

The transition from home to college to Independence and employment

Everyone has a different pathway to Cal and onto employment. With that in mind, here are some things to consider if you are a disabled student hoping to attend UC Berkeley. These ideas and resources may be of particular interest to potential students with severe disabilities who would like to join the Workability IV program (WAIV), which can connect students who are consumers of the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) employment training.

Here's how...

Applying to Cal

UC Berkeley only accepts applications during the month of November. In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, ending affirmative action. Unlike Universities in many other states, UC schools do not have a spot on the application to declare your disability for special consideration. However, the UC Berkeley application does include 2 personal statements. Many potential students use these statements as a platform to disclose their disability, explain how that shaped their work ethics, achievements and future goals. This would also be an appropriate place to explain if you were not provided with proper accommodations in the past, resulting in low grades or test scores. <http://admissions.berkeley.edu>

Independent Living

In some cases, DOR may support consumers working with some Independent Living programs, through organizations such as the Center for Independent Living <http://www.cilberkeley.org/>. However, other programs may be offered for those with autism or cerebral palsy through the Regional Centers of California <http://www.rceb.org/>, who can also sponsor such training through organizations like East Bay Innovations <http://www.eastbayinnovations.org/>. These types of programs can help People with Disabilities (PWD's) learn foundational skills to live on their own, including attendant management, self-care, social skills and financial literacy.

Housing

Freshman are guaranteed housing and can fill out an application as soon as they have submitted their Statement of Intent to Register (SIR) at the housing website <http://housing2.berkeley.edu/newstudents>. While filling out your application, be sure to notice the area asking if you need any accommodations. This is your chance to explain what you need (automatic door opener, adjustable desk etc.), so don't forget to fill this out, because they won't know what you need when you arrive unless you tell them specifically in advance. You will be sent a form to have your doctor fill out to verify that your disability requires the accommodations you have requested. It would be a good idea to have clear communication with your doctor about your needs (in person if possible).

The Residence Halls are a wonderful place to start life at Cal, but older students and those who will be inconvenienced by having to move out twice each year (The Res Halls close each winter and summer break) should consider the Berkeley Student Cooperative Housing <https://www.bsc.coop/> with locations around the campus. This is more affordable and one step closer to independent living with houses, dorms and apartments based on your preferred style of living. They are very helpful about disability accommodations, but accessible spaces are limited, so apply early on, just as an insurance policy. Just a warning, regular apartments and houses in the area are expensive and hard to come by, and many Craig's List ads are not what they seem.

Social Services

Many PWD depend on Social Services to live an independent life. These can be challenging to acquire, with complicated forms, ever shifting regulations and many applicants getting rejected when they first apply. It is important to view social services like a temporary job on your way to your career instead of a free service from the government. In a job, you work and they pay you. With Social Services, you jump through their hoops and deal with their bureaucracy and they provide you with the services you need to financially separate from your parents and become independent. However, you do not want to be stuck there dealing with this forever, so you should learn skills from the World Institute on Disability www.wid.org so you can build wealth without losing services before you are making enough income to finally drop these services.

Most PWD's qualify for Social Security Insurance (SSI) <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/>, which can take 4 to 6 months to obtain, and they often turn down the first application. If you are denied, stick with the appeal process, because when you finally qualify, you will get paid back to the day you applied. If you drop the ball on the appeal process, you must start all over again. Because SSI is the first step in many other social services you may need, and it can take so long to obtain, you should start applying long before arriving at school. You will need to speak with your doctor about how your disability and current life situation make it impossible for you to work at this time. SSI will be contacting your doctor for such confirmation.

Applicants cannot have assets exceeding \$2,000 in a month; so many potential students will need to begin financially separating from their parents well in advance. Financial aid and most scholarships do not qualify as income under the Higher Education Act of 1965, so don't worry about such income as potential disqualifiers.

Most people receiving SSI get around \$800 a month, qualify for section 8 housing and automatically receive Medi-Cal, California's version of Medi-Care, which is free health insurance <https://www.medi-cal.ca.gov/>. You can continue to receive health insurance from your parents and still qualify for Medi-Cal, even having multiple forms of insurance all at once.

Students requiring personal care to live independently will need to apply for In Home Support Services (IHSS) <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/agedblinddisabled/pg1296.htm>, which will provide a set amount of hours each month to pay for care attendants. It can take 1 to 4 months to obtain IHSS, so apply well before arriving at Cal. Once you arrive, you can transfer your case to Alameda County IHSS, which will trigger a home visit from a social worker to readjust and increase your hours now that you live away from home. To hire attendants, you can use the Public Authority Registry http://www.alamedasocialservices.org/public/services/elders_and_disabled_adults/in_home_support/public_authority.cfm. You must have Medi-Cal to qualify for IHSS.

