NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE SEARCH FOR STUDENTS WHO LEARN DIFFERENTLY

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“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

- Albert Einstein
KEY TERMS

- **Neurotypical** - what society considers “typical” brain development and cognitive/intellectual functioning.
- **Neurodivergent** - what society considers “atypical” brain development and cognitive/intellectual functioning, e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, autism, ADHD, etc.
- **Neurodiversity** is ALL of us.
  - All brains function differently.
  - This diversity is natural and beneficial for our species.
  - Differences should be accepted and valued, not viewed as a set of pathologies to be cured.

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION
Help students recognize and acknowledge their strengths.
The Prevalence of Learning Differences

• 1 in 5 students have a learning difference
• 1 in 16 have an IEP; 1 in 50 have a 504 Plan
• Millions remain undiagnosed to the detriment of individuals and society (NCLD, 2017)

Post-Secondary Disclosure Rates

• 24% of students with a learning disability
• 25% of students with “other health impairments” (the category that includes ADHD
• 63% of autistic students
Post-Secondary Completion Data (young adults out of high school for 6 years):

- In the general population, only 51% completed a post-secondary school.
- Among neurodivergent students:
  - 38% of students with learning disabilities
  - 35% of students with autism
  - 34% of students with other health impairments (includes ADHD) completed a post-secondary school.
- In one study at a large state university, students who waited until after their first year to request accommodations had 3.5 times the risk of not graduating within six years.

Improve the odds.
ACCESS AND UTILIZE SUPPORTS!
LEVELS OF SUPPORT IN COLLEGE

ADA COMPLIANT
- Meets ADA requirements for providing access
- Accommodations vary by institution
- No cost
- Small number of staff
- Student MUST advocate for services

COORDINATED SERVICES
- Accommodations plus some skill building services
- Universally available services
- Better student/staff ratio
- No cost
- Student MUST advocate for services

STRUCTURED PROGRAMS
- Comprehensive academic, tutoring, & skill-building support
- Weekly meeting with a learning specialist
- Full-time specialized staff
- Fee-based
- Less student advocacy required

LD COLLEGES
- Accommodations & beyond access supports embedded
- Comprehensive academic, social pragmatic, & executive function support
- Full time support staff
- No additional fees
- Often used as a springboard.
THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE
HOW THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE CHANGES

• K-12, the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) vs. the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Post-secondary
• Success vs. Access
• K-12, schools take the lead. Post-secondary, student take the lead.
  • The importance of self-advocacy
  • Students must understand and be able to articulate their learning difference
• IEPs and 504 Plans have no legal weight after high school
  • All students have the same course requirements and homework
• K-12, all teachers and staff are aware of a student’s disability status. Post-secondary, only those instructors a student chooses to notify will know. This information is considered confidential.
• Parental involvement encouraged K-12. In post-secondary, student assumes primary responsibility.
# HOW THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE CHANGES

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<tr>
<th>SECONDARY</th>
<th>POST-SECONDARY</th>
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<tr>
<td>● IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)</td>
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<td>● Schools take the lead</td>
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<td>● Parental involvement is encouraged — parents are often the “advocate”</td>
<td>● Students assume primary responsibility for their education</td>
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<td>for their children.</td>
<td>and must self-advocate.</td>
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<td>● All teachers and staff are aware of a student’s disability status.</td>
<td>● Only instructors a student notifies will be aware of their status.</td>
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✓ Transition Planning – When transition plans specify the accommodations a student will need, students are much more likely to both access and utilize them.

✓ A good college match means understanding what you expect, need, and want from your college years.

✓ Aligning these factors with what a college offers and delivers.

ACCESS IMPACTS SUCCESS!
MATCHING WHAT YOU NEED WITH WHAT A SCHOOL OFFERS
THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF KNOWLEDGE

- Who am I and what do I want from my college experience?
- What type of learner am I?
- In what environment do I learn best?
- What are my strengths & weaknesses?
- What accommodations and supports will best ensure my chance of success?
THE PROCESS

• WHAT DO YOU NEED?
  • What supports are in a student’s IEP or 504 plan?
  • Has the student consulted their counselor, teachers, and family for input?
  • Develop a list of accommodations and supports you’re looking for.

