

Students getting ready to enter college need to plan for the ways that higher education will be different from high school. These differences include higher academic expectations, increasing independence, and new social environments. A key difference is that students must advocate for themselves in postsecondary education. In high school, students often rely on parents, family members, and teachers to get the services they need. It is important for students to prepare for the changes that will occur within the college classroom and with receiving accommodations and services.



AREA OF DIFFERENCE	HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
Personal freedom	Less freedom: living at home with parents	More freedom, especially if students live in a dorm or in an off-campus apartment
Structure	More structure: school sets schedule	Less structure: student sets schedule
Class sizes	Predictable: typically 15 to 35 students	Less predictable: some classes can have 100 to 200 students or more
Teacher contact	Frequent: may see teachers every day	Less frequent: may only see professors one to three times a week
Study time	May be able to get studying done in a study hall or spend minimal time outside of class studying	Significant reading and independent work demands which may require an additional two to four hours a day
Tests	More frequent tests on less information	May have only a few tests a semester and assessments may cover many chapters or be cumulative
Grades	Course grade often based on many assignments	Course grade may be based on only a few assignments
Physical environment	Classes often held in one building	Classes may be held across campus in many different buildings
Legal protection	IDEA: students are entitled to a free appropriate public education	ADA & 504: students must be found eligible for services and reasonable accommodations
Special education classes	Specialized instruction, classes, and resource room services for students with disabilities	Special education classes do not exist at the postsecondary level, but supports do exist
Documentation	The school district evaluates the student and develops the individualized education program (IEP)	Student must provide disability documentation to receive accommodations Student's IEP or Summary of Performance (SOP) may not be considered sufficient documentation
Accommodations	Determined as part of the IEP process	Student must contact the person/office on campus responsible for providing accommodations
Advocating	Teachers and parents advocate for services	Student must advocate for accommodations and services
Communication	Parents notify school when student is going to be late or absent from school	Student must notify professor if they are going to be late or absent from class
Parents' role	Parents can see student records and are notified and must sign permission for any changes or decisions for the student	Students are protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Parents do not communicate with professors or have access to grades and student information

Adapted with permission from www.going-to-college.org (Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, Virginia Commonwealth University) and centerontransition.org (Center on Transition Innovations, VCU).