

From

High
School

To

College

Steps to Success for
Students with Disabilities

By Elizabeth C. Hamblet



Council for
Exceptional
Children

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Preface

to the Second Edition

When I asked Ward Newmeyer, Director of Disability Services at Dartmouth College, what qualities he sees in successful students, he asked me, “How do you define success?” (personal communication, January 20, 2016). What an excellent question.

At this time, the popular press and social media are full of inspiring stories of entrepreneurs, filmmakers, and others who have achieved success at a level that has garnered them worldwide recognition. Dylan Redford, for example, has served as a model for students with dyslexia through his advocacy efforts and the chronicling of his experiences on film in the documentary *The Big Picture*, where he was one of several students who told their stories.

Redford worries that the success narratives promulgated at this time can be a “double-edged sword.” Could the message that blockbuster successes are the norm inadvertently suggest that anything less than reaching the top means that individuals with disabilities have failed in some way? Redford says that—even if no one is actually telling them to do it—individuals with disabilities who have achieved some modicum of success may feel compelled to pursue a level of achievement that isn’t aligned with their own interests in order to provide a model for others:

I wonder how much such success narratives guided my decision to go—not just to Middlebury—but to college in general. I felt the tug of wanting to do certain things that matched the “underdog” narratives that are so often a feature of the stories of successful individuals with disabilities. When it was time to consider colleges, this notion of “going against the grain,” (i.e., of being a student who struggled with reading and writing attending a highly selective

Introduction

How to Get There From Here

When I tell people that I work with students with learning disabilities (LD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other special needs at Columbia University, this sometimes prompts them to ask, “How do those kinds of students get into Columbia?” When I give presentations at some high schools and mention my job at an Ivy League college, it sometimes results in head-shaking from a member of the high school staff. “Our kids aren’t going to a place like Columbia. They’ll go to community college.”

Such questions and statements about students with disabilities attending highly selective institutions are not troubling on their face; the truth is that most students will not attend these schools—nor should they if the fit isn’t right for them. What is troubling is a larger issue: These interactions reflect a lack of accurate knowledge regarding the services and accommodations that exist to support students with disabilities once they are admitted to college, even at Ivy League schools. Worse, these interactions show a lack of awareness about how very academically capable many students with disabilities are. I worry that these knowledge gaps—particularly among professionals working with students with disabilities and even among their families—may result in their discouraging students’ aspirations by steering them away from certain kinds of schools.

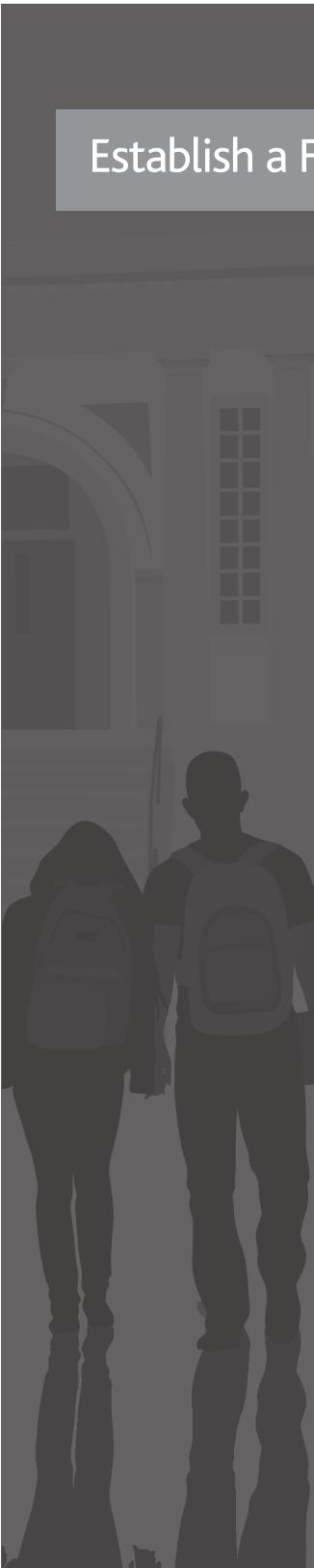
The research provides support for these concerns. A large national study found that students with disabilities enroll at 2-year schools at a higher rate (44.2%) than their typical classmates (20.6%; Sanford et al., 2011). Those same students apply to 4-year institutions at a lower rate (18.8%) than their typical peers (40.2%; Sanford et al., 2011). The aim of this book is not to discount the value of 2-year schools, which are a great choice for many students

