



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn



High School to College: Access Supports Through OPWDD and Accommodations

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What is Advocates for Children (AFC)?



AFC is an independent agency that protects the rights of all NYC students in K-12 Education

Our Services:

- Helpline: **1-866-427-6033** (Mon-Thurs, 10am – 4pm)
- Guides and resources: www.advocatesforchildren.org
- Workshops and trainings
- Free legal services to low-income families



Today's Training



- Introduction
- College Programs & Search
- College Disability Accommodations
- ACCES-VR
- OPWDD Supports and College Access





What is a Disability?



- A Disability is defined as an impairment of a major life function such as seeing, hearing, walking, thinking or caring for oneself.
- A disability may visible or invisible.
 - Physical and Mental Conditions
 - Emotional Disabilities
 - Learning Disabilities
 - Medical Condition
 - Short Term Disability



Statistical Data



Students with Disabilities Attending Institutions of Higher Education

- Now more than ever, high school students with disabilities are planning on attending postsecondary institutions to continue their educational endeavors (including vocational and career schools, two- and four-year colleges, and universities).
- The National Center for Education Statistics (the U.S. Department of Education's federal agency for data and research), states that 88% of colleges reported enrolling students with disabilities in the 2017-2018 academic year, or more than 905,000 students.
- CUNY has over 10,000 students registered with disabilities enrolled throughout the 25 campuses.



Statistical Data



STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED BY THE NYC DOE

- There are 1,047,895 students in the NYC school system, the largest school district in the United States (2022-23)
- Of those students: 20.9 percent (~220,000) are students with disabilities

SOURCE: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>



Statistical Data



NATIONALLY MORE THAN 20% OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS REPORT SOME TYPE OF DISABILITY

National Center for Education Statistics

Table 3.12.

DISABILITIES: Percentage of undergraduates who reported some type of disability and, among those who did, percentage distribution of main type of disability, by control and level of institution and selected student characteristics: 2015–16

