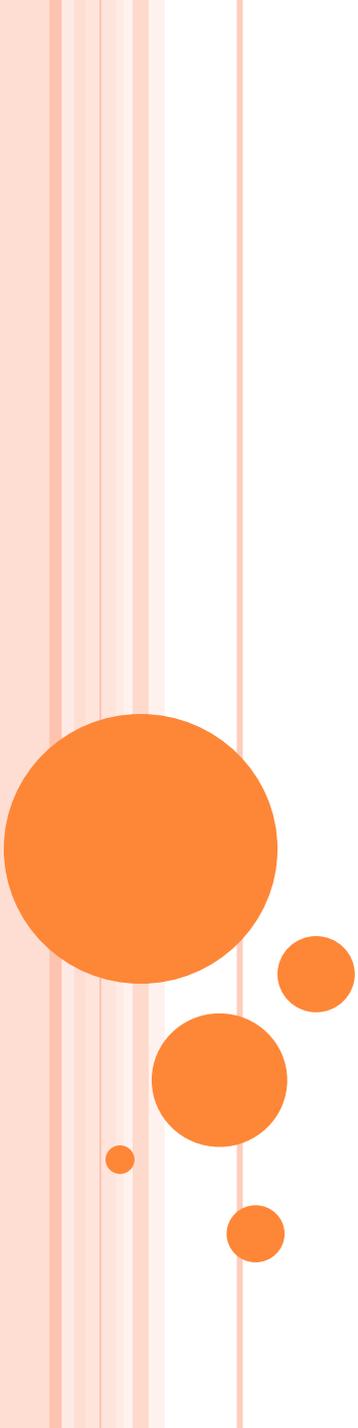


- Good morning. My name is Pat Rodriguez. I am the Independent Living Transition Coordinator at Heightened Independence and Progress, a Center for Independent Living in Hackensack, New Jersey. We are creating a series of videos about Assistive Technology and self-advocacy skills for students transitioning from high school to higher education or work. The name of the project is Assistive Technology for Life After High School, Funded by Disability Rights New Jersey, the Assistive Technology Advocacy Center. The partner organizations involved in this project are Region V Council for Special Education, Heightened Independence and Progress, and Adam Krass Consulting.





SELF-ADVOCACY AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

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WHAT IS SELF-ADVOCACY?

- Self advocacy is knowing what you want, knowing what you are entitled to, and how you can effectively reach your goals (Brinckerhoff, 1994)
- More specifically, self-advocacy emphasizes personal rights and responsibilities and the ability to effectively communicate needs and negotiate for help.



WHAT ARE SOME ADVOCACY SKILLS?

- It involves speaking up for yourself;
- Asking for what you need;
- Negotiating for yourself (working with others to reach an agreement that will meet your needs);
- Knowing your rights and responsibilities;
- Using the resources that are available to you;
- Being able to explain your disability either by the use of written words, pictures or gestures.



HOW CAN SELF-ADVOCACY HELP YOU AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

- Self-advocacy means knowing your skills, strengths, and weaknesses
- When you know what you need, then you can obtain appropriate accommodations in college or at work.



WHAT IS AN ACCOMMODATION?

College

- Accommodations are supports and services provided on college campuses so qualified students with disabilities have equal access and opportunity to benefit from classes, programs, and activities.

Work

- An accommodation at work is considered any modification or adjustment to a job or work environment that enables a qualified person with a disability to apply for or perform a job.



COMMON ACCOMMODATIONS

College

- Extended time, oral testing, scribe (for writing), low-distraction testing environment, large print; sign language interpreter; Braille material

Work

- Work site modifications – adjustable desks and seating, ramps, lifts, wall partitions around workstation to minimize distractions



WHAT IS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)?

- In 1988, AT was defined in the Technology-Related Assistance Act and has since been incorporated into several other laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990)
- “Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.”



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

College

- Alternative mouse device; alternative keyboard; text-to-speech application; speech recognition software; smart pen; digital recorder; graphic organizer software; talking calculator; screen magnifier;

Work

- Assistive technology such as assistive software such as voice recognition and word prediction; adapted computer set-up; amplified phone or text telephone; assistive software such as voice recognition and word prediction



ADVOCATING FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY - THE LAWS: WHAT CHANGES AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

- Understanding how your rights to assistive technology after high school differ from those that you had as a high school student will help you make the most of your postsecondary experience. Once you are familiar with the laws regarding assistive technology in college and work, and what types of questions to ask, you can become your own assistive technology advocate.



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LAWS

○ High School

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was the law that provided you free instructional and support services (possibly including assistive technology tools) through an Individualized Education Plan.

○ College

- Americans with Disabilities Act (most recent version is the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act or ADAAA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act take over.
- These civil rights laws mandate that colleges provide access to accommodations to all “otherwise qualified” students and afford them an “equal opportunity” in the institution’s programs, activities, and services. But what does that mean in terms of getting or using that text-to-speech software or other assistive technology devices you used during your time in high school?
- Remember: Whether you already own and use a particular assistive technology tool, or if you want your college to provide and pay for it, you will need to qualify under the law in order to use the technology in college.



WHAT'S THE PROCESS?

- In college, you must self-identify or disclose as having a disability in order to receive accommodations (assistive technology included).
- Present documentation of your disability to the student disability services office.
- If going to college, you may require a more updated evaluation. Every college is different.
- At work, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified employees and applicants with disabilities, unless such accommodations would pose an undue hardship (e.g. too costly, too extensive, too substantial, too disruptive). In general, the applicant or employee with a disability is responsible for letting the employer know that an accommodation is needed to participate in the application process, to perform essential job functions, or to receive equal benefits and privileges of employment. Employers are not required to provide accommodations if they are not aware of the need.



QUESTIONS TO ASK COLLEGES ABOUT ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Ask the college's disability services office specific questions that address the availability and accessibility of different types of assistive technology resources on campus. Ex: What documentation does the college require before granting you permission to use assistive technology? How will you coordinate your use of Assistive technology with your professors and disability services staff?
- Advocate for your individual needs.
- Ask early; ask often; ask other students who are using assistive technology.



WELL WHO PAYS FOR IT?

- Work – employer, reasonable accommodation – employer is not put in a financial hardship
- College – may pay for it
- Private insurance, non-profit, or through some sort of grant.
- New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS)
- DVRS works with people with disabilities; however, if someone has a visual impairment you may work through the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired



FINAL THOUGHTS....

- As much as you can maximize the positive and minimize the negative, you'll find greater ease in achieving your goals when you emphasize your abilities more than your limitations. By focusing on and developing your abilities, you can feel good about all the things you can do.
- Remember, after you graduate high school, it's up to you to speak up for yourself. This is the essence of self-advocacy and it becomes critical once you graduate high school to learn how to advocate for yourself to request the accommodations you need to be successful in college or at work.

