

# **Toto, I Have a Feeling we're not in High School Anymore...**

*A Handbook for Parents of Students with Disabilities*

DISABILITY SUPPORT  
SERVICES





## **Disability Support Services (DSS)**

A Handbook for Parents of Students with Disabilities

This handbook is directed primarily toward parents of students with disabilities. However, we hope that it is equally useful to high school teachers, counselors, and students themselves. It introduces some of the legal and philosophical changes that occur for students with disabilities upon graduation from high school and entrance into Midwestern State University. It is best used in conjunction with *The Guide for Students with Disabilities*.

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## **Introduction: The Land of Oz**

As parents, we watch our kids go through enormous changes, changes that seem to turn the world on its head -- at least for us. After those first steps, nearly everything in the house is within reach and, without warning, the pace of life suddenly leaps into warp speed. Or how about when our child first begins to read, learns to drive, or starts dating? Again, everything seems to change almost overnight.

For parents whose children have disabilities, however, the changes may come when a child doesn't reach these developmental milestones as expected. A child with physical disabilities doesn't learn to walk. A student with a learning disability struggles with reading. A blind teenager doesn't get a driver's license.

Another of those world-tilting events is about to happen. Your young adult is starting college. They might feel much like Dorothy and Toto in the Wizard of Oz -- one minute in good old Kansas, the next in the Land of Oz. Everything may seem completely unfamiliar, both terrifying and wonderful all at once.

Once your child turns 18 years old, they are legally an adult, responsible for their own actions and decisions--and free to make them. As they leave secondary school to enter a career in higher education, fundamental changes occur with respect to their education as a person with a disability. Any child who attends public schools has, for the most part, a legal entitlement to an education, regardless of a disability. They must also receive their education in the *least restrictive environment* possible. But they are children, and as such warrant care, guidance and sometimes are separated from their peers for special attention if needed.

In higher education, your student has a civil right to have access to their education. The fundamental principle at work is the assumption of integration and that the individual student is responsible for themselves, and is not the responsibility of the institution. It's a distinction that can make all the difference.

We hope this handbook will help you to better understand some of these distinctions and provide tips on how best to support your new University student on this exciting new road.

## **What is the difference between *entitled to education and right to equal access to education*?**

Unlike elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary education offers access rather than entitlement to academic programs. Most parents of a child with a disability at some time learn something about the laws that govern their child's education in the public schools. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This act, commonly known as Public Law 94-142, provided that any child with a disability was "entitled to a free and appropriate education" in public school systems.

That law, along with its numerous re-authorizations, reflects the nation's commitment to educating all its children, whether they have disabilities or not. Fundamentally, 94-142 and its successors (including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and IDEA Improvement Act of 1997) said that public schools, with your input and appropriate assessments, would determine what was most appropriate for your child's education. Then they were required to provide that education.

As a parent, you may wish it had been that easy all along, and perhaps it was. Now, however, your child has reached their majority under the law, and the rules of the game have changed. The principles of 94-142 and IDEA, including the required IEP (Individualized Education Program), no longer apply. Note: 504 Plans, under which many students are now served in high schools, are no longer valid either.

In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. Modeled on section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, ADA is a civil rights law. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, as long as the person is otherwise qualified. In the case of publicly funded colleges and universities, ADA affirms the right of a student with a disability to a level playing field.

That means that Midwestern State University must ensure access to all students who are otherwise qualified. Access means much more than ramps and elevators and wide parking spaces. It also means access to information and to technology. Therefore, Midwestern State University

must make reasonable accommodations for your student's disability, in order that they may be able to demonstrate their ability.

However, civil rights laws and the reasonable accommodations they call for are in no way intended -- nor are they able -- to guarantee success. At most, a student can expect a more equal chance to do the same work as their peers.

### **What is meant by *reasonable accommodation*?**

Reasonable accommodations are made in order to level the playing field for qualified individuals with disabilities. As much as possible, accommodations are designed to minimize the functional limitations of an individual in a given task.

