Preparing for college... on the Internet

By Sheryl Burgstahler

Transition from high school to college is a big step for everyone. Students with disabilities have even more things to consider than their nondisabled peers.

College-bound youth should begin preparing for postsecondary education and beyond while they are still in high school by selecting appropriate classes and earning good grades. In addition, they can begin to prepare for and to explore college options on-line. This article shares a few Internet resources for college-bound teens with disabilities. A complimentary publication posted at <www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/cprep.html> includes links to the Internet resources listed; if you use the electronic version, you can simply click on each Web site address rather than type it in.

To be cautious, parents and teachers should always check out Web sites before recommending them to a child. Keep in mind that the content of a Web site may change over time, so a site that was once a great resource for a teenager may no longer be appropriate. Parents and teachers should also consider exploring Web sites with a child, side-by-side. As always, if you find sites that are inaccessible to you or someone else who has a disability (for example, they include video clips without captioning for individuals who are deaf), do something about it. Send electronic mail to the Web site sponsors requesting that they make their pages accessible to everyone. These situations provide opportunities for young people to practice skills in self-advocacy, as well as advocacy for others.

The following sections give advice to college-bound teens and resources for further exploration.

Plan steps you will take to prepare for college

Think about all of the steps you will need to take to get ready for college studies, select a school, apply for acceptance, and succeed in postsecondary studies. Read the publication and, if possible, view the videotaped presentation at the following Web site.

College: You can do it!
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/college.html>

Find reasons to attend college and issues involved in getting there at the following Web site.

Preparing for college
<http://www.ncset.org/topics/preparing/>

Know your learning style

Are you a visual, auditory or tactile learner? Are you an extrovert or an introvert? Are you a concrete thinker or an intuitive thinker? As you set college and career goals, it is helpful to know your learning style so that you can adjust your study habits to be most productive and build on your strengths. At the following Web sites you can read about learning styles in general and take short tests to discover your own learning style.

Learning style survey
<www.metamath.com/multiple/multiple_choice_questions.cgi>

Learning style inventory
<www.oswego.edu/CandI/plsi/>

Become academically prepared for college

Take classes that will prepare you for college entrance requirements and earn good grades. Develop study skills that work for you. Also, prepare for standardized tests you might need to take and, if necessary, arrange for disability-related testing accommodations. Consult the following Web site for more guidance regarding preparation for college studies.

Academic preparation
<mapping-your-future.org/selecting/academic.htm>

Assess your skills, interests, and personality as you consider potential academic fields of study to pursue

Selecting a college, a major field of study, and coursework are easier if you have career areas in mind. It is also important, however, to keep your mind open to new areas of study and employment as you learn new things. It is common for people to wind up in careers that are perfectly suited to them that they hadn't even considered before they entered college. Besides seeking advice from family members, teachers, and career guidance counselors, the following Web site can expand your ideas about career options.

Skills and interests
<mapping-your-future.org/planning/skillsan.htm>

Based on the "Birkman Method," a 24-question, color-coded test at

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Check us out on-line:

www.closingthegap.com/

the following Web site can help you zero in on your ideal career.

What color is your work style?
<www.princetonreview.com/cte/quiz/career_quiz1.asp>

At the following site, take a humorous quiz to reveal what medieval occupation suits you best.

The kingdomality personal preference profile
<www.cmi-lmi.com/enterppp.html>

At the following Web site, enter skills you have or hope to acquire and see what occupations best match your skill set.

Skills search
<online.onetcenter.org/gen_skills_page>

Enter a college major and see what career choices match at the following Web sites.

What can I do with a major in?
<www.uncw.edu/stuaff/career/Majors/index.htm>

Major to career converter
<content.monstertrak.monster.com/tools/careerconverter/>

Consider different types of degrees and schools

Find out about all of your postsecondary academic options and decide which type of school is best for you, given your academic preparation, career interests, and personal preferences. Consider technical schools, community colleges, four-year universities, and other postsecondary options. Explore the following Web site.

Selecting a school
<mapping-your-future.org/selecting/schools.htm>

At the following Web site, see what occupations are listed when you select the average worker education level required - on-the-job training or an associates, a bachelor's , or a higher degree.

CareerInfoNet
<www.acinet.org/acinet/>

Consider challenges in transitioning from a two-year to a four-year college by reading the following publication and viewing, if possible, the training videotape.

Moving on: The two-four step (the two-year to four-year college transition)
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/24_step.html>

Consider what accommodations you might need and learn what typical accommodations are provided on college campuses

Colleges and universities are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. What is considered "reasonable" varies from campus to campus. Each school has an office, sometimes called Disabled Student Services or Disability Services, or a designated individual to whom you provide documentation and with whom you arrange for accommodations. The following resources include lists of typical accommodations provided by institutions of higher education.

