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INCREASINGLY, the nation's higher educational system is awakening to the needs of its special students. Today, students with AD/HD can choose among colleges that offer a wide array of services and programs designed to meet their unique learning needs.

The application process is one that starts months or even years before that first day on campus. Normal teenage procrastination, coupled with organizational problems, suggest that this search should start no later than the second semester of the student's junior year in high school to avoid adding unneeded pressures during the senior year. This process is critical and can make all the difference between success and failure. Choosing the right college will help students make the most of their educational experience.

The key components of the application process include educational testing, awareness of the student's learning strengths and weaknesses, and good research. With each step, qualified professionals are available to help students with AD/HD and their parents make the most of the resources available and to assist students in realizing their potential.

STEP I — Testing

Parents who are aware or suspect that their child has AD/HD should research available testing and diagnosis. Testing should be done as early as possible in a child's life and then again during the high school years. However, in order for any needed accommodations in college or entry testing to be effective, no more than three years should lapse between testing and the application date.

The three-year requirement has been made somewhat more difficult by the 1997 changes in Federal law and subsequent regulations. Public schools, including high schools, may now continue to provide accommodations and/or services to students with a disability without requiring a new assessment every three years. While this change provides a benefit to both the school and the student, it can create a hardship when the college process begins. For instance, if the high school will not conduct new testing because they are continuing all necessary services, parents may be required to obtain private testing.

This diagnosis will also assess a student's strengths and will indicate how a student compensates in areas

of difficulty. Understanding how one learns is the first step toward making changes, followed by the desire to seek assistance and establish realistic goals. Being able to articulate your personal learning style, whether in the classroom, setting up a course of study, personal

Applying to College

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tutorials or even when determining a living and study environment is important to becoming your own advocate and succeeding in the college of your choice. (For more on becoming a self-advocate, see the article, *Requesting Academic Accommodations* on page 30.)

As the testing guidelines state, a qualified professional must do the documentation. Testing is an important step toward understanding your learning style and becoming an independent student. As indicated above, in many cases public schools provide testing resulting in a 504 or Individualized Education Plan (IEP). However, even when schools do provide testing, time constraints may make private testing a more practical option. You should also make sure that you receive meaningful test results with both an oral and written explanation. The results must include a list of the tests administered, test scores, a narrative report analyzing and summarizing the data, and a clearly stated diagnosis of the problem. Notation of medications prescribed, if any, should also be included. In addition, both the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and most colleges will require documentation of the areas of educational impact, the severity of the condition and a justification for requested accommodations (SEE FIGURE 1).

Once psycho-educational testing has been completed, strengths and weaknesses have been identified,

FIGURE 1 ETS Guidelines for AD/HD Accommodations

1. A qualified professional must conduct the evaluation
2. Documentation must be current—completed within 3 years.
3. Documentation must be comprehensive:
 - A. Evidence of early impairment
 - B. Evidence of current impairment
 - C. Alternative diagnoses or explanations should be ruled out
 - D. Relevant testing must be provided
 - E. Identification of DSM-IV criteria
 - F. Documentation must include a specific diagnosis
 - G. An interpretative summary must be provided
4. Each accommodation recommended by evaluator must include a rationale
5. ETS will hold all documentation confidential

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effective study habits have been initiated, and an individual learning style has been developed, the student will be better able to evaluate the educational options available to him or her. (SEE FIGURE 2)

STEP 2 — Applying to ETS

The process of applying to ETS must begin early enough to allow time for the request to be processed and for responding to any questions that ETS may have. If test accommodations are granted, the testing results will be marked as “Nonstandard Administration.” However, reports do not indicate the nature of either the disability or the accommodation used.

The ETS Policy Statement for Documentation of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Adolescents and Adults, June 1999 (Revised), which is outlined in FIGURE 1, can be found at www.ets.org. This site also provides information on the type of testing accommodations that are available. Examples are: extended testing time, additional breaks, selectable background and foreground colors, test reader and/or other aids customarily used.

STEP 3 — The College Selection Process

Each student, regardless of social, cultural or educational background, must select a school that best suits his or her individual needs. For students with AD/HD, the options have increased substantially in recent years. As a result of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1997 amendments, changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Public Law 105-17) have brought about unprecedented accommodations and availability of learning aids for students with disabilities. A few of these aids include the use of computers,

tape recorders, taped textbooks and extended time for testing. Students who understand their individual strengths and weaknesses will be better able to articulate their needs and to identify those schools equipped to meet them.

