

HLA-NJ News and Views

A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of NJ

By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ

Tips for Helping Students with Hearing Loss Get the Most from College

Most colleges today welcome applicants with hearing loss in ways that would have been unthinkable a dozen years ago. To help families take advantage of falling barriers to access, the Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey is increasing the number of \$1,000 scholarships we offer to high school seniors with hearing loss who are applying to college. For students beginning college this September, HLA-NJ is offering four scholarships, up from three in previous years. Applications – which must be filed by May 1, 2012, are available on-line at www.hearingloss-nj.org. Additional information is available from Sandy.Spekman@hearingloss-nj.org.

Money is only one of the issues facing college-bound young people with hearing loss. For them more than most college students, “bright college years” can be lonely and frustrating. In addition to normal problems of homesickness and adjusting to a new environment, students with hearing loss need to develop new support systems and adjust to a world where the vast majority of students and faculty members know little about their needs and concerns.

Based on the experiences of past recipients of HLA-NJ scholarships, here are some tips to ease the transition.

- Find out the facts on support for people with hearing loss. Don't settle for vague assurances from admissions office personnel. Get statistics on how many students with hearing loss are enrolled, and see if it's possible to ask them about their experiences via e-mail. Find out whether most courses are offered in large lecture halls or small seminar rooms, and discuss with your student what environment suits them. Get commitments, in writing if possible, on availability of captioned lectures or notetakers, and make sure your student will be able to use assistive listening devices. Is special counseling available for people with hearing loss? Are there clubs or social groups for students with hearing loss? Check out the atmosphere of the college on a visit. A large campus might be impersonal—or it might offer better support systems than a small college that is

academically excellent but has limited resources. How welcome does your son or daughter feel on a college visit?

- Make sure the college-bound student is prepared. Be candid and realistic in talking to a son or daughter with hearing loss about what to expect in college. Many college-bound students with serious hearing loss have benefited from supportive, highly involved parents and a secondary school where not only guidance counselors but also classroom instructors understand their needs. Discuss with your son or daughter how they can become their own advocate and build new social and academic ties from scratch.
- Maintain contact with the student, especially in the first months. Many 18-year-olds entering college are eager to prove their independence. But leaving home for the first time is bound to be at least a little scary. That's likely to be especially true for a student with hearing loss. No college freshman wants to be smothered by parents, but frequent texts, e-mails, letters or (if appropriate) phone calls from home are bound to be welcome. Plan on visiting. You know your son or daughter better than anyone, and you are best qualified to spot signs of unhappiness.
- It's important not to exaggerate the difficulties of college. Students with hearing loss will discover all the pleasures experienced by previous generations—teachers who open their minds to new ways of thinking, and new ideas, friends from different backgrounds and other states and countries, the heady feeling of being out on your own. Just make sure you and your son or daughter plan ahead and have realistic goals. With proper preparation, college can be the gateway to a new world.

To learn more about HLA-NJ, please contact Arlene Romoff at info@hearingloss-nj.org. We also invite you to visit www.hearingloss-nj.org, or to attend one of our local chapter meetings in Bergen, Monmouth/Ocean or Middlesex County, and our newest Morris County chapter. Dates, places and times for chapter meetings are available at www.hearingloss-nj.org.