



How to Succeed in College

by Dria Fearne

As a disabled student-Attention Deficit Disorder and mild dyslexia-I was a little apprehensive about going to college for fear that it would be too difficult. Fortunately, college is not the academic nightmare guidance counselors and teachers make it out to be, but rather feels like the next logical step after high school-you will not fail if you put in the effort, especially if you take advantage of the following pointers.

Disabilities Services Office

- Visit before you choose which college to attend.

This allows you to feel out the waters and decide if you can get the services you need. Visiting UCLA's Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) was a deciding factor when I chose the school, because I knew the specialists were dedicated to helping every student succeed, and I've had a very positive experience with them.

- Take care of your paperwork (documentation) ASAP

There are no IEPs in college, so it is your responsibility to go into your disability services office to sign up for services-nobody is going to track you down to provide you with the accommodations you need. Also, if you are learning disabled you have to make sure your documentation is current - it's only good for five years-because otherwise you may not be eligible for services. I recommend renewing documentation during the senior year of high school, because most universities won't pay for it. Some schools do (Cal State Fullerton for example), but LD testing is a process, and you may not have it done before exams start popping up, in which case it will be a nightmare receiving accommodations. Also, make sure your documentation states everything you may need (e.g. tape recorder for lectures, computer for exams, a notetaker, etc.) even if you haven't been using those services previously.

- Services Offered

UCLA offered services include test proctoring (which allows for extended time on exams, as well as providing me with a private room and a computer), notetaking services, tutoring, adaptive equipment, books on tape (for the blind and dyslexic), interpreters, real-time captioning, and van service. Services are only given if it is applicable to the individual's specific disability.

Getting Classes

- Priority Enrollment

Lots of schools have priority enrollment for students with disabilities. Use it!

- Your Class Is Full

If you don't get a class you want (or are waitlisted) show up on the first day because a lot of people don't. Also, if it's a course you absolutely need to take (to graduate, etc.) some professors will take pity on you and add you even if the class is full.



How to Get the "A"

- Get to Know Your Instructors

Use your professor or teaching assistant's (T.A.) Office Hours (a time set aside each week for students to wander in and ask questions about the course), because it's an opportunity to be more than a face in the crowd. Also, you can get extra help in the class, and the material that your instructor talks about is probably what's going to be on the exam (cut your study time in half!). Also, talk to you T.A. about an upcoming paper and give him a draft to look over and give you input on-in lecture classes it's the T.A. that gives you the grade-so you know what he wants and then you'll get a better grade. If you're in a big lecture course you also need to talk to the professor to set up accommodations (your Disability Services Office should give you a letter for your professor to break the ice) for classes and/or exams-a professor with whom you've established a rapport is much more willing to meet you halfway.

- Study Environment/Style

Where do you study most effectively? Maybe in your room with music on (no TV!), or in the library with absolute silence. Make sure you know where you study best and stick to it-I go by myself to the quietest library on campus (not the main one, which is really social), so I have no distractions. Also, can you cram for exams the night before, or do you need to study a week ahead of time in smaller increments? I, like many LD students, cannot cram for an exam and retain any information, so instead I study for a week or so prior for an hour a night.

- Learning Style

The way you learn best-auditory, visual, or kinesthetic (or tactile) learners. Auditory means you learn best by hearing, visual by seeing, and kinesthetic by doing. Teaching styles tend to be more geared toward auditory and visual learners, making it more difficult for kinesthetic learners to succeed-coincidentally most LD students are kinesthetic learners. For kinesthetic learners I recommend taking a little non-distracting object to class for your non-writing hand (especially if you're a compulsive pen clicker), such as a koosh ball or silly putty, to channel the excess energy.

I have to say that my disability has played a positive role in the transition from high school to college. Yes, I said "positive," because many of the people that I have meet in college skated through their entire high school career, while I always had to go that extra mile for the grade, and it is that tenacity that has made a world of difference in this academic environment.

Word to the wise: I do recommend going into your respective disability services office with documentation in hand (if applicable) and a smile on your face, because you are going to see a lot of those people over the next four years.

Dria has Attention Deficit Disorder, dysgraphia, and a specific learning disability affecting language acquisition. Her plans are to attend law school after finishing her undergraduate degree. Dria is a third year political science major at UCLA, where she is heavily involved in both the Office of Residential Life and the Office for Students with Disabilities. Feel free to e-mail her with any questions, comments, or suggestions at dria@ucla.edu.