will make you a more

viable job candidate with a wider range of employment possibilities than you had before you started your journey.

- Remember: the two most important things for any job seeker are patience and persistence. Since you don't lose anything by sending your resume to one potential employer, you certainly don't lose anything by sending it out to fifteen or twenty.

Best of Luck

You've made it through challenges you never thought you could face before. Not only have you made it through, you've succeeded, conquered. The world is open to you like never before. With the increase in opportunities your degree or certificate affords you, also comes an increase in your earning potential. According to most research, the certificate or degree you hold in your hand potentially doubles your lifetime average income over having just a high school diploma or GED. Granted, this money won't come in all at once, but the pay will be much higher for someone with a degree (and will increase the more you specialize or the more advanced the degree you earn). For a breakdown of average salaries, check out <http://www.earnmydegree.com/online-education/learning-center/education-value.html>.

Get out there and show the world what you can do.
You've almost definitely surprised yourself more than
once on your educational journey by breaking down
barriers both within yourself and the world around you.

Never stop achieving!

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Written with educators, providers of services, and families in mind, this book is filled with case studies and best practices from around the country. Even though it is not geared towards students, this resource can be a handy place to see what is available and what different schools are capable of doing for you.

Gordon, Michael and Shelby Keiser: *Accommodations in Higher Education under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A No-Nonsense Guide for Clinicians, Educators, Administrators, and Lawyers*. GSI Publications, New York, NY, 2000.

This book concerns itself with the finer points of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This is a great jumping-off place for self-advocacy, as the best advocate is the most informed. It also includes an interesting examination of how petitions for accommodations under the ADA have been moving away from physically-centered accommodations to a wider array of psychological disabilities as the definitions contained in the law are expanded.

Grigal, Meg and Debra Hart: *Think College!: Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc., Baltimore, MD, 2009.

This book focuses on two main topics: the different approaches schools are using to educate people with intellectual disabilities, and how people with intellectual disabilities can work within these approaches. It includes an overview of current legislation and best practices from across the country. It also includes a self-advocacy checklist, as well as other lists and guides to help students get the most from their college of choice.

Kadison, Richard and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo: *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What To Do About It*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2004. This book contains an overview of the issues that students are beginning to present at counseling offices across the country in increasing numbers. This book deals mainly with psychiatric disabilities and the mental health resources available on campuses.

Kochar-Bryant, Carol; Diane S. Bassett; Kristine W. Webb: *Transition to Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities*. Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2009.

For students with disabilities, a big factor in their successful transition from high school to postsecondary education is accurate knowledge about their civil rights. The purpose of this guide is to provide high school educators with answers to questions students with disabilities may have as they get ready to move to the postsecondary education environment.¹

Peterson's *ed.: Two-Year Colleges*. Peterson's, Lawrenceville, NJ 2010.

Similar to the Princeton Review series, Peterson's book is a listing of Two-Year degree programs around the country with pros and cons for each one.

Reiff, Henry B.: *Self-Advocacy Skills for People with Learning Disabilities: Making it Happen in College and Beyond*. Dude Publishing, Port Chester, NY, 2007.

Full of useful information for students, parents, and guidance counselors, this book takes a practical approach to the issues and importance of self-advocacy. It covers the difference in the laws protecting high school students and college students, and also includes a wide range of lists, hints, and checklists from a wealth of different resources to help make the transition into college as smooth as possible for students, parents, and administrators alike.

Shaw, Stan F.; Joseph W. Madaus; Lyman L Dukes, III: *Preparing Students with Disabilities for College Success: A Practical Guide to Transition Planning*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc, Baltimore, MD, 2009.

This book takes a preparation-heavy approach to transitioning to college with a special eye towards individuals with "non-visible" disabilities (i.e. psychiatric disabilities or emotional trauma). Consisting

of essays written by educators and service providers, this book outlines a great many of the obstacles that people with disabilities may face as they go to college, as well as practical ways for overcoming them (or avoiding them altogether).

Unger, Karen V.: *Handbook on Supported Education: Providing Services for Students with Psychiatric Disabilities*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc, Baltimore, MD, 1998.

A step-by-step guide for various service providers, this book contains a wide range of information covering everything from historical perspectives on supported education, legal obligations for schools, as well as the rapidly increasing sophistication of the available resources for people with disabilities. Based on best practices, the approach outlined in this book is reinforced with checklists and fact sheets to help providers design educational support services.

