Know Your Needs

Teachers can help students with disabilities prepare for college by making sure the student understands their disability, are able to communicate with others about their disability and what type of accommodations that they need. The student as they get further along in high school be actively involved in implementing their accommodations, not just depend on their teachers, parents or 504 committee to actually do that for them because when they get to college the expectation is going to be that they take the lead on setting up those accommodations and work directly with their instructors in one of their classes to set those accommodations up. I would encourage the student with a disability to contact their Office of Disability Service at the college that they’re going to as early as possible, so they can begin that process well before the first day of classes. They need to be aware of what that process is, the documentation that they are going to be required to provide, and the procedures because if they don’t do it by the first day of class, it could be couple of weeks into the semester before they have things in place.

Obviously every student that we see is different. We see more and more students that come to college who are very self-aware and actively involved in that process, but we still do see some students who are not. We’re not very vested in the process of setting up their accommodations. Some things to consider or observe and maybe point out is that sometimes the parents are the people really initiating the process for setting up their accommodations without involving their student. Challenging the student or the parent that they really need to have that student involved in that process, so they are aware and start to develop that language and that awareness. Sometimes we interview the students to ask them questions about their needs and the first thing they do is their defer and point and ask the parent, “What is my diagnosis? What accommodations have I been using?” and getting them to kind of break out of that, cause they’re going to have to do that on their own. Every semester we see students who just don’t go through the effort of practically setting up their accommodations. They do it for all types of reasons: they’re either self-conscience about it; they don’t want to be mislabeled; they think, “I think I can do this without my accommodations.” And that’s fine, but if they don’t set up their accommodations or they don’t follow through, they’re going to have to live the consequences of not having those in place if it does negatively affect them. So if they don’t finish their first test, they don’t get a do over or what we call retroactive accommodations; they then have to go from that point forward. Students don’t have to self-identify to every instructor or set up accommodations in every class. If they’re responsibly deciding when to do it and how to do it and put that into place, but if they only want to use accommodations in their math class, they have the choice to do that. Just because they register with the Disability Service Office, they do not have to disclose or meet with every instructor unless they feel they need accommodations in that class.

If a student has not been diagnosed with a disability or suspect that they have a disability, but have never been formally evaluated, some things that they need to consider are the colleges are not required to evaluate them or assess them like an ISD or K-12 system would have to do, so they have to pursue that. So it
would be much more economical for them if they can pursue that while they’re in high school, especially if that services to do those assessments. Those things can take quite awhile to do, sometimes many hours, and they can be costly, so if you can do it through your school system that would be much more economical for the family, but they have to let people know what’s going on. Teachers may notice something; they may suspect that they might have a disability. Are they actually bringing those things up, citing those behaviors that they observe in the student, or in their writing, or in their work that might be indicators that there is a disability present and letting the student and parents decide if they want to pursue getting tested for that. So I just encourage students if they think they need it in college, the earlier that they get tested, the better, so they can have those services in place. And it may be that they don’t have a disability, but they identify a number of weaknesses or strengths, so they can figure out how to best be a good learner or to develop those skills and seek out resources that would help them even if it's not to a level of a disability.