Levels of support vary greatly among colleges ranging from the most basic to individualized, structured programs. Categories of support include minimal, moderate, comprehensive and developmental. The size or type of college generally has no bearing on the degree of support it offers, and while students may not need to use specific accommodations all the time, during their college career it is important to evaluate up front if an academic setting can provide the range of programs and supports needed to assist a student when necessary.

A college with a “minimal” level of support offers general services for all students such as writing or math centers and counseling offices. These colleges usually do not have an active advocacy program for students with AD/HD or a learning specialist designated to assist with course selection, special tutoring or coaching/organizational needs. Students in this environment must be clear about their own needs and be able to advocate for themselves.

Colleges with more sensitivity toward students with AD/HD offer a “moderate” degree of support. Moderate support services are a popular and fast-growing option for most schools and students. Students are offered a learning center generally staffed by at least one professional with an advanced degree in Special Education who acts both as a counselor and an advocate for the students on campus. The learning specialist may be able to assist students with their selections of classes and professors, organize informational workshops for professors and other college personnel, arrange for tutoring or coaching, and generally offer additional support to ensure each student’s academic success. These colleges may also offer peer support groups and peer or professional tutoring services, and may provide special orientation or summer programs for students with disabilities so they can pre-register and become familiar with the campus and academic expectations. Self-advocacy skills are essential to academic success at this level and in this learning environment.

Finally, there are colleges that are primarily or exclusively devoted to students with various learning disabilities. These colleges provide a “comprehensive” course of study that embraces the entire psycho-social aspect of learning with disabilities. Most colleges that

FIGURE 2 Acceptable tests for AD/HD (partial list)***Measure of intellectual, aptitude or cognitive functioning:**

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale—III
- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery—Revised Tests of Cognitive Ability
- Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale—Fourth Edition

Measure of achievement in reading comprehension, written language, and mathematics:

- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery—Revised Tests of Achievement Test of Written Language
- Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test

Measure of information processing in one or more of the following areas:

- Visual and/or auditory processing
- Memory
- Processing speed
- Attention and concentration
- Perceptual motor skills
- Other cognitive areas

* See Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) guidelines (www.ahead.org) for other acceptable tests.

offer comprehensive programs will also require a separate application for the program along with up-to-date documentation. Students in these schools receive individualized remedial instruction supported by learning techniques appropriate to each student’s needs. This type of instruction could include time management and organizational tools, academic programs, coaching, and tutoring sessions designed to help each student reach his or her full academic potential. Additional attention is also given to improving social problem solving skills, self-advocacy and developing self-confidence. These colleges often provide internship opportunities, which in turn provide students with a foundation for realistic career goals.

“Developmental” programs are usually defined as a two-year curriculum within a four-year college environment that enables students, upon successful completion, to continue college with junior-year standing in the undergraduate program of their choice. These programs place emphasis on core curriculum, close faculty advising, study skills and peer support. This type of structured and supportive program may prove appropriate for some students with AD/HD by helping them to gain the skills they need to continue their education and succeed within a larger university.

With the wide range of options available to students with AD/HD, thorough research is needed before choosing a suitable academic environment. Students can accomplish much of the initial research through the Internet and specialized college guidebooks. Many college websites now contain information concerning support services, programs and appropriate documentation. A high school guidance counselor, college counselor or independent counselor specializing in colleges with support services and programs can also help to identify and evaluate the available options, and to advise the student as to whether he or she meets the admissions standards set by these colleges. A counselor may be able to assist with college selection, accommodation requests, testing services, assistance with application preparation, preparing a student for college interviews and providing other related services. This process should also be helpful in determining whether a given college has the environment the student needs to succeed academically and socially.

All students should visit a college before choosing to attend, making an effort to visit those which interest them the most. Each college has an environment of its own, as do the instructors and students associated with it. When planning a visit to the college, schedule

appointments with both the learning center and the admissions office. Inquire about what types of services exist at the school and be sure they can accommodate all of your needs. If you are visiting several schools, take notes and write down your impressions as soon as you leave each campus. This will help you decide which college best meets your expectations and requirements for a successful academic career.

Many students are surprised to discover that the colleges they visit are interested in them as individuals, look positively at their accomplishments and are equally dedicated to making a successful match. Students are advised to approach these colleges with confidence in their own strengths and with the knowledge that they will contribute to the college, the campus environment and their own future. ■

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