



# CT AHEAD

Connecticut Association on  
Higher Education and Disability

## Meeting Minutes - April 9th, 2021

Accommodations from High School to College: Let's Talk Transition!

A conversation between CT AHEAD and CSCA

Kristen called the meeting to order at 9:00am

- 47 in attendance
- Kristen introduced meeting topic, agenda, and presenters:
  - Kristen Scavone, CT Ahead Board Member and Director of AccessAbility Services at ECSU
  - Sharon Veatch, CSCA Board Member and HS Counselor from Regional School District one
  - The overall goal was to facilitate a conversation between high school counselors and higher education professionals in order to have an honest dialogue where we could ask each other questions with the hope that the conversations and connections continue beyond today.

Finding a College – Determining a Good Fit

- [The CollegeBoard](#) is a great tool for *searching*, but this is different than *researching*
  - Researching includes considering the climate and culture of a school – will the environment be supportive of who the student wants to be
  - Think beyond accommodations: What is the academic, housing, mental health support, etc. experience like for students on campus?
- Students don't have to disclose in admissions process/essay; this is a personal choice
  - Can disclose if feels it is part of what makes them a strong student
- How to know where the student will thrive and not struggle?
  - Don't ask admissions about support, resources, accommodations, etc. for SWD (students with a disability)
    - Do ask DSO (disability services office – *named differently at each school*)
  - The DSO should be part of the *researching* that can provide information that will help student decide if school is a good fit
  - When scheduling a campus visit, ask to also meet with DSO
    - Ask about other supports, services, resources, etc. at school – what is available for all students, what is available for SWD, and which services (if any) have additional fees
- Additional context from Kirsten:
  - Reiterated talking to DSO during the researching process
    - Having a fear of disclosure is ok - DSO will not call admissions!
    - Even if only considering, and not yet applied, contact DSO
  - Additional things to ask/research:
    - Look at the ratio of SWD to DSO staff
    - Ask questions to DSO about more than the academics - ask about the residence halls, dining, supports, resource, services, etc. (are they accessible to you)
    - Research the clubs available to students – is there a club that represents your identity?
  - In higher education, the question is “what are the barriers for that student?”
    - DSO often knows which barriers exist, if accommodations are available, how well students navigate the campus, and can advise (yes, *that* is available / no, *that* is not available at the school)
    - The student must know which questions to ask!
    - DSO cannot determine if school is a good fit – school counselor can help with that decision based on information provided by DSO

- Clarifying information from CT AHEAD members
  - Each DSO is different in the level of interaction with prospective students
    - This is why self-awareness and knowing what is supportive for you is important!
    - Most DSO will provide general information even if they do not review and discuss specific accommodations before acceptance to the school
  - Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis through an interactive process
    - There is no “menu” of accommodations
    - DSO works with the student (and others as needed) to determine “what are the barriers for this student in this environment?” in order to determine accommodations
    - This is why accommodations are generally not promised to prospective students; instead, general information about what is available/possible is discussed

#### Other Factors to Consider

- Counselors work with students to try to develop advocacy skills and educate parents on transitioning from advocate to support
  - Students are encouraged to sit in on IEP/504 meetings as soon as possible
  - The student needs to be willing to get services, understand how their brain works, and articulate what they need
- The ADA defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity.
  - Students should understand what is a “disability” according to the ADA and start thinking about how this relates to their own situation
    - Which areas are impacted?
    - When/where are the substantial limitations? (this can vary based on the environment)
  - While the student does not need to know exactly everything, identifying potential barriers in different environments and situations is helpful when talking with DSO during research phase

