

# TRANSITIONING

# Transitioning to College

## From Dependence to Independence

### The Situation and the Challenge

The transition from high school to the postsecondary educational environment is a challenge for any student. There are new places, new faces, and whole new ways of doing things. Not only that, but transitioning students suddenly find they must advocate for themselves instead of having programs and services planned for them.

For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, the challenges are even greater. The reasons for this are complex, but it is enough to say that students may not have had as much exposure to a generalized knowledge of society. Appropriate counseling addressed to specific issues can overcome this knowledge gap to a large degree.

### Typical Issues Facing Students

How do I decide on my career goal?

How do I choose the right college?

How do I apply to college?

What type of accommodations do I need?

How do I get accommodation services?

### Self Assessment and Career Choice

1. The first step in the process is for the student to determine his/her wants and needs. To accomplish this, the student must go through a process of self-analysis. Numerous methods are available which will help the student focus on specific fields. Interest inventory tests, vocational education, and aptitude tests are available through school counselors, vocational rehabilitation (VR), or from private testing agencies or psychologists.
2. The second step is to understand the nature of work in possible careers. This information can be found in a variety of ways. Any library has books (such as the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* or *DOT*) which list jobs and describe what each job entails, along with the requirements for entering that field. Career and job fairs are good sources of information. They give the student an opportunity to meet prospective employers, discuss possibilities, and ask questions face to face. With some basic information in hand, the student can then make appointments for on-site visits. Visits to real work sites allow the student to ask workers who do the type of work being considered questions about the various jobs.

3. Decisions as important as choosing a career should not be made without consultation. Who should the student consult? A good place to begin is with the student's high school counselors and teachers. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors often have the most up-to-date information, as well as being able to guide a student in the proper direction. And, of course, the student's own parents and family are good sources of opinion, guidance, and information.

### Choosing a College

Choosing a college is a job in itself, and it's not accomplished overnight. Research into colleges needs to begin 2-3 years **before** high school graduation. If the student has determined a preferred career, college choice must start with finding colleges that offer curriculum tailored to that career. High school and college libraries usually have numerous catalogs from colleges both nearby and far from home. Browsing through these catalogs can give the student a general idea about a particular institution and can quickly identify schools offering the student's preferred major. *College and Career Programs for Deaf Students*, a joint publication of Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, can be a valuable resource in selecting a college.

Does the college have a program and services for students who are deaf and hard of hearing? If so, when was the program established? Do they already have interpreters, free tutors, notetakers, and assistive devices? How are the notetakers and tutors selected? Are they trained? Are interpreters state-screened or nationally certified? How many deaf students are currently enrolled at the college? Does the college have deaf students every year or only once in a while? How many deaf students have attended the college in the past? How did they like the college and the services it provided to them? All of these questions should be asked to the college's representative or counselor when the student goes to visit the campus.

If the college doesn't have a program for deaf students but the college is nonetheless where the student wants to go, the student may have the additional burden of educating the college about needs and accommodations. The student may need to seek out qualified support services such as interpreters, tutors, and notetakers. Good advocacy skills on the part of the student will ensure that qualified services are sought and obtained.

Distance from home might also be a factor. How far is the college from home? Will the student need a car, either to commute to a nearby school or at a school far away? Is commuting even an option? The need for a car will depend in large part on whether the student will live in a dorm or an apartment.

Once the necessary research has been done and a college selected, it would be best if the student actually visited the college campus. This gives the student an opportunity to see the environment for himself, to meet counselors and academic advisors, to talk with other students in the chosen major, and to learn firsthand about what support services are available and their quality. An enjoyable trip to a comfortable environment, to a friendly, accessible place, and a positive experience, provides a feeling of confidence that greatly helps the transition to college life.

### **Applying to College**

Students must be aware of the requirements for admission to their college of choice. What is the minimum GPA (Grade Point Average) that must be achieved in high school? Are tests such as the SAT required? Does the college require a high school diploma or completed GED? Almost all colleges require a high school transcript, the college's own application form, and an application fee. What is the deadline for having all application materials to the college?

The best way to find out exactly what the college requires is to meet with the college counselor. In any event, the student will want to meet with the counselor when it's time to register for classes. The counselor also will be able to review the financial aspects of attending college and give advice on where to find money.

### **College Finances**

Before making the final decision to attend college, the student must know what it's all going to cost. Tuition isn't the only expense. The student must figure on books and supplies, living expenses (whether in a dormitory or apartment), and transportation. Apartment living tends to be more expensive because of the additional utility and food bills.

Who will pay for school, books, and other expenses? The student's parents? Can the student help with regular SSI money or savings? Will VR be funding part or all of the student's education? Most students need help in one form or another. Many apply for financial aid in the form of loans or grants. Sometimes it's possible to earn a scholarship. And, of course, many students work part-time or full-time jobs.

Scholarships, loans, and grants must be applied for as soon as possible. The student who waits until the last minute will have a hard time getting financial aid because the money will already have been distributed to other qualified students who applied early. Financial Aid Forms (FAF) are available from college registrars or from financial institutions. College counselors will know of work-study programs that suit the student's major. The most important thing to remember is to apply early.

### **Accommodations - What and How?**

What type of accommodations does the student need to request? Will a sign language interpreter be needed? What about notetakers, tutors, assistive listening devices, TTYs, or other support?

Whether a college has these support services already in place or not, the student should first talk with a college counselor. Perhaps there is a student support service or even a deaf services staff. Any of these places would be a good starting point.

### **Remember: It is the student's responsibility to ask for accommodations.**

1. Try to know in advance what will be needed.
2. Research, investigate, and gather information before you arrive at school.
3. Visit the college before the semester begins.
4. Fill out all the necessary forms.

For more information, contact:

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