

STUDENT GUIDE

Strategies for College Success

Researchers have pinpointed several things that students can do to ensure college success, yet many students do not know what they are. The following suggestions can help you to flourish at BCC.

- Set realistic goals and priorities for course work. Try to have realistic expectations.
- Know what accommodations work for you and ask for them. It is your right under the law.
- Become knowledgeable and comfortable about describing your disability so you can advocate for yourself with faculty.
- Know where the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is and become familiar with their policies and procedures for requesting reasonable accommodations.
- Familiarize yourself with the adaptive computing lab and learn to use assistive technology when appropriate.
- Learn where the Tutorial Center, Writing Lab, Math Lab, Career Development Office, Transfer Counselor, and Personal Counselor are and use them when needed, successful people do.
- Understand why you are in college and keep that reason at the forefront of your mind. It will help you persevere through difficult times.
- Keep a calendar with all relevant dates, assignments, and appointments. Do not try to keep a schedule in your head.
- Get to know your academic advisor. He/she will support and guide you. If you are not comfortable with your advisor, ask for another.
- Choose teachers who involve you in the learning process, rather than choosing your teacher/class based on what will fit best in your schedule. Ask upper-class students who the best instructors are.
- Get to know your instructors.
- Show up for class! Instructors tend to test on what they discuss in class, and on attendance and class participation.
- If you can't avoid stress, learn how to live with it. A counselor in the Student Development Center can help.
- Know the college calendar, especially important dates such as add/drop week, last day to drop a class, exam weeks, etc.
- Sit toward the front of the classroom to maximize your contact and to reduce distractions.
- Use a tape recorder during lectures. Selectively record key points using the "pause" switch.
- Listen to the tape or review your written notes as soon as possible after class to refresh your memory and to fill in any gaps.
- Expect to spend at least 3 hours on homework for every hour spent in class. For example, if you are registered for 12 credit hours, you should spend a minimum of 36 hours outside class studying. Often students with disabilities need to spend considerable more time than this to be

successful. If you cannot make this commitment to studying at this time, consider enrolling part time or attending college at a later date.

- If you learn better by listening to others and then discussing what you have learned, start a study group.
- Make a copy of your schedule and keep it in a handy place.
- Know when your high and low energy times are and schedule activities accordingly.
- Review any course syllabus that has been given to you. Know your instructor's name. Know where your instructor's office is and what her/his office hours are. Know what readings you must do. Know what projects will be assigned. Know how you will be graded (tests, projects, papers).
- Tape record important tutor explanations.
- Take 50 minute courses rather than 75-minute courses if you have difficulty concentrating, have a bad back, arthritis, or other physical limitation that makes prolong sitting and/or writing uncomfortable.
- Limit reading intensive courses to three or less per semester if you have a reading or visual impairment.
- Take history, natural science, and mathematics courses during separate semesters if you have a learning disability that makes recalling material difficult.
- Turn notebook sideways and use the columns or use graph paper if you have difficulty keeping your place when solving math problems.
- Spread courses out over a full day instead of taking them back to back when side effects of medication result in a short attention span.
- Know who the people are who can help you and stop by regularly, even if it's only to say, "Hi!"

Academic Accommodations

The DRC at BCC will help you to obtain reasonable and appropriate accommodations to ensure your academic success. However, ***you must initiate the process***. For more information see "Policy for Academic Accommodations" on page 1.

Procedures

Described below is the normal sequence of events involved in obtaining academic accommodations.

1. The student self-identifies the need for accommodations to a BCC faculty or staff member.
2. The student is referred to the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in the Susan B. Anthony (SBA) building, just past the College Store, where the student completes an Intake Form and provides the DRC with a copy of his/her disability documentation.
3. A DRC staff member determines the need for academic accommodations based on official documentation of the student's disability.
4. The DRC staff member completes and signs the *Request for Academic Accommodations* form. Depending on the time of year, the form is either given to the student, or it is mailed to the student at the beginning of each semester. Students taking an online course can request an electronic copy of the Academic Accommodation form.

5. The student receives and signs the Academic Accommodation form (A photocopy is kept on file until the original is returned to DRC).
6. The student submits the accommodations request form to his/her instructor(s). Online students may email the electronic copy of the form to their professors.
7. If the accommodations are accepted, the instructor signs the request form and gives it back to the student. Online students will need to ask their professors to confirm receipt of the form and acceptance of the accommodations by emailing the DRC coordinator and attaching a copy of the form to it.
8. The student returns the form to the DRC. Online students will need to confirm with the DRC that their professors returned the form/email to the DRC.
9. **If the accommodations are rejected**, the student returns to the DRC staff member who completed and signed the request form in step 3 above.
10. The DRC staff member meets with the instructor to work out a reasonable solution. The student may or may not be present at this meeting.
11. If a reasonable solution cannot be reached, the DRC staff member takes the matter to the college's Affirmative Action/504 Coordinator.
12. During the time the adjudication is in process, the faculty member must allow the accommodation as recommended until a solution is determined.
13. The Affirmative Action/504 Coordinator meets with the Disability review Board (Dean of Student Affairs or designee, Dean of Academic Affairs or designee, Assistant Dean of appropriate program or designee, Coordinator of the DRC) to determine appropriate action.

