

Huskies BELONG

A STEM-FOCUSED TRANSITION PROGRAM AND COLLEGE
FRESHMEN EXPERIENCE

The HB Program

Illinois high school students with disabilities (SWDs)

Transition to 4-year degrees

- STEAM majors (i.e., science, technology, engineering, arts, math).

Spring orientation and needs assessment

5-day summer residential immersion program

Fall of Senior Year

- Essential Employability Skills (EES) online course
- NIU STEM Fest
- Apply to college and FAFSA

Transition to College Experiences

First-year academic performance is key

Admission criteria:

- H.S. Juniors with disabilities
- College bound
- Interest in STEAM



HB Goals

- Increased understanding of STEAM career opportunities
- Increase knowledge of and self-efficacy in establishing postsecondary disability accommodations and other supports
- Access resources for admission, financial aid and enrollment

STEM is for Everyone!

Supporting
inclusivity
in science
education



HB Partners

NIU

- P-20 Center
- STEAM
- Disability Resource Center
- Recreation Center
- Career Services

Donka, Inc. (Assistive Technology)

Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Horsepower (Therapeutic Horseback Riding)

RAMP Center for Independent Living

Kishwaukee Special Recreation Association

HB cont.

Spring of Junior year

- Needs assessments
- Career interest assessment
- Assistive Technology Evaluation
- Family Fun Day at NIU

Summer

- 5-day residential college immersion program



HB Summer Camp

Integrated Residence Halls and Dining

Academic Supports and Accommodations

- Interactions with Faculty and Students Role Play
- Undergraduate Panel of Current SWDs