Step 1

Establish a Foundation in the Law and Research

In this chapter:

- What laws govern the education of college students with disabilities?
- How does the college setting differ from high school?
- What accommodations are available for students in the college setting, and which are most helpful?
- What kinds of accommodations are colleges not required to provide?
- What skills and strategies are most helpful to students in the college setting?



The transition to the college environment presents many changes for all students, from adjusting to increased academic demands, to living among new people in a new place, to the need to function independently away from the supports and structure of home. Students—both with and without disabilities—may initially be overwhelmed and will likely need to employ different study strategies than they did in high school. Students with disabilities will have a smoother transition if they already know what strategies work for them and how to seek and use appropriate accommodations. Of course, the opposite is also true. Students who do not request accommodations or employ practiced study techniques are less likely to be successful. Too often, the reason students don't do these things is that their high schools have not told them about the availability of disability accommodations in college or what they'll have to do to access them. In addition, high school IEPs and Section 504 plans often prioritize use of accommodations over use of strategies needed to be successful in the college environment. For this reason, it is imperative that high school transition plans focus on ways to educate students about the changes they'll meet in college and provide them with the strategies needed to make a smooth transition to the new environment.

During public elementary and secondary school, special education services are either provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006) through an IEP or under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (2009) through a 504 plan. However, once students move to the college environment, they are covered by different laws—Subpart E of Section 504 and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA; ADA Amendments Act of 2008)—both of which differ from IDEA and Section 504 in several ways (Shaw, 2009). Although some things, such as basic accommodations, may be similar for students, there are changes in the way the disability services system works at the postsecondary level and in the kinds of services colleges are expected to provide. For students who use a number of highly supportive services and accommodations and who are accustomed to having modifications made for them in the high school setting, these changes may be significant (Shaw, 2009). To best

that of students who had been identified as having speech or language impairments (74%). Sixty-nine percent of students who had been diagnosed with a learning disability also did not consider themselves to have a disability, followed by those with other health impairments (64.9%) and emotional disturbances (52.5%). Of the remaining categories, fewer than half of the students in each thought they didn't have a disability (Newman et al., 2011).

Other studies (Baker, Boland, & Nowik, 2013; Cole & Cawthon, 2015; Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, & Floersch, 2013; Lightner et al., 2012; Marshak et al., 2010; Newman, L. A., Madaus, J. W., & Javitz, H.S., 2015; Stamp, Banerjee, & Brown, 2014) have found additional reasons behind students' not disclosing their disability, including:

- Apprehensions about stigma attached to disabilities.
- Lack of self-advocacy skills.
- Concerns about the cost of being assessed in order to provide documentation.
- Thinking that they would be taking services away from others who needed them more.
- Belief that disability accommodations were only for those with more obvious disabilities (e.g., physical disabilities).
- Lack of knowledge about the availability of specific DS services apart from general academic support.
- Insufficient awareness of the effect their disability might have at college, or a belief that they would not need services.
- Desire to be like their peers.
- Belief that they were not entitled to DS accommodations and services.
- Determination to be independent or self-sufficient, even if it caused them to be less expedient in their work.
- Concerns about professors' perceptions, or previous negative experiences with professors.
- Never having conceptualized their difficulties as "learning disabilities."

I think sometimes students are stronger than their parents, and I think parents should trust their students' instincts if they want to disclose. Schools are often impressed when students take the lead and show that they really embrace and own what their learning differences are, and understand how they can be successful with the proper accommodations.

Carolyn Mulligan
Owner, Insiders Network
to College

Step 2

Know Students' Responsibilities and Rights

In this chapter:

- What are students' rights and responsibilities in the college setting?
- How do students decide whether to seek accommodations?
- How do students register for disability services and accommodations?
- How do students manage their accommodations?



