

# Albinism and Advocacy: College Accommodation Considerations

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Are you planning to go to college? For students with albinism, applying to college often entails additional considerations. Each student with albinism is different: this article outlines some *common* questions, potential considerations, and advocacy tips for students with albinism.

## **Do I really need accommodations and to register with disability services at my college/university?**

You may be a whiz at using technology. You may have all the latest programs and apps and know how to find new solutions when tough situations arise. This will serve you well in the academic setting. However, courses at the college level can vary tremendously; each instructor has their own style, and each class has its own requirements. Universities do not provide accommodations until the student has disclosed a disability to the appropriate office, provided documentation, gotten approved

for selected accommodations, and notified the instructor. Because this can take some time and it might be difficult to predict future problems, consider communicating with your university disability office *before* you begin school. This is a proactive step that can support your needs in the long run. You do not have to get or use accommodations if you do not need them.

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## **I know I will probably need accommodations. Will disclosing my disability affect my chances of being accepted to the university?**

Generally, disclosure of your disability to the campus disability office is not connected to admissions. Some individuals with albinism disclose their disability in their college admissions essay and materials, while others choose to not convey this information in the actual application. If you anticipate any need for accommodations, registering with the disability office is key, regardless of your decision to disclose your disability in the application or not.

Disability offices will require you to submit documentation of your disability. Often, this will be a note or report from an ophthalmologist or optometrist. Always make sure your documentation is current and keep copies of these reports for future use.

## **What types of accommodations should I request?**

Accommodations will often be different from those used in high school, so it is important to plan ahead by evaluating potential courses, accessing syllabi and course requirements, and communicating with faculty.

Here are some areas to consider:

- **Distance media (Smartboards, screens, whiteboards, etc) accommodations:**
  - Screen sharing applications that allow you to access the screen on a tablet or monitor at your desk
  - Personal copies of content displayed on the board
  - Notetaker
  - Video magnifier with distance viewing capabilities
  - Taking pictures of content provided on board or presented at a distance

**Always make sure your documentation is current and keep copies of these reports for future use.**

- **Recording of lectures and discussions**
- **Accessible text, braille, tactile/raised line graphics, large print, and other formats.** Some universities provide services to assist with obtaining accessible textbooks and content in braille; others do not. If your university provides braille services, make sure to clarify if you prefer embossed (paper) or electronic format (like BRF). Access to large print should be specified for tests, quizzes, and course materials as well.
- **Extended time for assignments:** ensure that the amount of extended time in your accommodations is clear and how it may vary for major papers and projects versus regular homework assignments.
- **Testing accommodations:** Will you need extended time, a quiet testing room, and/or access to devices for exams?
- **Specific course accommodations:** Some accommodations and devices you may only need once, while others will become a reliable tool for years to come. For example, you may need to take one laboratory science class that includes using a microscope. You may benefit from an alternative method, such as using a microscope with a connection to a screen.

Accommodations more specific to albinism may include glare filtering lenses, settings on computers/tablets, hats, high contrast materials, manipulatives, and opportunities to explore devices and visuals presented in classes and laboratories.

**Housing:** Some students with albinism benefit from choosing their campus housing in advance

and require a specific type of unit for a variety of reasons. Often, this request needs to be submitted many months before the anticipated move-in date!

**Scheduling:** Universities usually offer the option to register for classes early for students with disabilities. This can be a benefit if you have limited access to transportation and need classes to be on a certain time or day, or if for navigation purposes you need classes in a certain area.

### **I am approved for accommodations. How do I ensure my professors will allow me to use them?**

Proactive planning and communication are the best tools you can use to facilitate accommodations. This means you obtain your disability accommodation letter from the university and provide it to the professor before accommodations are needed. Providing the letter before the semester begins is ideal. When I was in my PhD program, I knew I would take advanced statistics courses with highly visual content, and since this was not my strongest area of study, I met with the professors a few months before the classes began to discuss their teaching styles, unique course requirements, programs, and apps. I also inquired about support websites and online tutorials.

Before each semester begins, orient yourself to the routes for each class. If you require orientation and mobility services, submit these requests well in advance.

Before classes begin, make sure any requested accommodations are in place. For example, if your university approved you to use a screen-sharing program in classes to access distance media, work with the disability office and professors to ensure that the equipment and programs are installed, operational, and that procedures are in place for the instructor to share the screen.

*Information provided in this article does not reflect disability accommodation procedures and provisions at any specific university.*

**No: you are not bothering the professor by seeking and utilizing your accommodations.**

Students with albinism are often given accommodations for glare sensitivity. This may include preferential seating to avoid glare from a window or use of sun filters and caps indoors. Be certain to highlight these accommodations to your professors in advance. This may prevent being called out to remove your hat in class or being assigned a bad seat.

### **Am I bothering professors by requesting accommodations?**

No: you are not bothering the professor by seeking and utilizing your accommodations. Professors have willingly entered the teaching profession in higher education. It is their responsibility to ensure that students can access course content equitably. It is your responsibility, however, to facilitate this process.

### **I have encountered issues with access at my university. What should I do?**

Always check with your university resources to seek support. If your accommodations are not working or if you realize you need some additional support, do not hesitate to contact your university disability office to request new or different accommodations. Sometimes, a simple e-mail or phone call alerting the proper department or instructor to an issue is all it takes to remedy the problem.

Countless individuals with albinism have successfully completed all types of degrees at every level at various universities. You are not alone in your quest to further your education. Using a proactive approach and strong communication are essential: these practices can put you on the path to college success.