Valerie Kaplan, who has Asperger's, belongs to a campus club of self-proclaimed “nerds, geeks, freaks, visionaries, outcasts” at Carnegie Mellon
Photo: Bob Fritz/The New York Times/Redux

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This Issue Highlights
Higher Education and Students with Disabilities
Access New England is available in large print, Braille, audiocassette, computer disk, and email upon request and online at: www.NewEnglandADA.org

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Regional Advisory Board

The Regional Advisory Board meets twice a year. The members’ input and commitment greatly assists the New England ADA & Accessible IT Center in its mission.

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Can We Improve Employment Outcomes for Students With Disabilities?

Adaptive Environments has received a five year federal grant award from the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation Research of the U.S. Department of Education to research effective strategies to improve employment results for people with disabilities in the six New England states. The new grant, DBTAC–New England ADA Center has created a set of partnerships and collaborations that will help to meet the new expectations. We are pleased to report that The Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University is our primary research partner. The target populations for New England ADA Center’s research are students with disabilities and their diverse support services at institutes of higher education, and employers in demand-driven, high growth industries in New England. Read about how the New England ADA Center plans to identify strategies to improve academic success and employment outcomes for students with disabilities. The story is entitled “Labor Market Projections – A Perfect Nor’ Easter” (page 3).

Nationwide, college students with disabilities are not receiving the same employment and career outcomes after graduation as their non disabled peers. Specifically, a college graduate with a disability is 8-12 times more likely to be unemployed than a college graduate without a disability (American Council on Education 2000). Unemployment rates for college graduates with disabilities range from 33-45% which compares unfavorably to the 3-4% unemployment rates for students without disabilities.

Why does this phenomenon exist?

There are many reasons, some of them obvious in patters of experience by many students with disabilities. Once they arrive on campus, students with disabilities “under–explore” their career options. For example, they register with career services about one-third as often as non-disabled students (Getzel, 2005), rarely participate in Co-Op and other internship programs (Rumrill, 1999), and tend not to engage in part-time and other work study employment—especially, if they are receiving SSI (Burgstahler, 2001 and Wehman, 2005). Some strides are being made however, to help students motivate themselves to gain internships. In the region, the Rhode Island Governor’s Commission on Disability provides paid internships for students with disabilities. Employers look for work experience on a resume and some employers hire students who have interned with them (page 12). Also, EAST Alliance of the University in Southern Maine, is assisting students with disabilities to get internships in the sciences throughout New England. Read more about their exemplary project on page 12.

The limited engagement in career exploration activities exhibited by students with disabilities may be compounded by their colleges support services. Some disability service personnel lack expertise in employment, and career service personnel often lack expertise regarding the needs of students with disabilities (Rumrill, 1999). However, this tide is changing. Through the efforts of Alan Muir at Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (www.COSD.org), the lines of communication between career counselors and disability services are opening. As well, the Association for Higher Education and Disability (www.AHEAD.org) members are now attending to employment issues for the students with disabilities they serve. Recently, I have spoken with Disability Services Personnel who have further identified a major issue-students lack of preparation in transitioning from high school to college. In K-12, students rely upon family members and advocates to speak for them. In college, students need to figure out what they need and learn to speak for themselves.

Continued on Page 2
Our Feature Stories

Our feature stories highlight a stunning series by the New York Times (November 5, 2006), “A Dream Not Denied.” This series of articles describes students with intellectual and cognitive disabilities and their support systems and the innovative strategies being used for successful navigation of a college education.

Included in this series is “Just a Normal Girl,” a story about Katie Apostides and her enrollment at Becker College in Massachusetts. Katie is at the forefront of a wave of intellectual limitations students gaining a place on college campuses nationwide. Studies commissioned by the National Down Syndrome Society have shown that the quality and quantity of jobs for students with cognitive disabilities increases with post secondary education. This concurs with the Connecticut (CT) Department of Labor report that more than half of the 20 fastest growing occupations will require a minimum of a Bachelor’s or Master’s Degree. The ADA Coalition of CT stresses the importance of keeping abreast of the jobs of the future and grooming students for them (page 12). Katie and other college students with intellectual disabilities are out to prove they can succeed in competitive employment.

A related article, “A Dream Not Denied: Students on the Spectrum” (page 5) depicts best practices assisting students with Asperger’s syndrome to stay in school, and survive socially in and out of the classroom. The Autism Foundation is claiming that one in every 166 children has been diagnosed with autism (Autism Speaks, 2006). These children are now beginning to enroll in higher education, leaving institutes of higher education ill-prepared to address the magnitude of demand for support services for students with disabilities. As I read the stories in Moore’s article, I was awestruck by the simplicity and effectiveness of some of the strategies, such as older students mentoring younger students.

Can We Improve Employment Outcomes for Students With Disabilities in New England?

The employment issues facing youth with disabilities exist on many levels. These issues involve the intersection of a student’s personal situation with national policy, as well as the prevailing societal and economic regional environment. For instance, on the national level, the loosening of eligibility requirements of SSI has magnetized people away from work. Furthermore, the labor market catastrophe occurring in New England additionally challenges the personal and developmental factors influencing student decision making.

Read about these issues. The story is entitled “Labor Market Projections – A Perfect Nor’ Easter.” (page 3). Our newsletter offers an array of articles addressing the multi-layered challenges to improving education, training and employment success.

Oce Harrison, Project Director

References

American Council on Education (2000). Facts in brief: Students with disabilities have lower persistence rates, but graduates are successful. Vol.48, No.11.


