

# Planning Guide for Minnesota Students Entering Postsecondary Education Programs



This pamphlet contains information for you and your family on postsecondary education. Postsecondary education includes many kinds of educational and training programs, technical college degree and certification programs, apprenticeship experience, two-year colleges, private trade schools, on-the-job training and universities.

The key to a successful postsecondary education is for you to become knowledgeable about your own accommodation needs, as well as your postsecondary educational rights and responsibilities. As a student with a disability, you can participate in planning your transition from high school to college during the annual review of your IEP or at any other IEP meeting at which you request to discuss this issue. In fact, the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) requires that transition planning be part of the IEP process for all students with disabilities beginning at age 14. If you plan to attend college, preparing for this goal is essential.

### **How do I Decide Which Postsecondary Program is Best for me?**

Minnesota has a wide range of programs and services within our technical colleges, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. Following is a brief example of each to assist you in navigating through the educational system.

#### **Technical Colleges**

Admission to technical colleges is open to anyone who has earned a high school diploma, holds a GED Certificate or successfully proves ability to benefit. Different technical programs have different technical standards (often called pre-requisites) in reading, writing and math which must be met before the student is allowed to enroll. Students not meeting technical standards may be required to take developmental courses before enrollment.

Certain technical programs have exit criteria/licensure requirements which may exceed the initial entrance requirements. Additionally, satisfactory academic progress is required in all programs and may affect financial aid status and academic standing within the college.

#### **Degrees Offered:**

- Associate in Applied Science (AAS)
- Associate in Science (AS)
- Diploma Programs
- Certificate Programs

## **Two-Year State Public College Programs**

The two-year state, community and technical colleges have an open admissions policy, which means you can enroll if you have a high school diploma or a GED. Even without those, you may be admitted if you demonstrate potential for success in college. Standardized tests are not required for admission to two-year state colleges, nor are your high school grades or class rank taken into consideration. After you have been admitted, you will be required to take a test for placement in the appropriate classes based on your reading, writing and mathematics skills.

You have a better chance to do well if you complete a “college prep” curriculum in high school, including at least three years each of mathematics, English, science and social studies. If you did not pass the Minnesota Basic Skills Test at the state level, or the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, you may not be admitted to a program of your choice. You may have to take developmental courses that will not count toward a degree before you can take college-level courses.

## **Four-Year State Public University Programs**

The seven state universities will generally accept you if the answer is “yes” to at least one of these questions:

- Did you graduate in the top half of your high school class?
- Did you score 21 or higher on the ACT standardized test?
- Did you receive a combined score of 1,000 or higher on the SAT standardized test?

Admission to some of the seven state universities may depend on meeting slightly different requirements, so check with the university admissions office for specific details. If you don't meet minimum requirements, you may still be considered for admission under special provisions.

Apply early in your senior year for the best chance to be admitted.

For admission to a state university, you should have completed the following courses during high school:

- Four years of English (including composition and literature)
- Three years of math (two years of algebra and one year of geometry)
- Three years of science (including one year each of a biological and a physical science)
- Three years of social studies (including one year of U.S. History and geography)
- Two years of a single world language
- One year of either world culture or fine arts

If you have not completed a high school curriculum with these courses, you may be required to take specific course work designed to increase your chances for success.

For further information contact the MnSCU website at: <http://www.mnscu.edu/index.html>

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system values diversity in its college and university communities and is committed to ensuring equal access and opportunity to qualified students with physical, learning or psychological disabilities. Buildings are accessible and a wide variety of accommodations are available to help students with disabilities succeed. To request accommodations, contact the disability coordinator at the college or university you wish to attend. Visit [MnSCU.edu/student/disabilities.html](http://MnSCU.edu/student/disabilities.html).

### **Private Postsecondary Institutions**

Entrance requirements at private, four-year, religiously affiliated schools will vary, depending on the specific school you choose. However, a general rule of thumb is that consideration will be given to:

- High school GPA
- ACT or SAT score
- Class ranking
- Letters of recommendation
- Personal essay or statement

Inquire as to the specific ACT/SAT scores or ranking placements your school of interest requires for admission. There may also be something called an “automatic admit” which means you’ve fully met all requirements for admission, no one area is deficient. Or, perhaps the school may call it a “conditional admit” which means that you’ve met one or two of the admissions criteria, but are deficient in the others. Such identification means that you will need to meet certain expectations during your first semester/quarter in order to continue at the institution. Some schools may have such specificity in the admissions process, some may not.