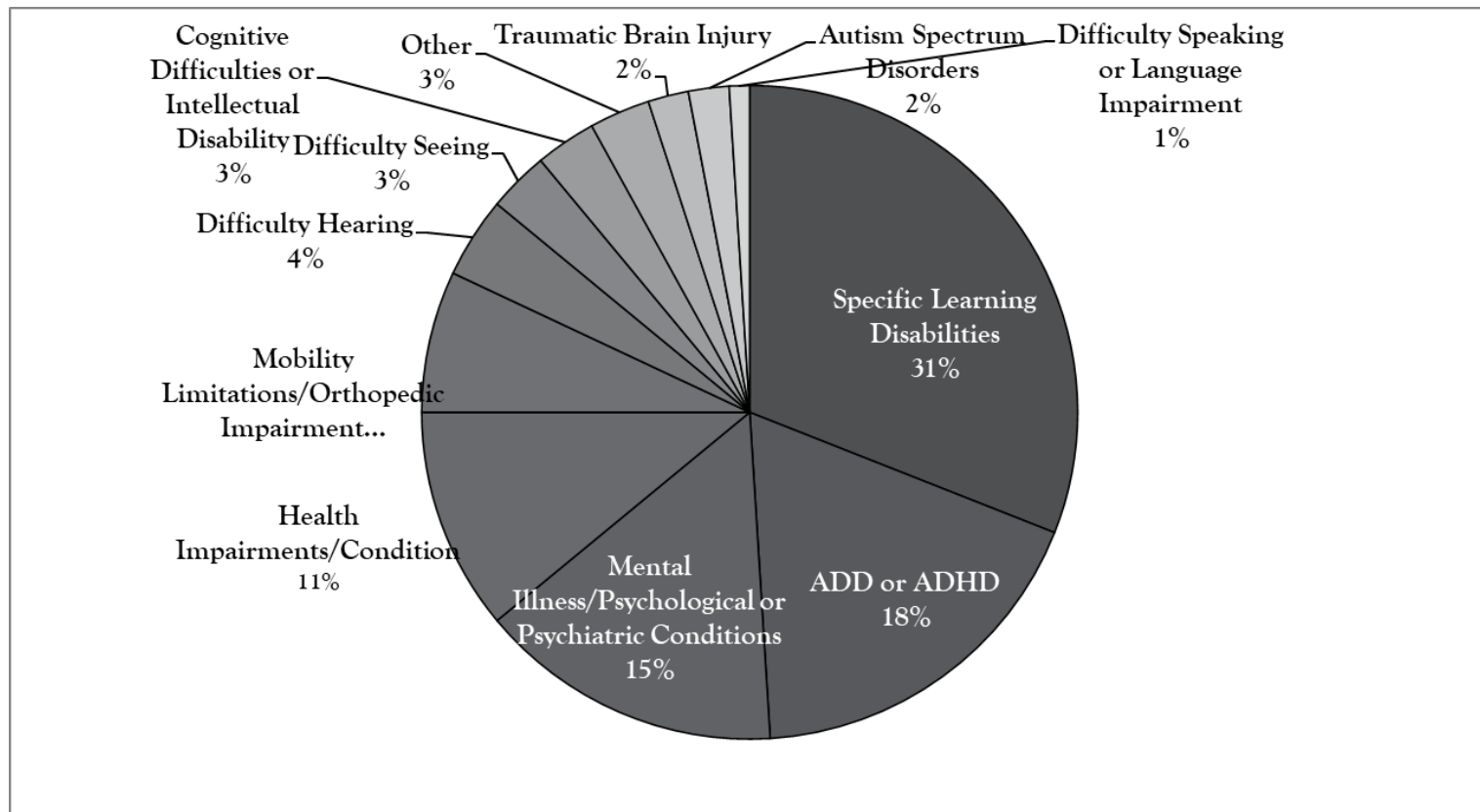
Control and level of institution and selected student characteristics	Any disability ¹	Main type among students with disabilities							
		Visual	Hearing	Speech	Ortho- pedic	Specific learning disability	Attention deficit disorder	Mental illness/ depression	Other ²
Total	19.5	4.2	3.9	1.3	5.9	3.5	26.4	40.0	14.7
Type of institution									
Public	19.3	4.1	3.6	1.4	5.5	3.8	27.6	39.9	14.2
Less-than-2-year	20.9	‡	8.1 !	‡	‡	‡	31.6	37.4	16.2
2-year	20.8	4.6	4.5	1.3	6.2	4.7	27.2	36.0	15.5
4-year	17.7	3.4	2.4	1.4	4.5	2.8	28.1	45.0	12.4
Non-doctorate-granting	18.4	3.9	2.4	1.9 !	5.8	3.6	25.0	42.4	15.2
Primarily subbaccalaureate ³	20.0	3.8 !	2.1 !	1.6 !	5.8	5.0	22.8	41.3	17.7
Primarily baccalaureate	17.0	4.0 !	2.6 !	2.3 !	5.7	2.1	27.3	43.4	12.6
Doctorate-granting	17.4	3.2	2.4	1.1	3.8	2.4	29.7	46.3	11.1



Statistical Data



CUNY Enrolled Students by Disability Category



College Programs & Search





Planning for College



All students are likely to face some challenges as they begin their college experience

Students with disabilities will need the same skills as any other college freshman plus the ability to compensate for their disability

Readiness for college extends beyond academic skills and achievements

Unrealistic expectations of the types of services in college and being uninformed about the process to access accommodations, can leave students and parents surprised and unprepared



Planning for College



Admissions

- Each college has the right to determine its own admissions policies
- Students must meet the same admission criteria, academic & technical standards required for participation in a class, program or activity

Study Expectations

- In college, students will generally need to study/work on assignments at least 6 hours per week for each class (x 4 classes = 24hrs/per week)



Types of Program



College Matriculation Program

- Degree bearing
- Students must meet the same admission criteria , academic & technical standards required for participation in a class, program or activity

College Experience Program

- Non-credit bearing
- Generally, no financial aid (but may be partly OPWDD funded)
- No degree
- Sometimes integrated setting, other times not



College Programs – Related to Disability

General Education with Accommodations

All schools must provide ADA accommodations

General Edu with Accommodations and Supports

Learning Specialists, Coaching, Resource Centers, etc

Mitchell College, Adelphi University BRIDGES Program

Individualized & Customized Programming

Tailored Instruction and Universal Design Learning Curriculum

Landmark College, Melissa Riggio Program / CUNY Unlimited

Additional Considerations:

- What are student's needs?
- Campus inclusion and community
- Student goals and outcomes

General Colleges with Support Programs



For Learning Disabilities

- Hofstra University
 - [PALS Program](#) – academic coaching
- Adelphi University
 - [Bridges Program](#)
- Mitchell College
 - [Bentsen Learning Center](#)
- Dean College
 - [Arch Learning Community](#)
- Iona University
 - [Comprehensive Assistance Program \(CAP\)](#)
- Manhattanville College
 - [Pathways & Connections Program \(PAC\)](#)
- Marist College
 - [Learning Support Program](#)

