# College Student Handbook

# FL_Sunshine_Hat_Icon.jpg Picture of graduate cap in the sun horizonFlorida Division of Blind Services



**Last Revised: Fall 2021**

**Introduction**

Welcome & congratulations on your college passage! As you pursue a higher education, we have some pillars of information for a successful pathway. There are several things you need to know, in order for you to have a positive rapport with your college, and the Division of Blind Services (DBS). This college handbook will provide some guidance for a positive journey and components that will help with your requirements, career pathway, reminders and other resources. In addition, it will familiarize you with your responsibilities, as well as those of DBS.

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

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

 Overview of College Student Handbook:

* DBS College Program Requirements;
* Term Expectation & Semester Reviews;
* College Support Student Services;
* Career Pathway;
* Where to Go For More Information/Resources and Q&A
* Conclusion;

## See the source imageSee the source imageDBS College Program Requirements

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.

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. 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 will only sponsor individuals at institutions that are fully accredited according to the list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies provided by the U.S. Secretary of Education.
3. 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.
4. DBS requires that you enroll 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. However, 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. **Note:** If you need to withdraw from a class after the final drop/add period, you must consult with your counselor before doing so.
5. A cumulative grade point average of 2.0 at the undergraduate level is required in order to receive DBS sponsorship of academic services. If your grade point average is going to drop below 2.0, contact your counselor immediately to discuss possible probationary terms. The minimum cumulative GPA for graduate students is established by their school.
6. DBS will sponsor remedial courses in each subject area in the event that the college requires it. 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.)
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. Students must apply for Federal Financial aid including the Pell Grant. Students are also encouraged to apply for other grants and scholarships. You must supply your counselor with a copy of your student aid report and award or denial letter each year by August 15th. DBS will not provide financial assistance until we have received your Pell award or denial letter. There is no charge to submit a FAFSA form.

All financial aid (excluding loans) will be applied to your tuition, books, and other fees before DBS sponsorship. After all 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.

Before each year of college, reapply for federal grants and work-study with FAFSA. Applications are generally due each spring and deadline dates can be found online at www.fafsa.ed.gov for the Pell Grant, or the college Financial Aid Office.

(**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 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 to your parents' income, then you will not be eligible for DBS services that require you to meet the financial need criteria.

1. When determining maintenance, your household size/income (as reported on your most recent federal income tax return) and your resources will be considered. 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.
2. 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 if your GPA drops below a 2.0 for an undergraduate.

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.

If you want more information concerning maintenance, you may request a copy of the maintenance policy form from your counselor.

1. 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.

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

## See the source imageSee the source imageTerm Expectations & Semester Review

1. 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.
2. Identify the books and class related supplies that you will need at the beginning of the term so that your DBS counselor can complete a purchase order. 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. 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.
4. You are required to take your own notes utilizing appropriate aids and devices to class. Note taker services can be provided through your college's Disabled Student Services office or similar department if additional assistance is needed.
5. If you are receiving maintenance at the time of graduation, you can be considered for additional maintenance for up to three (3) months if you are actively seeking employment. Counselors will document the activities to support the ongoing need and amount.
6. Checks are not released, if you have not provided a term update, as well as a copy of your grades and class schedule to your DBS counselor in a timely manner.
7. 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 select the same person for both tutoring and reader services.

1. 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.
2. 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, # of hours etc. 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. Tutors are individuals who are knowledgeable in a particular subject area and who have the skill to teach that subject to you. Generally, tutors are needed only on an occasional basis when a student has difficulty with a particular class.

DBS can authorize three hours of 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.

1. DBS may sponsor individuals to attend field trips or international experiences when it is required as part of their degree or credential program; these shall be approved by the Bureau Chief.
2. The student must maintain the minimum academic standards established by the post-secondary institution and must provide grade/ records to DBS after each academic term throughout the program. In addition, you must supply your counselor with a copy of your schedule at the beginning of each term. Failure to provide these documents will result in tuition and fee payments being withheld.
3. 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.
4. DBS may sponsor individuals beyond an undergraduate degree program (i.e., Master’s Degree) if the client’s vocational goal requires a graduate degree to obtain an entry level position in that field and/or for the purposes of career advancement.

**College Student Support Services**

Self-Advocacy - you must remember this: you are responsible for yourself in college. College is a time to build independence and self-advocacy. You must seek out the help for support services, provide documentation of your disability, and advocate for necessary academic accommodations.

Colleges recognize the importance of assisting and encouraging all students to reach their full potential. Every college/university student support services office has reasonable accommodations and disability-related services to foster full involvement of students with disabilities in all phases of college life. Here are some of the college services center resources available for you:

**Student Success Center:** Academic Advisors work with students in identifying career and academic goals, in creating an educational plan to ensure students stay on the correct pathway, and assisting in degree planning and course selection through Student Planner. Academic Advisors also utilize the Career Assessment Tool with students to facilitate career pathway exploration for those students who have not yet selected a career pathway.

**TRIO Programs:** The Office for Student Support Services is designed to meet the special academic support needs of qualified students. To be eligible to receive services, the student must either be:

• A first-generation college student where neither parent has a four-year college degree;

• Financially disadvantaged; or

• Have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Services available to qualified students include academic, career and personal counseling, tutoring, field trips to cultural events and workshops on strategies and techniques to help students succeed in college.

**Services for Students with Disabilities:**  The Services for Students with Disabilities office works with each student on an individual basis to determine & implement appropriate and reasonable accommodations: to ensure successful completion of their course work and/or degree plan.

Services are coordinated to fit the individual needs of the student and may include:

• Exam and classroom accommodations;

• Academic services: participation in student success workshops;

• Academic counseling;

• Referral to campus resources;

• Advocacy; and

• Sign Language Interpreting Services (when requested in advance).