Also, while attending college depends greatly on whether one meets the criteria for admissions, it would be advisable for you to investigate the “exit requirements” as well. Meaning, there may be standards or expectations that one must meet to earn a degree and exit the institution. Exit requirements, graduation standards, and skill expectations are set by the institution. While disability service offices accommodate students, it’s imperative to note that these are reasonable academic accommodations that remove the barriers that exist due to the disability. Alterations of graduation standards, exit requirements, or skill expectations are not accommodations. These standards are not waived, nor are students exempted from meeting them due to a documented disability.

Each student, with or without a disability is expected to meet the performance standards set forth by the institution. Exit requirements that one must meet are often identified as:

- Quantitative Reasoning or Statistics (even if you have an identified math disability)
- Mastery of an identified Math Skill Level (even if you have an identified math disability)
- Writing Skill (even if you have an identified writing disability)
- Speaking Skill (even if you have a psychiatric diagnosis that impacts one's ability to speak in front of people)
- Modern Language Requirement (even if you have a documented disability that may impact mastery of a modern language)

There will also be course and standard requirements within your choice of major/minor that you will be expected to meet. As with the exit requirements, graduation standards, and skill expectations, course and standard requirements within your specific field of study are not accommodated. These standards are not waived, nor are students exempted from meeting them due to a documented disability.

With or without a disability, students are expected to meet the requirements set forth by the college and major department. All students are held to the same standards. Expectations are not lowered due to a documented disability.

### **Disability Services and Information**

Students with disabilities who desire to receive services while attending a postsecondary school are responsible for requesting services from the campus disability service office. Prior planning is the key to ensuring the proper delivery of services. It is recommended that you meet with the disability office staff to discuss the services you have received in the past and the procedures for setting up those services. In order to receive accommodations, you will need to provide the disability service office with current documentation of your disability, which may include your high school special education records and/or a report from a licensed psychologist, disability specialist, or medical doctor. This information is maintained in compliance with federal and state data practices laws.

Self-advocacy is critical to success in college. Colleges and universities are restricted from seeking out students with disabilities due to privacy laws. You are responsible for requesting the services you believe you need; the college or university generally does not provide accommodations until they are requested. Your ability to advocate for yourself is imperative if you wish to access academic supports and/or accommodations at the postsecondary level.

### **Here are a few suggestions:**

- Know yourself and your disability. Before you can advocate for yourself, you need to know how to talk about your disability in a way that other people will understand.
- Know your rights and responsibilities. The college or university must provide services that will allow you an equal opportunity to access and participate in school activities. Please refer to the Office of Disability Services for information about the college's legal responsibilities.
- Know where to go for help. A very important part of being successful in college is knowing when you need help and where to find it. Writing down the names and phone numbers of the people on campus who can help you, including staff at the disability service office, is a good idea.
- Take action. Develop a plan for communicating your needs. While the disability services office can assist you, developing your own communication skills may be very helpful. Consider practicing with a counselor or a trusted friend about using your accommodations before talking with your instructors.

### **How is a College or University Different From High School?**

1. High school students, typically spend six hours per day, five days per week in class. College students typically are in class 12 to 18 hours per week, depending on their course load.
2. The high school academic year is about nine months long. The college academic year may vary depending on the kind of school you attend. It could be semesters, quarters or trimesters. It varies from institution to institution.
3. In high school, time is structured by others, and teachers closely monitor attendance. In college, students arrange their own schedule with an advisor or counselor and must carefully manage their own time.
4. High school students do not always know what courses to take to graduate. In college, you are responsible for knowing what expectations you need to meet for graduation from a particular program.
5. In high school, teachers check students' completed homework. College instructors don't always do that.
6. In high school, teachers might remind students of missed work and provide them with information they've missed when you are absent. College instructors don't remind students of missed work, and they expect you to get notes from classmates for any classes you've missed.
7. In high school, a case manager acts as an advocate. In college students must advocate for themselves.
8. In high school, special education services result from the Individual Educational Plan (IEP). An IEP does not retransfer with the student to postsecondary institution. What was outlined in the IEP for accommodations does not mandate the accommodations you will receive in college.
9. In high school, there is regular parent contact. In college, parent contact is limited by privacy laws.
10. In high school, districts are required to identify students with disabilities and determine what is needed for the student to be successful. Colleges are restricted from seeking out students with disabilities by federal and state laws.
11. In high school, educational and psychological testing is provided when needed. In college, you, as a student, are responsible for providing documentation to the appropriate office that serves students with disabilities.

12. In high school, you are legally protected under (IDEA). In college, civil rights and anti-discrimination laws (ADA, Rehabilitation Act, Section 504 and the MN Human Rights Act) apply.