For ASD

- Daemen College
 - [College Autism Transition Support \(CATS\) Program](#)
- Nassau Community College
 - [ASPIRES Program](#)
- Pace University
 - [OASIS Program](#)
- Rutgers University
 - [College Support Program \(CSP\)](#)
- Ramapo College
 - [ENHANCE Program](#)
- Fairleigh Dickinson University
 - [COMPASS Program](#)

Specialized Disability College Programs



Specialized LD College Programs

- [Landmark College](#)
 - Fully tailored for students with learning disabilities
 - Close to special education
 - Multiple centers of support
- [Beacon College](#)
 - Fully tailored for students with learning disabilities
 - College readiness programs
 - Multiple support programs

Pre-College Transition Programs

- Molloy College
 - [Molloy Opportunity for Successful Transition \(MOST\) Program](#)
 - [CONNECT Program](#)
- Mitchell College
 - [Thames – pre-college transition program](#)
- Transitions USA
 - [Transitions College Program](#)

College Experience Programs



- Generally for students with I/DD
- Usually require student mentors or direct support professionals
- Non-degree programs
- Main resource for these programs is Think College – see directory --
<https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>

-
- [CUNY Melissa Riggio](#)
 - Partnership with AHRC
 - Several campuses
 - Modified curriculum
 - Student coaches/mentors
 - Rockland Community College
 - [College Steps Program](#)
 - University of Mount Saint Vincent
 - [Bridge Program](#)

Bridges to Adelphi Program



- Academic, social, transitional, and vocational support program for neurodiverse Adelphi students
- Coaching for students in
 - **Vocational:** Job coaching, Internship search, Vocational assessments
 - **Social:** Peer mentor, Social clubs, Social interaction coaching
 - **Academic:** Executive functioning, Procrastination anxiety, Organizational support, Assignment completion support
- Fee for service: \$5,095 per semester
 - OPWDD self-direction can pay for this program for two years
 - ACCES-VR can pay for all or part of this program for four years

Hofstra University PALS



Executive functioning and academic support program for students with disabilities

- Most often ADHD or learning disabilities
- Not for students with mental health as primary disability or students who need content tutoring
- Once accepted to Hofstra, students apply to the PAL program – only available to incoming students

Services:

- I:I Learning Specialist meet with once per week to map out assignments and create a roadmap for success
- Study hall once per week
- PALS will coordinate with others on campus if necessary: counseling, advising, or career services
- Social events

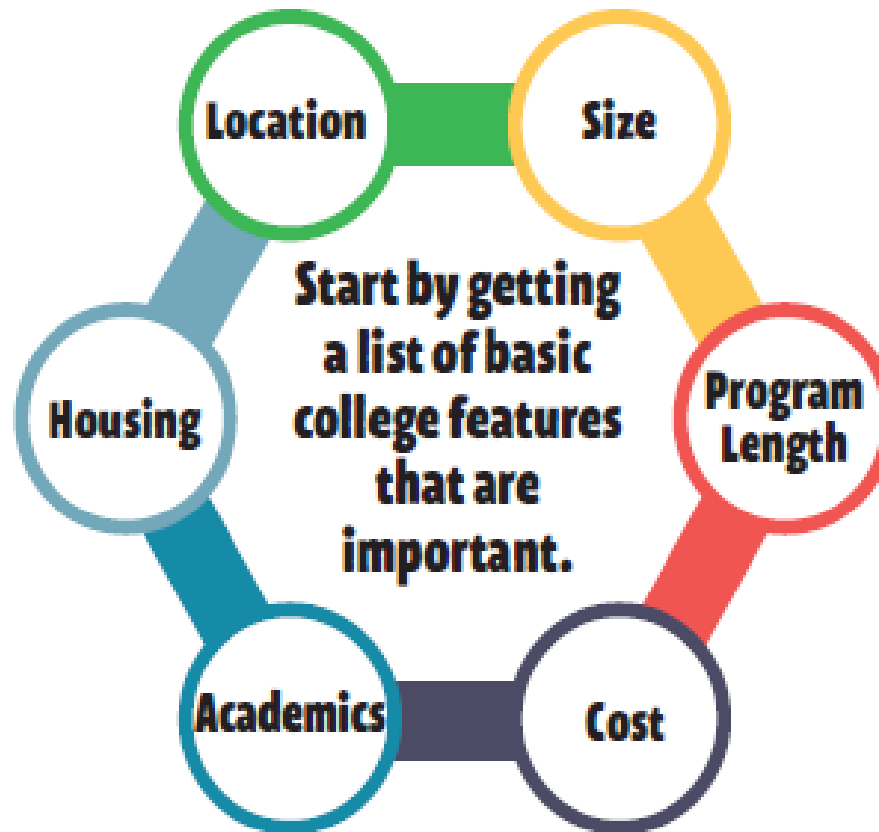
University of Mount Saint Vincent Bridges



