

My name is Emily Romero, I am a sophomore at Regis University in Denver, CO, and my experiences with DVR are as follows. I applied for services through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) during my sophomore year of high school at the age of 16. I had some pre-vocational goals in mind, including receiving training for the summer at the Colorado Center for the Blind which would help me with college and work readiness. Unfortunately, I was denied for services and placed on the wait-list, and I was not removed from the wait-list until August 19th, 2014, one day before I was due to move into my college dorm at Regis University in Denver. This meant that I would not be able to receive any services or student benefits through DVR for my entire freshman year. College was and is the cornerstone of my vocational readiness, so this late removal from the wait-list severely hampered DVR's ability to assist me in achieving readiness for employment.

I have always had self-confidence and the ability to set goals for myself and fulfill them despite my disability; the only time I have felt belittled or inferior due to my total blindness was when my DVR counselor found out I was planning on attending Regis University (which is prestigious, academically rigorous, and a private university) and he asked what the need for this was, and why I wasn't taking my classes at community college. While community college is a perfectly respectable option and is an option which works well for many, it was obvious that my counselor was only asking me why I was going to a four year university because I was blind. His implied meaning was clear to me: He did not expect that any blind person could navigate the mobility challenges, academic rigor, and general environment of a full-time university.

This is but one example of the largest problem facing persons who are blind like myself as we attempt to navigate DVR's system: counselors are uneducated on what blindness actually means for a person's employability and educability. Many hold a view of blindness as a completely catastrophic impediment to success in all its forms, when in fact blindness, in actuality is a condition of being which requires some relatively minor adjustments in life (such as having things verbally described or using technology in different ways than otherwise would be the case). This lack of an understanding of what blindness means for a person's goals is the single most inhibitory factor in my receiving services through DVR.