Learning Skills Assessment

Berkshire Community College is happy to provide reasonable accommodations for the Learning Skills Assessment (Accuplacer) to qualified students with documented disabilities. Please refer to *Policy for Academic Accommodation* to determine acceptable documentation and reasonable accommodations.

Procedure

In order to obtain accommodations for the placement test, the following procedures must occur:

1. The student self-identifies the need for accommodation to either, the Assessment and Testing Center staff and is then referred to the DRC; or the student self-identifies to the DRC directly.
2. A DRC staff member determines the need for academic accommodations based on official documentation of the student's disability.
3. A DRC staff member reviews the documentation and completes a *Learning Skills Assessment Accommodation* form and forwards it to the Testing Center.
4. The Testing Center contacts the student to schedule the assessment with accommodations.
5. The Testing Center administers the assessment and notifies the student of the results.
6. The student schedules an appointment through the Registrar's Office to meet with an academic advisor in the Academic Advising Office to select courses.

Alternate Testing

Every effort will be made for students, who need extended time or a quiet proctored setting, to take their course exams with their instructors.

However, if the instructor is unable to provide the accommodation, or if additional assistance is needed, eligible students (*Request for Academic Accommodations* form completed and on file) must do the following at least one week prior to the course test date:

1. Schedule an appointment with Disability Resource Center (DRC).
2. Request an *Exam Proctoring Checklist* from the DRC and deliver it to the instructor in a timely manner.
3. Inform the instructor that you will be taking your exam with accommodations in the DRC and that this form must accompany your exam.
4. Report to the DRC on time for your scheduled exam. Unfortunately, if you arrive late, you risk losing your testing appointment or having time deducted from your allotment because our staff, space, and time is limited.

Your instructor must have the exam in the DRC office at least 48 hours prior to scheduled test date. This enables DRC staff to scan tests, record them, or to enlarge them, if necessary.

Testing accommodations are available:

Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the main campus. Special arrangements can be made for night students or students taking courses at the South County Center, McCann Technical Center, or the Intermodal Center by contacting the coordinator of the DRC.

Exceptions

Every effort will be made for you to take your course exam at your regularly scheduled class time. The only exceptions are when you have:

- back-to-back classes, or
- an evening class, or
- DRC does not have an available proctor at the requested time.

Only under the above conditions will you be allowed to schedule a course exam for a time other than the designated class time, and only if it is within three days of the scheduled exam. Alternative arrangements must be made with the instructor.

DRC will not permit students to make-up exams without written/verbal consent from their instructor.

Course Substitutions

A student with a disability may qualify for either modification or substitution of specific course work required for a program certificate or degree based on the limits of his/her disability.

Policy

In all cases, it is your responsibility to furnish documentation verifying your handicapping condition (see "Documentation" heading on page 3 for an explanation of appropriate documentation).

For the purpose of course substitution, the documentation must provide clear and specific evidence that supports your inability to do the course work. Such documentation shall be submitted to the Coordinator of the DRC, who, acting for the college, will determine the nature and conditions of accommodations as they relate to the disability.

Acting with advice from the Coordinator of DRC and the appropriate Assistant Dean, the Dean of Academic Affairs shall determine the need for the modification or substitution of course work. In such cases the following conditions must apply:

- You must be otherwise qualified to complete the program with, or without, accommodations.
- Modifications or substitutions are only granted if the college determines they are not essential to the program of study, or to particular degree requirement; and only after you have made a good faith effort to complete the course with accommodations.

This policy does not obligate the college to modify or waive other academic requirements including, but not limited to, the college's right to require appropriate substitutions for modifications made.

Procedures

The following procedures must be completed for a course substitution to be considered:

1. The student completes a *Request for Course Substitution* form based on his/her disability.
2. The student submits the form to the DRC coordinator, along with a copy of his/her disability documentation, if not already on file.
3. The DRC coordinator interviews the student and explores all possible course accommodations before a course substitution is considered.
4. When the documentation is in place, the DRC coordinator evaluates the specificity of the documentation, as it relates to the request.
5. The DRC coordinator makes a determination and, if appropriate, recommends a course substitution.
6. The DRC coordinator meets with the appropriate Assistant Dean to discuss the course substitution. At this time, the Assistant Dean may make suggestions of appropriate alternative courses, or deny the request because the request would require a substantial change in an essential element of the curriculum.
7. The Assistant Dean and Dean of Academic Affairs review the decisions, consult with the DRC coordinator, and reach a mutually agreeable recommendation. The decision is recorded on the *Course Substitution* form.
8. The DRC coordinator meets with the student and the two of them sign the *Course Substitution* form. One copy is given to the student, and one is placed in his/her file.