#### Post-Secondary Accommodation Process

- Important differences between HS (high school) and HE (higher education):
  - HS focuses on success (under IDEA); HE focuses on access (under ADA)
    - DSO asks “what will provide access” by considering the barriers identified for that individual in that environment
    - Accommodations identified to alleviate the barriers
    - Accommodations cannot alter essential/fundamental requirements
      - No modifications in HE
      - DSO will help determine what is “really” essential/fundamental through communications with faculty/program
  - The student must self-disclose to DSO
    - Admissions does not share information with DSO when a student discloses in an essay
    - DSO is unable to provide support/services without student self-disclosure (for example, DSO cannot provide accommodations when a parent asks for them)
  - The parent/family role is now support and the student takes the lead in self-advocacy
    - The DSO helps; students are not on their own!
    - DSO often honors parents’ involvement in the process handing advocacy over from parent to student - acknowledging parents’ past role and guiding student
    - DSO also considers
      - Cultural differences in the way parents/families may be involved
      - Does the student want for their parent/family to be involved? If not, DSO will honor student request
  - In college, the student is responsible for services of a personal nature, such as a personal care assistant (PCA), individual life coach, etc.
    - Students utilizing a personal service, such as a PCA, are encouraged to discuss applicable processes/policies with DSO (access to residence halls, for example)

- Accommodations are determined through the “interactive process”
  - DSO meets the student where they’re at (while preferable, it is ok if the student is not ready to identify with the “disability label” – they can still get services based on the barriers)
  - DSO needs to know each semester what the barriers are for each course (this can also be impacted by each faculty)
  - DSO needs to know what the barriers are each year for housing
  - The interactive process includes DSO, student, and sometimes others (like a faculty member) when determining environment, essential requirements, barriers, etc.
  - Some accommodations need more discussion than others (for example, flexible deadlines and/or absences should include a conversation with the faculty member to determine what is reasonable in that particular course)
- Disclosure is not automatic and is only done by the student
  - There are no IEP/504 Plans; instead, a letter of accommodation is prepared for each course
    - Letters do not identify the disability; they only include the accommodations needed for that particular course
    - Listed accommodations are only what the faculty must provide
  - DSO can send emails and advocate for the student regarding other types of support, but these are not legally required – the letter of accommodation includes the formal accommodations
- DSO knows it’s not fair and will support the student through the process
  - We know... participating in this process is an extra step for SWD
  - We know... other students don’t have to do extra steps to participate in courses / campus life
  - We strive for this process to be manageable and assist students in self-advocacy development

#### Determining Accommodations in Higher Education

(Each institution may differ; it is important to ask in the researching phase!)

- DSO can consider the history of services
  - Accommodations received in past from anywhere (K-12, transfer institutions, etc.)
  - Recognizing that the history could have been written “for” the student and not “with” the student, receiving the student’s self-report / narrative is just as important
- DSO will review documentation
  - From a variety of sources
    - Usually, the preferred source is dependent upon the diagnosis
    - Each school is different in their documentation requirements
  - DSO will consider:
    - The rationale from provider/documentation of the *why* for previous accommodations
    - Accommodation recommendations are not always appropriate for HE – documentation which identifies the barriers helps determine what is appropriate
    - Documentation must relate to the disability and requested accommodations
  - Additional things to consider:
    - A “diagnosis” on an IEP/504 Plan is not always helpful or relevant to HE
      - The current level of impact is more important than the “diagnosis”
      - If there is no updated evaluation, the HS can provide information on the current level of impact / student needs
    - Continuation of work with professional provider/clinician can be helpful
    - Some DSO are able to assist students who are undocumented (it is important to ask)
    - While a disability doesn’t expire, the individual experience may change overtime
      - DSO needs enough information to know how to best help the student where they are at, and this may change throughout their time at the school
      - Updated documentation may be needed when changes occur
    - While many DSOs will accept documentation that is slightly outdated with additional historical information or a provider update, other intuitions may not (Post-graduate exams, graduate schools, study abroad, etc. often require adult normative evaluations)

- The student will participate in an intake meeting with DSO
  - This is the most important part of the interactive process!
  - DSO discusses barriers and accommodations with the student
  - Questions may include:
    - How do you take notes?
    - What is something that worked great for you in the past?
    - What do you feel might work for you in this course?
    - Do you feel this would help?
    - This is approved, do you want to try this?
  - DSO cannot tell a student what they MUST use, but can provide information on what is possible based on the review of the history and documentation
  - DSO converses with the student to determine what is relevant and reasonable on a case-by-case basis (each course, year, program, etc. may be different)
    - If needed, DSO will contact the faculty member to help to determine essential requirements and reasonable accommodations
    - If a student asks for an accommodation that is not reasonable, DSO will work with the student to identify the barrier (why they made the request) in order to identify a reasonable accommodation based on the essential requirements
  - After the initial intake, the process is NEVER closed!
    - Students can engage with the office at any time
    - There are no “pre-determined review periods”
    - If a situation changes at any point in the year, the student can contact DSO

