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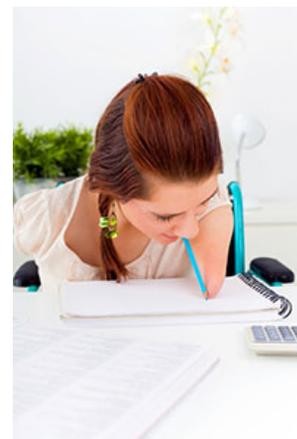
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## Postsecondary Education & Training

The biggest question students face when leaving high school is what will be next. When students leave high school, they go in many different directions. For an increasing number of students with both high and low incidence disabilities, the next step may be postsecondary education and training. Postsecondary education and training are for students who want to continue to learn in another environment after high school. Reasons for pursuing further education differ but often include obtaining credentials in a field of interest, experiencing life away from home, or securing a better paying job. Postsecondary options are varied and may include public or private universities, colleges, community colleges, career/technical schools, vocational/trade schools, centers for continuing education, campus transition programs, and apprenticeship programs. Today's students may access traditional or online formats as a means of obtaining the education they will need to expand their opportunities and meet their career and life goals.



Transition Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) are an extremely important part of planning for postsecondary education and training. The IEP teams must prepare students for the challenges, demands, and rigor of higher education. Remember, we want our students to graduate from these institutions, not just be accepted. In order to increase the likelihood of success, students need to be college and career ready, aware of the differences between high school and postsecondary education, and able to use skills related to self-advocacy and self-determination.

*“What am I supposed to be doing with all of this free time?”*

*–College freshman*

### College and Career Readiness

One of the first steps all teachers should take to prepare students for [college and career readiness](#) ([http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/college\\_career\\_readiness/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/college_career_readiness/index.shtml)) is to help them identify career clusters or career paths of interest. Why? Let's look at two examples. First, a young woman goes to work in the human services field as a cosmetologist, but previously failed to identify that occupation as her career goal while in high school. Unfortunately, she missed the opportunity to take the cosmetology courses available at her high school and had to pay for them through a private vocational school (trade school). In addition to having to pay for classes, it also took her longer to begin working in her chosen field. Next, we have a young man who failed to think about careers before leaving high school and accumulated a great deal of debt going to a four year college only to later choose a career as a brick mason. In this scenario, the question was not if he had the education he needed, but whether it was the right education for the career he chose. This young man spent a great deal of money to enter a career that does not require a bachelor's degree. Like the previous example, this young man's entrance into his field of choice was also delayed.



(<http://www.printfriendly.com>)

While secondary students are not expected to know their exact career choice, it is critical for them to begin learning about occupations within clusters and narrowing down their selections. This decision becomes the basis for many more high school decisions. For example, career choices influence a person's need for postsecondary education and training which in turn influences the type of diploma a student earns. In Virginia, it is generally accepted that the most appropriate diploma option for students planning to enter a four year college is the Advanced Studies Diploma, while students planning to enter a community college or career/vocational/trade school could earn a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma. Career choices also determine the plans of study (academic and career) for middle and high school.

In addition to learning about careers, students benefit from learning about themselves in order to become college and career ready. Encourage new extracurricular activities, volunteer experiences and community participation to further explore, identify and develop individual passions. Students should know their strengths, preferences, interests, needs, and skills. By comparing the information gathered through formal and informal assessments with the skills and strengths required by the career clusters that interest them, students can further develop or refine their career choices.

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## Differences between High School and Postsecondary Education and Training

There are many [differences between high school and postsecondary education \(http://www.going-to-college.org/campuslife/discovering.html#highschool\)](http://www.going-to-college.org/campuslife/discovering.html#highschool) for students with disabilities. One of the main differences is the change from entitlement under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to eligibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The IDEA is an education law that requires public schools to identify the educational needs of students with disabilities and provide a free and appropriate education for those students. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability and helps to ensure that students have equal access to every aspect of the college's programs, services and activities. At the college level, there are no special education teachers or case managers who provide services; instead, the college must provide appropriate accommodations to ensure it does not discriminate against a qualified person with a disability.

Another major difference is that students must advocate for themselves in postsecondary education. In high school, students often rely on parents, family members, and teachers to get the services they need. Once in college, they need to talk with the college personnel in charge of academic accommodations and their professors in order to get their accommodations in place. Academic accommodations are individualized but may include extended time on tests, priority registration, alternative textbooks, testing in a limited distraction room, or a notetaker.

Students leaving high school and entering postsecondary environments need to plan for the diverse climates and cultures of higher education, higher academic expectation, and increasing independence. Some students find the strategies they successfully used to compensate for their disabilities in high school are not effective in college. A failure to adapt to these differences can lead to low grades, academic probation or eventually dropping out. Additional differences between high school and college include changes in required documentation, parental roles, academic expectations, and social environments.

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## The Role of Self-determination in Preparing for Postsecondary and Training

Self-determination skills are a set of personal skills that include accepting a disability and how it affects learning, understanding which support services are needed, knowing how to describe one's disability and advocating for supports, and having the determination to overcome obstacles that may be presented. Of critical importance is gaining an understanding of how to access and use accommodations in postsecondary education and training. Students do not have to disclose their disabilities in college but if they want to receive accommodations, they must follow the institution's process. Although each college or program may have different guidelines, here are some general steps for getting accommodations:

- **Students** must contact the person in charge of accommodations, often called the Disability Support Services (DSS) Coordinator, on campus or in their training program and register as a student with a disability by providing current documentation of the disability. Usually IEP or 504 forms are not considered documentation. Check the college's website for the handbook for students with disabilities where the documentation requirements can often be found.
- **Students** must discuss accommodation needs, such as the accommodations that were used in the past, what has worked, and what the student thinks he/she will need while in college, with the Disability Support Services (DSS)

Coordinator.

- **Disability Support Services Coordinator** (or the person in charge of accommodations) will review the documentation provided and determine if the student is eligible for services.
- **Disability Support Services Coordinator** (or the person in charge of accommodations) will determine what accommodations the college or university will provide, if it is determined that the student is eligible for services. The coordinator will write a letter informing professors of authorized accommodations.
- **Students** must give their accommodation letters to professors and be prepared to talk with each professor about how to receive accommodations. It is always the student's choice as to whether or not to disclose his/her disability and receive accommodations.

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### **[More Resources \(../resources/postEd.html\)](#)**

Virginia Commonwealth University (<http://www.vcu.edu>)  
Center on Transition Innovations (<http://centerontransition.org/index.html>)  
1310 West Main Street  
P.O. Box 842011  
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2011  
Email: [transition@vcu.edu](mailto:transition@vcu.edu) (<mailto:transition@vcu.edu>)  
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