

## Understanding Yourself to Help Yourself

### **Knowing and understanding your condition and the impact it has on your life:**

Knowing your diagnosed condition is extremely important as you migrate into the adult world. Most disabling conditions are permanent in nature and knowing what your condition(s) is/are will enable you to advocate for yourself as a person with a disability. There are protections that are afforded to you as an individual with a disability, not only in college but beyond in the world of work.

**Understanding your strengths and weaknesses:** Knowing what your strengths and weakness are will enable you to navigate through adult life more successfully. You must first realize that no one is good at everything (for an individual with or without a disability). Acknowledging your weaknesses does not mean that you give into them; it just allows you to know the areas that you will need to compensate for using your strengths, thereby maximizing your total self. Another way to compensate for your weaknesses is to take advantage of the tools that you as a person with a disability have a right to. Academic accommodations are a perfect example of such a tool. Having insight into what works and what doesn't work for you will not only help you in college, but also in the world of work and beyond.

**Being familiar with the accommodation process:** What exactly is an accommodation? An accommodation is afforded to a person with a disability to essentially level the playing field. An individual with a disability must first qualify for this accommodation by having a physical and/or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. It will be the individual's responsibility to prove the disability and associated limitations by submitting the required documentation. Secondly, the individual must be able to perform the essential functions of the class, degree, assignment, or job with or without a reasonable accommodation. In other words, the individual must be capable of performing the task (whatever the task is) at hand without reducing or modifying the standards of the task. Reducing the standards is viewed by law as an exception and not an accommodation.

An accommodation **MUST** meet the following conditions:

1. Must be reasonable
2. Does not impose an undue hardship to the operations of the program, employer, or job
3. Does not change or modify the integrity of a degree, class, assignment, or essential elements of a job.
4. Allows for reasonable modifications, equipment, or assistive devices as necessary
5. Does not impose a significant threat to the health and safety of self or others

**Knowing the laws that protect you:** There are significant differences between the laws that protect individuals with disabilities in high school and post-secondary education settings. The IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) covers all students with disabilities 12<sup>th</sup> grade and under. Under IDEA, it is reasonable for the school to modify educational programs to fit the unique needs of the student with a disability. In the post-secondary environment and in the world of work, it is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act that protect individuals with disabilities. Listed below are some general statute differences. The ADA and Rehabilitation Act exist to protect individuals with disabilities right to equal opportunity and equal access. It **DOES NOT** insure equal outcome or successful outcomes.

**IDEA (Elementary-High School)****ADA/Rehabilitation Act (College)**

Education is a right and MUST be provided in an appropriate environment to the individual.	Education is NOT a right. Students must meet admission criteria defined under ADA as "otherwise qualified."
School is responsible for identifying a student's Disability.	Students must SELF-identify.
School provides free testing, evaluation, and transportation to program. Transition planning and timelines exist to clarify student's choices and coordinate appropriate coursework options.	Student must provide current and appropriate documentation as defined by the college. If documentation is not adequate, the student will need to secure additional testing and submit it to the college. Student is responsible for contacting faculty and advocating for services.
School develops Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to define educational supports and services under Special Education (SPED.)	Modifications that fundamentally alter the nature of a program, course, or evaluation of student is not considered reasonable. Students make all course work selections.
IEP team determines IEP support and services that will be provided. Access to general curriculum, necessary modifications, and a variety of appropriate accommodations are available.	Academic accommodations are available based on the student's needs (determined by disability documentation.)
Personal services for medical and or physical disabilities are provided and paid for as necessary.	No personal services are required to be covered.
	Equal access not equal outcome. Keiser, S. (1998). International Dyslexia Association Conference.

**Taking responsibility for your success:** Your right as a student, like any other student, is having the opportunity to participate. This right does not guarantee success as a student. You are the only one responsible for your success or failure. There is no law that insures this. You will also be held to the same standards as any other student on campus, including adhering to the Student Code of Conduct. As an adult you will also be responsible for following all state and civic rules and laws.

**Learning to speak out and to have a voice:** Should you feel your needs are not being met regarding access to services, classes, jobs, and or programs, it is your responsibility to voice your individual concerns. You will need to seek out the appropriate individual(s) to assist you. Often times, waiting for someone to ask if you need help may come too late to remedy your situation in a timely manner. There are also advocacy programs available for individuals with disabilities such as the Hawaii Disability Rights Center, Office of Civil Rights (OCR,) and the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii. These programs help individuals with disabilities for who believe their individual rights as a person with disability have been violated.