If the student is not satisfied with the decision, he/she has the right to follow the grievance process as outlined in the college's policy guide.

Obtaining a Note-taker

Note-takers are generally classmates who share copies of their course notes with you. You may obtain class notes by

- asking a classmate for copies of his/her notes,
- asking your instructor for copies of his/her lecture notes,
- asking your instructor to make an announcement seeking a volunteer note-taker. When you require a note-taker, the DRC will attach a letter, for your instructor, to your Academic Accommodation form. This letter will contain information about what your instructor needs to do to assist you in obtaining a note-taker.

Interested students are asked to see the instructor after class at which time the instructor takes the name(s) and phone number(s) of the volunteer(s), and gives them to you. You then contact one of the volunteers to be your note-taker.

If needed, a DRC staff member will role play appropriate methods for asking someone to be a note-taker, or for asking an instructor for assistance.

If a volunteer note-taker within the class cannot be recruited, DRC will assist you in finding a volunteer to go to class with you.

Once a note-taker has been recruited, he/she may use the photocopy machine in the Student Development Center, or he/she may use carbonless paper available in the DRC office.

After you receive at least one set of notes, you should meet with the instructor during his/her office hours to evaluate the notes to see if they are meaningful and effective. The following elements should be considered:

- Did the note-taker identify and write down at least four or five of the most important ideas that the lecture was built around?
- Did he/she make connections among them? Include supporting details?
- Did he/she leave space on the notes for a recall column – a space where you can fill in key words or phrases that will act as labels or tags for main ideas and key information covered in the notes?

If the notetaking arrangement is not working in a satisfactory manner, you must inform DRC as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Sign Language Interpreters

If you need a sign language interpreter, you must request one from the Coordinator of the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Reasonable notification is expected.

Because interpreters are costly, you are expected to notify DRC within 48 hours before an expected absence, or when you do not need the services of a scheduled interpreter, so we may cancel the service. *Three unexcused absences or late cancellations, without good cause will result in the suspension of interpreter services until you meet with the DRC coordinator.*

If you, or the interpreter, are absent unexpectedly, please let us know as soon as possible so we may adjust our records accordingly.

Personal Care Attendants in the Classroom

A personal care attendant (PCA) is a person who assists an individual with a disability with the activities of daily living.

In the classroom, the PCA may monitor the student's adaptive equipment, serve as the student's voice when appropriate, or take notes for the student. The college recognizes that the role of the PCA is critical to the success of the student.

Guidelines

To ensure that students with disabilities are recognized as independent class members, the following guidelines are provided for personal care attendants:

- attend to the needs for which he/she was hired,
- serve as the student's voice, when appropriate, without offering his/her own perspective,
- demonstrate appropriate classroom behavior,
- abide by college policies as described in the college's policy guide,
- adhere to all college parking regulations, and
- be considered a full participating member of the class, only IF he/she is registered for that class.

Supported Education Specialist/Advocate

Supported education has been defined in the following terms:

"Education in integrated settings for people with severe psychiatric disabilities for whom post-secondary education has not traditionally occurred, or for people whom postsecondary education has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a severe psychiatric disability and who, because of their handicap, need ongoing support services to be successful in the education environment."

Services

A Supported Education Specialist generally assists students with the following:

- Identifying interests and educational preference;
- Completing admissions and/or financial aid applications;
- Assisting with the registration process;
- Coordinating campus support service (i.e., DRC, Counseling, Tutorial Center) and community-based support services (i.e., Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, Mental Health Services of the Berkshires, Berkshire Training and Employment);
- Reducing anxiety through skills training; and
- Providing crisis resolution.

Advocates for students with disabilities may assist them by doing the following:

- refer to student to the DRC;
- accompany the student to the DRC;
- request or recommend accommodations for consideration via the DRC;

- with the student's permission, participate in faculty/student/DRC meetings, as deemed appropriate by DRC;
- with the student's permission, participate in faculty/student conversations regarding clarification of student's assignments;
- with the student's written consent, request to be informed of the student's progress (i.e., academic warning, faculty concerns) via the DRC office; and
- accompany the student to college offices (i.e., Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar), but not act on the student's behalf.

Advocates for students with disabilities may NOT do the following:

- negotiate accommodations, academic adjustments, or any other academic issue with faculty, regardless of the student's presence. All such matters must go through the DRC office. Students requiring such services must formally register with that office; or
- have access to a student's grades pursuant to The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 without written consent from the student on file in the Registrar's Office.

