

REAL SUPPORT FOR REAL STUDENTS

MAKING COLLEGE ACCOMMODATIONS WORK FOR YOU!

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The Learning and Working During the Transition to Adulthood
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (Transitions RTC)

Acknowledgements

The Learning & Working Center at Transitions RTC is a national effort that aims to improve the supports for youth and young adults, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions to successfully complete their schooling and training and move into rewarding work lives. We are located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA, Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center.

Visit us at:

<http://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsRTC>

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What is the Transitions RTC?

The Transitions RTC is a national center that aims to:

- Improve supports for the successful completion of schooling and movement into rewarding work lives among young people, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions (SMHC)

How?

1. Conduct cutting-edge rigorous research that tests or informs interventions
2. Develop and translate knowledge to multiple stakeholders
3. Infuse Participatory Action Research (PAR)/Youth Voice into all activities



Overview

“**Real for Real Students: Making College Accommodations Work for You**” is an interactive workshop that explores college students’ rights to academic accommodations and the different possibilities that legally exist outside of the usual recommendations by college accessibility offices.

Outline

Your Mental Health Rights on Campus

Your Right to Academic Accommodations

A Real-Life College Journey: Lessons Learned

Thinking Outside-The-Box about Accommodations

Resources



Why is it important to get support during college?

- College attendance rates among students with mental health conditions range from **7% - 26%** compared to **40%** for the general population.
- Students with mental health conditions who attend college experience longer delays in entering college and have **high dropout rates** - one of the highest of any disability group.



MENTAL HEALTH RIGHTS ON CAMPUS



Can my school discipline me for something that happened because of my mental health condition?

- Not if the school is discriminating against you...
 - You can request a **hearing** and/or **appeal process** in most schools if you think you are being discriminated against because of your mental health condition.
- However...
 - If your behavior violates a school's code of conduct, their disciplinary action may not be considered discriminatory **as long as it is consistently applied to all students.**



Can my school require me to take a leave of absence?

- Only if an individualized assessment determines you to be at risk of harming yourself or others.
- If the school tries to make you leave involuntarily...
 - You **should** be given a notification and explanation of the action
 - You can file an appeal within the school
 - You can file a complaint with the disability compliance officer and/or the civil rights office.
- The school should provide you with the same withdrawal arrangements as if you were leaving due to physical health reasons.



How can I get help for my mental health condition on my college campus?

- College Counseling Centers
 - Most colleges provide free therapy visits
 - A range of services are typically offered:
 - Individual or group sessions with psychologists, social workers, or psychiatrists
 - A resource for referrals to off-campus therapists and programs



GETTING ACCOMMODATIONS AT COLLEGE



What Are Academic Accommodations?

- The “American with Disabilities Act” (ADA) entitles students with disabilities, like mental health conditions, to get academic help with accommodations.
- An **Academic Accommodation** is a slight change in how you do the course work so that you have the same opportunity that everyone has regardless of your mental health condition or disability.



Accommodations vs Modifications

Academic Accommodations **are not**
the same as Modifications:

- A **Modification** is a change in the curriculum of the class or how you are graded.
- An **Accommodation** does not change the structure of the class, but provides additional support to learn the same material and meet the same expectations as other classmates.



What Are Some Common Accommodations?

- **Testing Supports**

- Alternative Testing Format, Breaks, Extra Time, Distraction Free Environment

- **Attendance Supports**

- Breaks during Class, Flexible Attendance

- **Supports in the Classroom**

- Audio recorded lectures, note-taker, preferred seating

- **Supports outside the Classroom**

- Extended time on assignments, time management skill development, emotional support animal



How Do I Get Accommodations?

1. **Contact** the disability services center on your campus.
2. **Get a signed note** from your doctor that states your mental health condition or disability.
3. **Discuss.** Tell the person at disability services what accommodations you think you need.
4. **Decide.** Someone at disability services will then determine if you are eligible for services and approve the accommodations.
5. **Notify teachers.** The disability services staff will provide your professors with your accommodation letter.
6. **Revise.** Make changes to your accommodations at any time if needed.



How Do I Know Which Accommodations To Ask For?

- When considering accommodations, it is important to think about your academic needs, what has worked in the past, and what supports you anticipate you will need in college.

Ask yourself...

- What do I need in the classroom?
- What do I need during exams?
- What do I need completing assignments?
- What are my academic strengths?
- What are my mental health challenges?



What About Confidentiality?