- Two-year, non-degree program providing college experience for students with disabilities
- Take non-credit bearing courses focused on employment, goal setting, independent living, public speaking, fitness, and more
 - Can audit credit-bearing classes throughout the University
- Students live on campus, integrated into the residence halls and receive a peer mentor
- Internship program to gain work experience in industries of interest



College Search





College Search



Admission



Fees, Tuition, &
Financial Aid



Inclusion with
the Campus
Community



Academics



Housing



Supports



Program
Administration



Communication
with Parents



Career
Development



Program
Outcomes



Issue Spotting



Is the student interested in college?

Does student meet requirements to apply to college?

What are student's interests? Which program?

Strengths and challenges related to disability

Accommodation needs – can needs be met?

What do the evaluations and assessments say?

Program requirements

Career consideration and goals

Financial considerations & budget

Independent living ability

Which college is right?



Information Gathering Tips



Very important to know and get answers
- lots of variation between schools

Disability offices may be reluctant to discuss services and specific requests before enrollment

Request informal meeting
– ask what is offered generally

After admission but before enrollment (decision) may be a good time for discussion

Consider reaching out to other students

College Access: Commonly Asked Questions



- **Office of Disability Services**
 - How regularly do I meet with my counselor?
 - Do you offer [this] accommodation?
- **Physical Accessibility:**
 - What's the layout of the school?
 - Is there accessible housing?
- **Supports**
 - What type of support does [this] center offer?
 - What social clubs and academic supports are available?
 - Are mental health and counseling services available?
 - ✦ Where is it? Is it free? Who are the providers?
- **Social**
 - Are there other students with [specific disability] who go here?
 - ✦ SWD population:? What's the community like? Any support groups?
 - ✦ Graduation rates for SWD?

How Can Students Prepare?



Participate in all transition planning meetings at school this provides an opportunity to make choices and improve problem solving and decision-making skills

PRACTICE educating others about their disability/learning style and what's needed to be successful in an academic setting (self advocacy skills)

PRACTICE asking questions at home, in school and in the community

Start using a weekly/monthly planner/ cell phone (calendar, timers, reminders etc.) to improve time management/organization skills

Expand independent living skills (meal preparation, banking, personal care, use of public transportation options, making appointments)

Attend college events, visit campuses while classes are in session

College Disability Accommodations





Disability Services and Accommodations

Secondary vs College



- As required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), post-secondary schools and programs must be accessible to students with disabilities. The type of accommodations and available services varies from school to school.
- Under ADA, you are now eligible for services and must advocate for your needs. This is a shift from high school, where you were entitled to accommodations and services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Differences between secondary education (high school) and college
 - IDEA vs ADA
 - Environment
 - Curriculum
 - Supports



Disability Services and Accommodations

Secondary vs College



- Differences between secondary education (high school) and college
 - IDEA vs ADA – “good education” vs accommodating tasks/activities
 - Environment – specialized vs general education (example: class size)
 - Curriculum – customized vs fundamental alteration
 - Supports – special education vs accommodations (“equal access”)
 - Administrative or financial burden (additional consideration)
- Most IEP services are not offered in college
- Your IEP is not determinative of what services you’ll receive
 - Only serves as supplementary documentation/evidence

IDEA → ADA



IDEA (birth - graduate/age 22)

- Entitlement (Student Rights)
- IEP (Individualized Education Program)
 - Special education setting
 - Related services
- No cost to families
- Parents are involved
- Annual IEP meeting

ADA - Post-secondary (all ages)

- Eligibility (Meet Criteria)
- Self-disclosure
- IEP retires (no longer active)
 - No special education services
- College supports
 - Office of disability services
- Students need to register
- Reasonable requests
- Burden on student
- Increase in responsibility



College Accommodations - Generally



- All accommodations are **individualized** and based on the specific criteria of the student's needs
- Colleges and universities must look at each individual disability and the **functional** impact of the disability for each student
 - Case-by-case and class-by-class
- When evaluating a student's request for accommodations, the overall objective of the law is to afford "**equal access**" to the opportunity
 - Cannot create unfair advantage
- Postsecondary institutions are not required to lower or substantially modify essential standards or academic requirements, or make adjustments that would **fundamentally alter** the nature of a service, program, or activity.
 - or that would result in an undue financial or administrative burden
- Temporary vs permanent disabilities



What is a “Appropriate” accommodation?



