

College Shopping for Students with Learning Differences  
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Although all college bound students should do careful research in order to decide which schools to send an application, this advice is especially important for students with Learning Differences (LD). A visit to each college is even more critical for LD and ADHD students. Once the list of colleges is well researched and narrowed down, these students should visit each campus and make a beeline for the Learning Support Center and other offices that provide services for students with special needs.

LD students should start their research with inquiries to the Learning Support Center at each school. (The name of these centers varies a bit from-school-to-school, but every school provides support to LD students). Although colleges are required by law to offer support services, the level of support and types of accommodations vary widely. A phone call to the Learning Support Center is an opportunity to ask about the availability of support and accommodations. The objective is to find the right match between the student and the type and quality of support services offered; accomplishing this objective will help to ensure the student's success in college. Ideally, the support services offered in combination with a student's motivation and ability to use these services will place the student on a level playing field with peers. LD students and their families should be prepared to ask questions that will help them make informed decisions about colleges that are potentially a good match. The following are general questions that can serve as a starting point.

1. Is the Learning Support Center staffed by a Director? What is the administrative structure of the Center? (This information should be available in writing along with staff contact information.)
2. How long has the Center's program been in existence? How has it evolved over time? What kinds of services are currently provided?
3. What type of testing and documentation is required for accommodations? How current must the student's testing be to apply for accommodations?
4. What percent of the undergraduate student body use these services?
5. Is there an additional fee for services?

6. Is the staff specialized in instructional work with LD and ADHD? What Assistive Technology (AT) services do you offer? Do they have an AT expert on staff?
7. What is the procedure for getting extended time for exams and/or projects? How do students arrange for this extended time? Where do students take exams and who proctors?
8. Do the students have counselors that are from the Center's program? How many full-time and part-time counselors are on staff? What is the caseload?
9. Does the student have an academic counselor as well as a counselor in the Learning Support Center? If so, how do the two counselors work together?
10. How are conflicts or disputes resolved? (for example, if a professor is not in compliance with a student's accommodations)
11. What are the most difficult majors or areas of concentration for students with learning challenges to manage successfully at the college? (the response to this question will depend on what the student's learning differences entail and what major the student wishes to pursue.)
12. What is the four year graduation rate for students with learning challenges? Is any information provided about success after graduation?
13. Are there students who are currently in the program available to interview?

Answers to these questions will be helpful in the initial stages of screening colleges for students with LD. In addition, there are students who have learning challenges related to other conditions like anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression and bipolar disorders. These students may also benefit from services provided by Learning Support Centers. The Centers are good places to start your research, but also check out the Student Counseling Center (often housed within Student Health Services) since professionals at these facilities may also provide necessary therapeutic, medical and/or pharmacological support.

Each student is unique and so students and their families must prepare to modify general guidelines and questions in order to obtain the information needed. This is often done best using the help of qualified professionals who can lend support in their respective areas of expertise. The proper input, direction and support helps students with special needs discover which colleges provide the best fit, so they can go on to pursue their goals and aspirations in happy and productive ways.