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# From the Field: Strategies on Career Development and Employment for Students with Intellectual Disability.

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By Kelly Haines and Daria Domin

Many students with intellectual disability (ID) acquire work experiences while attending postsecondary education programs. Program staff work with students toward the goal of seeking and sustaining competitive employment, both during college and after program completion (Grigal, Hart, Papay, Smith, Domin & Lazo, 2019). Programs support students with ID in career development and employment activities by utilizing existing resources such as partners on campus and peer mentors, providing access to trained employment staff through community and state agencies, and developing relationships with potential employers (Domin, Taylor, Haines, Papay & Grigal, in press).

Strategies can vary across programs, so we asked staff at postsecondary programs to share what they do. These six responded, sharing strategies they use to support career development and employment for students with ID:

Ohio State University (OSU)	Kennesaw State University (KSU)	University of Vermont (UVM)
		
Highline College	Bergen Community College (BCC)	Millersville University
		


On the following pages we share each strategy and highlight critical aspects of each practice demonstrating alignment with the Think College Standards for Inclusive Higher Education.

The strategies offered represent a range of employment services and supports higher education programs are providing to students with ID. Common threads evident in each strategy is the goal for all students with ID have access to:

- ...the right opportunities
- ...at the right time
- ...in the right employer setting
- ...with the right supports.

These examples can spark ideas and discussion for program serving students with ID who are on a path to competitive, integrated employment.



## CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES ARE RELATED TO STUDENT'S CAREER INTERESTS AND GOALS AND ARE ALIGNED WITH COURSEWORK.

Program	Strategy	Standard Alignment
	<p>At KSU, several students expressed interest in culinary arts. The campus dining hall offers paid internships to all students with a stipend that is slightly more than minimum wage. KSU Academy students, with the help of the Academy staff and peer mentors, apply, go through the on-boarding and training process, and work regular shifts. Job rotations may include working in the dish room, the bakery, and flipping burgers on the “line.” Advisement takes into account the work schedule and inclusive classes, often in the culinary arts, so students are scheduled with flexibility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Related to student interests</li> <li>☑ Paid above minimum wage</li> <li>☑ Coordinated with coursework</li> </ul>
	<p>Consider career-specific classes on-campus. Some departments offer professional management courses that address the credentials, specialized certifications, and protocols for applying within specific industries. Students enrolling in these courses receive dual benefits: 1) the students learn valuable industry information; and 2) students have the opportunity to forge relationships with future industry leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Coordinated with coursework</li> </ul>
	<p>At BCC, internships are pursued at the county level for students with ID. Internships in our county are all paid, and typically begin placements for positions 6 months prior to the internship start date. As a rule, we give at least a 6-month lead time when sourcing a new internship partnership. We suggest trying to get connected with critical decision makers like a Deputy Chief of Staff. To make these connections we have participated on a local workforce development board advisory committee and on human services committees like the Division of Disability Services. This can be time consuming, but networking with a director who may have access to thousands of potential internships and jobs is well worth it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Paid internship</li> <li>☑ Employs people with and without disabilities</li> <li>☑ Access to local networking opportunity</li> </ul>
	<p>Effective employment services and supports complement the students’ academic experience and move toward the end goal of competitive integrated employment. The following is a sample timeline for students in a four-year program at OSU:</p> <p><b>Year 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Unpaid internship opportunities for career exploration</li> <li>» Participate in employment skills and career exploration courses</li> </ul> <p><b>Year 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Varies from unpaid internships to competitive employment</li> <li>» Eligible for a variety of paid employment positions including workstudy and other campus jobs</li> </ul> <p><b>Years 3 &amp; 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Continue paid student employment positions</li> <li>» Begin competitive employment in the community upon graduation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Employment activities designed to build up year to year</li> <li>☑ Paid and unpaid opportunities build work experience</li> <li>☑ Student employment positions for those with and without disabilities</li> <li>☑ Focus on goal of competitive employment after program</li> </ul>

## PROGRAM CONDUCTS OUTREACH WITH EMPLOYERS BOTH ON AND OFF CAMPUS TO IDENTIFY WORK OPPORTUNITIES.

Program	Strategy	Standard Alignment
 <b>KENNESAW STATE</b> UNIVERSITY	<p>Campus departments and offices can offer part-time jobs, internships, and short-term work experiences within the university environment. At KSU, in addition to the departmental and Dean's Suite reception areas, the office of Study Abroad and Global Initiatives hosted internship positions to allow Academy students to build work skills with the support of peer mentors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Array of work-based learning experiences offered on campus</li> <li>☑ Broad reach across campus departments</li> <li>☑ Use of peer mentors</li> </ul>
 <b>HIGHLINE</b> COLLEGE	<p>When approaching a business about a paid internship, the Achieve Career Specialist uses this script: "Hi, I work at Highline College setting up internships for students. I have a student who is interested in your industry. I want to find him/her somewhere to learn about this type of work and dip their toes into your industry. The internship is 10 hours/week. Is this something you might be interested in?" This tactic solicits a "yes" about 75% of the time!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Focus on understanding employers' needs</li> <li>☑ Presents opportunity to business</li> </ul>



## PROGRAM COLLABORATES WITH COMMUNITY-BASED EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES TO FACILITATE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS.

