

Hunting for the perfect college

Looking for a college that is right for you can be a difficult task as a student with a disability. As an individual with a learning disability, it seemed harder for me. I always wanted to go to college, but I was thinking what if there is not a college for me? What if things get too hard and I can not keep up? What would I do? Is there anyone or any place I could go to get the help I would need?

I visited many colleges inquiring about the help they provide to students with disabilities. When I contacted Eastern's Admissions Office they referred me to speak to Dr. Pamela J. Starr, who is the Coordinator and Counselor of the Office of AccessAbility Services. I was briefly informed about what they offer to students with disabilities, and I made an appointment with Dr. Starr to learn more about what Eastern offered.

On the day of me meeting with Dr. Starr, my mom and I drove up to Eastern's campus and we were given a tour. After the tour I met with Dr. Starr. I remember being so nervous about meeting her. I did not know what to say or how to feel. While waiting to meet with her, I felt like I was going to be judged by her. I did not want her to act differently towards me since I have a disability and I was wondering what she would think of me. After a few minutes, out walked this friendly face with this big smile and I started to feel comfortable immediately. My mom and I walked into Dr. Starr's office and she was so nice. I did not feel uncomfortable nor did I feel I was treated differently just because I have a disability.

Helpful tips and questions on choosing a college that is right for you:

- **Write down any questions you may have and be sure to receive answers for them.**
- **Set up a meeting with the person who is in charge of providing services to students with disabilities.**
- **Find out what types of accommodations and services the college offers.**
- **Find out what you need to do to become eligible for services.**
- **Make sure you feel comfortable with the services that they provide.**
- **Find out if the college offers tutoring that can provide assistance to you in your studies.**
- **If you have a major in mind then make sure they offer it. If not, Ask if you can create an individualized major.**
- **Inquire about class size. How many students are in a class?**
- **Walk around the campus to feel comfortable. If you are not comfortable, then it may not be right for you.**
- **Check out the Residential Halls. What are they like? How many people are allowed to live in the halls, how many people will you share a room with?**

- Investigate availability of activities that interest you. Do they have the sports teams you like or clubs that you might be interested in? Also, what types of activities does the college have at night or on the weekends?
- If you want to stay close to your family, you should consider choosing a college close to your home.

Starting College

Starting college for anyone is kind of a nervous thing. Everything is new. You do not know where your classes are and which building is which. You do not know who any of the people are. It is not like high school where you are in the same classes with basically the same people. Everyone around you is new.

When I first started taking classes I was unsure of what to tell my professors. I did not feel comfortable walking up to my professor telling them I have a learning disability. I did not want the whole class to know; they might treat me differently and think that I could not do the work. I do not believe that it is any of their business. I decided that I was going to set up a meeting with Dr. Starr to see what I should do about telling my professors. When I met with her she told me about accommodation letters. They are letters that students give to their professors letting the professors know they have a disability and what type of accommodations they will need in their classes. In my accommodation letters they listed

accommodations that were specific to my needs such as extended time for exams and quizzes, a distraction-reduced setting, and a notetaker (a person who goes to classes to take notes for students with disabilities). I would wait until after class or go to my professors' offices during their office hours so I could give them my letters and talk with them about my learning disability. The letters made me feel better when I presented them to my professors. I would let the professor read the letter and if they had any questions, I would answer them.

One area my learning disability affects is my reading. When classes begin they require a lot of reading and I start to feel overwhelmed and start falling behind in my classes. Upon Dr. Starr's recommendation, I agreed to try books-on-tape and try a reader to determine which one would work best for me. Personally, I found that working with books-on-tape was very difficult for me. I contacted a few of Dr. Starr's student workers who were listed as readers for students with disabilities and met a young lady named Megan. We compared our schedules and were able to come up with set hours when we could get together for her to read to me from my textbooks. Not only would she read to me, but she would also explain what she read. That way, I was able to better understand the material better. Once Megan and I got into a steady routine, I began to catch up in my classes and was able to follow along with what my professors were talking about.

During my freshman year at Eastern, I had to take a math requirement. I could not understand anything the professor was trying to

teach the class. I was falling behind and I began to worry about my grade. I talked with Dr. Starr about it and within the next week she found me a tutor named Zach. Zach and I met two days a week for an hour or so. He understood that I needed a little more time with the material and I needed it explained in a different way. Zach had taken the class a few years back so he remembered some of the formulas; however, the ones he did not remember he would read over and teach himself before teaching me. We would go to a quiet room with my math book and notes, and we would read the lessons out loud. We would use the white board in the room and write the problems out. He would do problems out on the board as an example to show me step by step how to solve them. He would also make up his own problems to make sure I understood what he taught me. He would have me solve the problems on the board. He made learning the information more fun. I completed the class with a final grade of a B+.

