

Accessibility

INSIDER

A Comprehensive Guide to College
for Students with Disabilities



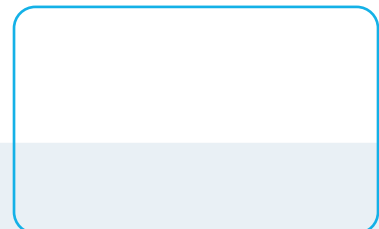
Laws and Your Rights



Advocating for Yourself



Transitioning to College



Granite Edvance, formerly the NHHEAF Network, is a 60-year-old nonprofit whose mission is to support NH students and families in navigating their education and career pathways. We offer college and career planning support at no cost, as well as scholarships, grants, and a private student loan. Learn more: GraniteEdvance.org



What's Inside

This guide will walk you through what you can expect when transitioning to college. We'll talk about your rights, how to request accommodations from a college, where to find additional resources, and much more!

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Information is up to date as of 2026. If changes occur, the most recent Accessibility Insider can be found on GraniteEdvance.org/resources.

Welcome!

Congratulations — you are thinking of going to college! If you have a disability, you might be wondering what changes to expect. Each college is different, but all schools have something in common: They cannot discriminate against anyone due to a disability. U.S. schools are responsible for making their courses, campuses, activities, and services accessible to people with disabilities. This guide will help you understand the laws affecting students with disabilities, plan for college, and get the support you need. Looking for more information on college admissions or financial aid? Check out our Admissions Insider and Financial Aid Insider!



About Granite Edvance

Granite Edvance (formerly The NHHEAF Network) helps NH students prepare for college and careers. Our team shares their knowledge through free workshops, presentations, and individual appointments, helping thousands of students every year. We make college and career planning as easy as possible so that students can reach their goals with confidence and excitement. We also work with school counselors, colleges, and community and business partners to reach as many students as we can. All NH students are welcome to use our free services!

REAL STORY SPOTLIGHT

Finding the leader hiding inside her

Hattie Cavallaro had no intentions of getting involved at college. Starting her freshman year at age 24 due to health issues, her plan was to “get in, get my diploma, get out.”

That changed when Hattie was asked to participate in New England College’s peer leader program, teaching an introductory course to college freshmen about college life skills.

“I decided to give it a try and it honestly changed everything for me,” said Hattie, who has a rare auto-immune disease that can cause

her heart rate to leap unexpectedly, sometimes forcing her to leave class or go on bed rest. “I’ve always enjoyed helping people, but I didn’t know how much I would enjoy leadership.”

After joining the peer leader program, Hattie went on to work as a college tour guide, conduct advocacy for the school’s disabled students, and join multiple committees.

Ultimately, she hopes to become a museum curator. “I want to bring in art and exhibitions that are more disability friendly and art that depicts disability,” Hattie said. “Museums are for everyone, and everyone should be able to have equal access.”





Accessibility at College

Your rights will still be protected when you go to college, but you will see some changes.

College Accessibility Offices

Public and private colleges and universities have staff who approve **accommodations** and services to students with disabilities. This office will have different names at different schools, including Campus Accessibility or Disability Services. You can find the name used by each school on their website by searching the term “disability” or “accommodation.”

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations are changes to the tasks, environment, or the way things are usually done to make sure individuals with disabilities have equal access to resources, programs, or activities. There are many examples, including wheelchair ramps, large print, or sign language. Accommodations are a big part of how colleges provide equal access to campus resources.

CONTACTING ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

Any student with a diagnosed disability who thinks this disability could affect their learning or accessing classrooms or other campus spaces should contact the Accessibility Services office at their school. Remember, you have a right to access classrooms and all physical spaces as well as educational offerings. You may ask for accommodations for academic needs, housing, and food.

QUICK TIP

IEPs and 504 Plans

Do you have an IEP or 504 Plan? There are no IEP or 504 plans in college. Students with one of these plans should learn about the laws affecting their education and how to get the help they need.

Types of Disabilities

A disability is any physical or mental limitation that affects one or more major life activities, such as caring for yourself, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, or working. There are several categories of disabilities, all of which can affect college students:

- Cognitive / Learning
- Physical / Mobility
- Medical
- Visual / Hearing
- Psychological
- Communication

YOU'RE IN CHARGE

There are different accessibility laws for college than for public high schools. You should also know that you — the student — will be responsible for getting what you need in college.

Laws and Rights

IDEA

In public K-12 schools, educational rights are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services.

ADA

Students with disabilities in post-secondary education are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Public and private colleges/universities are required to offer accessibility services and remove barriers to learning. However, these changes cannot cause a “fundamental alteration of a recipient’s program or impose an undue burden.” The law requires colleges to provide effective accommodations, not the best or most expensive accommodations.

