

**Chapter 29: College and University Campus Travel**

College and university campuses present unique orientation and mobility challenges. Campuses can be large and sprawling, with buildings interconnected by winding walkways that branch off and intersect with other walkways and roads. There are frequently large open plaza areas. This type of lay out is difficult to navigate as there are minimal tactile and audible cues. Though some campuses may have truncated domes at key locations, more often there are only very subtle or no tactile cues to identify intersections. If you will be attending a college or university, you will need to plan carefully and leave plenty of time for training sessions with your dog before actually starting your classes and daily routine.

Ideally, you will be well oriented to the campus, getting a general idea of the overall layout, identifying your housing, bus stops, classrooms, offices and other important places like the student union, dining areas, etc. Once you have your schedule, you will want to make a list of your routes. Remember to include relief areas for your dog. The better you know your campus routes before classes begin, the easier it will be on both you and your dog. If possible, you should contact and get assistance from an Orientation and Mobility specialist. If you are unable to get assistance from an O&M professional, the students with disabilities office should have someone to assist you with orientation. You have likely already worked with them regarding accessible course materials, classes, etc. Their level of services and assistance regarding orientation will vary. Don’t be shy about advocating for your orientation needs. The college or university is required to provide you with reasonable accommodations.

Before you can teach your routes to your new dog, you must first receive orientation to the campus and learn the routes yourself. While you are learning your routes, identify places you will be teaching your dog to target and landmark. Once you have a basic foundation and have prioritized your routes, you can begin patterning your guide dog. It is a good idea to do this over several days before classes begin, when the campus is less crowded. If you have several routes, you may not be able to tackle them all in one day. Keep training sessions relatively short and very positive. Take breaks and have some fun and games at your destinations before proceeding to either a re-work of the route or another route. Initially, heel your dog through the route, taking time to draw the dog’s attention to targets and landmarks by utilizing praise and food reward. Next, you will need to put into practice the targeting exercises taught at Guiding Eyes. Begin working your dog to targets and landmarks by back chaining. Remember to start very close to the target and not to increase distance from the target until you can bet someone one hundred dollars the dog will identify the target. Then, and only then, will you be able to raise your expectations and add a little distance. This will be an area where using your clicker with food reward will become extremely beneficial. Once your dog is consistently identifying targets, work routes with sighted assistance following you. Ask them to cue you if you are getting off track so you can quickly give your dog clear direction, avoiding confusion. Should you need to cue your dog, you will want to reward their getting back on track and then re-work that area by heeling them back to a point several feet before they veered from the intended line of travel. Repeat until the dog no longer needs a cue. It is a good idea to have sighted assistance shadow you when classes start. All the people now traveling on campus add new challenges as they may impede your line of travel and may unwittingly block your targets. For example, groups of students tend to congregate in large open areas. This group may be blocking your intended line of travel, giving the dog a challenge of figuring out the best way to get around the group and back to the intended line of travel. For another example, suppose one of your targets is the intersection of campus, tactile strips or a garbage can and a person is blocking those physical targets. Your dog will need to figure out how to get you to the target without knocking the person over. Getting feedback from sighted assistance will allow you to support your dog with direction and praise as they figure out how to maintain the intended direction of travel or still indicate the blocked target. Helping your dog to be successful at the beginning will give them confidence and greatly increase your long-term success.

Each new semester will bring new classes and new routes. You will need to pattern your dog to the new routes using the same process as before. Since dogs pattern very strongly, your dog will want to indicate old target locations. It will take patience, direction, and praise to assure them you no longer wish to find the old targets. Should your dog be successful and indicate an old target, you can essentially ignore the target or use a no-reward marker such as “Not now” to let the dog know that is not what you are looking for. Next, provide clear direction back to the intended line of travel. New target locations should receive a lot of reinforcement and your dog will eventually focus on the new, reinforced locations. All your planning and efforts will pay off as having a guide dog has a distinctive advantage over a cane in a non-grid environment. However, navigating any campus can be challenging and you may get discouraged from time to time. Take time to rehearse routes and establish strong targets. Seek assistance when you feel you need it.

When attending classes, it will be important to choose locations in the classroom that keep your dog from being stepped on, interacted with, or offered food. When possible, choose a seat where the dog can see who is entering and exiting the room. The dog should be looking out rather than facing a wall. Avoid the center of the room and choose an aisle that is protected by a wall or desk etc.

You and your dog will be faced with many distractions throughout your everyday campus life. It will be important for you to control your dog both when working in harness and when on leash. When you stop to chat, it is a good habit to immediately place your dog in a control position (Sit or Down). This way the dog can wait for further information from you and will be deterred from visiting other people or searching for dropped food items on the floor. People may intentionally try to distract your dog. Keep in mind, you cannot control the actions of others, you can only control your dog and your response. If you consistently put into practice the counter conditioning exercises done at Guiding Eyes, people trying to distract your dog will be very disappointed when your dog looks lovingly to you and not them. You may try to educate the community by distributing or posting the Guiding Eyes “To Whom It May Concern” letters or bookmarks which explain important facts about guide dogs, including how to behave around a guide dog and why. Stacks of bookmarks can be sent to you through Graduate Support Services and can be left in common areas. Finally, a “do not pet me” sign placed on the harness handle may help deter people from petting or talking to your dog as well.

If you find yourself working primarily campus travel with your dog and rarely working in a grid type of environment, it is highly recommended that you make time to do some regular street work to keep your guide dog’s skills sharp in a grid environment. You may become oriented with the school’s city or town and make a point of working your dog there on occasion, or you might find you can only do this when visiting home. Either way is fine and will ensure that when you graduate, your dog’s guide skills in a grid environment will have been maintained.

A few final considerations: You may find it beneficial to carry a Nylabone, extra dog food, a collapsible bowl, pick up bags and a long line in your backpack. If you are running late and cannot get back to your housing, you are still able to provide for your dog’s needs. The Nylabone can be used for down time away from other students. You may want to find out where you can do some long line play and/ or retrieve games with your dog on campus. It is a good idea to find an accessible room for this, especially during inclement weather or weather extremes. It will be important for you to know several relief areas for your dog as well. For traveling around a large campus, you may want to consider looking into a GPS, which can be helpful used in conjunction with your dog. You will want to become skilled using the GPS and skilled using your dog separately before using them at the same time.

*Updated September 2020*