An appropriate accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course, program, service, activity, or facility that enables qualified students with disabilities to have equal opportunity to attain the same level of performance or to have equal benefits and privileges as are available to similarly situated students without a disability.

Temporary accommodations are offered to students who may have undergone surgery or experienced a temporary physical injury that requires assistance with course work or the ability to maneuver around campus. To qualify for this one-time accommodation, the student must provide documentation from a medical source describing the nature of his or her injury and indicating the duration of the impairment.



Common College Accommodations



- Extended time on exams and quizzes
- Testing in an alternative, distraction-reduced location
- Breaks during exams
- Calculator or laptop access
- A note-taker, reader, and/or scribe
- Access to audiobooks and E-books
- Accessible specific classroom seating/layout
- American Sign Language interpreters
- Assistive Technology (iPads, smart pens, calculators, auxiliary aids, etc.)
- Facilitated Consultation with Faculty/Advocacy
- **Accommodations for Activities and Experiential Learning**
- **Housing Accommodations**

Lots of
variation
across
colleges



Common College Accommodations



- Referrals to and follow up with college and external resources (Counseling, ACCES-VR)
- Student is provided with advanced copies of overheads and PowerPoint presentations
- Permission to tape-record class lectures
- Closed captioning
- Priority course registration
- Access to voice recognition and text-to-speech software
- Class materials in alternative format (Braille, Digital File, Recorded)
- Regular meetings with an accessibility counselor or learning specialist
- **Reduced course load and extended time to complete degree requirements**
- **Remote/virtual classes and instruction**



College Accommodations That May be More Difficult to Obtain



Extensions for
specific assignments

Alternate test
format (e.g. multiple
choice, true/false,
essay)

Tests and directions
read out loud, or
read and repeated

Reduced course
load and extended
time to complete
degree requirements

Remote/Virtual
Classes



Additional Support Services



Learning
specialists

Writing
center

Tutoring

Assistive
technology
training



Assistive Technology...



Kurzweil
Believe you can



livescribe™





Admission Process & Accommodations



You can request accommodations as part of the admission application process

Students with or without disabilities must meet academic standards and requirements

Disability Service Offices do not participate in the admission or application process

Accommodations during admission process are different from services offered after enrollment



Additional Supports



Admissions
assistance



Financial aid
assistance



Mentoring and peer
network programs



Recreation and
social programs



Dormitory support



Course auditing or
online coursework



Educational support
such as peer
tutoring

College Disability Accommodations Request Process





Accommodations Request Process



Steps to Apply For Reasonable Accommodations

1. The student decides what to disclose and what accommodations to request.
2. The student then submits application and documentation to the college's accessibility office.
3. The student will meet with an accessibility counselor to discuss available accommodations.
4. A decision on the request is rendered.
5. Once accommodations are agreed upon, the student or office will inform professors and teaching staff of which courses they are requesting accommodation.
6. The student applies for specific testing accommodations 1-4 weeks before they are needed.
7. Repeat as necessary.

Apply early! 4-6 week review time

Documentation Guidelines



- According to the *Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)*, documentation should include the following elements:
 1. The credentials of the diagnosing professional.
 2. A statement identifying the disability, date of the most current diagnostic evaluation, and the date of the original diagnosis.
 3. A description of the diagnostic tests, methods, and/or criteria used, including specific test results (including standardized testing scores), and the examiner's narrative interpretation.
 4. Recommendations for accommodations, adaptive devices, assistive services, and/or support services and strategies.

Confidentiality



All colleges or universities will treat data on students with disabilities with confidentiality in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Disability information and documentation is housed separately from students' academic information.

Professors will be informed of accommodations granted, but not health or medical information.



