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LD InfoZone

The Path to Success: Pearls of Wisdom from Anne Ford Scholarship Applicants

By **Noreen Byrne**

Noreen Byrne is a sophomore at the University of California at Berkeley. This semester she is studying politics at New York University and interning with NCLD. Noreen speaks from experience: She is a successful college student with dyslexia.

College-bound high school seniors have a lot in common. They are excited, nervous and think that they "have it all figured out" in one aspect or another. College-bound students with LD have even more in common. During the past four years, NCLD has been reviewing essays written by applicants for the Anne Ford Scholarship. Patterns have emerged from these essays and we have gathered excerpts from some of the best essays to present here. These selections describe a journey filled with hard work, struggles, and frustrations as each student makes his or her own unique and successful transition from high school to college. By sharing how some students with LD "have it all figured out" we hope to encourage and inspire others to take on the academic challenges of college.

College life presents social and academic independence—for better or worse. By the time a student with LD is gearing up for college he or she usually has a good grasp of what tools are needed to be successful and what it means to be a self-advocate and self motivator.

I was never happy about the change [from a mainstreamed class to a special education class]. The class was isolated from the normal 3rd grade classes and only mixed with the general student population for a part of the day. Even though I was only eight years old, I hated being different. I pushed myself to get better in those areas where I was weakest.

This experience has had a lasting effect on my work habits and personality. I discovered my most successful work habits and began to always take the extra steps to learn in that fashion. In spite of my learning disability I know how to focus, persevere and achieve notable results on my own. My teachers remark on how hard-working and conscientious I am. I put in as much time as it takes to finish a job up to my standards.

—Emily E.

All students have to make adjustments when they transition from high school to college. For students with LD, the adjustment to college also means adjusting to a new arrangement of necessary accommodations.

I have utilized assistance such as books-on-tape and having my parents read to me at home. However, as college approaches I have used my parents' help less and less as I do not intend on having two

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additional roommates. While books-on-tape have been very helpful, they are not always available immediately upon request. I have spent an inordinate amount of time reading and studying so that I will be fluent and comfortable when I am alone in college. In order to do this I've had to sacrifice much socializing and fun. I keep a very organized schedule so that I'm always ahead of my assignments.

—Hans B.

Hans and other students with LD on their way to college know what specific accommodations they need to be successful, and are willing to work hard using tools, strategies and accommodations to help handle every academic challenge.

The sacrifices that students with LD make to be successful can bring stress and frustration. College can bring new, and potentially dangerous, outlets for this frustration and so it is increasingly important to find safe and healthy ways to use this emotional energy. Just as important as knowing what academic accommodations are going to be needed is important that students with LD is finding healthy ways to deal with frustration and stress.

To put so much effort into academics can be exhausting...Swimming has become an essential part of my life. Every stroke I take channels my mental and emotional tension into physical energy. I leave the pool feeling physically refreshed and mentally revitalized; ready and motivated to commence with studying.

—Hans B.

Just because a student with LD has had academic success and been accepted to college, does not mean that the LD has gone away.

I won't tell you that at this point I came to terms with my learning disability. I won't tell you that my fight was over. I can't tell you that the past doesn't linger. It took some time and a lot of growing and maturing before I reached an epiphany: there is no one out there that can or should set limits on us. As human beings, we are in charge of our own destiny. I was so engrossed with the idea of being like everyone else, being "normal," that I almost lost track of who I really was or could be.

—Katrina B.

In order to be successful, students with LD must recognize the frustration, challenge and pain of being a student with LD is not going to end, no matter the prestige of his or her new university or class rank.

Having confidence in one's self is essential for a successful transition to college. For a student with LD, academic confidence may be low, even after a long list of accomplishments. The new challenges of college life and academics will shake every student. But students with LD are used to rising to these challenges.

I am a very determined person and I don't like being told that I have limits on what I can do with my life. I am the kind of person who believes that one person can change the world and make it a better place, and that you can do anything you set your mind to. For years my main goal was to graduate high school, go to college, and then go back to Dr. Cutler and show her that she was wrong. That goal has changed. I no longer want to do this just to prove to everyone who ever doubted me that they were wrong. I want to do this because I know that I can, and when I do, I will be able to help children who went through the same thing I did.

—Emily M.

Proving others to be wrong is a very powerful source of confidence, but it runs out fast. The strongest and most lasting source of confidence comes from wanting and doing for one's self rather than showing and proving someone else wrong.

Students with LD are used to beating the odds. Some weren't supposed to read, and did. Some weren't supposed to be mainstreamed, and were. Some weren't supposed to graduate from high school, and now they are going to college. The transition into college can seem like a final challenge, but the transition from high school to college is not different from any other transition that college-bound students with LD have made successfully throughout their entire academic careers.

The greatest lesson I take from overcoming my learning disability is the realization of my own ability to adapt. I can see how life's surprises have shaped my mind. The world does not fit itself to a person; a person fits himself to the world.

—Michael C.

The transition from high school to college is one of self-discovery and adventure, just like every other day in the classroom for students with LD. Students with LD who are planning to go to college have successfully figured out the tools they need to learn, and the transition to college cannot change that. The stories that the scholarship candidates tell are an inspiration to all who struggle to learn, especially for high school students who are hoping or worrying about their postsecondary years.

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