

Differences Between Secondary and Postsecondary Education

Secondary (high school)	Postsecondary (college)
Legal differences	
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004)	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990)
IDEA is about facilitating <i>SUCCESS</i>	ADA is about facilitating <i>ACCESS</i>
The Rehabilitation Act applies to high school and college students (i.e., Section 504 regarding accommodations, Section 113 regarding Pre-Employment Transition Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation [VR] transition services for VR clients).	
Documentation	
IEP and/or Section 504 Plan	Documentation guidelines specify information required for each category of disability
Evaluation provided at the school's expense	Student is responsible for providing necessary documentation (i.e., testing)
Documentation intended to determine eligibility for services based on specific categories in IDEA	Documentation must include information on specific functional limitations and must demonstrate the need for specific accommodations
Self-advocacy	
Student – identified by the school; supported by parents and teachers	Student must self-identify (disclose) to the office of disability services
School is responsible for arranging accommodations	While the school must provide accommodations as arranged, the student is responsible for arranging and ensuring accommodations are provided
Teachers may approach the student if they feel they are in need of help	Professors may wait for the student to initiate contact if help is needed
Parental role	
Parent has access to the student's records	Student must provide written consent for parent to access student records (due to FERPA)
Attends IEP or Section 504 meetings	Students attend meetings on their own (unless they provide consent and request to attend meetings)
Parent may advocate for their child	Student must advocate for themselves

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Instructional differences	
Teachers may modify curriculum or assignments in certain courses	Professors are not required to make modifications to curriculum nor to assignments (including deadlines)
Content is supported differently (i.e., material for homework may be discussed in class or re-taught)	Many classes require large amounts of reading and writing which may or may not be reviewed in class
Class sizes may range from small (8 students) to large (30+)	With the exception of seminars for older college and graduate students, class sizes may range from 20 to more than 200 students
Student responsibilities	
Tutoring and academic support may be a part of a student's IEP or 504 plan	Tutoring and academic support are not a part of the office of disability services; students use the tutoring/academic support services offered to all students
The student's time is structured by others (i.e., in school 8 hours a day)	The student structures his or her own time to complete assignments
Study time outside of class may be minimal	An average of 2-3 hours per credit hour is usually required in college-level classes (i.e., a 3 credit class requires approximately 8 additional hours of preparation)

Credit Debbie Holzberg, PhD (2017)/ Updated NTACTION (2024)