

Consortium to Enhance Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

Abstract

Youth with developmental disabilities have not had many chances to go to college. In fact most youth with developmental disabilities have not even been expected to participate in any kind of adult education. However, 30 + years of a Free and Appropriate Public Education under the IDEA have raised expectations for students with disabilities, their families, institutes of higher education, and school systems across the nation begin to expect more and to create opportunities for these youth so they may also reap the benefits of a postsecondary education. There is a growing trend nationally to develop dual enrollment and/or adult postsecondary education options for youth with developmental disabilities (DD). We have identified approximately 150 postsecondary education (PSE) options. Little is known about these PSE options. There is no national coordinating entity for the conduct of research, training and technical assistance, and dissemination. Simply put, we do not know the quality of existing programs, nor which practices lead to positive outcomes for students with developmental disabilities.

The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston in collaboration with seven University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCED) (Delaware, Minnesota, Hawaii, South Carolina, Tennessee [Vanderbilt], Ohio, California and the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) have established a Consortium that will conduct research, provide training and technical assistance, and disseminate information on promising practices that support individuals with DD to increase their independence, productivity and inclusion through access to postsecondary education resulting in improved long-term independent living and employment outcomes. The proposed Consortium will be the national resource for knowledge, training, materials, and dissemination about the participation of individuals with developmental disabilities in postsecondary education. The main goals and activities of the Consortium are:

- 1. Research and Planning:** to develop and validate promising practice quality indicators; to conduct a national survey to identify PSE programs and promising practices that support students with DD in PSE, (including dual enrollment programs); to identify gaps and variance in information; and identify and collaborate with other national initiatives.
- 2. Develop and Test a National Training Program:** that supports replication of promising practices and addresses gaps in information for PSE institutions that are developing new or expanding existing programs for students with DD using a multimodal approach with traditional (e.g., replication guide, fact sheets, monthly e-newsletter, 4 annual research-to-practice briefs, enhanced ThinkCollege website, 3 annual regional face-to-face Capacity Building Institutes, State-of-the Practice Symposium at AUCD annual conference) and non-traditional strategies (e.g., universally designed self-paced web-based training modules such as, Role of Coaches or Universal Course Design; instructor lead web-based credit bearing courses that are based on needs identified in Goal 1; Community of Practice for individuals interested in PSE for students with DD; student run Second Life Island with student led Blog; student engagement in participatory action research using multimedia tools; and a web-based PSE program self-assessment tool based on Quality Indicators developed in Goal 1).
- 3. National Implementation and Transition to Sustainability:** through partnering with ADD Technical Assistance Centers and other national organizations (e.g., AHEAD, CEC, ACCTE, Pacer) for large-scale dissemination of the training program that has been tested in Goal 2.