



PEN

## **The Transition to College for Students Who Are LD and/or ADHD**

### **PEN Speaker Series, September 12 2008**

*Review by Board Member Julie Traun*

Dr. Joan Bisagno, Director of Office of Accessible Education at Stanford University is an invaluable gift to PEN. To a sold-out, standing-room-only crowd, Joan detailed the step-by-step transition from high school to college for students who are LD and/or ADHD. Joan's experience, professional training and warmth provided not only an in depth and well researched presentation, but lots of down-to-earth, common sense advice for both parent and student. Her handouts were some of the best and most comprehensive we've seen; she had endless recommendations and had all the resources at her fingertips or outlined in her handouts.

Often parents and students hyper-focus on preparing for "the big test," the applications, the essays, and the student - especially the student with special needs - gets lost in the process. Remember, many schools no longer require college entrance tests. For a list, see: <http://fairtest.org>. Preparing well in advance of the application process alleviates some of the stress. Making sure there is sufficient documentation for any accommodation request is essential. The documentation checklist includes all of the following:

- (1) Evaluation by a *qualified professional*
- (2) An explicitly stated diagnosis
- (3) Current testing [ADHD – within 3 years; LD – within 5 years]
- (4) Developmental, educational and medical history
- (5) Clinical assessments and observations [Are there behavioral observations for the student under standardized test conditions? Are there observation data from teachers, parents and other professionals who have interacted with the student over time?]
- (6) Functional limitations [What are the substantial functional limitations in academic as well as other life settings?] and
- (7) There must be a rationale for each requested accommodation linked to the deficit as evidenced by objective testing data, clinical observations and historical information.

There is so much students and families can do to prepare - long before the college application process descends on them that will help the student to remain whole, not only during the application/testing process but during and after their transition to college. Students need to really know themselves, understand how they learn and where their strengths lie. They need to know what strategies, interventions and accommodations best support their learning. Students need to use their time in high school to develop academic and self-management skills: college schedules are nothing like high school schedules. Take the time to explore assistive technology while in high school. Develop strong note-taking skills, learn to synthesize information. And most importantly, know how to self-advocate: be able to describe your learning needs and make use of the support offered in high school and in college.

Joan provided handy charts explaining the applicable law (IDEA, Section 504 and ADA) and their implications at all stages of education. An amazing handout on assistive technology, linking each product to the learning need was especially helpful. And likely the most interesting tool in Joan's bag of tools was her demonstration of Livescribe's Smart Pen. Check it out, it's pretty awesome: <http://www.livescribe.com/>

Many thanks to Dr. Joan Bisagno. If only we could clone you so that every college and high school could be lucky enough to have such knowledgeable advocacy available to every student and family.