Students are not required to accept an accommodation.

**The Testing Center:** The Testing Center promotes academic achievement and success by providing efficient and accessible services in a secure testing environment.

It is important for you to contact an advisor at the support services center. A student support coordinator will meet with you to assess your needs, provide a referral or direct/contact information to a resource that supports your need for achievement.

All of these support services serve as a resource to fit your individual student needs and attempt to remove barriers against your academic success.

**The Florida Bureau of Braille and Talking Books Library:** They provide information and reading materials in Braille and recorded audio format to Florida residents who are unable to use standard print as the result of visual, physical, or reading disabilities.

The Florida Bureau of Braille and Talking Books Library is the largest library of its kind in the U.S. with a collection of more than 2.4 million items in Braille and audio format. The Library serves more than 31,647 Florida residents with annual loans exceeding 1.99 million items. (Off-campus) <http://dbs.myflorida.com/Library/index.html>

**Special Note**: The student support services center can provide some services DBS cannot, such as testing facilities, priority registration, an adapted computer lab, and student advocacy groups etc.

Make sure you have your DBS Identification cards, when applying for student support services. DBS identification cards may be issued to individuals who are visually impaired or meet the definition of legal blindness.

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**Career Pathway**

Work-based learning is a steppingstone to future employment. Each step on a career pathway is designed explicitly to prepare you for the next level of employment and education. Here are a few options for career exploration & research during & after your college journey:

* Part-time Work-Study;
* Internships;
* Apprenticeship;
* Paid Work Experience;
* Career Mentor;
* DBS Business Enterprise Program;

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.

Internship, Apprenticeship & Paid Work Experiences can be arranged through the college and DBS. 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 from DBS.

Career Mentor is an excellent resource to acquire; they lead you to cultivate your thinking and expand your network base. Also, mentors share their knowledge and expertise with you in order to help you set goals, fix problems, and make good choices along your career path.

The Florida Bureau of Business Enterprise (BBE) provides people who are legally blind with rewarding and profitable entrepreneurial ventures. BBE administers one of the largest vending and food service programs operated by legally blind people. They provide job opportunities in the food service sector for eligible blind persons under the Randolph-Sheppard Act. Job opportunities include: snack bar, cafeteria, highway vending machines, or non-highway vending.

## See the source imageWhere to Go for More Information


## Resources and Q & A

## Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): FAFSA is an application that students can fill out free to access the federal student aid (e.g. Pell federal grants, work-study, and loans) for which they qualify. <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>

* **SSA:** Social Security Administration Work Incentives—Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) **https://www.ssa.gov/**
* **Florida Student Scholarship & Grant Programs:** <https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org/SAPHome/SAPHome?url=home>

## Florida Shines & My Career Shines: Shines has the resources you need to explore careers, make a plan, and prepare for work. Explore ways for career planning options. It all starts here! [Florida Shines.org](https://www.floridashines.org/find-a-career)

## Apprentice Florida: Through mentorship and technical instruction, job seekers receive on-the-job training to learn necessary skills while earning a paycheck. The average starting hourly wage for an apprentice is $15.00. The average starting annual salary for a fully proficient worker who completes an apprenticeship is $60,000. <https://apprenticeflorida.com/>

## Career One Stop: Search more than 8,000 scholarships, fellowships, grants, and other financial aid award opportunities. You can use the filters to see only awards for certain award types, locations, level of study, and more. [www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/training/find-scholarships.aspx](http://www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/training/find-scholarships.aspx)

**Q & A**

1. **How many college applications fees will DBS sponsor?** DBS will sponsor up to three (3) application fees. Students will be responsible for paying any additional application fees.
2. **Can I use my maintenance check to cover my graduation fees?** DBS will not pay for graduation fees (cap, gown, ceremonies fees, etc.).
3. **Does DBS cover or reimburse cost of the CLEP exams?** 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.
4. **How much of my college medical insurance fees does DBS cover?** DBS will NOT provide college required medical insurance. DBS will only provide one pair of glasses unless your prescription changes.
5. **If I want to attend a private college, what will DBS cover?** 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:** 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).

1. **What is DBS policy on other scholarships, late fees and deferment?** 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. **If I get a job out of state, what financial support will DBS provide?** DBS will assist withrelocation expenses to secure employment outside your home area. These expenses may include deposit(s) for any of the following: apartment, including first and last month’s rent security deposit, utilities, phone connection, and the cost of a moving company or truck rental.

## See the source imageConclusion

As you embark on your college journey, choosing a college & degree program is one of the most important decision of your life. It is DBS desire to help each student reach their goals and to strengthen the workforce with exceptional DBS graduates.

Please remember that this handbook may not answer all of the questions you may have as a student & DBS client. These pillars of information are a reference guide for you throughout your college years and keep you on a path to graduation.

You are encouraged to be proactive and attempt to solve problems independently. Please try to anticipate your needs before each term begins (e.g. reader services, books on tape, etc.).

You should discuss all-important issues you have with your DBS counselor. Each client is dealt with on an individual basis.

Please feel free to visit, call, or send an email with any questions you may have about DBS & college commitments. We are here for you and we want to see you succeed!

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

Have fun in your journey!



**College Student Handbook**

**Florida Division of Blind Services**

**College Student Handbook and Signature Page Acknowledgement Form:**

I,       acknowledge that I received the Division of Blind Services, 2021 College Student Handbook from my counselor. In addition, I have had the opportunity to discuss the contents with my counselor, and fully understand the policies and procedures therein.

Participant Signature: Date:

Counselor Signature: Date:

**College Student Handbook**

**Florida Division of Blind Services**

