

# Woolf College Consulting



## Special Advice for Special Needs Students

*Services Vary from School to School*

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Does your college-bound teen have a learning difference? That's right – a learning difference, not a learning disability. There's something about the word, “disability,” that suggests that an LD student is not as capable as a student who doesn't have a learning issue. Colleges know that's not the case --- that LD students are often bright, inquisitive and excellent students. They just learn a little differently, so what they really have are learning *differences*.

Then there are the ADD/ADHD students who have attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Also horrible names. Most people think of kids in perpetual motion, and that's what the “H” stands for in ADHD. There's no “H” in ADD; these students are just easily distracted and impulsive. And in one type of ADD, called primarily inattentive, students are actually great at focusing on what they're interested in, although easily distracted by what they're not. Sound familiar? Often, these students find their way in college when they settle on a major, studying something they want to study.

If the high school student in your house has a learning difference and/or is ADD/ADHD (the two often go hand-in-hand), the college search is more time-consuming, detailed and complicated than it is for the student who does not have special needs. That's because the

college search should include finding a college that has the right academic support structure.

Under federal law, colleges are required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that they don't discriminate on the basis of "disability," which includes learning differences and ADD/ADHD. It probably doesn't come as a surprise that colleges are within the law when they provide a minimum level of services. Nowadays, drop-in writing centers abound on college campuses, as do peer tutoring and academic tutoring centers, generally not staffed by special needs specialists. These services are available as part of the cost of attendance at college.

Some schools have a more formal structure for providing services to special needs students, with an office that makes the arrangements. To use these services, students must apply and present supportive documentation showing the need for services. As with everything else on the college scene, the documentation required and the nature of the services may vary, but you're likely to find group tutoring (by a special needs specialist), personal tutoring (often at an additional cost), and even referral to private services in the community. Students have to voluntarily request accommodations (test accommodations, for example) and services, such as skills classes, after they have been admitted to the college.

The most comprehensive programs are easy to identify; they charge an additional fee for services. These programs often have names like the SALT (Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques) Center at the University of Arizona or Curry College's PAL (Program for Advancement of Learning), and are staffed by a director and trained learning specialists. Students usually are required to spend a specific amount of time each week in the program, and there is regular communication between the program staff and faculty.

Admission to comprehensive programs is not guaranteed. Many cap the number of students they can service, and the staff looks closely at an individual student's psycho-educational test report to make sure the services offered can meet the student's needs. Most of these programs also require an interview in order to be considered for an interview.

The application process for these comprehensive programs also varies by school. Some colleges require students to first be admitted to the college before the special needs staff assesses a student's eligibility and admission to its program. That can result in a good news, bad news scenario: You've been admitted to the college but the support staff doesn't think you need the level of services it provides. Still, the staff may be able to refer a student to other providers, on or off campus.

At some colleges, the special needs staff and the admissions staff review documentation simultaneously, and students receive acceptances to both the college and the program at the same time. And some programs are more flexible in their general admission requirements for special needs students.

Finding the right college for a student with LD and/or ADD/ADHD is well worth the effort. With my help, one of my LD students has just started school down south. When her admission letter came, she was as excited as any other student who receives a letter of admission to his or her first-choice college. She loves the school and is secure in the knowledge that she will be receiving the academic support that will enable her to succeed.