Question	IDEA (Public Schools K-12)	ADA and Section 504 (Qualifying Post-Secondary Schools)
Who is affected?	Children with disabilities, until they graduate from high school or age out.	Anyone with a disability, as long as they are “otherwise qualified” to attend school.
What rights are guaranteed?	Access to free, appropriate public education.	Protection from discrimination because of a disability.
How is a disability assessed?	The school is responsible for identifying and evaluating the disability.	Student must provide proof/ documents about their disability. Different schools have different requirements.
How do accommodations get assigned?	The school creates the Individualized Education Program (IEP), listing accommodations and modifications (if any).	The student must request “reasonable accommodations” and the school must ensure equal access to education for the student.*
What about special equipment and services?	The school must provide special equipment and services for students who need them.	Some schools may provide some adaptive equipment for educational purposes, but students must provide their own “individually prescribed devices” and “personal aids and services.”
What is the parent/ guardian’s role?	Parents/guardians work closely with the school.	Students who are over 18 are adults and make their own decisions.



*ADA and Disabilities

The ADA does not protect all people who have a disability. The disability must “substantially limit” their ability to perform one or more major life activities.



Getting Started

Preparing and asking questions early will help you transition to college life smoothly.

Transition Planning

Transition planning means thinking about life after high school. What needs will you have? What strengths and skills will you need? It's important to start planning before graduation. In New Hampshire, high school students receiving special education services must begin planning at age 14. A transition plan brings together parents/guardians, school counselors, and any other professionals involved in your care and success and should include, among other things:

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

You, the student, should be part of any meetings about your transition plan so that you can voice your needs and wants. When you turn 18, you are legally in charge of your transition plan and make all decisions about it (unless another legal arrangement is made).

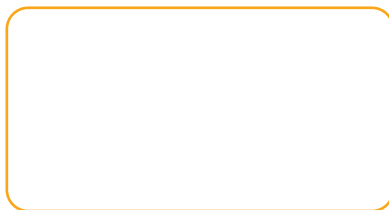
POST-SECONDARY GOALS

These goals are not just about learning. They should also cover life skills, job options, housing, and transportation.

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE

This replaces an IEP. It should include academic performance and progress towards academic goals and life goals.





Questions to Ask Colleges Before Applying

You will be making a big decision when you apply to college. Asking questions about accessibility will help you understand how the college will handle your needs. Each school is going to address your disability in its own way. Here is a list of possible questions to ask during an inquiry meeting:

GETTING STARTED

If I need accommodations, when should I start the process?

What types of documentation does the school need?

Can I meet with college staff who work with students with disabilities before I enroll?

COURSE LOAD AND GRADUATION TIME

Can students with disabilities get a reduced course load?

How will a reduced course load affect things like financial aid and graduation date?

Can students with disabilities register early?

HOUSING

Will my disability affect my on-campus housing options?

STUDENT GROUPS

Are there special groups to help students with disabilities network with each other on campus?

Are there student leadership/mentoring programs for students with disabilities?

SUPPORT SERVICES

What support services are available to students?

Does the campus have specific services for students with my disability?

What adaptive technologies does the school have? Who pays for them?

Can I get the medical or psychiatric services I need on campus? What is the cost and how often can I go?

If testing is needed, who will pay for it?

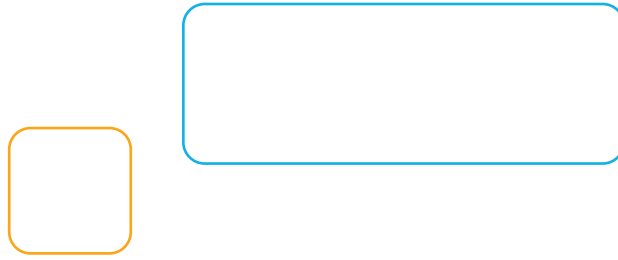
Applying to College

When applying to colleges, keep in mind you will be evaluated just like any other applicant and will have to meet the same admissions requirements. The admissions staff will look at your transcript, GPA, class rank, essay, and other required materials. A school cannot ask you anything about a disability any time during the application process.

DISCLOSING YOUR DISABILITY

You do not have to tell the colleges you're applying to that you have a disability. You can choose to talk about your disability in your application if you feel it is part of your story and want to share. Sometimes it can help admissions staff understand why something is difficult for you or demonstrate how you've learned to adapt and succeed. The college cannot say no to your application just because you have a disability. You do not need to tell the college about your disability after you enroll either, but if you want to ask for accommodations you will need to share this information and meet with the accessibility services staff.





Setting Up Accommodations

To receive accommodations in college, you must tell the Accessibility Services office about your disability and be ready to provide documentation. You are the one who has to ask for the accommodation. A staff member will review your request and your documentation. If they confirm a disability, they will talk with you about accommodations; however, it is also up to you to set up specific accommodations with each professor.

Remember, the accommodations you had in high school may not

be the same in college. There may be more than one way to accommodate a student's needs. The college staff will listen to what you want, but they might meet your need in a different way than you requested.

This process is private. If you need accommodations for one or more classes, those accommodations will be shared with your instructors, but that is the only information they will see. The details of a disability are not shared with anyone unless the student chooses to share.