STEAM exploration and activities

- Engaging with NIU faculty
- Career interest assessments

Integrated Recreation and Socialization

- Recreation Center
- Esports gaming

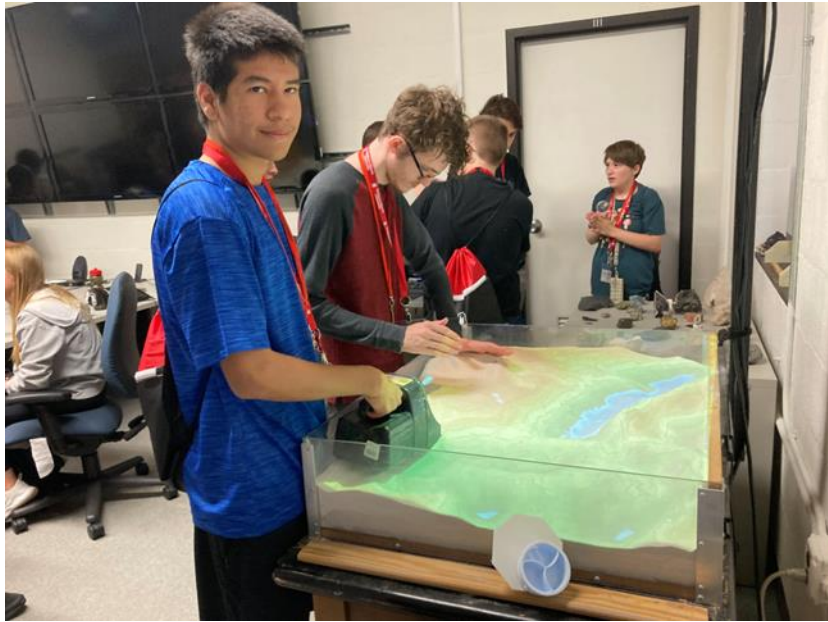
Residence Halls and Dining



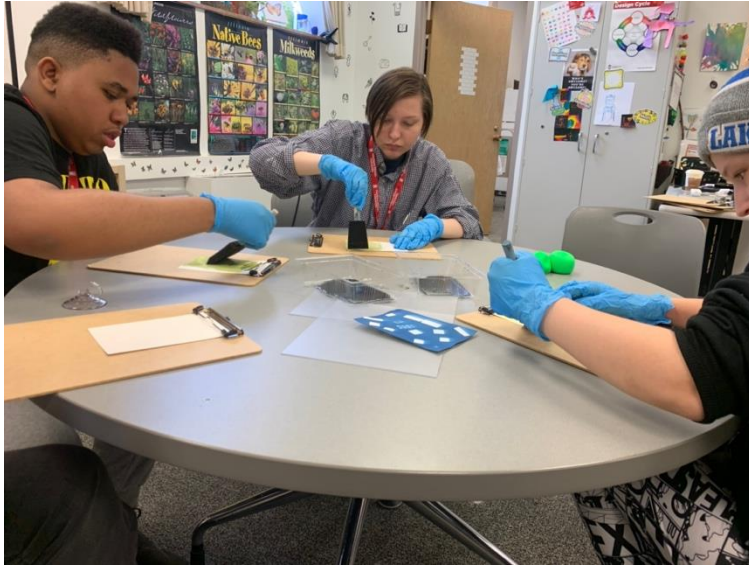
Science on a Sphere



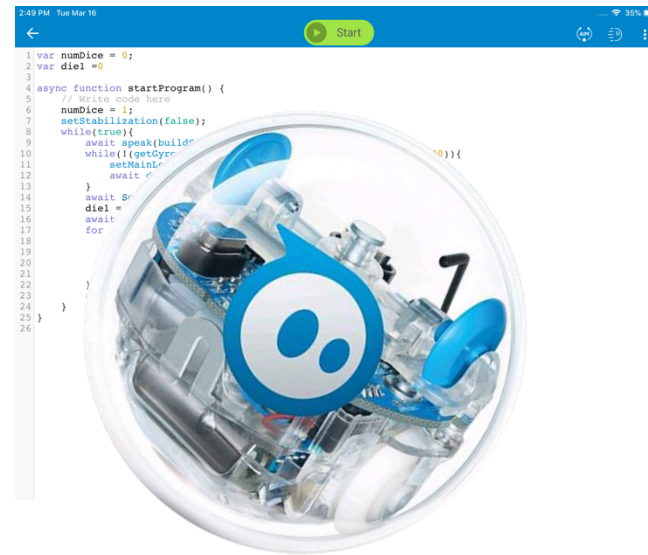
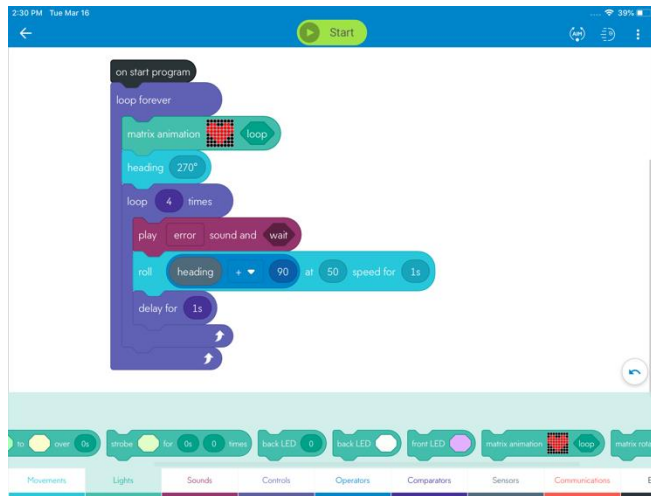
Geology: Simulated Tornado, Topography Sandbox



