

Transitioning to Post-Secondary School

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The transition from high school to university or college can be stressful time for any young person. Students with hearing loss face added challenges not faced by their typical hearing peers.

There are many differences between secondary and post-secondary schools, some of which are of particular importance to students with hearing loss. For example, the typical class size in high school is around 35 students. University classes can range from 50 to 2,000 students in one class. This larger class size means the instructor's speech will be at greater distance and embedded in a greater amount of noise. This means that additional equipment will be necessary to comprehend speech.

An additional issue is that for many students, this may be their first time living away from home. The student must become more self-sufficient and cannot rely on parental support for such basic tasks as waking up in the morning. I am always quite surprised when I conduct informal polls of high school students asking how they wake up every morning. I do not have exact figures, but it seems that about a third of students still rely on a parent or guardian to shake them awake every day. These students will quickly need to ensure they have a reliable means of waking up, hearing fire alarms, and other important sounds as their loving mother will not be there to act as their ears.

hearing loss and the accommodations that were provided.

One also needs to take initiative with the professors and instructors. It is important that professors are educated about hearing loss, and the accommodations that will be required for success. The Office for Students with Disabilities can be of significant help in this regard. However, if students with hearing loss takes initiative on their own, they will learn how to advocate and be independent. Should they encounter any obstacles, the student's accessibility counsellor can certainly intervene.

Social isolation can be a consequence of hearing loss. As such, it is critical that students with hearing loss take initiative in learning about activities outside of class. These include clubs, fraternities and sororities, sports and fitness. This will ensure that students have a healthy social network for support and companionship.

The third pillar is having a positive attitude. For example, even if one has an appropriate wireless microphone system, the student may still miss information. Short term setbacks can occur, but with a positive attitude, a social support network and the assistance of professionals such as the student's audiologist and accessibility counsellor, modifications and changes can still be made. In the upcoming column on case examples, we will highlight examples in which the first set of accommodations were not successful and modifications were needed.

In summary, the three pillars (Planning, Initiative, and Positivity) will ensure that the transition to a post-secondary institution for a student with hearing loss will be a successful one.