# Florida DivisionofBlind ServicesCollege Student Handbook



**Last Revised: Summer 2016**

## Introduction

Now that you are enrolled as a college student, there are several things that you need to know in order for you to have an effective relationship with your college and the Division of Blind Services (DBS). This guide is to help remind you of things that should be taken care of each term, or annually, and to familiarize you with your responsibilities as well as those of DBS.

You should review this handbook each term and discuss any questions you have with your DBS counselor.

Congratulations on your choice to pursue a college degree, and good luck!

**NOTE: DBS will sponsor up to three (3) application fees. Students will be responsible for paying any additional application fees.**

## Basic Requirements

1. Before you enter college, you must participate in the development of your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with your DBS counselor. This should involve a meeting to discuss services that you may need as a college student. The IPE will include the services that DBS agrees to provide and/or sponsor \*(e.g., number of hours taken, etc) and the responsibilities that you must fulfill in order to receive services (example: maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 for undergraduate and the minimum academic standard established by the school for graduate-level students). All services must be previously authorized by your counselor and included in your IPE before they may be rendered. You and your counselor will review your IPE each term and make any needed amendments at that time. IPEs are in effect for one year after they are signed and must be reviewed and updated annually. IPEs MUST be signed by you prior to ANY services being rendered.
2. DBS requires that you be enrolled and complete a full time course load each term attended. Full time is considered twelve (12) term hours for undergraduate students and nine (9) term hours for graduate students. You are not required to attend summer classes unless your college has a summer requirement. But if you choose to do so, you must enroll for a minimum of six (6) hours. Exceptions can be made but must be approved by your counselor prior to your registration. Tuition and other fees will be withheld until exceptions are approved. If you need to withdraw from a class after the final drop/add period, you must consult with your counselor before doing so.
3. A cumulative grade point average of 2.0 at the undergraduate level is required in order to receive DBS sponsorship of academic services. If you are aware that your grade point average is going to drop below 2.0, you should contact your counselor immediately to discuss possible probationary terms. The minimum cumulative grade point average for graduate students is established by their school.
4. DBS will only sponsor you to the bachelor's degree level unless sufficient justification is provided in writing that demonstrates you are unable to reach the desired employment goal without additional training and education, as required. Our goal is to provide you with the skills necessary to obtain employment consistent with your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, career interests, and informed choice.
5. It is a federal requirement that you apply for the Pell Grant and other grants/scholarships available through Federal Financial Aid. You must supply your counselor with a copy of your application and award or denial letter each year by August 15th. Applications are generally due each spring and can be obtained from your college's Financial Aid Office. **All financial aid** (excluding loans) will be applied to your tuition, books, and other fees before DBS sponsorship. After these expenses have been addressed, if there is a Financial Aid balance remaining, it should be applied to any necessary living, transportation, or other expenses before requesting DBS assistance. DBS also encourages you to apply for private scholarships and grants to assist with your academic expenses. Check with your counselor for sources and applications. Applications are generally due each spring and deadline dates can be found online at www.fafsa.ed.gov for the Pell Grant. They can also be obtained from your college's Financial Aid Office. DBS will not provide financial assistance until we have received your Pell award or denial letter. (**Note: If the Pell award or denial letter has not been received prior to payment being due, the District Administrator can grant an exception for DBS to pay for one semester to avoid classes being cancelled.**)

If you do not receive SSI or SSDI and you are not eligible for a Pell Grant due your parents' income, then you will not be eligible for DBS services that require you to meet the financial need criteria. Exceptions can be discussed with your local District Administrator if you believe there is a justifiable reason for an exception to be made.

\*\*We encourage you to look for scholarships and grants. Websites such as www.FloridaStudentFinancialAid.org can be very helpful.
6. It is your responsibility to contact your DBS counselor at the end of each term to set up a term review. This meeting is an opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have or to request any changes to your plan of services. Your counselor will review your current plan and economic need application in order to determine if any changes are needed. These reviews are mandatory. Payment of fees and maintenance will be withheld if you do not attend.
7. You must supply your counselor with a copy of your grades and schedule at the beginning of each term. Failure to provide these documents will result in tuition and fee payments being withheld.
8. DBS will only sponsor (pay for) a course one time. If you fail a class or drop a course after final drop/add period, you will be responsible for paying to retake the course. (**Note: If DBS did not pay for the class and you must retake it, DBS can sponsor it at that time.**)
9. DBS will sponsor remedial courses in each subject area in the event that it is required by the college.
10. DBS will reimburse the cost of a CLEP exam if you pass. You must inform your DBS counselor of your intention to CLEP a course or courses prior to taking the exam so that the DBS counselor may plan for potential reimbursement in your plan of services.
11. Tutors are often available through your school and you are encouraged to use this resource if needed. However, if you feel a private tutor would be more beneficial, you **MUST** discuss this with your DBS counselor prior to setting up any services. If your counselor agrees with your request, you will be responsible for finding and hiring a tutor to meet your needs. You and your tutor will negotiate a fee based on the tutor's experience and education, and your DBS counselor must approve the fee prior to beginning services. To assist in the process of hiring a tutor, you may want to review the following website: http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring/privatetutor.html. It provides some good information on what to look for in a qualified tutor. Tutorial services must be authorized in advance. Tutoring fees are negotiable. Counselors may wish to consult with disability services to establish a prevailing rate. Tutors are individuals who are knowledgeable in a particular subject area and who have the skill to teach that subject to you. A legitimate need for a tutor in a specific subject must be demonstrated when requesting tutorial services. Generally, tutors are needed only on an occasional basis when a student has difficulty with a particular class.