I knew my parents expected me to use the disability services at college, but they didn't push me. I thought, "I'll be fine." But first semester was rough. I didn't go to office hours and didn't know I wasn't doing well. I didn't use my time well and turned work in late—

I ended up on academic probation. I guess sometimes you need a reality check to figure out what you should do. Once I did, I found the people in DS couldn't have been nicer.

They sent letters to my professors to let them know about my accommodations.

Erin Harris
Student, Pitzer College

Unlike public elementary and secondary schools, colleges do not have a legal mandate (such as Child Find) to locate students who might have a disability and offer them services (McGuire, 2009). Similarly, college applicants are not required to reveal their disability at any part of the admissions process. This means that students must contact the disability services (DS) office and complete the school's process to register and request accommodations if they wish to utilize them.

Professionals and families should know that students are not considered to have "registered" unless they go through the school's established procedures (they should be able to find this on the office's webpage). Students who have revealed their disability in their admissions packet (e.g., by writing about it in their essay or in another part of their application, or by including their IEP, Section 504 plan, or other documentation) but have not completed the DS registration process are not considered to have registered with the disability services office and should not expect DS to follow up with them (Madaus, 2009). Even if the admissions office forwards such information to the DS office, this does not mean that DS will contact students to ask them to complete the registration process. (The exception to this rule is typically found only in situations where students are applying simultaneously to a college and to its special fee-for-service support program for students with disabilities. See Step 5).

A cautionary tale comes from the Lightner et al. (2012) study. In that study, a college freshman who applied for accommodations after he was placed on academic probation said that because he mentioned his disability in his application for admission, he "thought that would be it" (p. 152). He did not understand he would have to submit other information. To avoid these kinds of missteps, high school professionals must have direct conversations with students to make sure they understand there is a general process they must complete to register with DS once they get to college.

Figure 2.1. Letter of Accommodation

HAMBLET
UNIVERSITY

DISABILITY SERVICES OFFICE

123 Administration Building | Anycollege, USA | 999.555.0000

LETTER OF ACCOMMODATION

Student Name: _____ Semester: _____

Today's date: _____ Valid from: _____ through: _____

Federal legislation including the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 state that academically qualified students with disabilities must be reasonably accommodated in instruction and academic assessment. A disability is legally defined as a physical or mental impairment substantially limiting one or more major life activities.

This letter verifies that the above-named student has undergone a needs assessment with Disabilities Services and it was determined that he/she has a disability requiring the academic accommodations or services listed below.

The accommodations checked below are those to which this student is entitled:

- Extended testing time
- Reduced-noise testing environment
- Word processing for essay tests
- Note taker
- Use of device for recording lectures
- Interpreter, ASL, for lectures and oral exams
- Electronic books or books on tape

DS accommodations are intended to provide equal access as required by law. Revisions to accommodations may occur pending additional information, changes in disability status, or by periodic review. Faculty is encouraged to work collaboratively with the student and to seek support from DS as needed. Please contact DS with questions or concerns regarding the provision of accommodations and services.

Sincerely,

DS Coordinator
Hamblet University

Professor Objections

Sometimes professors might not provide an accommodation because they think it is unnecessary (e.g., "It's only a 5-minute quiz. You don't need extended time for it."). Others might refuse an accommodation because they think it constitutes a fundamental alteration (see Step 1). In these cases, they may substitute an accommodation they think is appropriate. The expectation at most colleges is that professors will contact DS when they receive students' LOAs to discuss any accommodation requests they consider to be fundamental alterations. Some professors, however, may not do this and instead will simply refuse to accommodate the request.

Students should not assume that professors who refuse accommodations have taken the appropriate steps to notify DS. They also shouldn't assume that DS checks in with professors to ensure their cooperation. Instead, students need to contact their DS coordinator regarding the professor's objection as soon as the professor refuses the accommodation. (However, if students have asked professors for an accommodation not approved by DS, it is unlikely that DS will support them.)

they are unlikely to encounter this situation, but they may take comfort in knowing how to handle a professor's objections should they arise. Students should also remember that there will be appropriate timelines that apply to such notifications. If they wait until the semester is over to alert DS that a professor refused them an accommodation, they may not get the resolution they want because of their failure to give DS enough time to respond.