Standard of Review for Accommodations



Temporary vs
permanent disabilities

Different disabilities

Different
accommodation types

Different classes and
activities

Different “functional
limitation” impacts

Strength of
documentation

Lots of
variation
across
colleges
–
No
uniform
standard
of review

Lack of or Insufficient Documentation



Granting Temporary Accommodations



Referring students for evaluation



Accommodation counseling and guidance

Student Rights and Appeal



Students have the right to appeal a denial of disability accommodations.



Review the denial letter and gather supporting documentation.



Contact the disability services office for guidance on the appeals process.



Be prepared to present your case, follow up on the progress, and seek external resources if needed.



Initiate the appeal following the college's established procedures.

ACCES-VR





What is ACCES-VR?



- **A**dult **C**areer and **C**ontinuing **E**ducation **S**ervices-
Vocational **R**ehabilitation
 - A state agency that helps people with disabilities explore their job interests, find a job, and keep it.



Eligibility



Must be at least 14

Have a disability

Most people with an IEP or 504 Plan qualify

US Citizen

or non-citizen with documents that allows them to work in US

Additional criteria:

- the disability creates a barrier to employment
- student can benefit from rehabilitation services
- vocational rehabilitation services are required to achieve employment



Additional Criteria & Info



- After initial review:
 - Must be approved for each service
 - Related to and justified by **career goals**
 - Reasonable expectation of completion/benefit
- Presumed Eligibility – certain benefits like SSI
- Considerations
 - Already working (underemployed or another career goal)
 - Simultaneous services (e.g. while working or in college)
 - Residential setting (e.g. community, group home)
 - IQ threshold
 - Travel trained



Financial Need Criteria & Info



- Financial Need
 - Some services are based on you or your family's financial need
 - Income review and resources review (household)
 - Public benefits recipient (certain exemptions)
 - If you have income and/or assets you may be asked to contribute to the cost
 - Financial-based services vs Non-financial based services
 - One-time services (e.g. auto & home modifications)
- Comparable Benefits
 - Must apply for all available benefits that may reduce the cost of the service; eg. for college you will be asked to apply for financial aid including TAP and PELL



ACCES-VR vs OPWDD



ACCES-VR Services

- Pre-ETS
- Tuition assistance
- College supports
- Competitive employment
- Vocational counseling
- Work-related expenses
- Transportation

OPWDD Services

- Supported employment
- Job coaching
- Internships
- Assistive technology
- E-modifications
- Job placement
- Evaluations & assessments

- Medicaid HCBS
- Services
- Medical services
- Therapeutic services
- Care coordination
- Community habilitation
- Day habilitation
- Residential programs
- Respite
- Home care
- Housing



ACCES-VR vs OPWDD vs Others



- “Entitlement” vs Determined-To-Be-Eligible Programs
 - Entitlement – Special education, OPWDD, Medicaid, SSI, SNAP, VA benefits
 - Qualifying Eligibility – ACCES-VR
- Eligibility Criteria
 - ACCES-VR – broader disabilities
 - OPWDD – developmental disability, before age 22, permanent, etc
- Services Covered
 - OPWDD covers more types of services including healthcare, personal services, day services, housing, etc
 - ACCES-VR only employment-focused services (still a long list)
- Work Environment & Wages
 - Integrated and competitive employment* (Supported employment is limited)
- You can get both ACCES-VR and OPWDD at the same time



Application Process



Get an
application

Interview
with a
counselor

Turn in
application

Create an
IPE

Including disability documentation –
preferably recent (within 2-3 years)



Needed Documents

- Identification

- anything with a picture on it; a school ID would be fine



- Birth certificate

- Social Security card

- Diploma (if possible)



- School transcript

- IEP or 504 Plan

- Evaluations

- Disability documentation

- ACCES-VR Application



Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)



Written plan that lists your specific employment goal, outlines the services ACCES-VR will provide and the steps you need to take to achieve your employment goal

Can be written by Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) with input from you, or you can write it

Should consider how your disability affects your ability to work, type of job, ability to do the job, and work history

Must be mutually agreed on (& signed by) you and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC)

IPE can be revised and updated



Services available through ACCES-VR



During High School - Youth-Aged Services

- **Pre-ETS (Pre-Employment Transition Services)**
 - Community work experience
 - Career exploration assessment
 - Career counseling and guidance
 - Self-Advocacy skills
 - Work readiness training
 - Work-based learning opportunities & internships
- **Internships (paid)**
 - Public benefits counseling
 - Tests to identify your skills, interests, and challenges (e.g. vocational, psychological, or assistive technology evaluations)
 - can be done older as well



Services available through ACCES-VR



After High School Services (Ages ~18 to 25)

