

STRATEGIES AND TIPS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

COLLEGE SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES



Includes a unique listing of disability-friendly colleges in the United States!

- ▶ Provides strategies for adapting to college life and obtaining necessary services
- ▶ Offers college planning guidance from students with physical disabilities

A **Prufrock Press** Book

CHRIS WISE TIEDEMAN

ROUTLEDGE


**COLLEGE SUCCESS
FOR STUDENTS WITH
PHYSICAL
DISABILITIES**



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CHRIS WISE TIEDEMANN

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of my best college friend, Rick Whitesell, a college success before the law guaranteed him even a high school education; to all students with disabilities who pursue postsecondary education today; and to the wonderful colleges that go out of their way to help those students succeed.



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Thanks also to the disability services directors and professors from disability-friendly colleges across the country who graciously agreed to be interviewed for their insights into college success: Cheryl Amoruso, University of Houston; Jacob Karnes, University of Kentucky; Larry Markle, Ball State University; Jeffrey Vernooy, Wright State University; and Julie Walton, East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. Thanks also to those disability services directors and staffers who contributed suggestions and resources to this project.

I sincerely hope that this effort to illuminate the elements making up a successful college experience for students with physical disabilities will encourage more colleges to offer supports beyond what the law requires.



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INTRODUCTION

Why a Book About College and Physical Disability?

FOR the student making the transition from high school, college may represent the first point of passage into the adult world. For those contemplating college following a few years in the workforce or military service, college may be the key to a new occupation or an enhanced quality of life. But whatever their varied and individual reasons for attending college, all students must adjust to a brand-new environment there, according to a 2008 report by the National Council on Disability (NCD).

Yet students with disabilities often enter college unprepared for the new responsibilities and challenges they will face, the report noted. This is because they are often poorly informed about the dramatic differences between their prior educational experiences and the realities of college life—higher academic expectations, greater personal responsibilities, and much different services for people with disabilities, to name a few. Often, too, they have not been prepared to meet the changes they will encounter upon reaching the college campus.

OUR FAMILY’S EXPERIENCE

Our family experienced this firsthand when my son Tommy, who has cerebral palsy, began searching for a college in 2003 and eventually attended three very different types of American colleges. We found information about college success for students with physical disabilities

remarkably limited. No books, websites, or college guides. We learned, too, that existing college guidebooks and websites were not written specifically to answer the questions of students with physical disabilities, and even school guidance offices had little information relevant to their special needs. Filling this information gap became an urgent priority for us 2 years before Tommy's high school graduation. Tommy did his senior project in high school on "colleges that accommodate people with disabilities." But even when he was accepted at college and began classes, we often found ourselves working out our own solutions "on the fly" to issues we should have been aware of much earlier.

Eventually we learned the questions to ask, the people to see, and the right way to do things in college (and sometimes, the *wrong* way to do things). So we decided to start a website where families could learn which colleges went beyond the requirements of the law in providing assistance to students with physical disabilities. Our website, <http://www.disabilityfriendlycolleges.com>, provided a place for students, families, and professionals to read about and discuss these issues. By then, however, we had learned that finding one's best college was only the first mile marker on the road to success in college. A student with physical disabilities must also learn to make use of the college and its disability services and to advocate for his or her own very individual needs.

HOW THIS BOOK CAN HELP YOU

The stories of the students you will read about here prove that students with disabilities *do* experience college success, but they must begin the college search as early as they can, understand how college will be different from high school, learn solid self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and, if possible, plan and prepare for that transition from the early years of high school through the first semester of college.

This book is written for prospective college students, their families, and those who work with them. Its purpose is to provide an introduction to the full range of ingredients in college success, from a student's earliest participation in the IEP process to the time when she regularly and easily discusses her accommodations with her college's disability services office and professors.