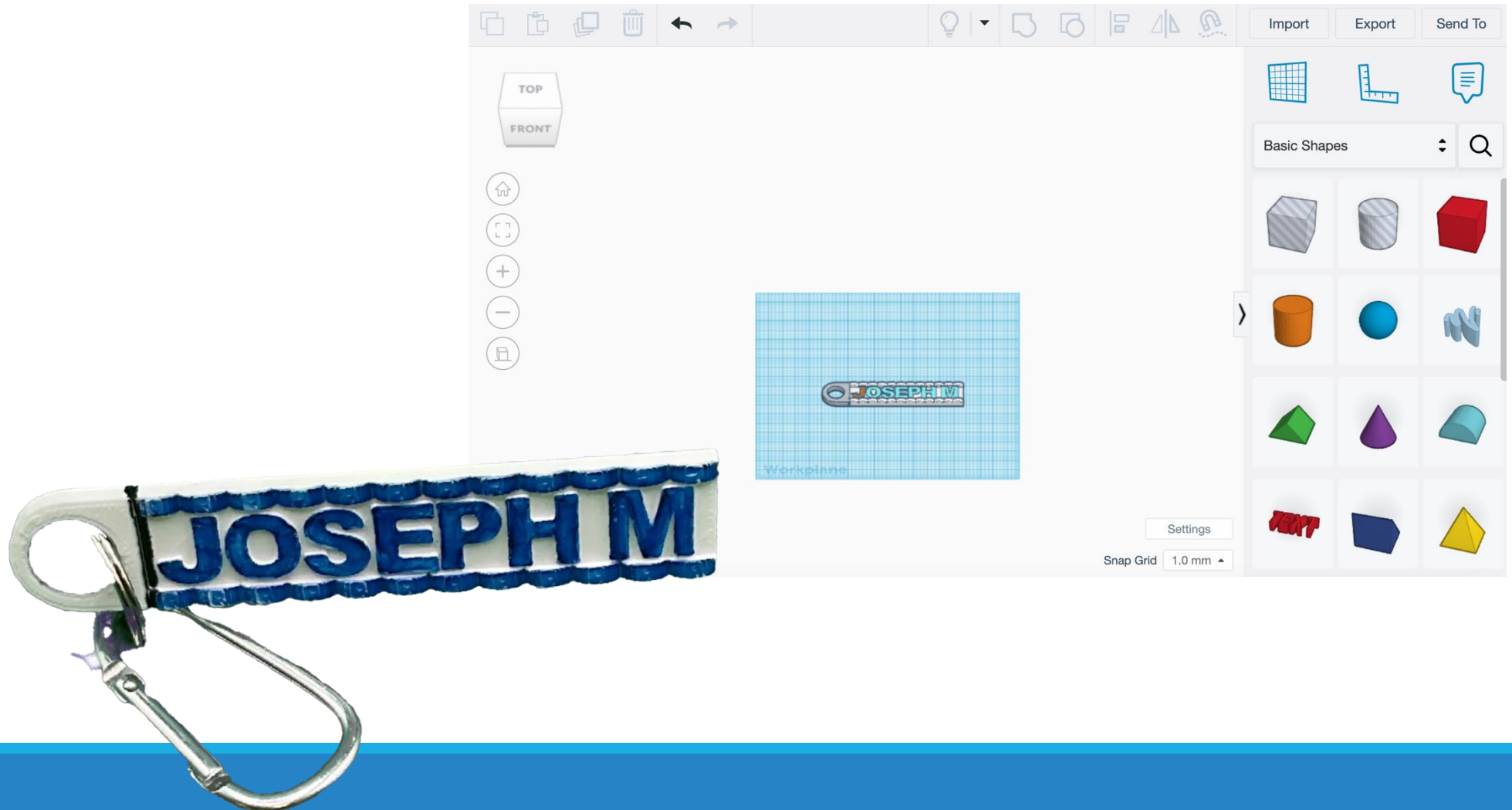
Cyanotype (Sun Print)



Sphero Robot - Coding



Tynker Cad – 3D Printing



Green Screen – Marketing



“Chopped” Cooking Competition



Recreation and Socialization



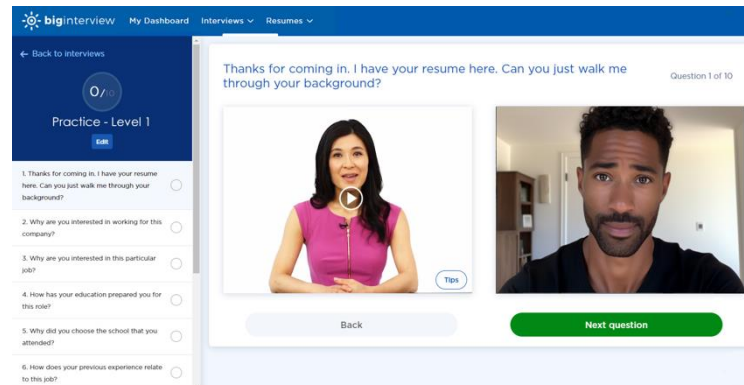
Esports Gaming



Fall HB

Fall of Senior year

- Family Fun Day at [NIU STEM Fest](#)
- [Essential Employability Skills](#) (EES) online course
- Mock Job Interviews
- Big Interview



NIU STEM Fest



Essential Employability Skills



STEAMCLASSROOM

Programs ▾

NIU STEAM ▾

My Account

Help ▾

Contact Us

Request NIU Info



ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: MODULE 2

MODULE 2 CAREER VIDEOS



Module 2 should take approximately 40 minutes to complete.

Assignment

Done: Start discussions: 1

Restricted

Not available unless:

- The activity **Assignment** is marked complete
- The activity Label is marked complete

Complete the *Career Video Check List* worksheet and submit your response.



Essential Employability Skills: Thought Process

Watch later

Share

ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

THOUGHT PROCESS



Watch on



NIU STEAM

ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Teamwork & Conflict Resolution

Students can use their understanding of working cooperatively with others to complete work assignments and achieve mutual goals.

Communication

Verbal: Students can use their understanding of English grammar and public speaking, listening, and responding, convey an idea, express information, and be understood by others.

Written: Students can use their understanding of standard business English to ensure that written work is clear, direct, courteous, and grammatically correct.

Digital: Students can use their understanding of email, keyboarding, word processing, and digital media to convey work that is clear, direct, courteous, and grammatically correct.

