**Self-Advocacy in Higher Education**

By Mark Riccobono, director of the NFB's Jernigan Institute

Colleges and universities are generally obligated to provide students with disabilities accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to ensure equal participation in college and university programs.  Unfortunately, securing accommodations from a college or university is not always easy.  While every campus is different, the following recommended best practices can help you to prevent or mitigate complications:

1. Request accommodations in writing from your school’s disability support services (DSS) office as early as possible and well before a new semester begins.   Think through each accommodation you will need and list each accommodation with specificity.   Be prepared to explain why you need the specific accommodation requested; for example, why you need all instructional materials in Braille rather than audio or other formats.

2. Request an accessible copy of your accommodation letter or form from the DSS office and review this letter to ensure accuracy.  Note if the document includes the entirety of the accommodations you requested and if any specification is made as to when these accommodations will be provided.   If there are discrepancies, note these in writing as an addendum to your accommodation letter and resubmit it to the DSS office.

Remember, too, that in an effort to gather current information regarding the technology that schools are implementing, particularly what is accessible versus inaccessible, the NFB maintains the Digital Technology and Accessibility in Schools survey.  Please complete this survey every semester--your feedback helps to drive the NFB’s advocacy and legal agendas.  You can locate the survey at [http://nfb.org/digital-tech-access](http://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=2646&qid=248382).

**We can help.** For additional information, contact Valerie Yingling, paralegal at the NFB, at [vyingling@nfb.org](mailto:vyingling@nfb.org), or (410) 659-9314, extension 2440.

\*\*From the NFB JI free e-zine, "**Imagineering Our Future**," Issue 57, October 2013.