

Lauren 00:06

Welcome to the LDA podcast, a series by The Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our podcast is dedicated to exploring topics of interest to educators, individuals with learning disabilities, parents and professionals to work towards our goal of creating a more equitable world. Welcome to the LDA Podcast. I'm here today with Elizabeth C. Hamblet. She's a college learning disabilities consultant, and an author and speaker on preparing students with disabilities for college. So Elizabeth, thank you so much for being here.

Elizabeth Hamblet 00:34

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so pleased to be here.

Lauren 00:37

So would you be able to give us a little bit of your background, how you got to where you are?

Elizabeth Hamblet 00:41

Oh, sure. So it's going back, you know, farther and farther with every year that passes, but I started my career in special ed, as a high school special ed teacher and case manager. And while I was doing that job, part time, I started working at a college. And in doing that I started to realize that my training as a special ed teacher had not covered what happened for my students once they moved to college, where the rules are different. And the system is different. And so I moved out of Massachusetts, where I was living at the time to New Jersey, where I now live and had a second job at a college and a disability services office and was, you know, the realization of how that that information gap was affecting students started to become clear to me, we had students requesting things that were not typically granted at the college level, some things that didn't even seem to be accommodations that they were requesting. And so when I left my second job, I decided to start making these presentations, preparing students for college transition and doing some writing. And I wrote my first book, and I am now at my third university, and now what I think adds up to more than 25 years. So I've been at it a while, I guess.

Lauren 02:04

That's great. Well, hopefully, we can help fill some of that information gap with this podcast here today. So I guess just to start off, can a high school student expect their IEP or 504 plan to come with them in college? And if that's not the case, what can they expect?

Elizabeth Hamblet 02:19

Oh, that's a great question. So there's a lot of misunderstanding about this, which is understandable. So just from a perspective of what that plan is for, it's just for use in the K through 12 system. So what gets confusing to a lot of students is that sometimes a college will allow a student to use their IEP or their 504 plan as a source of documentation when they come to college. So when students are admitted to college, that's when they enroll, that's when they can register with our office. And as part of that process, most colleges require some kind of documentation to show their history of receiving accommodations to perhaps show more about their, their, their profile of strengths and weaknesses.

Elizabeth Hamblet 03:11

And so sometimes colleges will take the IEP and 504. And sometimes they will grant the same accommodations that were written into that plan. And some people interpret that to mean that that means that the college is following their 504 or their IEP. Now, I am not a lawyer, and I am not a doctor. So I'm always careful to preface everything I say, with the caveat that none of this is legal or medical advice, or should be construed as such, but I've been in the field a long time. And essentially IEPs and 504 plans expire when students graduate from high school. Now you working at LDA, you probably know that there are some students who don't graduate from high school on a traditional timeline. They can keep their high school plan, as long as they are still in the system. But once they graduate, those plans no longer have a legal application. And so, let me be clear, let me start with the good news, colleges do provide accommodations. There are lots of different accommodations that are out there in the world. But it's really important that students and professionals and parents and guardians don't expect that because a student has something written into their IEP or 504 plan, the college will have to provide it. They're just, they're not legally valid after students graduate. And so they may be useful as documentation, but they don't put any kind of requirement on a college.

Lauren 04:44

That's good to know. Is it possible for students to know if a college will accept their IEP plan before they enroll? Where could they look for that information?

Elizabeth Hamblet 04:52

That is also an excellent question. So students should be able to find what are commonly called a college's documentation requirements by looking for them online. So they'll navigate to the college's Disability Services page. And it's helpful to know that sometimes the office's name doesn't have the word disability in it, it might be called the office for access or equity or accessibility. And once they navigate to that, they should be able to find the documentation requirements. If they have poked around, and they can't find them, they can call the office and ask for them. But most of the time, they'll find them online. And you know, sometimes they'll be very, very general. And sometimes, you know, certainly for learning disabilities, they may have specifics about what testing students have to have had, how old their documentation can be, that is the source of a lot of mythology.