Students' Rights

Learning that the process is not onerous may encourage students to take the initiative to register with DS. If they do not register, they do not have the "right" to accommodations. But once they do register, Section 504 and the ADA grant them certain rights, which aren't explicitly outlined in the laws as they are here, but are commonly understood to provide the following protections.

Students Have the Right to Keep Their Disabilities to Themselves

Though it may seem strange, students with disabilities have a right not to claim their rights as individuals with disabilities. In other words, schools cannot "force" students to register with DS or otherwise identify themselves as members of a particular group; this would be a textbook example of the very discrimination Section 504

Pave the Way to College

In this chapter:

- How do self-determination skills help students at the college level?
- What can teachers, schools, and families do to support students developing these skills?
- How can teachers, schools, and families help students self-advocate?
- What other functional skills are important in the college environment?
- How can teachers, schools, and families promote student independence?



There are ways to gauge any student's readiness for college. For instance, has the student had success living away from home (e.g., at a camp)? How does she handle stress? Can he show flexibility when things don't go as planned? How aware is she of her own strengths and weaknesses? Is he willing to ask for help? Can he regulate his emotions? Because these things affect students' daily functioning across all environments, it is crucial that parents and professionals look at such issues with a critical eye.

Lorraine Wolf
Director, Disability Services
Boston University

As adults often tell high school students, college is not "Grade 13." The academic demands are typically higher and the environment offers less structure (no one will force students to go to class, study, or seek help if needed). For students who will be living at college, the environment can offer distractions that may exacerbate their difficulties in using their time well (Shaw, 2009).

What does it take for students to be successful in this new setting? Milsom & Dietz (2009) asked this question of professionals with experience in transition. Seasoned staff in college disability services (DS), academic affairs and retention, special education, and school counseling fields rated a number of characteristics for their importance in college readiness. These experts gave high ratings to confidence, perseverance, resilience, self-determination, self-discipline, and self-regulation.

What's interesting is that in the research discussed in Step 1, students themselves identified some of these same qualities as being those that helped them find success. Such characteristics have received attention in the popular media over the last several years (Baer, 2014; Del Guidice, 2014) because they are related to achievement for everyone in a variety of situations.

In Garrison-Wade and Lehman's 2007 study, students described the characteristics that helped them work toward their goal of completing college. They said that their own self-confidence and self-reliance were strengths that helped them to persevere in the face of difficulties. They reported that they did not dwell on barriers and figured out how to overcome obstacles. These students' families had helped them to develop these inner strengths while they were still in high school. Students in a study by Anctil and colleagues (2008) reported that persistence actually built self-confidence, in that it allowed students to achieve their goals, which boosted their sense of competence after they succeeded in spite of past failures.

The concept of *self-efficacy* refers to students' expectations for how they will perform in certain situations. Zimmerman (1999) said that self-efficacy can affect students' effort and persistence, and it can also be affected by students' effort. Students' belief in their ability to do well

Step 4

Anticipate the College Environment

In this chapter:

- How does the college academic life differ from that in high school?
- How do time management and organizational skills help students in the college setting?
- What strategies and tools should students learn in high school to help them when they get to college?
- What supports can students seek out at college if they are struggling in a course?



Looking back, I think it's obvious that I wasn't ready to go to college, but I was determined not to be the only one of my friends left behind. I thought just getting in would be the end of my troubles. Get in to college and you win. I thought that college was a utopia where you got to learn interesting things constantly and only had to take the classes you liked the most. I imagined everyone sitting around with cups of coffee discussing fabulous things. The actual work part didn't even cross my mind.

