

Expanding the Dream: Post-Secondary Options for Students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

FYI
For Your Information

ECAC 2013



At the time when today's high school seniors were born, the idea that students with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) could go to college was pretty much unthinkable, at least by most people. Even then, however, there were undoubtedly some young people with I/DD who had dreams of going to college like their siblings or neighborhood friends, and parents who struggled to explain why this would not be possible. As expectations for higher achievement and greater community participation for individuals with disabilities have increased over the last decade, so has the number of programs that are available to give young people with I/DD an opportunity to continue to develop their skills as part of a college experience. Today many more young people are living their dream!

Think College! is the joint effort of several federally funded projects. It is focused on promoting post-secondary education (PSE) as a choice for adults and transition-aged youth with intellectual disabilities across the nation. In 2009 Think College! conducted a survey of existing PSE programs and identified 149 programs located in 37 states. Today there are at least 212 programs, with 9 located here in North Carolina!

The Think College! website has a wealth of information about PSE programs, evidence-based practices, research findings and related resources. Think College! also provides training and technical assistance for parents, self-advocates, educators, administrators, legislators and others who play key roles in developing and supporting additional high quality PSE programs. Learn more at: www.thinkcollege.net

The Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities (CIDD) coordinates the North Carolina Post-Secondary Education Alliance (PSEA), a diverse group of stakeholders who have a mission to expand the PSE options for individuals with I/DD in North Carolina. The PSEA webpage has information and links for those interested in creating new programs as well as information on the existing programs. There are currently programs at 5 community colleges: Alamance, Central Piedmont, Cleveland, Randolph, and Western Piedmont. There are also programs housed at Appalachian State University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Greensboro, and Western Carolina University.

Visit the PSEA homepage at: www.cidd.unc.edu/psea In addition to information about "the Alliance" and its activities, you will find links to comprehensive information about each North Carolina program. For an easy side-by-side comparison, there is also an "At-a-Glance" document that uses a grid format to provide some key information.

If you have or know of a young person with I/DD who may be interested in going to college after they leave school, be sure to discuss this with their teacher and IEP team. The student's transition component and other parts of the IEP can be developed to help prepare the student for a successful PSE experience. Focus on the hard and soft skills that will be needed on campus, in the workplace and community, and for independent living. Many of these programs also work with adults who have already been out of school for a while, but some have a special focus on those who are in the process of making the transition to adulthood. Contact any program that you have interest in to get more information, sooner rather than later. That's how you begin to turn a dream into a goal, and then into reality!



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