Elizabeth Hamblet 05:50

There's no requirement in the law anywhere that addresses the age of documentation. So there may be colleges out there that say, if it's three years old and a day, they won't take it. But that's not commonly the case. Some schools will say it has to be current, and they don't define current so that they can show some flexibility. So it's a really good question. I'm glad you asked. Students should check this stuff out, in my opinion, while they're adding colleges to their list, so that they know they're starting to get a sense that they can take some notes with their parents in that way, once they get accepted and enroll somewhere, they'll already know what they need.

Lauren 06:32

Absolutely. That's good to know. So what rights should college students with disabilities be aware of?

Elizabeth Hamblet 06:38

I'm really glad you asked. And I have to start with the right that sometimes makes the adults around students uneasy. But a student has a right not to identify themselves at college as being a person with a disability. There is no college Child Find requirement like there is in K through 12. Colleges are not responsible for seeking out students with disabilities. And asking them if they want to register, we don't go dorm, room by room and freshman orientation knocking on doors saying, Hey, here's our registration materials, do you want to sign up with us? So that is their first right as long as they are not interested in having accommodations. If they do want to have accommodations, then they do have to register with us. But once they do, they have a bunch of rights. And you know, the research shows us that some students report in studies that the reason that they don't register with us, or they don't do so until later, which is also their right, meaning after they initially start school, they that they want that information to be private that they don't want professors to you know, think differently about them. Now, in order for them to have their accommodations, the professors do need to know that they've been approved. But the notifications that professors get that say Elizabeth Hamlet is a student in your class, and she has a disability, and we have approved her for ABC and D, don't tell professors what the disability is. And so can I promise that across 4000 schools in this country, it never happens? I can't but I think it's very unlikely. And again, it's a question students can ask while they're looking at colleges and say what do your notifications look like?

Elizabeth Hamlet 08:33

So that is something that they don't have to worry about. We keep the information about the specifics regarding their disability private, if they want to tell a professor all about their disability, they're welcome to do that. But we generally won't do that. And then you know, if they register with us, they have a right to individual consideration of all of their requests. We don't just say, Oh, if you have ADHD, here's the pile of things you get. And if you don't have ADHD, you don't get those. We will look at every request. They may, even when they request things that we don't have to provide or we just generally don't, we will always look at the requests and make a decision. And they have a right to have those accommodations we've approved unless a professor can make a case that is a fundamental alteration to their class objectives or what they're measuring. And that's not something a professor just gets to design on their own. They have to go through a process. Those vary. The law doesn't lay out what that process has to involve. But they have to have at least consideration by a few people at the university of the professor's objections before it can be determined that they can't have a particular accommodation.

Lauren 09:59

Okay, so students who do disclose their learning disability to get accommodations, how do they go about getting these accommodations? What sort of documentation will they need?

Elizabeth Hamlet 10:10

So it really does vary. And the way that they go through the process is fairly similar across schools. Again, they can navigate to our Disability Services Office page, they should be able to find the registration process there. It's not always easy, sometimes you have to look under new students. Some, I mean, some will have a button sort of register here, which is really nice. But if not, they can look under new students or prospective students to find that process. Sometimes it's all online, and they access it with their student ID number. Sometimes it's a PDF that they print out that they can sometimes fill out online, and then submit, you know, via email. And so they're going to answer a bunch of questions, you

know, just the kinds of questions every office, the university has, what's your name? What's your email address? You know, What class are you in? And then often we will say, what accommodations are you requesting? Which have you used in the past? What, you know, why do you need this particular accommodation that you're requesting, and it is absolutely fine for students to request things that they have never used before. Where, you know, we will make a decision based on how we see their eligibility, but they don't have to have used it in the past to ask for the next environment. And then they will also provide the documentation. And again, that really varies from college to college. So at some colleges, if they just have the IEP or 504, that is enough. I just saw a study that somebody did that they reviewed, I think it was 300 websites. And I apologize if I have these numbers wrong, I think it was a study that folks at Landmark did, Manju Banerjee and Adam Lalor and somebody else. So I think 10% said, just an IEP or a 504, or what's commonly called an SOP, a Summary of Performance document. And that is something that high schools have to put together for graduating seniors on IEPs. Students on 504 plans don't get those.