Rae Jacobson
Senior Writer and Content
Engagement Specialist,
Child Mind Institute

College is not simply an extension of the high school environment, and students have to learn how to cope in their new setting. Once at college, students who previously counted on external controls (e.g., daily homework deadlines, weekly quizzes, and family members who dictated study time) to stay on track must shift to internal controls to cope with an environment where they won't find external structures in place (Hall et al., 2008). Adding to the challenge is the increase in academic demands; students are expected to do a lot of independent, critical thinking (Lombardi, Kowitt, & Staples, 2015), write long papers that incorporate research, and prepare independently for midterms and final exams.

Given these challenges, how do students with disabilities fare at college? The answer depends upon the measure used to evaluate performance, so research does not provide a clear picture. An examination of graduation rates at one university (Wessel, Jones, Markle, & Westfall, 2009) found that students with disabilities graduate at the same rate as their typical peers, which is a different finding than that of NLTSS2. The difference may be attributable to variations in the samples studied (i.e., the NLTSS2 is a nationwide sample of students attending numerous schools, whereas the Wessel et al. study only looked at students at a single university, so students in that sample might have had similar profiles). As discussed in Step 1, Trammell (2003) found that students who used fewer accommodations had higher GPAs than their fellow students with disabilities who used more accommodations. Trammell theorized that the students with the lowest GPAs did not have a good sense of what accommodations would be most effective for them.

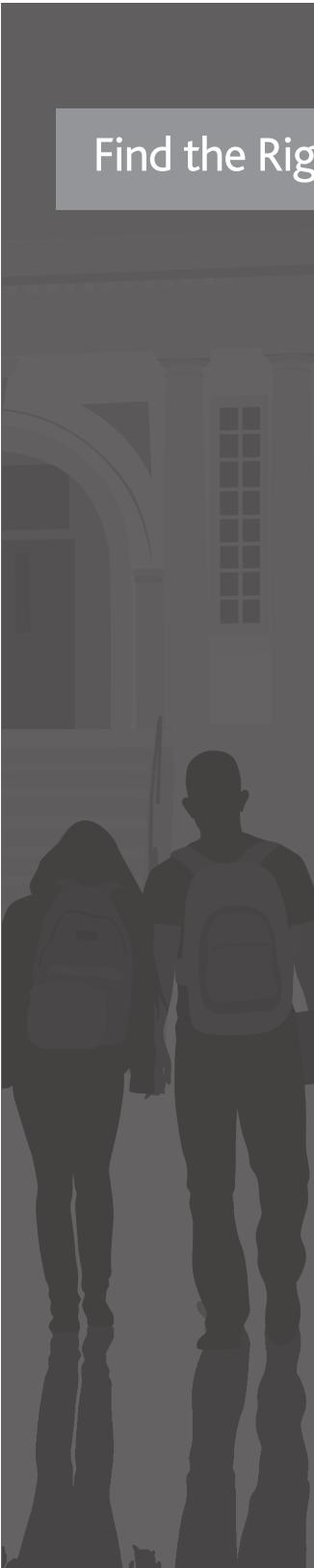
Much of the research on students' academic skills is qualitative and comes from the viewpoints of college-level professionals and students themselves, as college students do not take state or other standardized exams that measure their academic skills. However, some studies have combined qualitative and quantitative research (see Table 4.1).

College DS professionals in Janiga and Costenbader's study (2002) reported that some students lacked math and writing skills as well as study skills; they said that some students expected college supports to be the same as they

Find the Right College

In this chapter:

- What components are part of finding the “right” college?
- What different levels of support and service are there?
- How do students research potential schools, degree programs, and supports?
- Should students disclose their disability when they apply to college?
- What other paths to postsecondary education exist?



Finding a college presents a challenge for all students as they seek the right “fit” in terms of location, culture, and academics. For students with disabilities, the search should also include gathering information about the services, accommodations, and supports available at the schools they are considering. As discussed in Step 1, colleges that receive federal funds (i.e., those that distribute federal student loans and grants) must abide by federal disability-related laws; this means that nearly all colleges in the United States have to provide disability accommodations (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2011a). However, federal law doesn’t define how college disability services should be run or what they should include (McGuire, 2009). The level of service and support available varies from school to school and is based solely on the resources that each college decides to put into disability services.