Those who do not qualify for IHSS can often find Cal students seeking part time work <https://saservices.berkeley.edu/CCApps/Callisto/CallistoLogin.aspx> through the Career Center's Calisto site. There are also private attendant agencies in the area such as Inclusive Community Resources (ICR) <http://icrsls.com/> as well as emergency attendant care (when your worker calls in sick or your chair breaks down) through Easy Does It <http://www.easydoesitservices.org/>, found only in Berkeley.

Healthcare Services

All Cal students receive the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP), which gives you access to the Tang Center <http://uhs.berkeley.edu/> on campus, which offers doctors, nurses, a pharmacy and many other immediate need medical services. Students who feel they have adequate medical coverage already and want to save money sometimes qualify for SHIP waiver, but sometimes they regret this choice and ask to get back on <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/students/insurance/waiverselect.shtml>

Leaving home to make this transition and entering a big, unfamiliar and highly competitive environment like UC Berkeley can have a huge impact on student's mental health. Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) is a great resource <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/students/counseling/cps.shtml> and SHIP students can be seen free 6 times each year. The Disabled Students Program (DSP) has a special liaison within CPS, specializing in the needs of disabled students. When you start school, you may want to see Dr. Jean Franco jcfranco@berkeley.edu before stress starts.

Campus/Community Access

All Cal students can obtain a free Bear Pass sticker on their student ID card <http://services.housing.berkeley.edu/c1c/static/actransit.htm>, which allows them to access Alameda County buses for local transportation. The campus also features shuttle buses around the perimeter of campus into the evening hours <http://pt.berkeley.edu/around/beartransit> and during the day, inside campus, there is the LOOP service <http://pt.berkeley.edu/ada/theloop>, which can get you to classes on a first come basis.

The Bay Area has excellent public transportation. Many students with mobility impairments sign up for Para Transit Services <http://www.eastbayparatransit.org/>,

which can get you places a bus does not go. However, most students with disabilities access BART and Cal Trains for long distance trips using a reduced fair clipper pass, <https://www.clippercard.com/ClipperWeb/discounts/index.do>.

For blind/low vision students needing Orientation & Mobility training a near by agency is Lion's Center For The Blind <http://www.lbcenter.org/>. Other students needing mobility training can receive that from the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley <http://www.cilberkeley.org/2012/02/23/free-public-transportation-and-mobility-training/>

Recreation

As the birthplace of the Independent Living/Disability Rights Movement, Cal has accessible gym equipment and many sports and programs tailored to PWD's <http://recsports.berkeley.edu/about/member-services/membership-types/cal-star/> including accessible yoga, Goal Ball for B/LV, Power chair soccer, roll'n shoot basketball and golf. Many of these programs are done in conjunction with Bay Area Outreach and Recreation (BORP) <http://www.borp.org/>, which includes accessible biking, skiing and hiking. If sailing or boating is your thing, you can join Bay Area Association of Disabled Sailors who launch each weekend out of the San Francisco yacht club <http://www.baads.org/>. Joining these activities will help new students join the community, network, and build skills of teamwork, leadership and self-empowerment.

Social life

All students are encouraged to have an active social life while at Cal. This should be a time you look back on as a wonderful moment full of new friends experiences, not memories of isolating in your room studying and stressing out. Studies show that scheduling time to socialize and exercise instead of cramming and studying all night increases test scores and memory retention. However, many students with disabilities can be shy about socializing. Because they may not be good at it, they avoid it. But social skills are just as important as a diploma. A diploma gets you into a job interview, but if you cannot come off as confident and interesting in the interview, you will not get the job.

Students should use their time at Cal to build a network of friends, academic and employment connections that will help get them through life. Cal has over 1,000 student groups on just about anything you could imagine, from Poke-Mon to Snow Boarding to... you name it. This is an instant group of friends for you to connect with around a hobby or passion <https://asuc.org/>. There are also numerous supports based around culture, race, faith or economic class. These groups can provide support, scholarships, and tutoring and social connections. Check out the Equity and Inclusion website for a full list: <http://diversity.berkeley.edu/campus-programs-and-services>

Ed Roberts began the Independent Living Movement at Cal back in 1962 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Roberts_%28activist%29 with a belief that the core of independent living is role modeling so the younger people are learning from the older people and seeing others with disabilities going to school, falling in love, having a job and owning a home. Disabled people need to see this from each other and society needs to see this so disability becomes normal. It is a good idea to join in the vast campus and community group of PWD's so new students' get that role modeling. A good start is to join the Disabled Students Union (DSU) or Autism Speaks U (both of which can be found on Facebook).

Some Other Tips

Always be the one to frame your disability in the way you want it framed. If you leave it up to other people to figure out your needs they will almost always get it wrong.

DSP, Housing, DOR etc. are all separate services. Even though you may be asked by each entity to get your doctor to fill out similar forms verifying your disability, these are separate and they do not communicate with one another.

It is best to take a reduced course load when you begin. This is a legal accommodation and cannot affect any scholarships or unit quotas. It will allow you time to adjust and get your bearings. When you are ready, you can always make up lacking units in summer sessions.