• WHAT DOES A SCHOOL OFFER?
  • Work with your advisor to start the list of schools.
  • Explore college websites: - disability services & universally available services
  • K&W Guide to Colleges for Students With Learning Differences
  • Call/email Admissions or Disability Services
  • Determine location of Disability Services
  • Talk to students and parents. It’s not just about what a college promises. What do they deliver?
DISCLOSING
WHY DON’T STUDENTS DISCLOSE?

• Fear of stigma
• The desire to create a new identity
• A large percentage don’t believe they have a learning difference.
• Unfamiliarity with disability services, what’s available, and how to access
• Inadequate transition plan from high school.
• Underestimating the importance of accommodations to their success
• Lack of sufficient transition planning
DISCLOSING: WHEN AND WHY

• WHY DISCLOSE?
  • It’s the only way to receive accommodations

• WHEN?
  • Accommodations must be in place for the beginning of the semester
  • Options
    o During the application process
    o After an admission decision

My Recommendation: Disclosing early provides the best opportunity to evaluate services and attitudes and experience how easy or hard it is to access the services that will foster success.
ACCOMMODATIONS: AN ONGOING PROCESS

• Every semester, your student will need to request accommodations from disability services and inform their instructors.
• Students should have regular meetings to discuss the effectiveness of their accommodations.
• Students should consistently monitor the extent to which their accommodations are providing access to course content.
• If access is diminished at any point, SELF-ADVOCATE.
BEYOND ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- Student Life & Campus Connectedness
- Availability of Social Pragmatic Support
- Mental Health Services
- Career Readiness Support
MORE QUESTIONS

✓ Is assistance 1:1 or in a group?
✓ Who does the academic advising for students who have LD’s?
✓ Can students take a reduced course load?
✓ Is the college test-optional?
✓ What are the college’s retention, graduation, & placement rates for students with LD’s?
IS COLLEGE THE BEST NEXT STEP?

- Transition Programs
- GAP Year
- Travel
- Volunteer
- Job Internships
  Training
“The barrier to accessing education is not intrinsic to the student but is created by a mismatch between the student and the educational environment.”

Shea, Hecker, Lalor, “From Disability to Diversity” (2019)
Location: Putney, VT, 125 acres

450 Students from 38 states & 12 countries

6:1 Student/faculty ratio
8-12 average class

11 Associates & Bachelor’s Degree Programs, + concentrations

50%: The number of students who transferred to LC in search of a better college experience.

87% bachelor’s degree students are employed or in graduate school
LANDMARK SUPPORT

✓ Wraparound, fully integrated support services
✓ No additional fees.
✓ Academic advising – weekly meetings
✓ Drake Center for Academic Support - Faculty-run. Executive function coaching available.
✓ Educational technology
✓ Counseling & health services
✓ Residential support system
✓ Therapy Dog Program
✓ Social Pragmatics Support for Students with Autism
✓ Career Connections
WHY LANDMARK?

- **Multiple Paths:** Online Dual Enrollment, Summer Programs, Bridge Experience, College START & Online Associate Degrees, TaC, Associate and Bachelor’s Degrees
- Universal Design for Learning
- **Perspectives in Learning:** Students learn how they learn
- Community
- Landmark College Institute for Research and Training (LCIRT).
- Center for Neurodiversity
- Centers for Diversity & Inclusion
- **Activities:** Sports, Speaker Series, Clubs, Social Events, Trips off Campus
- **Study Abroad** led by LC Faculty.
THE TRANSITION AFTER COLLEGE
Over the past decade, employers have begun to embrace the benefits associated with a neurodiverse workforce.

Companies with neurodivergent employees outperform their competitors, averaging 28% higher revenue plus higher shareholder returns. (Hyland and Connolly, 2018)
QUESTIONS

www.landmark.edu