Although tutorial services may be requested for any class, they are most often needed for classes with which a student is less familiar, such as those outside their major area of study. Once the need for a tutor has been justified, DBS can authorize tutoring hours up to the number of class hours per week. For example, three hours of tutoring services per week may be authorized for a three hour class. Tutoring hours are in addition to reader service hours.

It is expected that you will complete a majority of your course work without the assistance of tutors. If you request tutors for more than one-third of your courses over a one year period, you will be required to meet with your DBS counselor and supervisory personnel to discuss whether your selected major is appropriate and/or whether college continues to be an appropriate vocational goal. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE TO MAKE A PASSING GRADE BEFORE REQUESTING ASSISTANCE!

You can select one person to perform both tutoring and reader services. However, separate invoices must be submitted and services may not be performed at the same time.
12. Maintenance may only be considered for those expenses incurred that are directly related to attending college and are in excess of normal expenses. Expenses such as housing may be considered at a rate of 70% of the lowest double occupancy dorm room cost per term. You are encouraged to attend your local community college/university unless your program of study is not available at the local level, there is no community college/university in your home area, or you were not accepted into your local community college/university.

If you attend a state school, a food stipend will be granted at the rate of the school's basic meal program cost per term. If the school does not have dorm or meal program fees, these expenses will be computed using the nearest state school's fees or those consistent with the state college of your home area--whichever is most beneficial for you.

If you attend a private school, DBS will pay for tuition (housing and meals, if applicable) at the rate of the closest state college or the state college of your home area, whichever is greater and thus most beneficial for you.

It is important to note that prior to providing maintenance services, the DBS shall: (a) conduct a thorough assessment of your needs and resources utilizing the adopted financial needs assessment form; (b) determine whether comparable services and benefits exist under any other program; (c) determine whether those services and benefits are available to you; and (d) re-evaluate your needs and resources each term to determine the level of support to be provided. SSI and SSDI income cannot be included when determining maintenance eligibility.

**Note:** For exceptions to this rule, you may send a request in writing to the District Administrator for final approval. You will receive written notice following any reduction in maintenance. You have the right to appeal a decision by requesting an Administrative Hearing in writing.
13. DBS will not pay for graduation fees (cap, gown, ceremonies fees, etc.).

\*\*DBS can consider sponsorship for anything that is required to obtain a degree and/or physically obtain a diploma.

## Term Procedures

1. If you are receiving tuition sponsorship, it is your responsibility to notify your DBS counselor before the beginning of each term. DBS does not pay late fees unless they are incurred as a result of a DBS error. Deferment forms are not issued to those students receiving the Pell Grant and/or other scholarships.
2. Identify the books and class related supplies that you will need at the beginning of the term so that a purchase order can be completed by your DBS counselor. In some instances, a purchase order can be faxed to the bookstore if you are unable to pick it up from your DBS counselor. Purchase orders for copy centers (e.g. Kinkos) can be handled in the same manner. However, DBS does not authorize purchases for under $5 at copy centers. You are responsible for these charges.
3. Reader services may be available as needed and agreed upon by you and your DBS counselor in advance of each term. If you cannot make the reader services request prior to the start of the term, please contact your counselor for assistance. You should make every effort to acquire books via electronic format, as DBS will only consider sponsorship of reader services when there are access issues to printed materials. DBS will pay readers at the current minimum wage. DBS may be able to supply names and phone numbers of potential readers. You are encouraged to hire readers of your choice (no family members). The Disabled Student Services office may also be able to provide you with names and phone numbers of potential readers you could hire through DBS (not the college). When you have obtained a reader, you must notify your DBS counselor. In order to get paid, your reader will need to complete the Vendor Registration process and be registered with the DBS office prior to beginning work. Reader hours are authorized at the same number of credit hours you are enrolled in per week, plus or minus one or two hours. For example, if you are enrolled for fifteen (15) credit hours, you are permitted 15 to 17 hours of reader services per week. If you need more reader hours than this limit, you may discuss your need with your counselor for approval of extended hours. You may be referred to the Office of Disabled Student Services at your college for extra hours.