Elizabeth Hamblet 12:32

So if it's not going to be if they don't just accept those plans by themselves, typically for learning disabilities, they want the kind of testing that often is done for those students. So testing of their cognitive ability, and their academic ability, which taken together is called a psycho educational evaluation, which is the kind that most school districts do. Sometimes I hear parents telling each other Oh, your student has to have a neuropsychological evaluation. And that may be true in some places, but generally not. So don't worry about that. As far as how old testing can be, as I started by saying, there, I assume there's a school out there that says three years old and a day is too old. I can't name one for you. But that's always a possibility. But, you know, and again, I haven't seen recent data, looking at how old colleges say that stuff can be in talking to my colleagues. It kind of ranges often. If they've been tested at some point in high school, that will be okay. But again, those specific students can find online.

Lauren 13:47

Get ready for LDA's 60th Annual International Conference in Las Vegas from February 21 to 23rd. For 60 years, LDA has held annual conferences that aim to raise awareness about learning disabilities, and provide individuals, educators, grad students, families and professionals with the latest information and learning disabilities topics. This year we'll be holding LDACON at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hotel. Learn more and join us by visiting bit.ly/LDACON60.

Lauren 14:18

All right, well, so what are some of the common accommodations in college that they can look for?

Elizabeth Hamblet 14:24

There are a lot of them. So I can't certainly speak to all of them. But the high frequency ones center often on exams. So extended time for exams is a very commonly approved accommodation. The numbers are a little strange. Sometimes they're represented as decimal points. 1.5 times is what we use where I work. Sometimes it's called phrased as 150% time. So generally if a student's classmates get two hours to take their exam, the student with 1.5 would get three hours to take the exam. And I think it's really important to start introducing students to the vocabulary that we use at the college level,

because I think sometimes terms used in K through 12, you know, may not seem so meaningful there, but they mean a lot to us. So, sometimes students come in and they ask for untimed exams, or they ask for unlimited time. And there may be a college that says yes, but most of us won't, because that literally means untimed. And if we say yes, then we have to provide however much time the student says that they need. So instead, we will usually substitute a specific amount. Double time is something that is available, it is an awfully long time to take an exam. And sometimes students will get additional accommodations that might help facilitate their progress through tests, so that perhaps they won't need double time. And that's an example of something so for instance, a student might get accommodated with a laptop, for written answers where they're, you know, writing essays or they have to write, you know, some short answers. And they can use the spellcheck and the grammar check. So that might, for a student who's a really slow processor and also has, you know, slow graphical motor speed that could help. Reduced distractions site is something that students might be eligible for, if they have attention deficit disorder, and they are easily distractible. Again, we generally don't say distraction free, because we kind of can't promise that a student won't be distracted by, you know, the color of the paint on the walls, for instance. And we don't often have a private room for every student who wants to be able to test in that way. So we will put them in a place where restrictions should be reduced.

Elizabeth Hamblet 17:11

Use of a calculator is often not problematic at the college level, because in a lot of college math classes, they actually need to have a calculator. But students who have dyscalculia should ask for it just in case for some reason a professor objects. And, you know, again, the use of a laptop shouldn't be problematic, unless it's something where part of what the professor is measuring is the ability to spell certain terms correctly.

Lauren 17:41

Well, that's a really good overall of things that people can look for, look out for and know to expect. Do you have any advice on helping college students with LD to self advocate?