These adjustments permit students with disabilities the opportunity to learn by removing barriers that do not compromise academic standards. Thus, wherever possible the disability is minimized as a measure of performance in the academic environment. This is typically accomplished with services or strategies focused on the end result, rather than the means by which that result is customarily achieved.

Consider these examples:

- A student who is deaf cannot hear class lectures. Provision of sign language interpreters as an accommodation gives the deaf student access to the information discussed in the classroom at nearly the same time it is presented, and in their first language of American Sign Language. Thus, the student has a better opportunity to interact with the rest of the class. Students who are deaf are often provided with note-takers, even though the lectures are interpreted. This is because it is virtually impossible to follow a signed lecture and take notes at the same time.
- A student, whose physical limitations prevent them from writing efficiently or from writing at all, may request note-taking services as an accommodation. They may also use a scribe for taking exams. Thus, the student will not be graded on their

- inability to physically write, but on the ability to learn and to demonstrate that they have learned the material.
- Students with mobility limitations, such as wheelchair users, may request that classroom locations be moved if they are not accessible on a ground floor or by elevator.
  - Blind students are accommodated by receiving printed materials (textbooks, course syllabi, handouts) in Braille, on audio tapes or from live readers.
  - Students with learning disabilities may be accommodated in a variety of ways, depending on the limitations of their particular type of learning disability.

In these examples, as in practice, the student must meet the academic standards. They must demonstrate their mastery of assigned material. In other words, they don't receive "help," but they enjoy their civil right to learn and compete on the same level as their peers.

The ADA assumes that people with disabilities have contributions to make, and that they have every right to attend colleges and universities -- regardless of whether they have a disability. Thus, access means empowering students with disabilities to take better control of their academic environment, permitting them to demonstrate their skill and knowledge. It also expects, however, that they can meet the academic standards with or without appropriate accommodations.

### **What is meant by *otherwise qualified*?**

When your son or daughter applied to Midwestern State University, they were required to demonstrate to admissions staff that they, indeed, met the admission standards for this institution. They provided their high school transcripts, college entrance scores (ACT or SAT) and any other important information about themselves having a bearing on their potential to succeed and contribute to the University's diverse campus community.

If they have already been accepted to the University, then they have demonstrated that they are, in fact, qualified individuals, despite having a disability.

This is different, of course, from the way things were when your student entered public school. Whether or not you knew of their disability at that time, or whether they acquired a disability later didn't matter. There was only one qualification for entry into public school -- as a child of the appropriate age; they were entitled to learn to the best of their ability.

None of us would argue that every person is entitled to attend college and receive a bachelor's degree. We would no doubt agree, however, that any individual who meets admission standards should have an opportunity to earn a degree. For the most part, disability is not part of the process of determining qualifications. Following admission, we would expect that each individual would continue to demonstrate that they are otherwise qualified by meeting or exceeding the academic standards set by the institution, and they must do so whether or not they request accommodations.

### **What is meant by the phrase *with or without reasonable accommodations*?**

Understanding this phrase is critical to understanding the distinction between a civil right and an entitlement. Put bluntly, it's legal for a student with a disability to flunk out of college. There is no guarantee of success. Civil rights laws do not mandate a safety net. Students with disabilities must perform at the level that their academic and professional programs expect of all students. The University will strive to level the playing field, but ultimately the student's work must be their own and be of a satisfactory quality.

In addition to guaranteeing civil rights to reasonable accommodations, the ADA also guarantees any individual with a disability the absolute right to refuse any accommodation. That means that DSS doesn't



make sure that a student requests accommodations. In fact, DSS doesn't determine these unilaterally in typical cases.

While coordinators rely heavily on documentation of the disability when determining accommodations, they also draw the student into a discussion of functional limitations and possible strategies. If a student doesn't request an accommodation, however, the consequences of that action belong to the student.

The care and concern parents and teachers show students in public schools, ensuring they have services and make use of them, would be viewed in the adult world as paternalism and unwarranted interference. While it is perfectly OK and legitimate for parents and other important people to influence some decisions for children, adults make their own choices.