The good news for students is that there are so many schools in this country, those who want to go to college will likely be able to find a school that is a good match for them. The downside of having so many choices, however, is that it can make conducting a college search a daunting task. Numerous guidebooks and websites can help students identify schools that meet some of their criteria (e.g., size of student body), but few offer information about disability services. This means that students will have to seek out this information.

In working with students on their college search, professionals and families should avoid making any assumptions or generalizations about what kinds of services schools in a particular category (e.g., large research institution) will or will not offer. For instance, people who think public institutions won’t devote resources to disability services should know that schools like the University of Connecticut, Ohio State University, and the University of Arizona all have very supportive disability services (DS) offices. Similarly, students shouldn’t assume that highly selective schools will provide only minimal services, because schools like Stanford University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University also offer very supportive services. That said, these examples shouldn’t be taken to mean that all state schools or all Ivy

TABLE 5.1

Levels of Services Offered by Colleges

Level of services	Description
Level 1	Schools that provide only what is required by the law offer basic (sometimes referred to as <i>compliance-level</i> or <i>compliance-only</i>) services, meaning that their services meet only the minimum that the law requires. Level 1 services typically include only those required by law in order to provide “access” (Banerjee & Brinckerhoff 2009; Elksnin & Elksnin, 2009; McGuire, 2009). This means that they provide basic accommodations such as extended time for exams or permission to record lectures but don’t typically offer what might be seen as “services” (e.g., special tutoring or special advising).
Level 2	Colleges providing Level 2 services may offer special classes or workshops in study skills and time management. They may have a full-time staff member training students to use AT, or offer one-on-one time with a learning specialist or academic coach to help students learn study strategies, gain an understanding of their learning profiles, develop self-advocacy skills, and use compensatory techniques—typically for free.
Level 3	Some colleges offer expanded fee-for-service programs that may include content-area tutoring, academic coaching, or specialized academic or career advising. These specialized programs can cost several thousand dollars a semester in addition to baseline college costs.

League institutions provide similar services. The important message here is that the level of services offered by a school will depend on individual factors, (e.g., the financial resources the school chooses to devote to DS or the philosophy of the administration about how well students with disabilities should be served by the institution).

Professionals and families should not make any assumptions—they should do their research.

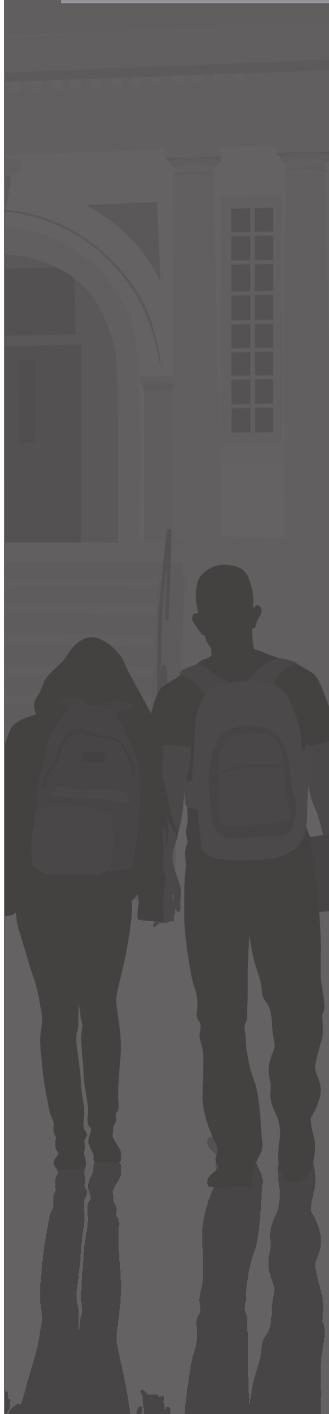
Levels of Service

For this discussion, it will be helpful to use some categories to describe the different levels of services offered at colleges. Absent standard definitions, this discussion will use service-level designations (which colleges themselves do not necessarily use): Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 (see Table 5.1). College search guides and sites may have their own categories to which they assign schools. Also, some may mistakenly refer to any DS service as a “program,” which can be misleading. Generally, schools only call something a program when they charge an extra fee for it. Of the different levels of services colleges offer, only Level 3 services, which require more coordination, organization, and planning than Level 1 and 2 services, require a fee.

