

# Preparing for College: How CIP Supports Students on the Autism Spectrum, with ADD and other LD's

It's that time of year again. But how do we know if and when our students are ready? Since I started at CIP in September of 2008, I have discovered that there is much more to college age life preparedness than having a backpack full of supplies and a map to class. Luckily, CIP is here to offer comprehensive supports to facilitate the balance that leads to their likely independence.

There are just a few things that students should be open to in order to fully receive the benefits of CIP supports:

1. Attend every class (and CIP appointment) for its entirety (with the exception of illness or family event).
2. Understand diagnosis, how it impacts them academically and accommodations they will need to facilitate academic success.
3. Accept feedback regarding academic process and personal life as it affects academics. This can only happen through attendance and understanding of diagnosis.

## **Academic Goals to Support a Life Goal**

Motivation can be achieved by setting goals. The smaller the goals get, the more achievable they are. Achieving goals promotes individual confidence and momentum. For example, in order to get a job, I will need a degree. In order to get a degree, I will need be successful this term. What does success in college look like this term?

1. I wake up every day on time.
2. I eat regularly, sleep regularly, medicate regularly and clean myself and my space daily.
3. I make an academic plan for the day and enter it into my schedule. (Ex: Do 10 math problems from 2-3pm)
4. Reflect on the plan. (Ex: I was only able to complete 5 problems because I did not understand 2 of them and felt defeated. So I stopped.)
5. Make a new plan. (Ex: I will do 5 problems from 2-3pm. If that goes well I, will do 5 more. I will work near the math lab so I can get help if I need it.)

Although frustrating, it is important that students are allowed to (respectively) set their own pace. Students should start slowly and then ease into a more rigorous (more classes or more intense- not both) course load. If they are balancing work, home, social and other personal experiences and goals, they will need to further extend their timeline. In addition, the students will need more help with classes that are not in their realm of special interest because it is likely to be challenging to push through the things they don't want to do in order to obtain long term goals. Or if they do see the big picture they can be easily overwhelmed because they may not be able to break it down into small parts. Even after a student understands how to break assignments down, if they are experiencing stress, they still may need assistance to meet the requirements of assignments. As most people have experienced at one time or another, careful, rational thought leaves us when balance is not achieved. However, we are able to move forward with support and encouragement.

## **Social and executive skills support for academics**

The type of supports needed depends on the student's specific needs and experiences. Students who have received support services at an early age will be more prepared for a college experience. They are willing to accept who they are and adapt themselves to society's expectations earlier. In addition, students who have received intensive social skills instruction and practice in the environment for which it is to take place, tend to have a more positive and successful experience in college. Without services, it is hard to judge the level of readiness for a particular school. In which case, students should start in a school that allows students to take one class that is smaller in size and works well with student services. This will allow time for the student to become proficient with social and executive skills, rather than focus solely on academic content.

At CIP, students are taught how to communicate with their professors. For example, when a teacher tells the student to ask questions if they need clarification, they do not mean that it is okay to ask for more details ten to fifteen times during class. The student may require direct instruction to only ask three questions per class and write the rest down for after class. In addition, students are taught to keep an organized binder and planning system to break down and track their assignments.

## **College support services**

Using college support services is a skill acquired over time. Many students require assistance to understand, obtain and follow through with using the supports offered by the college, even after they have been instructed by college staff and have had practice using them. This is because changes in a student's environment may affect how they make decisions. For instance, a student who completed a degree at a community college and is continuing to a state university, may become overwhelmed by the new experience, resulting in poor performance. As a result, students are taught how to sign up for and utilize college support (disability, tutoring, writing labs, clubs and counseling services, etc.). They are directly taught how and when to disclose as well as how to use student support services to help with the disclosure process. There are phases of this process which may need to be repeated if life events occur.

1. Direct instruction of what they are expected to do to get the best outcome. (ex: schedule a test with extended time, report an absence, ask for help from teacher or other support staff)
2. Planning the negatives and positives of the interactions. (Ex: If I tell the teacher I will miss the class due to illness, then the teacher will know that I still care about the class.)
3. Scripting and Role play of what the best outcome will look like.
4. Execution of the interaction with assistance (Generally just the presence of CIP staff with minimal prompts or contact with instructors). (ex: Emailing college support staff to ask for advice on meeting with the teacher to explain missed assignments and ask for help).
5. Student executes the task (with college supports) on their own with minimal prompts and no CIP staff present.
6. Student self-reports problems, solutions and completed tasks (with college supports only).

The college experience can be a motivator for self-discovery. For some students it happens right away, while others are not ready until much later. Back to school time is exciting because the students get to be out on their own, running their own lives and making their own decisions. But it is stressful for some because they are concerned that they may not make the right choices. While others are not yet sure of the consequences and advantages of their decisions. It is through these experiences that students learn what to do differently in order to get a better outcome. The CIP academic department is dedicated to helping the students to achieve academic independence through goal setting, social and executive skills support and eventually independently utilizing an outside support system in times of need.