The bottom line, then, is that students with disabilities must perform at satisfactory levels in their academic pursuits at Midwestern State University. If they do not request reasonable accommodations and perform poorly without them, their civil rights have not been violated. The student must then live with the consequences of unsatisfactory academic performance.

## **Who will manage my son or daughter's educational services?**

The student is ultimately responsible for managing their own education, understanding their functional limitations and requesting necessary accommodations for a disability.

As adults, all students go through a process of learning about themselves. They develop the skills of self-determination, including confidence enough to advocate for the things they need in order to thrive and achieve. In the case of a disability, that includes advocating for equality -- their civil right.

Disability Support Services endeavors to promote this kind of self-knowledge. With respect to disability, each individual must be able to

explain their functional limitations. That is, how their disability affects them or limits the ways in which tasks are performed. Students must also understand how those limitations can be effectively accommodated to create a level playing field for them in school. They will need to be prepared to insist at times, and to be firm in their conviction that what they ask for is reasonable.

It is in the development of these skills that DSS can best guide the student with a disability in their educational growth. These skills are critical, because it is the student, not DSS, who will approach instructors, other staff, and even other students to request the accommodations that are reasonable for them to receive. Clearly, these are the skills all students need to have when they leave Midwestern State University and move successfully into their chosen careers.

### **My Son or Daughter is adamant --They don't want anything to do with any disability office! What happened?**

From the perspective of those of us with disabilities, this attitude or reaction to disability professionals is not surprising. In fact, it's a given that disability is devalued in our culture. It's easy to recognize that being ostracized by peers is devaluing. Unfortunately the good intentions of professionals and other adults can do as much or more to reinforce devaluation. Simply put, your student may feel shame about having a disability and want to turn away from it.

Uncomfortable as it is to say, the experience of Special Education, resource rooms, or 504 services (adult services such as Vocational Rehabilitation and even DSS offices are not immune, either) may result in unintended effects on students. They don't want "help" anymore. They don't want someone looking over their shoulder. They don't want to be expected to achieve less than their peers. Whatever happened or didn't happen in high school, these are often the feelings students come away with, and may be part of what motivates a student to avoid Disability Support Services. Believe it or not, they simply may be trying to preserve a "positive" sense of self.

Students rightly want to feel that the work they do in school is of equal value to that of their classmates. They often express discomfort at feeling like they are getting some *advantage* others may not have, and they struggle with the feeling that they could be the object of charity by well-meaning adults. They often tell us "I just want to make it on my own, without any *help*."

DSS does not "help" students. We do not look over students' shoulders to ensure that they are getting their homework done and going to class. We don't hold their hands to get them through registration or financial aid problems, or reduce the academic standard so they won't experience feelings of failure. These things, while intended to be helpful, are more likely to cement the conviction that the student is less qualified than other students to be at Midwestern State University. Rest assured -- kids recognize when that is happening. In the long run, that kind of help hurts. It can contribute to serious academic consequences when a student gets to college.

Rejecting negative attitudes about disability, about ourselves, is the right thing to do, so long as we recognize that the assumptions and devaluation of disability are the underlying problem -- not the disability itself. The student may come to terms with their disability in one of two ways. The most important is changing their attitude about having a disability. This requires assuming the attitude that disability is a normal part of life, and that the student has every right to be here. It means they must look at accommodations, not as a reduction in expectations, but as a means to level the playing field -- because we *won't* reduce the academic standards. It also necessitates an acknowledgment of the functional limitations of their disability and refusal to apologize for being who they are.

If you are even partly successful in communicating these ideas to your student, you will have done more for them than you will ever know. But for many students who come to Midwestern State University wanting to shed their disability "status" like a snake sheds its skin, they may likely experience the second way of coming to terms with their disability. They may not come to DSS until they are in trouble academically, or with Financial Aid. It may seem as though some students need to be knocked down hard before they are ready to learn how to hold their heads up without shame. This is an unfortunate, but common, aspect of the disability experience.

What else can you do? Keep sending them the message that it's up to them, that you have faith in them, and they have nothing to be ashamed of or apologize for. Let them know that a visit to DSS doesn't mean a commitment. That they are in control of their academic career and civil rights also means the right to refuse any accommodation. But they ought to fully inform themselves about what their choices may be before deciding.