#### Questions / Discussion

- More information from the HS counselors:
  - The best advice when searching for a college is to get good information!
    - There is a difference between “searching” and “researching”
      - They work with families on how to research school – they often want to go to the admissions page first, but this should be last place to look
      - Instead, look at professors, the research that students are doing, the DSO and other supports and resources
    - As they narrow down their list, that’s when to contact DSO
  - Counselors try to help families embrace that the student has a disability, and help the student learn about how their brain works and how to connect with appropriate resources
  - Not specific to SWD, counselors provide coaching on life skills:
    - How to make phone calls, write emails, send letters, etc.
    - We cannot assume that because students are online all the time that they are comfortable or knowledgeable about digital tools, searching, communication, etc.
- More information from CT AHEAD members:
  - Guide students (and their families) to understand the “language of HE”, the differences in HS and HE services, and what to expect – use other sources of information!
    - This helps the student to become their own self-advocate, and helps parents to know their role is shifting (and not just because “you” are telling them this!)
    - Knowing the language helps communication with DSO be more productive sooner
    - DSO will sometimes have transition and/or family information on their website
  - As the school counselor, you can also contact the DSO to ask questions when working with a student and family
  - Once the student is accepted, look at the documentation guidelines for that school
    - A DSO may have a form that a provider/clinician can fill out to give us the specific information that is most helpful to us
    - If getting updated documentation is an undue burden for the family – encourage the student to contact the DSO office; we can help!

- Accommodations available, and how they are provided, vary by school and will look different than they did in high school
  - For example, “extended time for exams/quizzes” may no longer be provided in a separate/private room and a school may or may not have a testing center
  - This is information the student can ask DSO during the research phase (not whether or not that individual will be approved for the accommodation, but is the accommodation able to be provided and how)
- Information that is most helpful to DSO when determining accommodations includes:
  - Information beyond academics (how is the student impacted in a residential setting?)
  - Information should be current to the impact of going into college
  - IEP/504 Plans are only sometimes helpful; what is more helpful is the information, documentation, evaluation, etc. that was used to determine the IEP/504 Plan
- REMEMBER:
  - YOU (the school counselor) are NOT the reason a student doesn’t get accommodations!!!
  - IEP/504 Plans are based on *success*; the ADA is based on *access* – we have different benchmarks for providing accommodations than K-12 (IDEA)
- Encourage students to be in touch early and often! Accommodations are not retroactive, and we can only help a student who comes to us to ask for assistance!

#### Further Description of Some Terms Used Above

- *Barriers* – are based on the impact of the student’s disability within a specific environment; not all barriers are disability-related (there is a difference between “change and growth is hard” and a disability-related impact on being able to learn, demonstrate, etc.
- *Fundamental Alteration* – an accommodation request that changes the nature or essential requirements of a course, service, program, etc.; the DSO will discuss with others to help determine the essential requirements of a course (for example, a faculty member must have a *reason* for saying something is an essential requirement)
- *Intake Appointment* – the initial meeting a student will have with DSO to discuss accommodations; often this is after the documentation has been reviewed
- *Letters of Accommodation* – the letter which identifies the accommodations (not the disability) which must be provided to the student for a specific course; letters are not automatically provided to faculty by DSO, and students should ask DSO what the letter/disclosure process is for their school
- *Reasonable Accommodation* – an accommodation that does not fundamentally alter the nature of an academic course or institution policy and does not place an undue burden on the institution
- Undue Burden – an action or requirement that results in a significant difficulty or expense