Handicapped Parking

Handicapped parking is conveniently available throughout the campus. However, *the college cannot issue handicapped parking permits.*

In order to park in a handicapped space, you must possess one of the following:

- a distinguishing license plate issued in accordance with Massachusetts General law, Chapter 90, Section 2, or
- a special parking identification plate issued in accordance with the above law and bearing the driver's name and photograph, or
- the official handicapped parking identification issued by any other state or Canadian Province.

The Registry of motor Vehicles is responsible for issuing the above plates in Massachusetts. The DRC office cannot issue handicapped parking permits.

College Resources

Berkshire Community College provides the following resources to assist BCC students.

Adaptive Computing Lab

Adaptive computing services and training are available for qualified students with disabilities through the Adaptive Computer Lab located in the DRC. The Lab provides access for students with disabilities to computer technology through specially designed adaptive software/hardware.

Support Services

The staff at BCC provides a wide variety of services and experiences that complement your academic pursuits. You are encouraged to make use of all available resources, services, programs, and facilities.

Below is just a partial list of the services available to you. Please see your Student Handbook for others.

Career Development

Are you unsure about your career direction? Explore your options with the help of the Career Development staff. Workshops can help you identify your skills, interests, and values in relation to career selection.

Consider attending one of the workshops on resume writing, job search strategies, or effective interviewing skills that are held each semester. You'll find this information helpful whether you plan to transfer to another college, or enter the job market, after your graduation from BCC.

Personal Counseling

As a BCC student, short-term psychological counseling is available to you at no charge. Almost everyone feels confused, depressed, or lonely at times. Discovering a need for psychological help is nothing to fear. Many people choose counseling when they're under stress, or when they just want to learn more about who they are. Meetings are confidential, and referrals to community agencies can also be arranged.

Transfer Counseling

The Transfer office, located in the Student Development Center, is a resource for comprehensive information and assistance about every aspect of the transfer process. Students should consult with the Transfer Counselor as early in their education as possible for information about academic programs, Baccalaureate Colleges, course equivalencies, and general transfer policies, as well as joint admission, articulation agreements, and the transfer compact.

Trio Programs

The TRIO (Talent, Resources, Initiative, Opportunity) Program is a federally funded program that provides free support services to eligible students.

To be eligible for the program, a student must meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. neither parent graduated from a four-year college,
2. the student is receiving financial aid, or
3. the student has a documented learning or physical disability.

Once a student is accepted into the program, TRIO staff work with the student one-on-one to develop a personalized educational plan that helps to guide the student in the successful completion of his/her studies at BCC.

Tutorial Services

If you begin to feel overwhelmed with a certain class and you just "can't seem to get it," the Tutorial Center can help.

In the center you can find books, tapes, and other resources to help you with notetaking skills, time management, test anxiety, reading methods, study skills, memory, and concentration. Workshops on most of these topics are presented each semester.

The Center can also match you up with a tutor in almost any subject. All tutors are recommended by BCC faculty as caring and competent students.

In addition, the center offers a writing lab which can help as you work on papers in any academic subject. For more information, call or visit the Tutorial Center, located in the basement of the college's library.

Community resources

In addition to the available resources at BCC, students with disabilities can find the following resources in the community.

Funding

The following state agencies may provide funding for tuition and fees, books and supplies, interpreters and/or readers for eligible students with disabilities. They are also good resources in terms of career counseling, case management, advocacy, and information and referral services. To find out how you may benefit, call today.

- **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission**

6 Clinton Avenue
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413)499-2720 Voice/TTY
(800)210-9876 Toll Free

- **Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

210 South Street, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02111
(800)882-1155 Toll Free/Voice/TTY

- **Massachusetts Commission for the Blind**

1694 Main Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(800)332-2772 Toll Free/Voice/TTY

Advocacy/Referral Sources

The following agencies provide advocacy and referral services to individuals with disabilities. Ad Lib also provides peer counseling and skills training.

- **Ad Lib Independent Living Program, Inc.**

215 North Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413)442-7047
(413)442-7158 TTY
(800)232-7047 Toll Free

- **Client Assistance Program**

Massachusetts Office on Disability
One Ashburton Place, Room 1305
Boston, MA 02108
(617)727-7440 Voice/TTY
(800)322-2020 Toll Free/Voice/TTY

Transportation

The following two organizations are equipped to provide transportation for individuals with disabilities.

- **Berkshire Transit Authority (BRTA)**

BRTA buses make hourly runs to BCC and are accessible to people in wheelchairs. For more information, call 499-2728, ext. 772.

- **Cabulance**

Cabulance is a local taxi service accessible to wheelchairs. For more information call 499-3232.