Then, let them decide for themselves.

### **Okay, we've talked about academics, but what about my son or daughter's living situation?**

Both Residence Life and Dining Services at Midwestern State University are readily accessible to and usable by students with many disabilities.

Students, especially those with physical disabilities, are strongly encouraged to investigate and prepare strategies for self-care, access to food services, etc. prior to arrival on campus in the fall. Midwestern State University's Residence Life offers a number of accessible housing options both on and off-campus. Reasonable accommodations will be made to students with disabilities whose limitations require them. In addition, Midwestern State University Dining Services provides access in a variety of ways.

For example, a student who requires a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) must make arrangements for direction, scheduling and payment. On the other hand, the University, in this case Residence Life, will accommodate the student in ensuring the PCA's entrance to the building, etc., when the student requests such arrangements. Parking arrangements for PCAs may be made with Campus Security.

Dining Services can accommodate specialized dietary requirements. Students with physical limitations that prevent them from carrying food trays will be accommodated by dining staff. PCAs may be admitted to assist a student with meals when necessary.

## **Examples of Possible Housing Accommodations**

- Service animals
- Single rooms
- Wheelchair accessible rooms
- Fully accessible wheelchair apartments

## **The Student's Considerations**

- Certification of trained service animal
- Provisions for disposal of animal's wastes
- Space for equipment such as battery chargers or Hoyer lift
- Provision for personal services
- Personal Care Attendants
- Scheduling
- Parking
- Assistance with meals

For more information about access to **Residence Life** call 397-4217 and **University Dining Services** at 397-4203, or contact DSS.

## **Off to See the Wizard**

So here you are, your child is entering the world of adulthood, and taking the first steps of a marvelous journey. It's a world completely different from any other -- both strange and wonderful. As they enroll at Midwestern State University, the things that you and your student came to expect before, almost as black and white at times, are gone. It's all in Technicolor now.

We hope this handbook has been helpful in preparing you and your student for what's coming next. It may be very trying at times, but we know it can also be extraordinary. *Welcome!*

## **Comparison of Disability in High School and College**

Here is a point-by point comparison of some services and accommodations and the ways in which they differ between high school and college.

| High School   | College   |
|---|---|
| Under IDEA, children with disabilities are absolutely <i>entitled</i> to a "Free and Appropriate Public Education."   | <i>Equal access</i> to education is the order of the day – no one is <i>entitled</i> to anything, but rather students have <i>civil rights</i> and they must advocate for themselves in order to enjoy those rights.  |
| Section 504 in the public schools includes "Free and Appropriate Public Education" language, and accommodations may include a shortening of assignments, or the use of notes on tests, when other students cannot use them.     | Section 504 is the first civil rights legislation that applied to colleges. It upholds the institution's right to maintain the academic standards, and no accommodations may be permitted to reduce that standard for any student. Thus there is no "free" education, and shortening assignments and using notes when other students do not are not considered "reasonable accommodations." |
| Plans, either the IEP or a 504 Plan, drove all services and accommodations, and involved the teachers, counselors, and absolutely required a parent's signature.  | There is no plan, and instructors are not contacted, except by the student. In fact, parents may not receive even a student's grades without the student giving written permission.   |
| "Placement" is determined by the child's "team," and outlined in the plan, and must, by law, be in the least restrictive environment.   | Placement integration is assumed, and is the order of the day. We adjust the environment through accommodations, but we don't deliberate and select the environment for the student in advance.   |
| Students were qualified for public education simply by being of the appropriate age, and because they had a disability.   | "Otherwise qualified," in college, means that the student must meet all entrance and academic requirements, whether they receive accommodations or not.   |
| Everybody knew about a student's placement, and practically everybody signed the plan. Each teacher would know about a student even before he or she entered the classroom, and have a good idea what the student's needs were. | DSS never contacts a professor without express permission from the student. Thus, the student must initiate all actions regarding accommodation with each professor, for each course, every semester. In addition, students have the civil right to <i>refuse</i> accommodations they don't need or want; and if they do not request an accommodation it is assumed they do not want it.    |