Elizabeth Hamblet 17:52

I think that they have to, you know, feel confident that what we are here to do, is to level the playing field for them, you know, they are not getting

Elizabeth Hamblet 18:05

advantages from our office, we're not there to do that. And so I mentioned this, because I was just looking at the research again, and it said, some students don't request accommodations, because they feel like it's cheating, or they feel like it is putting them an advantage over their classmates, they feel funny about it, that's not what we're here for. And so, you know, it is their civil rights, again, not legal advice, but it's their civil rights as if they are found eligible by their college to have these accommodations for their disability. And so, you know, it's there for them to utilize, so that they can position themselves to do the best that they can, given the work that they've done, the studying, they've done, etc, and so on. And so I think that, you know, they should feel comfortable knowing that this stuff is here for them. And it is meant to, you know, address their disability.

Elizabeth Hamblet 19:08

If they want help putting together a statement to email to the professors, that something that disability services might help them with, or, you know, to practice what they might want to say to a professor about their disability, you know, preparing is always a good idea. And, you know, nobody's going to expect them to give an Oscar-worthy speech, you know, without notes if they go and sit down with their professors. So, you know, I can't promise that every professor that they would want to speak to would be, you know, open minded and but it doesn't matter, in that this is the law and as long as it's been approved by our office and the professor hasn't been able to show that it's, it's a fundamental alteration, the discipline, the accommodation, excuse me, stance.

Lauren 19:55

Absolutely. Well, that's good to keep in mind. And then that leads into my next question. What general advice would you give to students with learning disabilities who are transitioning into college?

Elizabeth Hamblet 20:06

Use your resources. And that's not just us, you know, more and more colleges. And again, this is all anecdotal, I don't have, I haven't seen numbers. But I am hearing more stories about colleges providing peer mentoring, or academic coaching, executive function workshops. And that's all there is a recognition that college is hard, and not just for students with disabilities, which is why some of this stuff isn't reserved for students specifically with disabilities. So that stuff is there, students who seek help tend to be the ones who are successful. And that I don't mean to say that by assuming that as every student with a disability is going to go to college and struggle, I just, college is meant to be challenging, and it's challenging to all students who are making that transition. And so the help is there for them to access. And, you know, one of the directors that I interviewed said, You know, it's really hard when they wait, and now they are, you know, underwater with their classes. It's hard to catch up when you've let it go a long time. And of course, the anxiety makes things even worse. So the moment you find that something is challenging, you know, go and seek the help, but also, you know, to have the habits that are associated with college success, you need to eat well. And frequently, you need to get enough sleep, you need to go to class, those sort of habits, and it's so easy to get behind on things like reading, because unlike in high school, you know, professors generally aren't giving you a bunch of comprehension questions that you have to, you know, submit every week. Now, you may have to do a response paper once a week, that you turn in and maybe respond to somebody else. But in situations where nobody's kind of keeping you on track, it can be really easy to get behind, and then have a huge pile of things to catch up on before a midterm or final. And so trying to organize your time every week, and just keep up with the work will go so far in just kind of keeping your head above water and you know, reducing the stress levels.

Lauren 22:32

Definitely. Well Elizabeth, this has been a great, really informative conversation, so thank you. So what are some resources that you can share? And how can people connect with you?

Elizabeth Hamblet 22:41

Ah, thank you for asking. So my new book should be out in late fall, it's going to be called Seven Steps to College Success, a Pathway for Students with Disabilities, Third Edition. So that will be out. I offer lots of free information on my website. So it's LD Advisory, that's ldadvisory.com. And from there, you

can find information just written for students and their families, general kind of foundational information about college and how the system works, admissions questions that people ask a lot, documentation, information, information about registering. And then there's a link to my blog, which will be updated in the fall with interview bonus interview content from the book. And I have a YouTube channel because I know some people would rather watch than read. So I've created videos there. I've also interviewed relevant experts that have things to share for these families. So there's lots of free information out there. And then there's the book, I have a six page kind of Reader's Digest guide on transition, and an on demand webinar about academic accommodations that goes farther than I had time to do today.

Lauren 24:13

Well, that's great. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

Elizabeth Hamblet 24:17

Thank you so much for having me. It was a pleasure.

Lauren 24:26

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