

The RRTC on Employment of Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



Employment Support for Students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities: Focus Group Results

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QR Codes for Presentation Materials



PowerPoint



Word Doc

Presenter: Dr. Megan Reynolds

- “Postsecondary Technical Assistance Associate” at VCU
- OTD from the Medical University of South Carolina; Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of South Carolina
- Experience in inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) programs, supported employment, nonprofit
- Enjoy being outdoors, live music, traveling, reading, and spending time with family



Objectives

- Discuss the needs and experiences of people *receiving* employment supports at a community/technical college setting
- Discuss the needs and experiences of people *providing* employment supports at a community/technical college setting
- Consider future directions for inclusive employment supports at community and technical colleges



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Community and Technical Colleges

- Typically:
 - shorter in duration (<4 years)
 - regionally or locally-focused
 - more accessible for non-traditional students (e.g., part-time students, students with parenting responsibilities, etc.)
 - offer certificates, Associate's degrees, and some offer Bachelor's degrees
- **35%** of all institutions of higher education are community or technical colleges



Community and Technical College Students with IDD

- Today, more students with IDD are enrolled in higher education than ever before:
 - Important legislation:
 - IDEA (2004)
 - HEOA (2008)
 - Inclusive postsecondary education programs (“inclusive PSE” programs, or “IPSE” programs)
 - **130** programs at community and technical colleges



Vocational Rehabilitation

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) provides a variety of services to help people with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep jobs.
- These services include, but are not limited to:
 - job development and goal-setting
 - job seeking
 - vocational skills training
 - job coaching
 - transportation, finances, etc.



Competitive Integrated Employment

- **Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)** is defined by the Department of Labor as work that is:
 - compensated **at or above** minimum wage
 - receiving the **same level** of benefits and opportunities for advancement as workers without disabilities in similar positions
 - at a location where the employee **interacts** with other individuals with disabilities



Key Problem

- Less than 1/4 of college students with disabilities report having a **paid job** while in school (23%; NCES, 2017)
- Those enrolled in community and technical colleges consistently have **less** earnings, work fewer hours, and are less likely to achieve competitive, integrated employment after graduation (NCES 2023; Phillips et al., 2022)
 - Could be for a number of reasons, including:
 - Less funding, or less resources than larger, 4-year institutions
 - Rural, less access to community/city resources
 - Smaller institutions = less staff

The Current Study: Demographics



- Focus groups with **3 types of participants**:
 - Community or Technical college staff (disability services, career services, IPSE program staff)
 - Vocational Rehabilitation professionals
 - Students or alumni with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD)
- **41 participants total**
 - 20 states

The Current Study: Procedure



- 10 questions
- 60-90 minutes, Zoom
- Cameras off, names changed to a number
- Analyzed data to discover “**themes**”
- Steering committee advised on developing questions, reviewed and approved themes

Research Question:

What are the barriers and facilitators to providing career development services to college students with IDD?

Questions for Students

- Did you use employment supports during college?
- What were some of the most helpful supports that you received?
- What difficulties did you face with accessing career development opportunities?
- What career-related supports did you need, but not receive?



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Student Themes - Part 1

- **Accommodations & Support Services**
 - Accommodations focused on academics
 - Support services were widely used*
 - Mentors were important influences
- **Job Searches & Networking**
 - Supports services helped with job development activities (resumes, interview practice)
 - Networking was an important skill learned in college

Student Themes - Part 2

- **Concerns and Needs**
 - Don't fit the “traditional” ways of finding/developing job opportunities
 - Attitudinal barriers
 - Job hunt takes significantly longer, less successful outcomes
- **Mock Interviews**
 - Students value the practice
 - Need more opportunities to practice

Student Quotes - Facilitators

“My **piece of advice** for people is like, when it comes to the disability services - really stay in touch with them. So they know how to work with you, and what you need.”

“So I'm like, why not just, you know, **start school**? You know, whenever I'm ready to look for a job, I'll **be able to look for a job of what I want to do.**”

“They helped me a lot. **My mentors**, they helped me along the way during my freshman year until my senior year in college. I learned a lot as a person. As a college student. I learned a lot from my mentors, and a lot of support from my mentors at [School Name], and I'm grateful that I have them in my life.”

Student Quotes - Barriers

“The main problem that we run into as people with disabilities is that - because even when you get out of school, there's like transition services that you can use. So, there's stuff out there. But the problem is people, it's really people's attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities is the main issue. Because, based off my resume and, like me having degrees...any time I apply for something, I always get an interview, because they just look at my accomplishments, and what I've done, and my degrees. So, I've never not gotten a first interview. I've always gotten the first interview. It's the second one after they realize my disability, that's when it's an issue. So, **it's really people's attitudes.**”

- Female Community and 4-year College Alum, Journalism Major



What suggestions do you have for overcoming these attitudinal barriers?

