



DISABILITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

For those facing mobility challenges with a disability, questions about the realities around higher education can be endless. *Will I be able to navigate easily inside of classrooms? Will professors and staff be able to understand my issues and work with me? Can the campus accommodate me?*

The answer to these questions, and many more is “yes”! it is fully possible to achieve your goals of obtaining a higher education degree and to become an integrated into the college community.

Can I go to college?

College is a personal choice. Some choose to pursue degrees while others make a choice to enter into the work force. MPS or ML should not prohibit you from attending and excelling in a higher education setting. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990, was put into place to ensure that all people with disabilities are granted equal access to employment, public services, places of public accommodation, transportation, and telecommunications – this includes colleges and universities. ADA disabilities include both mental and physical medical conditions. A condition does not need to be severe or permanent to be a disability.

Title III of the ADA (*42 U.S.C. §§ 12181–12189*) states that no individual may be discriminated against based on disability and they have a right to “full and equal enjoyment” of public accommodations. This means that since 1992, when the ADA was enacted, all new constructions in the United States must meet the ADA guidelines, and existing structures must be modified to allow safe passage of individuals with disabilities.

Will my Individualized Education Program (IEP) continue through college?

An IEP is an education plan custom tailored to a student’s special education needs regarding individual disabilities. Typically, based on the student’s needs, the IEP is established early in the educational process, and the program transfers through the entire educational years. This includes higher education and is a very valuable document to share with college counselors. If there was no IEP created in high school, a physician can provide a form or letter stating the restrictions and limitations cause by MPS and ML. These forms can usually be sent via fax or mail and will not require a face-to-face appointment.

What accommodations are available?

Accommodations are not designed to give a “boost” to a student, but to make it so that the student can participate in the curriculum and access material appropriately.

Accommodations vary depending upon need, but may include one or more of the following:

- Quiet testing areas to reduce distractions
- Extra time allotted for examinations
- Electronic or audio form of textbooks and handouts
- Note taking programs or a personal scribe
- Priority registration to ensure proper placement in courses
- Easy access to exits or other specialized seating arrangements

Physical needs and college?

Physically navigating a college campus can be a challenge for individuals with MPS or ML, but because of the ADA it is not impossible. A majority of larger colleges and state universities provide shuttle services to students who need them. Other ways to optimize campus navigation are reducing the amount of items carried by reducing printed materials and transferring as much as possible to a computer or iPad. Rolling briefcases and backpacks can reduce the direct weight on joints and assist in staying active all day.

Living on campus and getting to college?

Moving away from home and living on campus can be challenging for any student, but for individuals diagnosed with MPS or ML there are unique challenges. Prior to moving onto campus, most students complete an application regarding their housing selection. During this process, you are encouraged to reach out to the Office for Students with Disabilities and the Student Housing Office to ensure you are placed in a living situation that fits your needs. Such requests may include a room with wheelchair accessibility, private bathrooms, close proximity to classes and campus, as well as rooms fitted for deaf or hard of hearing students. With these requests, most colleges will work to place individuals with roommates that will enrich their college experience.

Colleges also provide resources to students who choose to live off campus to be able to easily get to classes and events. Many schools have contracts with ride sharing services to provide support to students within reasonable distances from campus. Tuition often includes access to public transportation near the college which can provide accessible options to get to school as well as around town.

A staff member of the Office for Students with Disabilities can provide students with further information about on-campus resources such as alternative transportation services, therapy, tutoring, and other available assistance.

Paying for college

Paying tuition can be an overwhelming process, especially once SSI or SSDI are involved. The first step to discussing tuition is filling out a Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. After filing the aid forms, students should check with Vocational Rehabilitation Services can assist individuals with scholarship and program information. The National

MPS Society also provides Continuing Education Scholarship to help individuals reach their educational goals.

Another large expense for the college experience is textbooks. There are several options that assist to reduce costs. The campus library is an excellent resource for finding copies of textbooks to review and copy. Textbooks are also typically available to rent or download in an electronic version at most Universities. Amazon and Chegg are reliable websites that rent textbooks and deliver them anywhere.

Advocating for yourself

Assess the university classes and campus carefully before registering. If the campus does not possess the resources needed or necessary accommodations, every individual has a right to advocate for themselves. Be forward with concerns and challenges and offer possible fixes. Start with the Disability Resources Office on campus, and if needs are not met, escalate to the Office of Student Affairs.