

Alex's College Tips

By Alex Carrillo



I'm currently a freshman at Merced College. I'm well-read and I'm well-traveled but the transition to college was very difficult for me. For those of you who are thinking about or will be starting college soon, I've cobbled together some tips to make the transition easier for you!

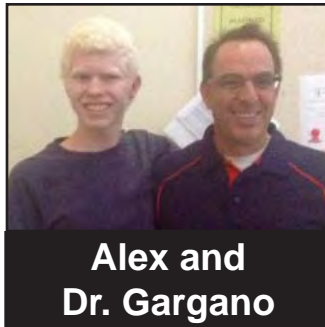
Figure out your transportation early!

If you're not fortunate enough to live on or near campus or if you're unable to drive, getting to college can be a headache. Familiarize yourself with the public transportation system. Riding the bus can be a drag, but sometimes it's the only way. You can ask family, friends and fellow classmates if they'd be willing to give you a ride. The bottom line is: make sure to have a plan B and C for getting to class and back home should something go wrong.

Wear your sunscreen! You *can* get sunburned in the few minutes it takes you to get from class to class or class to the cafeteria or so on. I learned the hard (and painful) way my first week.

Visit your college's version of students' office of disability early!

You don't need to wait until your first day of college to go there. Visit the office, meet with the staff, and go over the accommodations they offer such as access to computers with ZoomText (and how to use it), enlarged print, extended time on exams, someone to read things to you (not bedtime stories, unfortunately), tests in audio format, and most importantly, a note taker! That's someone in your class who will take notes and give you a copy. These accommodations are far more than anything I was ever offered in high school,



Alex and Dr. Gargano

so give it a try!

Get to know your access specialist!

In high school if you wanted something in large print, you had to go to your case manager, who would talk to someone at the district office who... well, you get the idea. In college, this is done in one step by a person in charge of all alternative media. At my school, this person is called an "Access Specialist," but I also call her "Laura" since that's her name! You can usually get your textbooks in large print, audio (CD or MP3), or PDF! I had all mine in PDFs and I put them on my iPad. Never have to deal with a large print textbook again. Heck, never have to carry a book again - just a 1.5 pound tablet. All this made possible thanks to my access specialist (and my lovely parents who paid for a \$500 shiny toy).

Find someone to talk to! Adjusting to college can be difficult for some people. You're apart from your high school friends and from family. It's a new campus, new people, new professors, new counselors and the start of your adult life. This can be a very stressful time, so it's important to have someone to talk to. My college offers a wide array of counseling services, but the person I go to is Laura - the lovely access specialist. Whether I need a test in large print or crackers and juice and someone to talk to, she's there. Find someone like that at your college.



Access Specialist, Laura

Connect with someone like you! Why do we love NOAH conferences? They're where we can connect with hundreds of other people like us to share stories, tips, laughs and create

everlasting memories! Unfortunately, because albinism is so rare, finding someone else with albinism on campus can be rather, well, rare. I keep hearing rumors that there is actually someone else with albinism on my own college campus - but sometimes you'll be the only one. Don't fret either way.

Above all, have fun! Once you've gone through the disability office and met with your version of Laura and bathed in sunscreen. Once you've figured out your transportation and found your mentor - have fun! College is an amazing experience. Trust me, the

people who say "high school years are the best years of your life" obviously didn't go to college. You can take the classes that interest you, usually at the times that best suit you. You make all the decisions - it's like the ultimate freedom. So join a club or two, make new friends and don't forget to do your homework. And while you're going through it all, remember some wise words from a wise woman. Rita Jackson reminded me to, "Study hard and you'll end up learning more about yourself than you can imagine just by having the experience of going to college."