Problem Solving

Students can use their critical thinking skills to generate and evaluate solutions as they relate to the needs of the team, customer, and company.

Decision Making

Students can use their understanding of problem solving to implement and communicate solutions.

Critical Thinking

Students can use their understanding of logic and reasoning to analyze and address problems.

Adaptability & Flexibility

Students can use their understanding of workplace change and variety to be open to new ideas and handle ambiguity.

Initiative & Self-Drive

Students can use their understanding of goal setting and personal impact to achieve professional goals and understand personal impact.

Reliability & Accountability

Students can use their understanding of commitment, time management, and follow through to ensure that a professional team functions properly and meets collective goals.

Cultural Competence

Students can use their understanding of diversity and inclusion to communicate and work effectively across a multitude of abilities, cultures, and backgrounds to ensure that a professional team functions properly and meets collective goals.

Planning & Organizing

Students can use their understanding of time management to plan effectively and accomplish assigned tasks.

Fall HB cont.

Temple Grandin: *Great Minds Are Not All the Same*

- Celebration of Neurodiversity: Resource and Activity Fair



Fall HB cont. (Scaffolding Supports)

Assist with college and FAFSA applications

- [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#)
- [RAMP CIL](#)

Referral to [Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services](#)

Help identify college supports

Purchase AT, equipment, supplies (e.g., laptop)

2023-2024 HB Participant Demographics (N=30)

Gender:

- Male- 84%
- Female- 13%¹⁷
- Non-binary- 3%

Race/Ethnicity:

- White/Caucasian- 53.3%¹⁷
- Two or more races- 16.6%
- Black or African American- 13.3%
- Hispanic or Latino – 10%
- Asian- 6.6%

Age

- 16-22 years old

Primary Health Condition:

- Autism- 50%^{10, 11, 12}
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)- 27%
- Specific Learning Disability- 10%
- Orthopedic Impairments- 6.5%
- Mild Intellectual Disability – 6.5%

Secondary Health Conditions:

- ADHD and/or Anxiety
- Anxiety and/or Depression
- Executive Functioning Impairment
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Epilepsy
- Asthma
- Hearing Loss
- Mild cerebral palsy

Comments

- "I loved doing art outside"
- "I'm proud of waking up today because it's hard for me to wake up."
- "The birth of the 🍷 Grilled Pasta Chicken Sandwich 🍷 It was the most challenging best proudest part of the day."
- "I enjoyed the Minecraft coding activity a ton"
- "I found out what to do better relating to my disability"
- "I have a lot of fun in the huskies belong program it gave me a lot of knowledge about what college life is like"
- "It was fun to meet new people, I gained 3 new friends"
- "By far, the best part about today was the trip to the horse farm. It was a nice break from being at the campus and it was a beautiful day outside."
- "I got to be creative with the buttons I made and the 3D print things on Tinker Cad."
- "I am proud that I have survived almost an entire day at my new camp."

Additional Comments

“I am afraid that I will forget to ask for accommodations in college, so I’m going to have to work harder to remind myself to ask for accommodations.”

“I am afraid to advocate for myself. Don't know where to start. Feel like I am being judged.”

“I think that the right amount will help me significantly in college, not too much but some support.”

“I was hesitant at first because I haven’t had this type of opportunity before... I gained experience advocating for myself and working with personal care attendants, and I learned I can live on my own and go to college. I am glad I did it and I would encourage other kids to give it a chance.”

“It was very enjoyable, I especially am liking the engagement between the team and I during my school life.”

"The Huskies BELONG program was my first full experience being away from my parents for more than two days. I was nervous at first, but I became proud of my resilience and learned to enjoy every second of my experience at NIU! .”

High School to College

2023 Cohort (20 students)

- 17 participants entered college in fall 2024
- 2 participants will attend college in fall 2025
 - 1 opted to wait and attend college in fall 2025
 - 1 participant currently a senior in high school
- 1 participant opted to work after high school

2024 Cohort (10 students)

- 7 participants have applied to college
- 3 participants responded “no”
 - 1 participant currently a junior in high school
 - 1 participant will receive transition supports through school district next year
 - 1 participant is undecided on school vs. work

Other Outcomes

1. Overall satisfaction with the HB program
2. Increased understanding of STEAM related majors and careers
3. Increased knowledge of postsecondary disability accommodations and other supports
 - Additional emphasis on improving self-efficacy in establishing postsecondary disability accommodations and other supports is needed
4. Follow up studies on 2023 and 2024 cohorts

Future Transition Services

Students' with physical and/or sensory impairments participation in STEAM majors and careers

Participant engagement

Institutional accessibility

- Physical and technological access