College Transitions

One of life’s most memorable experiences occurs when a student leaves home to begin his/her freshman year of college. For most high school students, the idea of college begins their junior or senior year when decisions about where to apply and time spent completing applications takes precedence in their lives. The transition from high school to college can also elicit emotions from excitement to anxiety. Some students experience an easy transition, while others struggle to balance a new-found freedom with academics and the energy a college campus can bring.

College transitions continue to be an important topic asked here at AG Bell. To aid students just beginning to think about their post-high school plans, three college/graduate school students were asked to share their perspective on researching, choosing and transitioning into a college or university.

Mariela Goett is a cochlear implant user from San Francisco, Calif. When Mariela was 15, she was bitten by the travel bug. She traveled to Peru many times during her teenage years and was encouraged to learn Spanish. Once Mariela went to college at the University of California at San Diego, she started taking Arabic classes, which inspired her to study abroad in Cairo, Egypt. Upon graduation, Mariela spent a year interning for the United Nations in Damascus, Syria. Mariela is currently pursuing a graduate degree in public policy at the University of Maryland.

Ben Case is a sophomore in the Residential College at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Mich. Ben is a history major and is following a pre-med educational track and is aspiring to be an otolaryngologist. Ben loves being around people and caring for them. He works in a research laboratory at the Kresge Hearing Research Institute as an undergraduate lab assistant. Additionally, he is studying photography and enjoys ultimate Frisbee and traveling in his free time.

Patrick deHahn is a 20-year-old college sophomore attending Pace University in New York City. He works as a resident advisor for the freshman dorm on campus. He is currently studying business management with strong interests in performing arts management, journalism and social media. Patrick is from the humble New England town of Belchertown, Mass., and he attributes his success to his family and school years at both The MacDuffie School and Clarke Schools for Hearing and Speech.
When did you begin seriously considering your post-high school plans?

Mariela Goett: It was always a given that I would go to college. Every career dream I had required going to college; at first I wanted to be a writer, then an anthropologist and now I want to do humanitarian work.

Ben Case: I began to seriously consider my college plans sophomore year of high school when I began to develop professionally. My family and I always expected that I would go to college, whether it was a large four-year university or a technical school.

Patrick deHahn: I started thinking about college when I was a high school sophomore, so I was about 17 years old. This was the time when I put a lot of thought into what kind of college I wanted to attend. The earlier you start thinking about it, the better.

What factors did you take into consideration when looking at colleges/universities? Was there someone you talked to about your options?

M.G.: For both undergraduate and graduate school, I took into consideration educational expenses. I was really lucky to attend the University of California at San Diego for my undergraduate degree before the tuition increased drastically over recent years. I also chose the University of Maryland for my graduate school because it was a combination of great quality education and affordable tuition prices, in comparison to other schools like Johns Hopkins or George Washington University. I honestly didn't talk to anybody about my college options. I, of course, kept my parents informed about my choices, but I ultimately ignored everybody’s advice and chose the school I felt was the best for me.

B.C.: My parents and I took three things into serious consideration: class sizes and professors, the track of study available and the accommodations available to me. We discussed these factors and other college options with everyone, including college counselors, registered students and offices for students with disabilities.

P.D.: I decided that location, internship opportunities, range of majors (specifically in business and the performing arts) and support from the disability services office were my top factors in choosing a college or university. I talked to my parents, friends and my high school college counselor about these things. Believe it or not, I did most of my research about my college options myself, online.

What kinds of factors did you research when looking into potential schools?

M.G.: I did not have to worry about services for deaf and hard of hearing students at the schools that I applied to in the United States, but studying abroad is another story. I considered pursuing a graduate education abroad, particularly at the American University in Beirut, but unfortunately they did not provide any accommodations for the deaf and hard of hearing.

B.C.: I researched the average ratio of students to professor, the classes offered, opportunities on and off campus, and the caliber of the school.

P.D.: As crazy as it was, I narrowed it down to two cities; I only applied to colleges in both Boston and New York City. I was adamant on attending college in a big city. I then narrowed it down to what colleges had the best internship opportunities and performing arts management programs.

Were you required to note your hearing loss on your application, and, if not, did you do so anyway?

M.G.: I did mention my hearing loss on a couple of applications, one because I was specifically asked and the other because I wanted to describe my experiences learning Arabic as a student who is hard of hearing.

B.C.: Most applications had a section for applicants to state any specific conditions or disabilities. If the section was there, I stated my hearing loss.

P.D.: My college essay was actually about my hearing loss, so every college knew from the start that I had a hearing loss. In the essay, I made it clear that my hearing loss didn’t define me. I don’t remember having to indicate my hearing loss in any other place on my application.
How did your hearing loss factor into your decision to attend the school you chose?

M.G.: My hearing loss deterred me from studying abroad for my graduate career. Although I would have loved to study in Lebanon, my inability to participate in class discussions would have severely impeded my learning. During my year abroad in Cairo, Egypt, I had a hard time following class discussions, especially because many of the teachers and students spoke English with an accent.

B.C.: I wanted to ensure that I could succeed in my educational pathway with my hearing loss so accommodations were a significant factor that influenced my decision.

P.D.: For all the colleges where I was accepted and seriously considered attending, I met with the disability services offices at each of these colleges. I was able to compare each of their services and support, while also weighing in other factors. My hearing loss came into play as the final, major deciding factor to make sure I was attending a school that would be able to serve my needs.

What challenges existed during your freshman year that you did not expect?

M.G.: To be honest, throughout my high school career, I never used any services. The only thing that I utilized was exemption from taking quizzes based on videos that we’d watched in class. So when I arrived in college, I was completely astounded by the fact that I had transcribing services (first CART, and now an actual transcriber in each class) available to me. I felt like I had been sleeping throughout my whole life, and that I had finally woken up and discovered the potential I had for learning. Classes were suddenly more fun because I could participate in them more fully.

B.C.: My transition went well as an incoming freshman. There is no way to prepare for the difficulty of college courses. I was most surprised by the amount of studying that you need to do. But once I understood how much I needed to do, I was able to succeed in my courses.

P.D.: It was a smooth and fun transition into college! I was mostly surprised by how fast the years in college go by... time management is key because the year goes by right before your eyes.

What advice do you have for current high school students with hearing loss considering a college or university?

M.G.: My biggest advice is not to worry too much about your college choice and go with the flow - it’s very rare for someone to end up hating the college that they go to.

B.C.: Some advice I have for current high school students would include college essays and visiting schools. Essays are an important part of the college application process and are key to getting into school. Spend time on the essays, incorporate your hearing loss and how it’s a positive part of you and not a disability. Use the college visits to really figure out what you want from your educational institute. Talk to the students, meet a couple professors from a class you really want to take, sit in on a class, etc.

P.D.: Don’t apply to universities that only offer one really specific major, instead attend one with a wide range of majors. Also, don’t think that you’re going to stick with one interest when you apply because you still have the chance of changing your mind to instead chase your childhood dream. I was set on an arts management program until this year when I wanted to get back into my interest of journalism. Finally, don’t let your deafness define you. Don’t be afraid to stand up for yourself and for your rights. Be confident, be yourself and that’s all it takes.

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