



# Five Questions to Ask About Post-Secondary Programs

## 1. What laws protect an individual with disabilities after high school?

Once a student leaves the K-12 education system (through graduation or age), they are no longer protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (**IDEA**). Instead, they may qualify to receive accessibility supports under the Americans with Disabilities Act (**ADA**) - but these are not guaranteed. In a post-secondary program, students must seek out and request accommodations and accessibility services from the school or organization where they are enrolled.

## 2. How does a student in a post-secondary program access accommodations?

In order to receive accommodations, a student must register as a student with disabilities at the school's Office of Accommodations or Student Support Services. The student will need to provide documentation of their disability. Unlike in high school, colleges do not pay for the evaluations that students need to document their disability, and it is up to the student to share and advocate for their disability-related needs.

The registration process looks different at each institution. Some schools support students through individual contact and others use a more technology-based approach. Because this takes time and you will want to find the best fit, it is important to begin this step as early as possible.

We are glad to be located near colleges with very active and supportive Offices of Student Accommodations. Some of them are listed below.

[Reynolds Community College](#)

[Courage to Succeed](#)

[Brightpoint Community College](#)

[Longwood Life](#)

[George Mason University](#)

### **3. Who supports a student with disabilities in a post-secondary program?**

There are no “case managers” in college. The people who work in the Office of Accommodations are on your side, but it is up to the student to keep the relationship going. They won't follow up with students and track their progress in the way a high school might. Their job is to provide access, not guarantee success. Besides the Office of Accommodations, the school or program may provide services free of charge that can also offer support. These include student counseling, tutors, mentors, and a writing center.

### **4. What types of post-secondary educational programs are available to an individual with disabilities after high school?**

Some young adults with disabilities attend traditional college programs. Others choose specialty programs designed to develop life or career skills. When thinking about post-secondary education, it is important to remember college does not have to be a four year journey. There are many degree and non-degree programs that take however much time an individual needs to complete them.

### **5. What rights do parents and guardians have when their student is enrolled in a post-secondary program?**

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (**FERPA**) protects the privacy of information about students. This law, combined with strict university policies, may make it difficult for parents to speak for their student. Young adults always have the right to tell their school to communicate with their parents. Having power of attorney also helps with access (for more information on POA, guardianship, and other legal protections check out our [5 Questions to Ask About Guardianship](#) resource). Colleges are not trying to withhold information from parents or make things unnecessarily difficult, but they need the student to take the first steps in advocating and communicating.