- In order to get accommodations, you will need to **disclose your mental health condition** to disability services.
- Most disability services staff are bound by rules of confidentiality and others will assure confidentiality at your request.
- Make sure to check with your disability services office about their privacy policy as this varies by school.
- Your professors will know you have a documented disability, but that's all. Its up to you if you want to disclose to faculty.



A REAL-LIFE COLLEGE JOURNEY



A Real-Life College Story

- Student in a Ditch of Depression
 - Downward Spiral of Bad Grades and Self-Deprecation
- Getting Time Off
- Coming back WITH a plan and finishing



What He Did

- Having a Support Network
 - Meeting once a week
 - Lots of planning
 - Lots of accountability
 - Lots of support
- Having a structured schedule
- Having an outside-the box accommodation



Lessons Learned

- It's okay to take time off
- You can do WAY MORE than you think you can
 - It just takes stretching
- There are people who really do believe in you, but you might have to ask
- “Haters gonna hate” so you have to make sure you're doing this for yourself!



Getting In the Right Place

Do whatever it takes:

- Actually use your support network
- Learn about your diagnosis and the symptoms you have
- Hear others' stories about coping mechanisms they use
- Keep track of your diet
- Exercise (not for weight maintenance) but for concentration
 - Stairs, running, jumping jacks, dancing, etc



Keep yourself happy

- WRAP Plan
- Example activities: Dance, listen to positive music, sing, detox from negativity for a while, watch comedy or inspirational videos, meditate/pray, go for walks, etc

THINKING OUTSIDE -THE-BOX ABOUT ACCOMMODATIONS



The Young Adult Peer Perspective is Unique

Most schools are used to providing typical accommodations such as:

- note taker
- extra time or time and a half for assignments
- assistive technology

However, having a mental health condition is a unique experience for different people.

Nevermind, being an emerging adult....



“Outside-The-Box” College Accommodations

Tip Sheet 11
Outside-The-Box College Accommodations
Real Support for Real Students
Tools for School II
Transitions RTC
March 2017

Students who have a mental health condition may need additional support to help them do the best they can in school and work. The “American with Disabilities Act” (ADA) entitles students with disabilities, like mental health conditions, to get academic help with academic accommodations and other legal rights.

Most schools are used to providing typical accommodations such as: note taker, extra time for assignments, and assistive technology for students of many different disabilities. Yet, the challenges of having a mental health condition are unique.

This tip sheet will help you to think “outside-the-box” to get the educational accommodations that help you with your unique struggles.

What Are Academic Accommodations Anyway?

Academic accommodations are like any other helping tool, like an audio book or a calculator. They are changes in how you participate in your courses. When considering the accommodation, you need think about things like:

- Where you take your test or where you sit in class
- How information is given to you (recorded audio, written notes, visual presentations, etc)
- How you work with students or how you respond to being called upon
- Extended or broken-up time for in-class work, tests, projects, and/or homework

Advance Warning or “Pre-Processing”	If classes make you nervous, it may help if the professor lays out what is going to happen at the start of class. This allows for “pre-processing” so that you can prepare mentally for what’s to come, easing any anxiety about not being prepared for class.
Broken Time	If you struggle with having to focus for a long period of time, a “broken time” accommodation may help. “Broken time” is different from “extended time.” Having “extended time” involves having 150% of the time originally given to take an exam, or some call it, “time and a half.” In “broken time,” you work for a period of time on classwork, an in-class essay or exam, during which you are allowed to take short breaks. You spend the same amount of time on the activity as everyone else, but the time is just broken up. Taking a break can refresh and reorient your mind, allowing you to better focus on the activity. This way whatever time you spend feeling anxious or distracted will not count towards your total time given.
Professors Limiting or Changing the Way Demand Responses are Requested	Being called upon in class or “demand responses”, can cause a lot of anxiety. Limiting being called upon in class unless your hand is raised can be requested as an accommodation. If the professor has established a need for in-class participation that counts towards your grade, the accommodation can be that the professor prepares the student before calling on them in class so that the student has time to ready themselves.
Reframing Participation Questions or In-Class Feedback	Professors can “reframe” questions in order to help you give a clearer, more correct, or specific answer while participating in class. If a discussion in class needs to be cut short because of time, but you still need further explanation, you can request that the professor meets with you after class.
Reducing Distraction	Finding classes with a small number of students can help if you struggle with concentration. If the school can’t provide a smaller class, you may be accommodated by having a reserved seat at the very front of the class.