How might career services and disability services working together help to dissolve these barriers?

Questions for College Staff

- What do career services and support look like for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities at your school?
- Successful strategies?
- Barriers?
- Do you work closely with the local vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency?



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College Staff Themes - Part 1

- **Inter-Department/Agency Relationships**
 - Collaborative relationships across departments and across agencies was key to student success
 - Relationships with VR agencies
 - Relationships with local businesses
- **Accommodations and Providing Learning Opportunities**
 - The majority of supports were in the form of accommodations and direct teaching opportunities

College Staff Themes - Part 2

- **Direct Support and the Workforce**
 - Examples: internships, job shadowing, job coaching, searching for jobs
- **Concerns and Needs**
 - Staffing, turnover
 - Lack of funding, resources
 - Lack of training



College Staff Quotes - Facilitators

“We work a lot with the community and **establishing relationships for employment...** We do a good bit with apprenticeships, internships, work study, wherever we can immerse them in an **inclusive world within the working community.**”

“Whether it be that something needs to be read to them, whether they need a special technical tool, special time, extra information. Just that's where we really kind of **learn about the student.**”

“What we have been doing though, intentionally...is working with that career center to offer them our expertise to develop some more...**programming that reaches all students**, and then also provide that information that might be useful to students with disabilities as they do their job search that their offices may not have been aware of: around accommodation, and resources to support the job search, or education and training around that.”

College Staff Quotes - Barriers

“In our very small town, **perception and opportunity** are barriers.”

“**Connecting their needs** with what the employer can or is willing to offer, **educating the workforce** as to the abilities of these individuals, and **instilling that confidence** and advocacy in our students.”

“Our career center’s one of the barriers. We **don't really have a functioning career center** to access things that way.”

“I think about **training** - like training for career services, and even us - like developing plain language materials, having sensory friendly events, thinking about that kind of accessibility. And then also just kind of knowing what supports and resources are out there.”

In your own experience, what are barriers or facilitators to students accessing career services?

Questions for VR Professionals

- What do career services and support look like for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities within your agency?
- Successful strategies?
- Barriers?
- Do you work closely with the local community or technical colleges?



VR Professionals Themes - Part 1

- **Inter-Department/Agency Relationships**
 - Collaborative relationships across agencies was key to student success
 - Relationships with colleges
 - Relationships with local businesses
- **Needs/Concerns**
 - Need for stronger relationships with colleges
 - Stigmas of students with disabilities
 - Helping clients find more realistic goal-setting, outcomes, and expectations

VR Professionals Themes - Part 2

- **Individualization**
 - Ensuring accommodations and services were student-specific
- **Support Roles**
 - Goals, education, networking, and finance
- **Direct Roles**
 - Vocational skills training, work evaluations, and transition services
- **Work-based learning**
 - Paid internships, job shadowing

VR Quotes - Facilitators

“I think we have all the tools that we need as VR counselors - the supports, having that relationship with different agencies, resources, collaborating with the other campuses, departments and everything like that... as long as everyone is in together, cohesive **on the team**, then most definitely we would be able to provide (students) with that support so they can **be the most successful they can be as a college student.**”

“We assist them with some **financial assistance** to help them get into some of those programs. We’ve built in some **job coaches** within some of those programs...we also provide some **sponsorship** for those students who are going into that academic side of college, and just be a support - make sure they have their **accommodations**, help them with **scheduling their classes**, some may need some **transportation assistance**, and things of that nature.”

VR Quotes - Barriers

“A lot of times, we limit based on what we see, versus challenging them, versus what they can do. So, I feel like, people that does not personally work with these individuals, or don’t have that experience, they often **limit them.**”

“So, getting the **buy-in** from the business as well, so making sure that they know that they have the supports, and that our individuals have supports, to help them through those different jobs.”

“Just having designated times to come to the table, for all of us to collaborate, so we can learn what each role does so we can **work together for the success of our students.**”

“My counselors who serve the IDD young people...also have a general caseload. They have a lot of people. **They have a lot of people on their caseload** that go in different directions.”

What did we learn?

- Students with disabilities need to have supports that meet their specific **needs**
- Not all **providers** know how to meet those needs
- Important roles/services: work-based learning opportunities, accommodations, mentoring, job development activities, direct skills training, goal setting
- Common concerns: staffing, attitudinal barriers, knowledge of/full utilization of services, inter-department/agency collaboration

Where will we go from here?

Next Steps



- Use the themes given by the participants to create a **professional development training**
 - 5 week course
 - Monthly meetings for 12 months
- The training will be for community and technical college staff and vocational rehabilitation counselors as a **“triad”**
 - 3 members from the same town/area
- Aim to improve employment outcomes

Any questions?

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Thank you!

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