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| Public schools, for the most part, are responsible for appropriate assessment of a student's disability.                           | Higher education does not have to assess the student, but can expect that the student will provide proof of their disability within accepted guidelines.  |
| Some subjects may have been waived for a student before graduation, if they were specifically related to the student's disability. | Substitutions for specific graduation requirements may be requested by following a rigorous petition process, but "waivers" for requirements are <i>never</i> granted. Substitutions are also granted typically after the student has <i>both</i> provided adequate verification to DSS of their disability <i>and</i> unsuccessfully attempted the courses in question with the appropriate accommodations recommended by DSS. |
| Labels are a way to categorize people.   | Student has a right to disclose to whom and when they choose, but must own their disability in order to enjoy a level playing field.  |
| Assessment, physical or other therapy, or personal care provided by school while in school.  | Student is responsible for personal services -- personal care, medical and related requirements, just as if they would if they were living independently and not attending school.  |
| Students often receive "Un-timed tests" if they have a disability.   | "Un-timed tests" are not reasonable, but time extensions may be reasonable, typically time-and-a-half but no more than double time.   |
| Teachers may be expected to learn all they can about the disability of a student in one of their classes.                          | Professors need know only that which applies to the accommodations the student requests.  |

## **Making the Transition from High School to College**

Students will most often find that there will be many changes in their lives during the transition between high school and college. The topics below are designed to give you a heads-up in regard to that transition.

### **What will be different in college?**

As you will soon learn, college is very different from high school. You will soon:

- See changes in the amount of personal freedom you have;
- Notice differences in how classes are structured and offered;
- Realize that expectations of college professors are very different than those of high school teachers.

You will also notice that:

- Effective studying in college requires much more work than studying in high school;
- Tests in college are less frequent than in high school—for example, you may have only one or two tests in a semester-long class;
- Tests are frequently cumulative—that is, you may be tested on everything you’ve learned by that point of the semester, rather than being tested on just one chapter;
- Grades are awarded based on performance and that extra credit is generally not given.

### Point-by-point comparison between high school and college

| PERSONAL FREEDOM IN HIGH SCHOOL VS. PERSONAL FREEDOM IN COLLEGE      |   |
|--|---|
| High school is mandatory and free (unless you choose other options). | College is voluntary and expensive.   |
| Your time is usually structured by others.                           | You manage your own time.   |
| You need permission to participate in extracurricular activities.    | You must decide whether to participate in extracurricular activities. (Hint: Choose wisely in the first semester and then add later.) |
| You need money for special purchases or events.                      | You need money to meet basic necessities.   |
| You can count on parents and teachers to remind you of               | Guiding principle: You're old enough to take  |



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| your responsibilities and to guide you in setting priorities.                                | responsibility for what you do and don't do, as well as for the consequences of your decisions.  |
| <b>HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS VS. COLLEGE PROFESSORS</b>   |  |
| Teachers check your completed homework.  | Professors may not always check completed homework, but they will assume you can perform the same tasks on tests.  |
| Teachers remind you of your incomplete work.   | Professors may not remind you of incomplete work.  |
| Teachers approach you if they believe you need assistance.                                   | Professors are usually open and helpful, but most expect you to initiate contact if you need assistance.   |
| Teachers are often available for conversation before, during, or after class.                | Professors expect and want you to attend their scheduled office hours.   |
| Teachers have been trained in teaching methods to assist in imparting knowledge to students. | Professors have been trained as experts in their particular areas of research. They may use many different methods to impart knowledge.  |
| Teachers present material to help you understand the material in the textbook.               | Professors may not follow the textbook. Instead, to amplify the text, they may give illustrations, provide background information, or discuss research about the topic you are studying. Or, they may expect you to relate the classes to the textbook readings. |
| Teachers often write information on the board to be copied in your notes.                    | Professors may lecture nonstop, expecting you to identify the important points in your notes. When professors write on the board, it may be to amplify the lecture, not to summarize it. Good notes are a must.  |
| Teachers impart knowledge and facts, sometimes drawing direct connections and leading        | Professors expect you to think about and synthesize seemingly unrelated topics.  |