Program	Strategy	Standard Alignment
 <b>KENNESAW STATE</b> UNIVERSITY	<p>The Georgia State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency designated a dedicated counselor, who coordinates the transition-to-work VR services for the postsecondary programs serving students with ID in the Metro Atlanta area. Programs include this dedicated VR Counselor in person centered planning activities, as a guest speaker in career classes, and in meetings designed to specifically address transition as graduation approaches. Involvement in these activities allow the VR Counselor to better know the students and match them with appropriate services as they exist from the program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Supports transition from college to career</li> <li>☑ Shared goal of paid employment during and after program</li> </ul>
 The University of Vermont	<p>Our VR contributes \$600 toward tuition each semester. Students can also apply for the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation non-degree grant funds. Eligible students can get up to \$1,200 each semester.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Students can receive financial support to attend program</li> </ul>

## PROGRAM ENGAGES WITH BUSINESSES IN MEANINGFUL WAYS TO CREATE PARTNERSHIPS.

Program	Strategy	Standard Alignment
 <b>KENNESAW STATE</b> UNIVERSITY	<p>A relationship-building tradition at KSUs Academy is the annual Employer Recognition event. A representative from each internship site, both on and off campus, is invited to this reception, where both staff and students share success stories. Each internship site is recognized, and presented with a certificate, plaque, or other token of appreciation. Students and staff can nominate exemplary supervisors and co-workers for various awards. Photos of the event provide excellent promotional material for both the program and partnering businesses. Some years, a separate event is held for professors, with each graduating senior nominating a “Star Professor”, and other years, the events are held jointly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Enhances visibility of program and students</li> <li>☑ Promotes employment in the community</li> <li>☑ Recognizes inclusive practices</li> </ul>
	<p>The job development approach should be the same with internal partners as external ensuring each interaction is: <b>professional</b> (respectful of each partner’s times, needs and expertise), <b>supportive</b> (keeping lines of communication open and being available, but not intrusive), and <b>educational</b> (providing resources and anticipating and offering answers to any questions that may come up).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Communication is thoughtful</li> <li>☑ Focus on understanding employers’ needs</li> </ul>
	<p>When interacting with businesses, don’t assume that businesses know the language of higher education and disability. Staff from Highline Community College recommend using business language rather than social services/higher education jargon. We also offer an explanation for any discipline specific terms we use and always make sure the employer knows who to call if questions or concerns occur. The better the relationship between the employer and the program staff, the better it is for the student. Good experiences with one student, may lead to future experiences for other students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Business has a point of contact with program</li> <li>☑ Focus on long-term relationship</li> </ul>
	<p>Find champions and potential collaborators in the local disability community, businesses and community groups or organizations. Get on their radar and their mailing lists so that you can have access to job leads and hiring events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Employers are diversified</li> <li>☑ Program engages with employers in meaningful ways</li> <li>☑ Program maintains a list of contact info</li> </ul>

## STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO TRAINED EMPLOYMENT STAFF.

Program	Strategy	Standard Alignment
 <p>KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY</p>	<p>KSU partnered with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to receive training on successful strategies for job coaching to better support the students in required internships. Peer mentors and program staff attended sessions taught by an experienced certified rehabilitation counselor, who stressed the importance of developing natural supports, identifying subtle ways to set up reminders, and establishing clear lines of communication. A strong focus was placed on building student independence while modeling appropriate work skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Staff trained to meet needs of students in the workplace</li> <li>☑ Collaboration with state vocational rehabilitation agency</li> </ul>
 <p>Millersville University</p>	<p>Millersville University spearheaded an Employment Services Program (ESP) Initiative by securing an AmeriCorps VISTA member to serve as the Experiential Learning &amp; Organizational Capacity Coordinator. This individual provided individualized career supports such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» offering support in developing job applications,</li> <li>» assisting with the discovery process,</li> <li>» conducting mock interviewing,</li> <li>» promoting career service workshops,</li> <li>» educating students on existing employment service resources in the local community</li> <li>» reviewing existing job search resources</li> <li>» connecting students to job opportunities of interest.</li> </ul> <p>Other responsibilities included assisting campus partners to reevaluate existing internship processes at the career service office and providing ongoing feedback to the career service office on accessibility considerations for existing programming initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☑ Ensures students have access to staff focused on career supports</li> <li>☑ Collaboration with campus career services</li> </ul>

## REFERENCES

Domin, D., Taylor, A., Haines, K., Papay, C. & Grigal, M. (in press). "It's Not Just About A Paycheck": Perspectives on Employment Preparation of Students with Intellectual Disability in Federally-Funded Higher Education Programs. Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

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