- Vocational counseling and guidance
- Job training at a vocational school, college, or on the job
- Job coaching (sometimes called “supported employment”)
 - OPWDD eligibility (prior to age 25)
 - Under certain conditions
- Coaching supports – at job or internship
- Help with transportation costs (including accessible transportation)
- Help with school, college & vocational training costs, like tuition, fees, or books
- Internships (paid)
- Funding for college supports, like note-takers or tutors
- Technology/equipment you may need to work
- Adaptive driver training
- Physical and mental restoration services
- Medical care for acute conditions arising during the program
- Modifications to homes, vehicles and worksites



Services available through ACCES-VR



Job Placement Services (Any Age)

- Community work experience
- Job search & placement
- Job readiness training
- Work-based coaching & supports
- Employment customization
- Extended job placement services
- **Work Try-Out & On the Job training**
- Occupational tools and equipment
- Occupational and business licenses



Funding for College



Degree needed to achieve employment goal –
Ability to complete college-level courses

Covers tuition, books, transportation and more –
Maximum contribution, based on CUNY/SUNY rates

Based on Financial Need –
Must apply for comparable benefits (e.g. FAFSA, grants)

Lots of documentation required and rules –
Full-time, timeframes, grades, acceptance



ACCES-VR Tips



Go into the meeting with some idea of what you want

- Even if you don't know the exact field you want, go with a list of general interests

Communication is **very** important

- The ACCES-VR counselor will not chase you. If you have questions or haven't heard from the counselor in a while, you should reach out – follow up & engage



Services & Approval Tips #1



Individualized based on applicant profile!

The more you share with your counselor, the more likely to receive the requested services – be specific

**MUST HAVE A CAREER GOAL IN MIND –
Must identify an occupational/job title**

FINANCIAL NEED REVIEW



Services & Approval Tips #2



APPLY EARLY - Significant wait times and processing time

Services and payments are not retroactive

Assessments and/or progress toward work goal can play important role

Must work with an approved ACCES-VR provider

College Funding Resources



Pell

TAP

Scholarships

ACCES-VR

Commission
for the Blind

OPWDD

OPWDD Supports and College Access



Self-Direction



In College, OPWDD Self-Direction can be used for

Coaching

Personal Care

Transportation

Housing

Tuition and
Academic
Instruction
Not
Covered

Transition
Programs

Housing Subsidy



Housing Subsidy can be used for dormitory and off-campus living

- Obtain “Preliminary Approval” for housing amendment
 - Valid for 90 days and can get a 90-day extension
 - Fill out preliminary housing packet
 - Care managers should do this but often do not. Broker or housing navigator can assist
 - FI or care manager must submit the preliminary packet
- Complete full budget amendment
 - Broker opens housing tab and inputs all required numbers and calculations

Housing Subsidy Tips



- Housing Subsidy is available with Self-Direction and traditional OPWDD
- Life Plan is critical: ensure it reflects a desire to live independently, in a dorm, around other students, etc.
- Start early as the preliminary approval process can take months
- Student pays 30% of monthly income towards rent
- Subsidy is based on “Fair Market Rent” in the college’s location
 - If student lives in Manhattan and attends school in Binghamton, the subsidy will be based on FMR in Binghamton.
- Dorms often have 9–10-month leases but the subsidy assumes a 12-month lease
 - Often need to pay up front and get reimbursed by OPWDD
 - If parents are contributing to rent, use an ABLE account to avoid SSI income eligibility issues

Housing Enabling Supports



“Home enabling supports” are tech-enabled home supports for independent living



Usually smart-home automation

Smart home prompting
Remote check-ins
Alerts



Can receive through self-direction or traditional services

Individual Directed Goods and Services (IDGS)



The IDGS Category (\$32,000 per year cap) can be used for:

- Academic/Executive Functioning Coaching (through ComHab)
 - Tip: Frame as organizational support, time management, assignment tracking, email management, scheduling, self-advocacy
 - Not tutoring!!
- Household Items
 - Microwave, laundry, cleaning services
- Community Classes
 - Must be non-credit bearing but can be used for things like social skills, hobby, and executive functioning classes.
- Transportation (related to waiver or self-directed services)
 - Useful if commuting to college
- Paid Neighbor
 - Someone to check-in and provide informal support/connection

IDGS Transition Programs



IDGS category for transition programs can pay for fee-based programs

- Adelphi Bridges
- Mount Saint Vincent Bridge Program
- Thames at Mitchell College
 - Tip: Ensure that the program provides materials or a letter that describes the service as “transition” rather than “tutoring”