Secure the Right Accommodations

In this chapter:

- What types of accommodations are available at the college level?
- How do students access accommodations in the college setting?
- What sort of documentation do students need to request accommodations?
- How can teachers, schools, and families best prepare students for accessing accommodations in the college setting?



As discussed in Steps 1 and 2, the laws that govern the disability services system in the college setting are different than those that prevail at the high school level. This means that the system for accessing accommodations is different, and some of the accommodations themselves may be different. While students are still in high school, they need to be taught how to register for accommodations and what accommodations they are likely to receive in college (as well as what adjustments and supports they may have to do without), so that they can see the importance of developing skills that will allow them to do well.

As noted in previous steps, colleges are not allowed to ask students if they have a disability during the admissions process, and they do not have to locate students with disabilities and invite them to register for accommodations. For their part, students can choose not to register with the disability services (DS) office, as long as they are willing to forego accommodations. If they do wish to register, they must follow the established DS procedure, which typically involves completing a form and submitting a copy of their disability documentation. It may also include an intake appointment.

Because a DS review of students' documentation and arrangement for accommodations can take some time, it is important for students and their families to know that they can start the process as soon as they have been admitted to a college, completed the enrollment forms, and sent their deposit. Students do not have to wait until they arrive on campus for orientation or the first week of classes; those who do register before classes start may find that their process is completed more quickly than it would have been if they had waited because DS offices tend to be inundated with registrations in the first weeks of any semester. Students who wish to get ahead of the crowd can begin the process during orientation or, if they will not be on campus before the beginning of the term, by phone.

The law does not say anything about how long colleges have to respond to students' requests; the length of time between students' completion of the registration process

