

LD/ND 101

By Eric Endlich, PhD, IECA (CA); Elizabeth Cooper, JD, IECA (MA); Sherri Maxman, IECA (NY); and Jen Hambleton, MA, IECA Associate (OR)

As LD/ND Committee members, we recognized a need to provide guidance to our colleagues who may be just starting to work with the neurodivergent population. Whether you're seeking more information to support a student needing services and/or accommodations for a learning difference in college, or you're looking to develop particular expertise in this area, read on.

How can I go about learning which colleges have the "best" support?

Please note that determining what constitutes the "best support" for any individual student depends on each student's individual needs and should be considered in the context of all factors that make a college an overall good fit for the student. Here are some useful resources to learn about college learning supports and services available for students with learning differences:

- Speaking directly with disability services (DS) staff can give you the most accurate, up-to-date information about each college. This can be done on the phone, via Zoom, or in person. Be sure to review the program's website in advance and be prepared with a list of questions about staffing, available services, fees, required documentation, and other relevant concerns.
- When you research colleges for your LD/ND student, be sure to investigate services (such as tutoring, academic coaching, writing centers, peer mentoring, etc.) that are available for all students. The availability of these services can be a significant factor in determining whether a college offers the support your student will need.
- The *K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Differences* (tinyurl.com/3hdyaeemn) lists colleges that offer varying levels of support for LD/ND students, ranging from basic disability services to fee-based, comprehensive academic support programs for students needing ongoing executive functioning (EF) support. This resource can be a good starting point.
- Top College Consultants Database (tinyurl.com/3aj6s6wh): Eric Endlich's list of colleges for neurodivergent students provides a state-by-state list of colleges, the names of support programs, the services they provide, and their fees.



How can I develop my LD/ND expertise?

- **IECA's Peer-to-Peer Resources** (link.IECAonline.com/peer-to-peer): The LD/ND Committee maintains an extensive library of information in the Peer-to-Peer Resources section of the IECA website. This page has useful articles, webinar recordings, and other resource links, and an LD/ND Roadmap outlining the route to developing your expertise in this area and obtaining your "L Designation" (see below).
- **UC Irvine's Independent Educational Consultant Certificate Program** (tinyurl.com/3cwvus3e): This certificate program offers an elective entitled "Working with Students with Learning Differences" taught by experienced IECA members who specialize in working with LD/ND students.
- **Landmark College Certificate Program** (tinyurl.com/bdhf65pb): Landmark College offers a Certificate in Learning Differences and Neurodiversity through its Executive Education program.
- **Find a Mentor** (network.IECAonline.com/mentormatch): Enroll in IECA's Mentor Match program and request to be paired with a mentor with the L Designation. A mentor can be an invaluable resource (and colleague!).
- **Earn your L Designation!** (link.IECAonline.com/L-designation): Do you already have—or are you hoping to develop—substantial LD/ND expertise? Consider applying for IECA's Learning Disabilities Subspecialty Designation, which helps demonstrate to colleagues and families that this is a real area of specialization for you. You can view the application at the link above.

continued on page M4



Eric Endlich, Top College Consultants, can be reached at eric@topcollegeconsultants.com.



Elizabeth Cooper, College Consulting Collaborative, can be reached at liz@collegeld.com.



Sherri Maxman, College Maven LLC, can be reached at sherri@college-maven.com.



Jen Hambleton, Intention Advising, LLC can be reached at jen@intentionadvising.com.



Interpreting Financial Aid Award Letters

By Penny Linsenmayer, JD, IECA Associate (TX), Member of the IECA Subcommittee on College Affordability (SOCA)

Your student excitedly texts you that he received a full ride to the public flagship university. A parent emails to share the happy news that her daughter has been awarded a full cost financial aid package to a small private college you know doesn't meet full need. At this point you might suspect that this all sounds too good to be true.



You are likely correct. Many financial aid award letters are worded in a way that can easily be mistaken as a better deal than is the case. Further, each college adopts its own award letter format, complicating the family's ability to do an easy apples-to-apples comparison.

Award letters might:

- list a lump sum financial aid award without any reference to the Cost of Attendance (CoA) or the Net Cost to the family;
- list a lump sum award that includes loan amounts without giving families a "Cost Before Loans" and a "Cost with Loans" breakdown;
- list a lump sum award that includes line items that don't use the word "loan"; or
- all the above.

In December 2022, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report highlighting that 91 percent of colleges understate or fail to provide any estimate of net cost to the family in financial aid award letters ([gao.gov/assets/730/723686.pdf](https://www.gao.gov/assets/730/723686.pdf)). The GAO report recommends that Congress pass legislation requiring colleges to include clear and standard information in award letters. In the absence of this proposed legislation, IECs can play an important role in helping families review and understand exactly what a college is (and is not) offering.

continued on page M6



Penny Linsenmayer, Pathway Admissions, LLC, can be reached at penny@pathwayadmissions.com.

LD/ND 101, from page M3

- **Reach out to anyone on the LD/ND Committee** to learn how to deepen your knowledge and develop your expertise.

When is it appropriate/helpful for students to disclose a diagnosis?

Disclosing a learning difference in the Additional Information section of the student's application can be helpful to explain any inconsistencies in the high school transcript that are due to the learning difference such as an uneven pattern of grades, multiple high schools attended, a significant discrepancy between grades and SAT/ACT scores, or an absence of foreign language courses. In these circumstances, we may recommend that students provide a brief explanation stating that the student has learning differences, how the learning differences have resulted in these inconsistencies in the record, and what the student has done to overcome the challenges and be successful. If there are no inconsistencies in a student's academic record, then there may be no reason for disclosing an LD; in the end, the decision is entirely up to the student. Some students choose to write about their neurodivergence in their essays because they feel it's a central part of their identity or story.

How do I know when to refer out?

None of us can be an expert in all aspects of independent educational consulting. The IECA Standards of Excellence clearly states:

"Understand the limits of one's expertise and competence, and seek professional input or assistance when necessary...Refer all clients whose needs are beyond the limits of one's professional expertise to other professionals."

There is similar language in the IECA Principles of Good Practice. Just as a student who wishes to be a recruited athlete requires an IEC with expertise in working with student-athletes, there is much nuance to working with students with learning differences and to helping them find good-fit colleges where they will succeed. If you do not have significant experience working with LD/ND students and find you are working with a student who could be out of your wheelhouse, consider reaching out to an IECA member with the L Designation to discuss whether this would be a student to refer out. Similarly, if you have been working with a student for some time before discovering their learning differences, consider consulting or teaming with a colleague who has LD expertise. 