

A Message for Parents

At Disability Services, we know that parents of students with disabilities have more and different concerns than the parent of a typical college student. We also know that you are accustomed to playing a very active role in your student's education. The change in services and responsibility in the college environment can be frightening to parents and to students, and we are aware that most high schools do not prepare students and their parents for the differences they will encounter at college. We hope that the information on this page and others on our website will give you the information you need to become familiar with the post-secondary disability services world so that you can support your son or daughter in navigating this new environment. If you haven't done so already, please look at the information on this page. These links should give you a sense of the differences between the K-12 service model to which you and your student are accustomed and the college model. If you have any additional questions after reviewing the information on our website, please don't hesitate to contact the Special Needs Counselor, Tieren Evans at (252) 738-3350.

As parents of a student with a disability, you may have worked closely with the child's study team to make sure that your son or daughter received accommodations. In college, the service model changes tremendously. While we do have an office for Disability Services, there is no equivalent to the team approach to which you may be accustomed. What this means is that Disability Services and the faculty of VGCC are not responsible for identifying students with disabilities and connecting them with the Disability Services office. Students must identify themselves to the office, and because your son or daughter is at least 18 (or, if younger, is attending college), he or she is viewed as an adult in the eyes of the law and is the only one who can initiate and participate in the process of applying for accommodations. Your role, at this point, is to encourage your student to apply for the necessary accommodations and then step back and let your student take on the responsibility.

We understand that it can be very difficult for you to take on this new and very different role, especially if you are worried that your son or daughter won't initiate the process. We encourage you to take a new view of the disability accommodations situation. Your son or daughter may be in the last environment where the disability laws and accommodations are well-understood by most people he or she will encounter. After college, your student will have to be able to articulate the nature of his or her disability and assert the right to accommodations. Now is the time for your student to begin to take on this responsibility and learn to self-advocate.

Many disabilities are lifelong conditions which will affect a person throughout his or her lifespan. This is why we believe that college is the place for students with disabilities to take responsibility for explaining their needs and for seeking accommodations by themselves. We want our students with disabilities to leave VGCC ready to articulate their condition and needs to employers. College is the place for them to learn to do this with the "safety net" that the Disability Services office can provide if they encounter difficulties. In our experience in providing services to hundreds of students with disabilities, we have found that many of them enter college with little idea of what their diagnosis is and little understanding of why various accommodations have been recommended for them. In many cases, students ask for accommodations that they have not even used in high school simply because they were written into their IEP or 504 plan. When asked why they think such accommodations will help, many don't have an answer. This is the time for students to be responsible for learning what truly helps them, as they will need this information as they move into the workforce. Such self-knowledge will serve students well as they earn their degree and move into the work world.

Your role as parents is crucially important, but it is different at this level. Part of the independence your student will gain by going to college includes making the choice about whether or not to pursue accommodations for a disability. But before your student comes to VGCC, there are several things you can do together to give him or

her information to help with the decision-making process and to prepare for the process of requesting accommodations.

You can help your student by:

- Looking over the Disability Services website together.
- Requesting information from Tieren Evans PH: (252) 738-3350 Email: evanst@vgcc.edu
- Going over the student's IEP or 504 plan and making sure your student knows what the diagnosis says and can explain what accommodations have been helpful.
- Visiting our page entitled "Requesting Accommodation and/or Services" for information on the process for requesting accommodation to be sure that your student comes to VGCC with all of the necessary paperwork and understands the procedure for requesting accommodations.
- Having your student sign waivers with the professionals who have performed testing in order to expedite the process for pursuing follow-up information (which in many cases will not be necessary).

We hope that gaining familiarity with the services and procedures at VGCC will reduce anxiety, help students in their decision to pursue accommodations, and assist them in gathering the necessary materials to make the process go smoothly.

As parents, you have helped your student get to this educational goal - enrollment in college. This is a great accomplishment! It is now your students' responsibility to develop the self-knowledge and self-advocacy skills that are essential to the success of any individual with a disability. We know that the change in your role can be frightening, but remember that college is the launching pad for your student's career and adult life. If you follow our suggestions above, you will know that you sent your student to VGCC with the tools to begin this new phase in his or her life. What happens after that is up to your student.

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