You may select the same person for both tutoring and reader services.
4. You are required to take your own notes utilizing appropriate aids and devices, which can be discussed with your DBS counselor. Note taker services can be provided through your school's Disabled Student Services office or similar department if additional assistance is needed.
5. All new students should register with Recordings for the Blind (RFB) and Bookshare before starting school. You may obtain an application from your counselor. You should check with RFB for your textbooks before requesting reader services.
6. As a new college student, your DBS counselor should refer you for orientation and mobility (O&M) services if this is a need you have identified. After your first term, it is your responsibility to contact your DBS counselor if you require further assistance. A sighted guide will only be provided the first few days of your first term to allow you time to familiarize yourself with the campus and locations of your classes.
7. Maintenance can be provided to offset any expenses you may incur that are in excess of the normal expenses expected while attending college. Maintenance will be evaluated at the beginning of each term and will be adjusted based on your current needs and resources. Maintenance will not be provided for any term you are not in school and will not be provided if your GPA drops below a 2.0 for an undergraduate or the minimum academic standard established by the school for graduate-level students.

**NOTE:** If a client wishes to pursue a program of study that is not available at their local school, the District Administrator or Supervisor may grant an exception to allow the student to relocate and receive on or off campus housing (whichever is most reasonable).

**NOTE:** If you are receiving maintenance at the time of graduation, you may be considered for additional maintenance for up to three (3) months if you are actively seeking employment. Counselors will need to document these activities to support the ongoing need and amount.

Checks will not be released if you have not provided a term update as well as a copy of your grades and schedule to your DBS counselor in a timely manner.
8. When determining maintenance, your household size/income (as reported on your most recent federal income tax return) and your resources will be considered.
9. If you and those legally responsible for you did not file federal income tax returns, the District Administrator will have the discretion to make an exception regarding eligibility. If you want more information concerning maintenance, you may request a copy of the maintenance policy form from your counselor.
10. Upon request, DBS will sponsor one color and one black and white ink cartridge per year to all college students who possess a computer. If a particular printer's ink cartridges are sold as multiple cartridges in a package and this is the only way to purchase these particular cartridges, DBS will sponsor them.

## General Information

Listed below are some points of information which are important for you to know. These points do not cover all of the issues that you may encounter as a DBS client, but they do address those that are most common.

1. It is important for you to register with the Office of Student Disability Services at your college. This office can provide some services DBS cannot, such as testing facilities, priority registration, an adapted computer lab, and student advocacy groups. You may obtain eye medical records from your DBS counselor if needed for registration with this office.
2. If you are not already receiving SSI or SSDI, you must apply for these benefits with the Social Security Administration. See your DBS counselor to discuss the application procedure.
3. Part time employment is highly encouraged by DBS. When applying for financial aid, you also have the opportunity to apply for a work study position on campus. Please discuss this with your DBS counselor, as well as other part time employment options. If you are in need of on the job accommodations, you should address this issue with your counselor as well. It is important to demonstrate to future employers that you have acquired work skills as well as a good GPA.
4. Trial Work Experiences arranged through DBS are available to those clients seeking experience in their chosen field. Before discussing this option with your counselor, you should explore possible job sites and opportunities in your area. These experiences are arranged with the employer as time limited internships (up to 40 hours per week for six months maximum), and you are paid an hourly training stipend ($6.00) from DBS. It is your responsibility to maintain time sheets and turn them in on a monthly basis. DBS will request that your supervisor evaluate you each month as well. These progress reports will be shared with your counselor.
5. Eye exams and eye medical care are provided through DBS if you are economically eligible and do not have insurance or benefits such as Medicaid. It is recommended that you have an annual eye exam (more frequently if your eye condition warrants). However, general medical care (other than eye care) is not usually sponsored by DBS. It is important that you explore all medical benefits available to you, such as Medicaid, Medicare, or student insurance provided through your college. DBS may assist with medical costs if you have no other benefits and your medical condition affects your ability to perform as a student. See your DBS counselor if you have specific questions.

\*\*DBS will NOT provide college required medical insurance. DBS will only provide one pair of glasses unless your prescription changes.

## Conclusion

Please remember that this handbook may not answer all of the questions you may have as a student and DBS client. It is meant to be a guide and reference for you throughout your college years. You should discuss all important issues you have with your DBS counselor. Each client is dealt with on an individual basis.

Please try to anticipate your needs before each term begins (e.g. reader services, books on tape, etc.). You are encouraged to be proactive and attempt to solve problems independently. However, please contact Student Disability Services and/or your DBS counselor if you need assistance.

Again, congratulations and good luck on your new adventure as a college student.

**Receipt and Signature Page**

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_acknowledge that I have received the Division of Blind Services, updated College Student Handbook from my counselor, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I have had the opportunity to discuss the contents with my counselor, and fully understand the policies and procedures therein.

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 Participant Signature Date

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 Counselor Signature Date