Figure 6.1. Accommodations Request Review

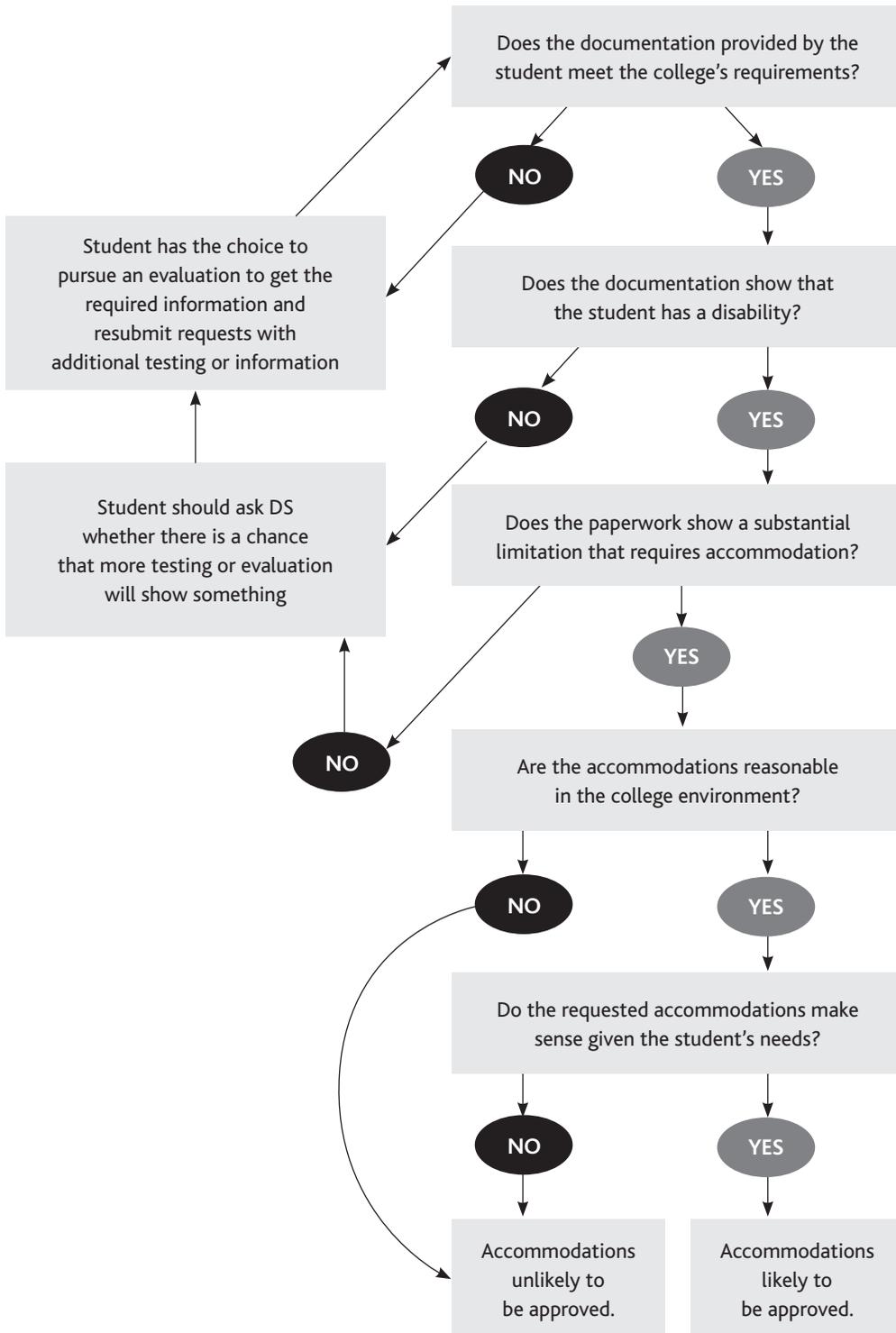


TABLE 6.1

General Requirements for Documentation of Disabilities

DS requirement/ element	Things to know
Qualifications of the evaluator (whether a school staff member or outside professional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Colleges may require that the psychoeducational evaluation (for LD, and if required, for ADHD) or the evaluation of a psychological diagnosis be done by someone with a Ph.D. (though reports from school psychologists with a master's degree are likely to be acceptable as long as the individual is licensed by the state to do such testing). ■ For medical or physical conditions, documentation may have to come from a specialist rather than from a general practitioner; paperwork from a nurse-practitioner, for example, might not be acceptable. ■ Colleges might request that the professional providing the diagnosis have specific training or experience in working with adolescents or adults (though this is unlikely to be a reason schools will send students back for another evaluation, even if the school's guidelines include this kind of stipulation). ■ Diagnosis or paperwork completed by a family member or friend may not be accepted, regardless of the individual's qualifications. (This is universal.)
Age of documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schools that want to see a "current" picture of students' functioning generally are looking for something five years old or less (McGuire, 2009). ■ Colleges may be more flexible about the age of testing for nontraditional students (e.g., they may be more likely to accept 10-year-old testing for someone who was 16 at the time of testing) than for students who were in elementary school at the time of evaluation. ■ Even if testing is old, current and objective information contained in the SOP may be sufficient for documentation.
Clinical interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Some guidelines may require that evaluators have spoken with the student directly instead of just gathering data from files. However, students are unlikely to have their paperwork rejected if their report does not include a summary of such an interview. ■ When included in a report, the interview provides students with an opportunity to describe how they experience their disability and to add information about how they function (e.g., how they self-accommodate) that testing results won't show.
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Some schools' guidelines may request students' educational, family, and medical history. ■ Colleges are unlikely to reject paperwork if it doesn't contain a history, although for certain disabilities (e.g., ADHD), some may require the report to show evidence of early difficulties. ■ Although a history may not be required, it can be helpful in providing more details about a student's functioning (e.g., a clear pattern of impairment over time and across all kinds of classes) than testing scores alone. ■ For students with LD, ASD, or ADHD, histories should include helpful descriptive information (e.g., "teachers report he always needed a minute to respond when asked a question in class") and objective information (e.g., grades, standardized testing scores, or results from previous evaluations). ■ It is helpful to include a description of accommodations that students have found useful in the past.