Students will learn about their rights under the laws governing education and disability, the meaning and importance of self-advocacy, and

perhaps most important, the dramatically different responsibilities and expectations that come along with becoming a college student. They will also learn how having a physical disability affects such college preparation basics as admissions applications, financial aid, and standardized testing. This book will discuss the types of academic and personal accommodations available in college and how to make sure students can get what they need. Finally, each chapter also contains insightful advice from college disability service specialists; resources such as sample forms, planning checklists, and timelines; interviews with college students who have physical disabilities; and profiles of some of the most disability-friendly colleges in the U.S.

Readers who have already completed high school may wish to begin with Chapter 2. Chapters 2–6 cover the college issues mentioned above. Chapter 1 focuses on using the high school years and the IEP process to prepare to go to college with a disability.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Students exhibit great variety, and students with physical disabilities are no different. Some students may prefer a college that offers personal services and has hundreds of students with disabilities. Others may prefer to be one of the crowd at their local community college or to pursue an esoteric major at an Ivy League school. All are valid options, and all require that the student understand the college ethic and get ready to meet its requirements for success.

Along the same lines, this book also recognizes that students with physical disabilities can have very different types and combinations of impairments. There is no “one size fits all” recommendation, and students will need to select their college and their services with their own specific needs in mind.

TALKING TO THE EXPERTS

As well as being the mother of a student with a physical disability, I am a professional writer/editor with experience as a journalist, communications manager, and freelance writer. This book approaches post-secondary education and physical disability from the perspective of the

student and her family, but it is supported by extensive research with college students and disability service specialists at colleges across the country.

Detailed interviews with four wonderful students appear at the end of each chapter. Kelly Lynn Berger, Dustin Gilmer, Lindsey Newland, and Tommy Tiedemann discuss their experiences with everything from taking the SATs to obtaining personal care services on campus.

Kelly Lynn Berger is a student at the University of Kentucky. She is a journalism major who has congenital muscular dystrophy. Dustin Gilmer, a telecommunications major, attends Ball State University in Indiana. Dustin has polyostotic fibrous dysplasia, also known as Albright syndrome, a brittle bone disorder that also keeps him from growing normally. Lindsey Newland received her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Kentucky following her injury in an auto accident. The accident resulted in traumatic brain injury with partial paralysis on the left side of her body. She studied social work with a focus on gerontology. Tommy Tiedemann (my son) is a student at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, where he majors in psychology. As noted, he has cerebral palsy. Tommy has also attended Chattahoochee Technical College and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. He has therefore experienced three very different types of campus: a technical college, a school known for its extensive services for students with disabilities, and a large state university. These are four smart, frank, and funny young people who never hold back as they bring to life the issues explored in this book.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for the warmth of their affection and support during the year I spent writing this book. No one understands better than Joe and Tommy how important it is that college be made accessible, in as many ways as possible, to those who desire a postsecondary education.

This book was written to help engender in all students the confidence to make good choices and thoroughly enjoy the beauty of the college years. I hope that through reading it, students will recognize that success can come in the form of good grades or a job, but also and more long-lasting, as personal growth, self-knowledge, and an awakened interest in learning.

CHAPTER ONE

PLANNING TO SUCCEED IN COLLEGE

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.—Benjamin Franklin

As a student who also has a physical disability, you are already aware of the important role that planning plays in your life. The same is true if you are close to someone who has a physical disability. For example, you know about the importance of parking near curb cuts, giving yourself extra time to get ready for school in the morning, or looking for hotel bathrooms with roll-in showers or grab-bars. Your Individualized Education Program (IEP) at school is, in fact, a plan for your entire K–12 education.

For students going on to college, however, planning does not stop with high school. There are no IEPs in college, but planning becomes even more important because the laws regarding accessibility and accommodation are much different from those that apply to high schools, with the student as chief advocate. Other changes kick in when you advance to college, as well. Perhaps the most important of these is the degree of maturity and responsibility required of successful college students.

In this chapter, you will begin to design a process that will prepare you to find your best college—and to succeed there.

Planning is one of the most important aspects of making a successful transition from high school to college—and the student should always be at the center of that planning process.