### **Information for Parents**

College life poses different challenges for students with disabilities. When students enroll in a college or university, they are considered to be responsible adults by faculty and staff. The expectations are that students will assume responsibilities for meeting their class requirements. This added responsibility is coupled with a change in environment. High school is a teaching environment in which students acquire knowledge and skills. A college or university has a learning environment in which students take responsibility for thinking through and applying what they have learned.

Another student responsibility is that of self-advocacy. Students must become adept at realistically assessing and understanding their strengths, weaknesses, needs and preferences. They must become experts at communicating this information to other adults, including instructors and service providers.

Although services will be available to students through an office specializing in services to students with disabilities, students will be responsible for seeking out these services and supports. Good communication skills and knowledge about oneself become crucial to success at any college or university.

Parents can help their son or daughter achieve a smooth transition to college life by considering the following requirements. Colleges don't guarantee success; they guarantee ACCESS to the educational experience.

- Bring in your current documentation when you meet with the disability services office during your campus visit.
- What your son or daughter received for accommodations, as listed on his/her IEP/IIIP, does not dictate the accommodations that will be received at the postsecondary level.
- IEP/IIIPs do not transfer to college.
- IEP/IIIPs alone do not qualify for "documentation" in the sense of what colleges look for as diagnostic assessment information.
- A "review of scores" is not adequate for documentation, especially if those scores are more than three years old.
- Know the college's documentation policy: "Current" usually means the documentation is three to five years old. Disability service providers usually have a policy that documentation for a learning disability will include: cognitive, achievement, information processing measures and fluency measures. A report diagnosing ADHD or a medical diagnosis usually must include: a narrative summary, a complete history, and DSM-IV diagnoses listed on Axis 1.

**What are Examples of REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS That are Provided by Disability Services to Students with Disabilities?**

- Accommodations for placement testing
- Extended time, a quiet place or tape-recorded tests
- Note taking or taping of lectures
- Adjustable tables or custom chairs
- Referral for taped textbooks
- Sign language/oral interpreting
- Provision of and/or orientation to assistive technology

**What Kinds of Services are NOT Provided by Disability Services?**

- Assistance with homework
- Readers for personal use or study
- Individually prescribed devices
- Special college classes only for students with disabilities
- Personal care attendants
- Transportation
- Personal tutoring
- One-on-one paraprofessional support as outlined in the IEP/IIIP

**Must Disability Services Provide Students With all the Accommodations and Services They Request?**

Disability Services are not required to provide academic adjustments or aids that would fundamentally alter the nature of a program or the academic requirements that are considered essential to a program of study or to meet licensing requirements. Additionally, graduation requirements are not altered or adjusted due to a disability. With or without a disability, students are held to the standards set by the institution.

## **What are Individual Accommodations?**

It is important to understand the distinction between accommodations (ensuring access to programs and services) and modifications (making changes to programs and services). An accommodation is a support that gives a student with a documented disability an equal opportunity to participate and benefit from school. Postsecondary educational institutions must provide appropriate accommodations, individually determined and authorized for each unique student based on the impact and manifestations of the disability, including but not limited to:

- testing accommodations
- taped textbooks
- note-takers, readers and interpreters

## **College-Prep Checklist**

It's never too early to get started. Look ahead and take the courses throughout high school that will meet entrance requirements at the college or university you wish to attend. Use this checklist to stay on track in reaching your postsecondary goals.

### **Freshman Year**

1. Develop an understanding of your disability and learning styles and how to explain it so others will understand your needs.
2. Identify transition needs and career planning goals through the IEP process.
3. Learn how to participate actively in your IEP.
4. Prepare academically by planning your course of study.
5. Start saving money.
6. Explore career options (interest inventories, career fairs, discussion with school personnel and parents).
7. Develop skills for academic independence (time management, study skills, note-taking and so forth).
8. LEARN HOW TO LEARN!

### **Sophomore Year**

1. Actively participate in your IEP transition planning with your case manager and IEP team.
2. Continue academic preparation and/compensation strategies, and identify any assistive technology needs.
3. Continue taking courses that prepare you for college.
4. Add to your understanding and use of learning strategies to help you access needed course work.
5. Participate in extracurricular activities and hobbies.
6. Identify your interests and preferences.
7. Meet with your career counselor to discuss colleges and their requirements.
8. Continue to save for college and investigate funding sources.
9. Investigate eligibility requirements and services available through the Department of Employment and Economic Development Rehabilitation Services and other adult service providers such as Human Services Center for Independent Living (CIL) and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) partners.
10. Participate in volunteer and paid work experiences.
11. Visit college and university campuses.