Transition Program:

- Must be non-credit bearing, non-degree bearing, non-matriculating
- \$800 per month - \$9,600 per year for two years
- ACCES-VR can cover transition programs for a longer than two years or more than \$9,600 per year
- Transition category cannot cover housing

ComHab



ComHab Category can be used for:

- Personal care needs (for independent living skills building)
- Independent living supports (shopping, laundry, etc)
- Campus navigation
- Academic and Executive Functioning Coaching
 - Tip: Write the need into the Comhab staff action plan and then hire for that need
- Comhab staff can help with obtaining accommodations and communicating with the office of accessibility
 - Tip: Frame this as “support” rather than “tutoring”
- Hourly rate: Minimum wage up \$50 (varies)
 - Important due to varying qualifications needed

Other Than Personal Services (OTPS)



The OTPS Category (\$3,000 per year cap) can be used for:

- Transportation (catch-all, not only medical or services)
- Software that could be helpful for classes
 - Assistive technology software like screen readers and speech-to-text
- Utilities like internet and phone service
- Food and clothing
- Transition costs
 - One-time moving costs

Technology



High-Cost / Dedicated Assistive Technology

- Separate Waiver Service
- Stand alone OPWDD application process
- What it is: Wheelchairs, dedicated AAC, specialized van lifts

Off-the-Shelf Technology & Software

- Category: OTPS (Other Than Personal Services)
- What it is: Software or standard technology that helps with a disability-related need
- Restriction: Standard computer hardware (laptops/iPads) not allowed

Technology Support & Training

- Category: IDGS (Community Classes or Coaching)
- What it is: Learning how to use the technology
- Examples: Community class on “How to Use Excel” or comhab staff trained on teaching students how to use technology

College-Related Self-Direction Tips



- **Function > academics**

- Frame needs around *independent living, organization, communication, self-management, and community participation*
- Avoid “tutoring,” “academic remediation,” or “degree completion”

- **Tie back to the Life Plan**

- Every IDGS/OTPS item should clearly connect to: Safety, Stability, Independence, Community integration, and College persistence

- ✦ **Start Amending Budgets Early – can take months!**

- ✦ **Justifications should be detailed: avoid “helps with college”**

- ✦ Do not assume that the reviewer understands college demands

- ✦ **OTPS: State-funded v. IDGS: Medicaid-funded**

Bottom Line: OPWDD can support college success, but only when:

- Supports are framed as **functional, not academic**
- Requests replace **parental scaffolding**
- The Life Plan clearly explains **why these supports are necessary**

FAQs



- **Can OPWDD support college attendance?**

Yes. OPWDD can support *housing and functional supports* related to attending college. OPWDD does not pay tuition or academic instruction.

- **Can remote or online college be covered?**

Yes. OPWDD Self-Direction can fund support services for remote college programs. Housing Subsidy does not apply unless the student also lives independently. Tuition for remote coursework itself is treated the same as in-person for funding purposes (not covered).

- **Can programs or colleges outside of New York be covered?**

Yes. OPWDD-funded supports do not need to be physically delivered in New York, as long as:

- The person remains enrolled in NY Medicaid / OPWDD
- The Care Manager and Fiscal Intermediary remain NY-based
- Services are included in the Life Plan, Staff Action Plan, and approved budget

- **Can I use OPWDD funds if I attend college part-time or take a semester off?**

Yes. Self-Direction budgets are designed around the individual's needs and goals, not a fixed enrollment status. However, your Life Plan and budget must reflect the current reality (e.g., reduced ComHab hours if not in school that semester). Budget changes require an amendment.

Student Testimonial



Kyle Hurysz

- Utilized OPWDD self-direction in graduate school at Columbia University



Links & Resources



- IncludeNYC College Guide: <https://includenyc.org/college-is-possible-guide/> & <https://includenyc.org/help-center/resources/college-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities/>
- Think College: <https://thinkcollege.net/>
- Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD): <https://www.ahead.org/home>
- National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD): <https://nccsd.ici.umn.edu/>
- Center for Disability and Education at the University of Rochester: <https://www.rochester.edu/warner/cde/lets-talk-about-college/>
- United Spinal College Guide: <https://unitedspinal.org/top-20-colleges-for-wheelchair-users/>
- CUNY main page: <https://www.cuny.edu/current-students/student-affairs/student-services/disability/>



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