

Questions to Ask Disability Services

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Students (or prospective students) often contact an office of disability services for specific reasons. For example, a student knows he or she has a certifiable disability and that necessary accommodations are warranted. Another reason for a student to contact the office might be that they suspect they might have a certifiable disability or condition that warrants accommodations. Another student might contact the office because they feel overwhelmed by coursework and need help with managing the load. Another common scenario is that a student might feel that making the office of disability services aware of their disability may open up opportunities to them that would otherwise not exist.

It often helps to generate a list of questions you wish to ask your office of disability services before meeting for the first time. Sample questions include, but are certainly not limited to:

- What services can you provide me?
- What is the communication structure of your office of disability services? Specifically, to whom should I speak if I need help or have a question? When and how do I contact this person?
- Do you honor the accommodations recommended in my existing IEP, or do you require the creation of a new one?
- I have trouble with _____. Can you help accommodate me with that?
- Are professors and other staff aware of disability regulations on campus?
- What efforts does the school make to prevent, resolve, and protect students with disabilities from acts of prejudice, hate or threats of harm? To whom do I report such behaviors?
- I have a mobility issue and/or trouble getting from place to place. Do you have paratransit available?
- Are there assistive technologies that can help me, and if so can you provide me with a copy?
- How long does this process take?
- Do you have a good working relationship with the residence hall staff?
- What kind of disability related peer support is available to me? Ex: organizations, programs, locations, events, social communities.
- I have need for regular talk therapy. Is there an office on campus that can help me with that?
- I take prescription medications. Does the university health center have a pharmacy, and if so, could you put me in touch?
- How much or how little would you advise me to disclose about my disabilities, and to whom?

Some common issues for students on the autistic spectrum include, but are not limited to:

- Difficulties with juggling different priorities from managing college life to coursework to extracurricular activities to roommates and other obligations
- Sensitivities to noise and/or specific fragrances or odors
- Difficulties with finding quiet places to study or to take exams
- Managing food allergies and similar sensitivities
- Managing mental health and locating appropriate help and resources

- Dealing with bullies and/or insensitive or uneducated professors and staff
- Dealing with feelings of isolation, loneliness, and/or homesickness

Ideas for dealing with the above issues include contacting the disability services office and making an appointment to talk to someone. Another idea is to look for ideas and tips that might address your issues by searching the Internet. Also, look for advocacy groups run by students on the autism spectrum and make it a point to attend a meeting. Surely someone else on the spectrum might be having the same issues. Perhaps they might have an idea or a helpful resource. Public libraries are another avenue. For example, if you experience difficulty with being assertive about your needs, perhaps you can find a book that can coach you and provide you with some useful tips. Whatever you do, don't give up! You've come too far to let fear keep you from your dreams!