#### Resources

- Books (links provided are for informational purposes only, not as an endorsement of Amazon):
  - [The K&W Guide to Colleges Programs & Services](#)
  - [The College Sourcebook for Students with Learning & Developmental Differences](#)
- Links:
  - ECSU Padlet: <https://padlet.com/scavonek/TransitiontoCollege>
  - Podcast interview on *Colleges For Students Who Learn Differently*: <https://wamcpodcasts.org/podcast/1590-college-for-students-who-learn-differently/>
  - Shared from Staples High School Guidance Department: *Post-High School Planning for Students with Learning Differences*: [https://shs.westportps.org/uploaded/site\\_files/shs/guidance/Post\\_HS\\_options\\_for\\_students\\_with\\_learning\\_differences.pdf](https://shs.westportps.org/uploaded/site_files/shs/guidance/Post_HS_options_for_students_with_learning_differences.pdf)
  - Information on the proposed RISE Act: <https://www.nclد.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/RISE-ACT-One-SheetD6.pdf>
  - Follow the RISE Act: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/869/>

Presentation/Discussion ended 11:05am

## Annual Business Meeting

Kristen called the business meeting to order at 11:15am

- 7 in attendance

### Summary of Meetings 2020-2021

- September 25th, 2020: CT AHEAD Roundtable Meeting – Accommodations in the time of COVID-19
- November 13th, 2020: A Panel Discussion on The Intersectionality of Ableism and Racism
- February 5th, 2021: CT AHEAD – Students with Disabilities Entering the Workforce with DRCT
- April 9th, 2021: Accommodations from High School to College with CSCA

### New Initiatives

- CT AHEAD hosted three Community Chats, and hopes to continue these next year
  - These are a chance for members to connect together informally
  - The four annual meetings held via Zoom didn't offer the same opportunities to connect
  - Next year, the board will ask other members to lead topics and/or offer Chats with no agenda
    - Continue to offer these virtually to supplement in-person meetings
- New board position - Digital Information Officer
  - Was approved as a three-year term; next term (2023) will rotate on two-year schedule
  - There has been a learning curve for managing the website this year
  - The focus for next year will be social media presence – member input is appreciated

### Treasurer's Report as of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021

- Initial Funds: \$5,478.80
- Received \$1024.92 in membership fees
  - The 8 cents difference was due to a miscalculation in PayPal fees
- Received \$250 from National AHEAD
- Total Expenses: \$ 1193.40
  - AHEAD affiliate renewal and liability insurance: \$187.50
  - PO Box for 12 months: \$134
  - Zoom: \$500.09
  - 3Play Media: \$371.81
- Current Funds: \$5560.32

### Next Term Board Positions

- Voting took place through an anonymous Google Form after the meeting
- 20 members participated in voting in the 10 days the form was open
- CT AHEAD Board for the 2021-2023 term:
  - President: Brooks Scavone (automatic succession)
  - President-Elect: OPEN<sup>1</sup>
  - Secretary: Debbie Kosior (20 affirms)
  - Treasurer: Stephanie Hackett (19 affirms; 1 abstain)
  - Digital Information Officer: Morgan Sutton (continuation from previous ½ term)

### New Business / Member Suggestions

- Providing members the opportunity for short-term involvement through ad hoc committees
- Identifying liaisons, areas of interest/expertise on the membership list
- Outreaching to city and town organizations that provide disability support for potential partnerships
- Meeting topics presented by CT AHEAD members (especially in-person meetings)
- Offering "big topic" / partnership meetings, open to non-members, in a virtual or hybrid format
- Update the bylaws to include a digital information policy and name/digital use policy

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<sup>1</sup> This position remains open.

The organization will gratefully accept a member into this position temporarily for one year (2021-2022).

Members interested in serving as President-Elect can email [board@ctahead.org](mailto:board@ctahead.org).

### Reminder of the Members-Only Area

- This is where name and contact information is listed for all CT AHEAD members
- Information on joining the Listserv is on this page
- There are also resources which have been shared by members to members
- Members who would like to add a resource to share can email [board@ctahead.org](mailto:board@ctahead.org)
- Password for the Member's Only Area is included in emails to members; members can also email [board@ctahead.org](mailto:board@ctahead.org) to request the password

Meeting Adjourned 11:50am

Respectfully Submitted,

Crystal Rose Hill-Farrell  
CT AHEAD Secretary