So we have to think
“Outside-The-Box”!

Some examples:

- Advanced Warning/“Pre-processing”
- Broken Time
- Changing the Format of Demand Responses
- Reframing or Diverting In-Class Questions/Feedback
- Reducing Distractions

Advance Warning or “Pre-Processing”

<p>Advance Warning or “Pre-Processing”</p>	<p>If classes make you nervous, it may help if the professor lays out what is going to happen at the start of class. This allows for “pre-processing” so that you can prepare mentally for what’s to come, easing any anxiety about not being prepared for class.</p>
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- Professor lays out objectives/class plan
- For anxiety issues
 - Allows for preparing mentally



Broken Time

Broken Time

If you struggle with having to focus for a long period of time, a “broken time” accommodation may help. “Broken time” is different from “extended time.” Having “extended time” involves having 150% of the time originally given to take an exam, or some call it, “time and a half.” In “broken time,” you work for a period of time on classwork, an in-class essay or exam, during which you are allowed to take short breaks. You spend the same amount of time on the activity as everyone else, but the time is just broken up. Taking a break can refresh and reorient your mind, allowing you to better focus on the activity. This way whatever time you spend feeling anxious or distracted will not count towards your total time given.

- For anxiety and concentration issues
- Different from “Time and a half”
- Allowed to take short breaks, but is overall the same amount of time as others
 - feeling anxious or distracted will not count towards time

Limiting or Changing the Way Demand Responses are Requested

Professors Limiting or Changing the Way Demand Responses are Requested

Being called upon in class or “demand responses”, can cause a lot of anxiety. Limiting being called upon in class unless your hand is raised can be requested as an accommodation. If the professor has established a need for in-class participation that counts towards your grade, the accommodation can be that the professor prepares the student before calling on them in class so that the student has time to ready themselves.

- For anxiety issues
- Limiting being called upon in class as an accommodation
- OR professor can prepare you before calling on you (even better if does the same for the whole classroom for the sake of confidentiality)

Reframing Participation Questions or In-Class Feedback

Reframing Participation Questions or In-Class Feedback

Professors can “reframe” questions in order to help you give a clearer, more correct, or specific answer while participating in class. If a discussion in class needs to be cut short because of time, but you still need further explanation, you can request that the professor meets with you after class.

- For if you sometimes have trouble understanding
- Professors repeat and reframe questions in order to help you give a clearer, more correct, or specific answer while participating in class
- If you need further explanation, the professor can meet you after class

Reducing Distraction

Reducing Distraction

Finding classes with a small number of students can help if you struggle with concentration. If the school can't provide a smaller class, you may be accommodated by having a reserved seat at the very front of the class.

- For those with concentration issues
- What You Can Do- find classes with a small number of students
- Your professor can provide a seat at the very front of class



How To Find Your Best Accommodations

- College Accessibility/Disability Services Offices (DSOs) can help, but **the person who knows you and your challenges best is you!**
 - What are your strengths and struggles?
 - If you can have anything to help you, what would you use?
 - Essentially up to DSOs to find a good accommodation that will line up with the rules of the college but can give you what you need
- Having a group of people that know you and support you is important to bounce your thoughts off of
 - People you trust and who have seen you positively

Some ideas for help while seeking accommodations

- Work with your **support network**
- Your support people cannot request an accommodation for you, but they can **accompany you or help you advocate** for your needs
- Talk to your doctor, clinician, or therapist to **get a letter** that describes your condition and how it specifically affects you
- **Contact the DSO** - professors usually provide information about how to contact them in the course syllabus
- Work with your professors and your school to **understand their requirements** from you as a student



RESOURCES



Resources

- For crises/emergencies: call 911, go to the nearest hospital emergency room, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK** - available 24/7
- Try Ulifeline, an online college resource: **www.ulifeline.org**.
- Active Minds is a student-run organization that raises mental health awareness and fights stigma: **<http://www.activeminds.org>**.
- The Jed Foundation has great resources about accommodations. “Set to Go,” a Jed program for emotional readiness has some good articles: **<https://www.settogo.org>**.
- Fashionably Ill Website by Jessica Gimeno:
<http://jessicagimeno.com/6-ideas-how-to-get-stuff-done-when-youre-depressed/>
 - TED Talk: How to Get Stuff Done When You're Depressed - **<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njESIZa2b10>**

THANK YOU!

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Any Questions?