Helpful tips for College

- **Get a feel for your classes and what accommodations you will need for each class.**
- **Meet with your disabilities counselor to make sure you have the right accommodations implemented for your classes.**
- **Request accommodation letters within the first two weeks of classes.**

- Find out your professors' office hours and meet with them to discuss your disability and accommodation.
- Set up regular meetings, if necessary, with your disabilities counselor to check in and to receive constant support from them.
- If you need help do not be afraid to ask for it. Discuss this with your disabilities counselor.
- Take advantage of workshops if they are offered. Some workshops offered at Eastern are study skills, time management, and test taking.
- Try to find a quiet place where you can do your work and study.

Talking to a Professor

No matter how many professors you have talked to in the past about your disabilities, it is never easy. Each professor is different and you do not know what their personality is like. The first time I went to a professor's office to talk about a paper was for a writing class. I was so nervous and I did not know how to approach her. I did not know if I should go right to her office or if I should check in with the secretary first. I was lost. So, I went in and asked the secretary if it was okay for me to go to my professor's office. The secretary kind of gave me a friendly giggle and instructed me to walk down the hall and lightly knock on the professor's

door and whether it was open or not. I was so nervous that when I knocked on the professor's door she asked me, "What's up?" I forgot what I was going to ask her. The professor was really nice about it and told me to have a seat to think about what I was going to talk about. Once I collected my thoughts, I was able to discuss my paper. The professor read over what I had already written to see how I was doing and made some corrections and comments on what else I could add to it. I received an A on the paper and over all I got a B+ in the class.

Tips on talking to professors

- **Initiate contact with your professors at the start of the semester that way you feel comfortable.**
- **Be polite and try to relax. (Remember they are human too).**
- **Know what you want to talk about and have a goal.
Remember to stay on topic.**
- **Set up regular meetings, if necessary, with your professors to check in and to receive constant support from them.**
- **Let them know when you have problems or concerns. It is a good thing to talk it out with them.**
- **If you are unable to meet during the professor's office hours, talk to them after class or email them to set up a time when both of you are available.**

- In case you get nervous, you should write down your questions as a reminder.

Time Management

Going to college is a lot different than high school. You have to get use to a completely different routine. Your classes are in more than one building, they are not scheduled back to back all the time, and you might have evening or night classes. Learning how to manage time can be a hard thing to do. My classes were all over the place my first semester, freshman year. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I had a class at 9:00 a.m. then one at 1:00 p.m. and another at 5:00 p.m. I considered from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. my school day even though I had six hours available where I did not have classes. I should have used that time to study and I did not. My Tuesday and Thursday classes were even worse because I only had two classes, one class at 8:00 a.m. and the other at 5:00 p.m. I had eight hours on those days where I did not do anything. I fell behind on work assignments right from the start and I quickly learned that I needed to start working on assignments in between my classes. I made out a schedule for myself outlining when I would work on my homework assignments. For my morning class I did the work the night before, for my afternoon class my assignments would get done after my morning class, and for my night class assignments I would them get done after my afternoon class. The second semester of my freshmen year, my class schedule was different.

To better help me manage my time, I had all my classes back to back so I did not have to worry about having so much time in between them. This allowed me to finish all my classes and have time in the late morning or sometimes in the afternoon to work on my homework assignments and meet with my reader. I felt that having my classes back to back worked better for me. Now that I am a senior I have a strong sense of how to manage my time.

Tips on Managing Time

- **Put together a class schedule with times that are most effective for you. Do you learn best in the morning, during the afternoon, or the evening? Do you want all your classes back to back or do you want time in between for yourself to have a break?**
- **Make a schedule for yourself including your classes, any type of meetings or appointments you may have, etc. This will help you know what times you are free to work on your homework assignments.**
- **When you receive your syllabus from your professors, look over the homework assignments you will have for the entire semester.**

- **Color coordinate your weekly or monthly calendar. You can put tests and quizzes in blue, papers in green, homework assignment due dates in red, etc.**
- **Hang up each syllabus over your desk so that you know which homework assignments you have to work on each day.**
- **Try to study and work on homework assignments at the same time everyday. That way, you can get yourself into a routine.**
- **Make your study area distraction free. Turn off your television, and your radio. Put your phone on vibrate, sign off of your instant messenger or anything else that may distract you from your work. This will help you to get your work done.**
- **Make a to-do list and prioritize it.**
- **Organize yourself.**
- **Learn to say “No” to your friends when you are studying or doing homework assignments.**

Reading

My reading and studying skills go hand in hand. Through the last few years, I formed a way to help me learn. When I get together with my reader, we go over the topics of the chapter. We also have highlighters and

pens to use while we are reading. While reading the chapter, my reader highlights any points we think are important and we would go over it a few times to make sure that I understood it. Another thing that we do is to write little things in the margins to let me know what the highlighted information is saying. That way, when I go over the chapters to study, the keywords are there to help me remember. My learning disability affects all subject that I take. I am a music minor and I still need help with reading the musical notes. I have always been interested in singing and before coming to Eastern I took private vocal lessons for five years. When I found out that Eastern had voice classes, I decided to become a music minor. I have taken vocal lessons and piano lessons here at Eastern. I found that when it comes to singing, I do not need to read the notes. I can just listen to the piano part and know the notes that I have to sing. When I started playing the piano, it was hard to read the notes I had to play because of my disability. I had to write out on a separate piece of paper the corresponding letter referring to the notes I would be reading to play. This helps me to read the notes. I also drew out both the treble clef and the bass clef and wrote the notes for the lines and the spaces. Another thing that most musicians do to identify the notes of the clefs is to make words for each line or space. For each clef I would use a mnemonic. The treble clef lines are “Empty Garbage Before Dad Flips” and the spaces spell out FACE. The bass clef lines are “Good Boys Deserve Fudge Always” and the spaces are “All Cows Eat Grass.”