## Junior Year

1. Focus on matching interests/abilities and career goals to appropriate postsecondary education choice.
2. Take classes that prepare you to continue your education after high school. At least three years each of mathematics, English, science and social studies are recommended.
3. Plan ahead and visit your school career center to explore resources including career guides and brochures from colleges and universities. Look for college campuses that have majors in which you might be interested and the kind of campus community in which you would like to live.
4. Continue to participate in your IEP transition planning with your case manager and IEP team.
5. Identify and keep a list of the appropriate academic adjustments and services that you will need in the postsecondary setting and learn how to use them efficiently. (Be sure to include assistive technologies such as electronic devices and specialized computer software).
6. Earn college credits during high school. Thousands of high school juniors and seniors earn college credit at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities by participating in the state's Postsecondary Enrollment Option Program:  
<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/SchSup/SchFin/GenEd/PostSecEnroll/index.html>
7. Consider taking a course to prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Test or for the ACT Assessment (ACT). Visit the website at: <http://www.act.org/aap/disab/index.html>
8. Learn time management, study skills, assertiveness training, stress management and exam preparation strategies.
7. Become skilled at how to advocate for yourself - not everyone will understand your disability or be sensitive to your needs.
8. Identify people to write recommendations for you.
9. Investigate services offered by postsecondary settings and determine which settings match your individual needs and goals.
10. Investigate the availability of financial aid from federal, state, local and private sources.
11. Investigate the availability of scholarships provided by organizations, such as corporations, labor unions, professional associations, religious organizations and credit unions.
12. Contact a Rehabilitative Services (RS) counselor who serves your school to determine your eligibility for RS services. Invite the RS counselor to attend your IEP meeting.
13. Make sure that the documentation of your disability is current. Colleges usually want current testing, usually less than three years old when you begin college.
14. Visit college and university campuses.

## Senior Year

1. Prepare a transition packet for disability documentation that includes: evaluation reports, transcripts, test scores, current IEP, medical records, writing samples and letters of recommendation.
2. Fill out applications. To apply to a Minnesota state college or university, fill out an application to the colleges or universities that offer programs, an environment and a location that fits you best. You can apply online at [www.mnscu.edu](http://www.mnscu.edu) or call toll-free at 1-888-667-2848 to have an application mailed to you. A one-time \$20 non-refundable application fee must be sent with the application form to each place to which you apply. Institutions may waive this fee in case of financial need. Ask the admissions office about its policy. Apply as early as possible.
  - Apply to a four-year university in the Fall of 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
  - You can apply to a two-year college any time before the semester begins, but applying early gives you a better chance of getting into the programs and courses you want.
3. Apply for financial aid in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, whether or not you have decided which college to attend. The free federal financial aid application is available from high school counselors, college admissions offices or on the Web at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). You will be notified about your financial aid eligibility. Look for scholarships, too. College admissions and financial aid offices can help you.
4. Continue to develop your advocacy skills and to refine your study skills.
5. Learn about your legal responsibilities after the age of 18.
6. Plan to visit campuses early in the year.
7. Learn to be interviewed.
8. Role-play college interviews with counselors, family members and teachers.
9. Finalize your transition portfolio so that it contains at least the following:
  - Copies of your psychological and educational evaluation.
  - Transcripts
  - ACT or SAT scores
  - Your current or latest IEP
  - Your medical records (if appropriate)
  - A writing sample or other work samples related to your choice of a major
  - Your letters of recommendation from teachers and employers
  - The current list of academic accommodation services you may need in college (be sure to include assistive technologies).
10. Formal College Visits
  - Write letters to college admissions officers and service providers requesting a visit.
  - Be prepared when you visit colleges to write or talk about your experiences and to take placement tests.
  - Admissions officers will provide information about admissions procedures and financial aid opportunities.
  - Take your transition portfolio with you to share with disability service providers, if appropriate.
  - Evaluate the disability services, service provider and staff.
  - Talk with college students receiving disability support services about their experiences.

11. Schedule an interview/tour with institutions of interest.
12. Compare the various colleges and think about living in the campus community (e.g., housing, social activities, classrooms, leisure activities, athletic activities, comfort level with support service).
13. Prepare your applications carefully, paying close attention to the instructions and deadlines. Be neat. Be accurate.
14. If not done in your junior year, contact the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) counselor to determine your eligibility for DRS services while in college. Jointly develop the Individual's Plan for Employment with Rehabilitative Services Counselor which identifies goals, services and responsibilities.
15. Develop service plans with other adult service agency providers as appropriate

You are the key to your own success. You have the support of your parents, teachers, counselors and other students, but the adventure is yours. If you plan ahead, develop goals and are willing to explore your interests and communicate what you need, who knows all that you will be able to accomplish!

### **Begin planning. "It's your future now."**

This document was a joint Interagency Project with the following teams:

- MNSCU Disability Coordinators
- Minnesota Department of Education State Transition Interagency Committee