Students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary education: Know your rights and responsibilities
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

Accommodation strategies
<www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty/Strategies/>

Typical policies and procedures
<www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty/Rights/Policies/>

Explore colleges and universities

You can learn a lot about colleges you hope to attend by exploring their Web sites. You can find out about entrance requirements, degrees offered, size, tuition, student services, and campus life. The following sites provide a good place to begin exploring postsecondary campuses.

American universities
<www.clas.ufl.edu/CLAS/american-universities.html>

CollegeNET

Colleges, college scholarships and financial aid

Community college Web
<www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/cc/>

Peterson's guide to college search, test prep and financial aid

Consider funding options

Life in college is full of expenses, expected and unexpected. There are financial resources to assist with and, in some cases, fully cover costs such as tuition, books, rent, lab fees, assistive technology, and application fees. Options include grants, loans, work-study and scholarships. Talk to teachers, high school counselors, and staff in postsecond-ary disabled student services and financial aid offices, and explore the following Web sites.

Financial aid
<mapping-your-future.org/paying/finaid2.htm>

College finances
<moneycentral.msn.com/family/home.asp>

Colleges, college scholarships and financial aid

Creating options: A resource on financial aid for students with disabilities
<www.heath.gwu.edu/PDFs/financialaid.pdf>

FinAid: The SmartStudent (guide to financial aid)
<www.finaid.com>

Finding out about financial aid
<www.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/Students/student.html>

Resources for students with disabilities in need of financial assistance
<http://www.icdri.org/Financial%20Aid/finaid.htm>

Funding Strategies for Students with Disabilities

Sources of funding to explore.
<www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/financial-aid.html>

Thompson Peterson's colleges and universities
<http://www.petersons.com/ugchannel/>

Use technology to maximize your participation, productivity and independence in learning

Computer and network resources are essential in many college and work settings. Computer-related assistive technology makes it possible for people with a variety of disabilities to use these powerful tools. Take advantage of opportunities in high school and college to learn about and use computer and network technologies. The following resources may be helpful as well. Read the publication and, if possible, view one of the videotaped presentations at:

Working together: Computers and people with learning disabilities
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/wt_learn.html>

Working together: Computers and people with sensory impairments
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/wt_sensory.html>

Working together: Computers and people with mobility impairments

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/wt_mobility.html>

Working together: People with disabilities and computer technology

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/wt_dis.html>

Consult the following Web sites for more information about technology.

ABLEDATA database of information about products for people with disabilities.

<www.abledata.com>

Assistivetech.net

Closing the Gap Resource Directory

<www.closingthegap.com>

Find role models and mentors.

Engage in interactions with peers and adults during the process of preparing for college, attending college, and finding a career. Networking can occur through professional organizations, friends, and family, on-line and in person. Contacts with individuals who have disabilities can provide mutual assistance and support. Potential role models with disabilities can be found at the following sites:

Career scientists who are disabled

<www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/organize/fsdrole.html>

Famous people with disabilities

<www.independenceinc.org/trivia.htm>

Famous people with disabilities

<www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/general/FAMOUS.HTML>

Famous (and not-so-famous) people with disabilities

<www.disabilityhistory.org/people.html>

Famous people with disabilities

<www.iidc.indiana.edu/cedir/kidsWeb/fpwdinfo.html>

DO-IT snapshots

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Snapshots/>

An example of a community of teens with disabilities preparing for college studies and linked to peers and adult mentors is DO-IT Pals. DO-IT stands for Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology. Information about how to join DO-IT Pals can be found at www.washington.edu/doit/Programs/pals.html. As an example of the value of networking, participants in the DO-IT electronic community offer the following advice to you as you prepare for college. Their suggestions reflect their personal experiences.

• Know yourself. Conduct an in-depth evaluation of your strengths, abilities, skills, and values.

• Research all of your different options for colleges.

• Work with the school you plan on attending ahead of time.

• Plan, organize, and evaluate your needs so that support service units can work together to make sure there are no gaps in assistance.

• Seek assistance from student service offices, such as Disabled Student Services, Career Services, and Cooperative Education.

• Be wise about the number of credits you take, especially the first quarter (when it is easy to be overwhelmed).

• Take some courses that look like fun, as well as more challenging courses.

• Request aid from your professors. Don't be intimidated by them, they are there to help.

• Take some time to enjoy the social life on campus - it is a good way to meet new people and make friends.

Postsecondary studies are an appropriate goal for many young people, including those with disabilities. Finding the right program match for a specific child requires academic preparation and research. Much of this work can take place on the Internet.

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