Reading Tips

- Read over the title of the chapter and any subtitles within the chapter to gather and gain an overview of what you will be learning.
- Read questions at the back of the chapter before starting the chapter and read over any study guides the professor has handed out. Try to answer the questions on the study guide and back of the book while reading or when you are finished reading.
- Find a method of reading that will help you study. Highlight specific points, write little notes in the margin, and/or make notes on a separate sheet of paper.
- While reading, write down any questions that you have for the professor about information you do not understand.
- Read over **bolded** or *italicized* words that are important to the chapter a few times or put them on note cards to study.
- After reading the chapter and making your own notes on it, read over them a few times to make sure you have all the information you need and try to understand what you have wrote.
- Review your notes often to learn the information from the chapter.

Note Taking

With my learning disability, it is more difficult for me to take notes for myself. It is not my hand writing I have problems with, but most of the time the professors talk too fast for me to write down what they are saying. When this happens, I get easily lost and start to get confused, frustrated, and I miss information from the lectures. Recently, in my classes, I write down everything the professors write down on the classroom board and try to write down little things that they might say about what they wrote on the board. After every class I get a set of more descriptive notes from a notetaker that I use to help with my studying. When I study for an exam, I take the notes that I have taken and the notes that the notetaker has provided to me and combined them on a separate sheet of paper. After I combined the notes, I read them over a few times. That way, the information sinks into my brain.

Note Taking Tips

- Choose a note taking method, how to set up the paper for note taking.**
- Write everything down the professor puts on the classroom board unless instructed not to.**
- Use a tape recorder to fill in gaps within your notes.**
- Try to write down any key points the professor states aloud.**

- **If you have a note taker you should compare your notes to their notes and combined the information together. Rewrite or type out your notes so that all the information is in an order which you can understand.**
- **After class ends, if possible, try to read over your notes and write down any questions you might have about them.**
- **If you are unclear about something you or your note taker has written down, then ask your professor about it before class or during their office hours.**
- **If you are having problems with taking your own notes, then talk to your disabilities counselor about needing a note taker.**

Test Taking

I always get nervous when it comes to taking a test. I always ask myself questions like: Did I study enough? Did I get enough sleep? Did I study the right material? What if my mind goes blank and I don't remember anything? What if I fail? I realized that you just have to go into a test and hope that what you studied stays in your brain long enough to take the exam and pass. Though I still get nervous about taking tests, I came up with little things to help me relax. Before a test I reread the study guide (if there is one) from the professor and make sure I understand all the questions it was asking. I also reread over my notes from class and the notes that I have made myself from the chapters. During the test I read

through the questions and answer the ones that I know right away, then go back and answer the questions that I skipped. Any short answer questions or essay questions I would answer last. During tests if I get nervous, I put my pencil down, close my eyes, and I take deep breaths. I also say a little verse in my head: “In with the good air; out with the bad air.” It always helps me relax and puts me back in the mind set of taking a test.

Study Tips

- Give yourself more than one day to study.
- Read over the study guide for the test and study the things that you are the most unsure of first.
- Read over all class notes and notes you made from the text book.
- As you find the answers to the study guide write them down on a separate sheet of paper.
- When you are done finding all the answers, give yourself a quiz to see how much you know. You can even ask a friend to help.
- Try to study with people from your class.
- Any vocabulary words that might be on the exam you might want to put them on note cards or write them out or type them out yourself.
- Visualize yourself taking the test.

Test Taking Tips

- **Read over all the questions and answer the ones you know first.**
- **On the questions you are unsure of, try to eliminate two of the choices, and then make an educated guess.**
- **Answer any short answer questions or essays questions last.**
- **If you get frustrated put your writing utensil down and relax.**

Self – Advocacy

As a student with a reading disability, I always have problems with comprehending what I read. It also makes me a slow reader because I stumble with words that I am unsure of. Knowing my learning disability and how it works helps me understand the accommodations I need. I am more comfortable about talking to professors or others because I know how to explain my learning disability. With my learning disability I not only have problems with reading from textbooks, I sometimes have problems understanding directions on tests and quizzes. When reading exam questions, I often need them explained to me so I know what the professor is asking on the test. It is important for you to know your disability and how it works because this will enable you to know what accommodations you need and feel confident about talking to people about it.

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