

UNDERSTAND HOW COLLEGE DIFFERS FROM HIGH SCHOOL

The changes you face when you move from high school to college may feel overwhelming. To ease the process, some colleges and universities offer orientation programs to assist students. Traditional freshman orientation programs may include campus visits, review of student handbooks and specific orientation materials, information about the institution, and question and answer sessions. Many institutions develop specialized, optional orientation programs that prepare students with disabilities for campus life. Included may be sessions on mobility, access to facilities, self-advocacy, student rights and responsibilities, and resources for needed support services. You will want to attend both orientation programs, if possible, to learn everything you can ahead of time.

Some of the major differences between high school and college follow. As you review them, consider your ability to adapt to each change, and determine the type and level of support you may need to be successful in this new environment.

Changes in the Academic Environment

- Less structure

- Fewer class meetings

- Grades based on only a few scores

- More writing assignments

- More long-range, comprehensive assignments distributed at the beginning of the semester or term with the expectation of independent completion

- Extensive independent study and assignments

- More independent work to supplement classroom work

- Proficient reading comprehension and note-taking skills

- Less time to ask questions in class

- Less personal attention

- Increased work load

Faster pace of classes

Graded on content mastery, not on effort or on level of improvement

A campus with several buildings to learn to navigate

More stressful and intense learning environment

Increased expectation of technology proficiency (e.g., word processing, campus email, on-line classes, library research)

No IEPs

Changes in the Teacher-Student Relationship

Instructors, not the students, set the class pace

You seek assistance by setting up an appointment with the instructor during his/her office hours

Instructors may have less contact with you

Teacher-to-student ratio increases (typically ranges from 1:20 to 1:500)

Motivation derives from your interests and desire to succeed, not from praise and external rewards

Changes in Student Expectations

You need to monitor your progress

You have more free time and must learn to manage your time efficiently

You must be able to advocate for yourself and your needs

You will work independently to complete all assignments

Excerpted from Virginia's College Guide for Students with Disabilities (2003 Edition).