Wax, Imy F. *ed.: The K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Disabilities (9th Edition)*. Princeton Review, Framingham, MA, 2007.

This book contains listings for over 300 schools across the country with a special eye towards helping students with learning disabilities. The information includes resources available on each campus, highlights of any special programs, and relevant contact information for learning or psychiatric disabilities.

¹ Quoted from U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights' Reading Room: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html>

Web Resources

School Locations

Educational Names and Addresses (EdNA) for Pennsylvania

<http://www.edna.ed.state.pa.us>

This website has the name, address, phone number, and Web address for every school (primary, secondary, and post-secondary), and programs leading to post-secondary certification, that has obtained licensing from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Use this site to find the schools closest to your home that offer the programs you want.

Education Planner <http://www.educationplanner.org>

This site has categorized lists of resources to help guide you through the planning, application, and payment stages of getting to college.

Rights Information

Bazon Center for Mental Health Law <http://www.bazon.org>

Check their publications. Most are available as free .pdf files that you can use to educate yourself and others about disability rights.

Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us>

Includes comprehensive information about the Medical Assistance state buy-in plan for Pennsylvania. Other states which offer the service have similar websites.

Skills, Assessments, and Jobs

The O*Net <http://online.onetcenter.org>

This site has a great skills assessment and jobs profiler that can help you identify your traits as a worker and a thinker, which will help you identify resources you want to take advantage of on a college campus.

Center for Workforce Information and Analysis <http://www.paworkstats.pa.us>

This site can help you find out in which fields there are jobs available and where they are. This may help you guide your search if you're looking to go to school for a specific job.

Grants, Loans, Scholarships

Next Student <http://www.nextstudent.com>

Check out the “Scholarship Search Engine,” which will allow you to search different scholarships based on different parts of your background.

Student Scholarship Search <http://www.studentscholarshipsearch.com>

Pennsylvania Higher Education Access Agency (PHEAA) <http://www.pheaa.org>

This site will help you find money from the Pennsylvania government, as well providing you with resources to help you plan for college.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

This website will help guide you through the FAFSA process, which is necessary if you want to receive any type of financial aid from the government including work study.

Student Aid on the Web <http://www.studentaid.ed.gov>

Support

Active Minds <http://www.activeminds.org>

Active Minds is a network of student-run mental health awareness/advocacy groups on college campuses across the country. The site also contains a page of links to other very helpful mental health support resources around the Web.

Wellness Recovery Action Plan

http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/dmh/PDFs/cfa_WRAPworkbook-adults.pdf

Use these forms much like the BU Toolkit below. They are meant to help you take an inventory of what is and is not available on your campus and the surrounding community.

Boston University’s Higher Education Toolkit (go to “Information and Resources”)

<http://www.bu.edu/cpr/resources/supportstudents>

This site includes blank Campus and Self-Assessment forms. If you like the format, more forms, and additional information, can be found here.

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s Counseling Center’s Self-Help Brochures

<http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu>

Authors' Note

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We sincerely hope it will help you on your journey towards post-secondary education. While the process of choosing a school and applying to it may seem daunting, we hope that this guide can help you take that first step. The smaller pieces you can break a big challenge into, the more manageable it will become and the less stress it will cause you. That is why we wrote this guide for you: breaking big problems into their components so that you can work every piece to your advantage. We could have filled entire books by expanding on all the topics in this guide to their fullest extent and examining each and every issue (we've included some of the people who have in our bibliography section), but we hoped that by giving you the basics of a wide range of issues, as well as appropriate resources for every step along the way, that you could give college "the old college try." There is no shame in asking for help when you need it, but it would be a shame if you didn't even know the help was available to you.

Keep in mind that this is a living document: any feedback you have would be greatly appreciated. Learning and working are both team efforts. One cannot learn in a vacuum, nor can one person see every facet of a given challenge. If you have feedback, or would like to see additional information included, topics expanded or revised, please let us know. You can contact the authors of this guide via phone or e-mail. We would love to hear from you.

Thank you so much, and best of luck in all your endeavors!

Roody McNair, B.A.,
Employment Specialist
Horizon House
120 S. 30th St.
Philadelphia, PA 19104
(215) 386-3838, ext. 151
roody.mcnaair@hhinc.org

Arlene Solomon, M.S., C.R.C., C.P.R.P.,
Director, Employment Services
Horizon House
120 S. 30th St.
Philadelphia, PA 19104
(215) 386-3838, ext. 109
arlene.solomon@hhinc.org