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| you through the thinking process.   |   |
| Teachers often take time to remind you of assignments and due dates.  | Professors expect you to read, save, and consult the course syllabus (outline); the syllabus spells out exactly what is expected of you, when it is due, and how you will be graded.  |
| <b>TESTS IN HIGH SCHOOL VS. TESTS IN COLLEGE</b>  |   |
| Testing is frequent and covers small amounts of material.   | Testing is usually infrequent and may be cumulative, covering large amounts of material. You, not the professor, need to organize the material to prepare for the test. A particular course may have only 2 or 3 tests in a semester. |
| Makeup tests are often available.   | Makeup tests are seldom an option; if they are, you need to request them.   |
| Teachers frequently rearrange test dates to avoid conflict with school events.  | Professors in different courses usually schedule tests without regard to the demands of other courses or outside activities.  |
| Teachers frequently conduct review sessions, pointing out the most important concepts.  | Professors rarely offer review sessions, and when they do, they expect you to be an active participant, one who comes prepared with questions   |
| Mastery is usually seen as the ability to reproduce what you were taught in the form in which it was presented to you, or to solve the kinds of problems you were shown how to solve. | Mastery is often seen as the ability to apply what you've learned to new situations or to solve new kinds of problems.  |
| <b>GRADES IN HIGH SCHOOL VS. GRADES IN COLLEGE</b>  |   |
| Grades are given for most assigned work.  | Grades may not be provided for all assigned work.   |
| Consistently good homework grades may help raise your overall grade when test   | Grades on tests and major papers usually provide most of the course grade.  |

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| grades are low.  |   |
| Initial test grades, especially when they are low, may not have an adverse effect on your final grade. | Watch out for your first tests. These are usually "wake-up calls" to let you know what is expected--but they also may account for a substantial part of your course grade. You may be shocked when you get your grades. |
| You may graduate as long as you have passed all required courses with a grade of D or higher.          | You may graduate only if your average in classes meets the departmental standard.   |
| Guiding principle: "Effort counts." Courses are usually structured to reward a "good-faith effort."    | Guiding principle: "Results count." Though "good-faith effort" is important in regard to the professor's willingness to help you achieve good results, it will not substitute for results in the grading process.       |

## Expectations of college professors

College professors expect you to come to class, work hard, and turn your work in on time. A survey of college professors at UM yielded the following (with apologies to David Letterman) presentation:

### "THE TOP TEN THINGS PROFESSORS DON'T WANT TO HEAR"

#### 10. "I didn't have time."

- There are 168 hours in one week so you have enough time to study 2-3 hours outside of class for every hour in class.
- You are investing your money (and your parents').

#### 9. "I don't understand."

- Ask questions in class.
- Visit your professors during office hours or at other times.
- Explain WHAT you didn't understand.

**8. "I didn't know that was plagiarism!"**

- Remember the five word rule: if you take more than 5 words from a source, you must cite it!
- Do your own work.
- The penalty is high.

**7. "I don't like the grade you gave me."**

- Nobody does!
- If you want to talk with a professor about a grade put your request in writing, and...
- Make an appointment.

**6. "But I was up all night writing this paper."**

- Don't wait until the last minute.
- Write more than one draft.
- Use the writing lab.
- PROOF READ!

**5. "I got bad advice."**

- Make time to see your advisor.
- Be prepared for advising appointments--know what is required.

**4. "This assignment is too hard."**

- Take advantage of the many opportunities for easing your academic transition...FIGS, Freshman Seminar, University Transition, and Study Skills (C&I 160).

**3. "Is this going to be on the exam?"**

- Professors are here to aid you in your thinking and learning.
- It's your job to know more than just "the right answers".

**2. "My grandmother died."**

- No disrespect intended.
- A surprising number of "deaths" occur just before final exams.
- Plan ahead and turn in your work on time.

**1. "Did we do anything important in class today?"**

- You are expected to attend class.
- If it were thought to be unimportant, class would be

cancelled.  
- Every class is important.