QUICK TIP

Examples of Accommodations

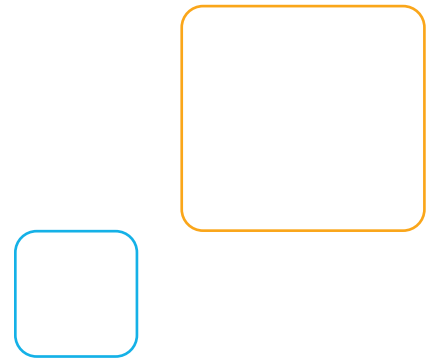
- Sign language interpreters
- Copies of class notes
- Audio recording of class lectures
- Test taking accommodations: extra time, a less distracting environment, repeated instructions
- Physical accommodations such as adjustable desks
- Large print or Braille, or screen readers
- Ability to take breaks during class



Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself. The first step in self-advocacy is self-understanding. You should understand your disability and how it may affect your education and career choices. You should know what you're good at and what is difficult for you. And you should be familiar with your needs and the accommodations that can help meet those needs. Knowing all these things will make it easier to speak up if your needs aren't being met or if changes need to be made.

In college, there are no case managers to set up accommodations and check on your progress. You are responsible for asking for help. You do not need to share any information about your disability with your instructor if you don't want to. But it's important to ask questions and advocate for yourself when you need help.



Temporary Disabilities

Colleges can provide accommodations for temporary conditions as well.

Some disabilities are temporary, meaning they will go away. These include broken bones, recovery from surgery, some physical illnesses, and some psychological conditions. Some colleges provide accommodations for temporary disabilities that may affect your academic progress. Students with temporary disabilities should contact the Accessibility Services office on campus to discuss their needs. The office may request documentation for the disability. Students need to communicate with each instructor about their needs and accommodations, such as missing class or turning in assignments.

QUICK TIP

Examples of Accommodations for Temporary Disabilities

- Assistive technology or personal help with reading, writing, or recording class lectures
- Re-scheduling a missed test or project
- Possible extra time for a test or a different environment for the test
- Preferential parking or seating





Resources

There are many sources of support available.
Taking advantage of them can help you succeed.

Additional College Services

Living independently at college can be overwhelming at first. Most colleges offer services to help with many different challenges. These services are available to all students, not just students with disabilities. Here are some examples:

ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTERS

Offer academic coaching, professional and peer tutoring, academic reading strategies, organization and time management skills, general study strategies, and strategies for specific classes.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Provide short-term assistance with stress management, homesickness, anxiety, and other mental health needs.

FINANCIAL AID AND BUSINESS OFFICES

Assist with school tuition/billing inquiries, financial aid questions, scholarship information, and post-college loan repayment information.

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Assist with housing and roommate issues.

HEALTH CENTERS

Help with illness, injuries, and medications. Provides referrals to area healthcare providers for more serious conditions.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT SERVICES

Support supplied technology like dorm internet service and computer labs, and answers general technology-related questions.

CAMPUS DINING SERVICES

Dietary experts can help students with food allergies, sensitivities, and other special needs.

RELIGIOUS CENTERS

Offer resources, events, and gathering spaces for students of various religious faiths.

CAREER CENTERS

Help students explore college majors, careers, internships, and post-graduation employment. Help with skills such as resume writing, interviewing, and evaluating job offers.

External Resources

PARENT INFORMATION CENTER (PIC)

NH-based parent/family assistance center — providing comprehensive information for families of students with disabilities.

picnh.org

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (NHVR)

Vocational Rehabilitation is a division of the Department of Education that assists persons with disabilities to help themselves to get a job, keep the job, and develop a lifelong career. This can include training and education.

education.nh.gov/vr

ASSOCIATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND DISABILITY (AHEAD)

AHEAD: develops, shares, and provides relevant knowledge; strategically engages in actions that enhance higher educational professionals' effectiveness; and advocates on behalf of its membership, their institutions, their work, and those they serve, ensuring full, effective participation by individuals with disabilities in every aspect of the postsecondary experience. AHEAD envisions a postsecondary experience that embraces disability and is free from barriers.

www.ahead.org

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (USDOE)

This Department is dedicated to helping students and their families understand the changes students with disabilities will face going from high school to college or to other post-secondary training.

ed.gov/ocr/transition.html

MOBILITY INTERNATIONAL USA

Mobility International USA (MIUSA) is a disability-led nonprofit organization advancing disability rights and leadership globally. Their mission is to empower people with disabilities around the world to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development.

miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/collegeaccessibility
miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/campusresources



College Disability Services at a Glance

This article provides an overview of what to expect as you transition from high school to college: understood.org/7-things-to-know-about-college-disability-services



How We Can Help

Granite Edvance is here for you through the entire college and career planning process. Our public presentations, resources, and one-on-one appointments have helped thousands of New Hampshire students and families.



Very knowledgeable and patient. Will definitely use [your] services again for other related questions and have recommended it to other parents. Thank you!"

- A NEW HAMPSHIRE PARENT

Visit our website to find college and career resources, publications, upcoming events, and more.



GraniteEdvance.org



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