A Perfect Nor’ Easter

Never in the history of New England have labor market factors been aligned in such a way as to create a ‘perfect economic nor’easter’! An unparalleled shortage of educated and skilled workers has created a labor crisis in the region. This crisis has been triggered by the retirement of baby boomers, the out-migration of skilled and educated workers, the immigration of uneducated and unskilled labor, and record rates of high school and college drop outs.

Looking more closely at two subsets of the population—the young and the old—is instructive in understanding the issues involved in New England’s labor market crisis.

The ADA Center is collaborating with several organizations to examine these issues, and in this article we examine in particular, those efforts that are steering youth towards a successful work life. The ADA Center is at the beginning stages of research on the question, “How can we improve employment outcomes for students with disabilities?”

The Youth Advisory: A Generation of High School and College Dropouts

In 2004-2005, the high school drop out rate was the highest ever in the state of Massachusetts—11,000 students dropped out. Evidence of failure abounds in current statistics. Currently, 75 of every 100 high school students graduate. Of the 75 graduates, 44 immediately enter college. Of the 44 that enter college, only 25 graduate (New England Board of Higher Education, 2006). Let’s face it, with education being the leading high growth industry in New England, and distinguished as a center of institutes of higher education with 270 institutions and almost 800,000 students – something has gone drastically wrong! To deal with this disturbing situation, the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) has launched a new regional initiative, the ‘College Ready Initiative’.

The College Ready New England Initiative

The College Ready Initiative unites businesses, government and education in all six New England states to develop strategies to increase economic competitiveness and well-being of our region through expanded college participation and success. One of the issues being addressed is how to increase achievement and raise skills in reading, writing and math so that students graduate high school and enter college prepared to succeed. Though laudable, the College Ready Initiative does not yet address how disability issues effect high school and college drop out rates. However, The New England ADA Center and NEBHE will be working together to understand how disability is a factor in educational attainment and subsequent labor market supply. You can visit the NEBHE’s website to learn more about this commendable initiative www.nebhe.org

New England ADA Center Examines How Students with Disabilities are Doing Educationally and in the Labor Market in New England

Under our new five-year federally funded grant, The New England ADA Center will be conducting research on the status of students with disabilities in New England. Our new research partners, the Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS) will create a systematic method for targeting growing jobs and employers and matching them with local college programs graduating students with disabilities who can fill those jobs. CLMS will produce and disseminate a “Guide to New England Jobs for Individuals with Disabilities”. CLMS will also be able to track students with disabilities to find out, what percentage of students with disabilities are graduating from high school, going onto higher education or getting employment. The ADA Center hopes to identify innovative approaches and solutions that increase employability for students with disabilities.

The Prevalence of Brain-Based Disabilities in a Brain-Based Economy

To help increase college success within the region, further solutions need to be discovered concerning students with disabilities entering higher education. This is especially true with regard to “brain-based” disabilities, which are reported as the most prevalent impairment in post secondary education today. The New England economy is “brain-based”. It is a hub of education, research, and innovation in technology, health care and the hospitality industries. At the same time, the University of New England reports a huge increase in students with Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Bipolar

Continued on Page 17
A Dream Not Denied

AT 6:30 a.m. Katie Apostolides rises, and readies herself for the day ahead. She arrives on the Becker College campus for her course on principles of teaching at 8:20 a.m. She is more than an hour early.

Forty-five minutes before class begins, she is in Professor Nina Mazloff’s office to pepper her with questions about what they will cover for the day, whether she will have to take notes and if there will be any homework. Ms. Apostolides, 23, likes to say of herself, “I am just a normal girl with a lifelong story.” But that is really just another way of explaining that she has Down syndrome.

In her determined quest to have a normal college experience, she is at the forefront of a wave of cognitively disabled students who are demanding, and gaining, a place on campuses nationwide. Ms. Apostolides was accepted at Becker, a small liberal arts school with campuses in Leicester and Worcester, Mass., three years ago through regular admissions. She attends regular classes and lives in a coed dorm.

While she is among a small number of students with Down syndrome to have such a completely integrated education, there are dozens of others in programs that place cognitively disabled students in regular classrooms and sometimes in dormitories. The Web site ThinkCollege.net, a database on postsecondary schooling financed by the United States Department of Education, has information on 106 programs and experts say that number is growing fast.

The opening of college campuses comes as an outgrowth of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 1975. That law mandated that public schools educate children of all intellectual abilities and, whenever possible, in regular classrooms with same-age peers.

Now, coming of age expecting full inclusion from kindergarten through 12th grade, students and their parents are asking to graduate to similar opportunities. By law, children with disabilities are entitled to a free public education until age 21. Until recently, that mostly meant an extended stay in special-education classrooms at a public high school, but recent clarifications of the law have allowed states to use money earmarked for lower education for appropriate postsecondary programs instead.

Colleges are discovering that teaching students with cognitive delays or mental retardation is the next frontier.

These new students are far more challenging than those with physical or learning disabilities. Colleges must struggle not just with how students learn but with the limits on what they can absorb.

Parents and educators pressing for inclusion say they are committed out of practical concerns as well. People with cognitive disabilities have abysmal rates of participation in the workplace, and when they do get jobs, they tend to hold entry-level positions, like fast-food clerk and custodial aide. But studies commissioned by the National Down Syndrome Society have shown that the quality and quantity of jobs increase with postsecondary education.

Postsecondary programs for the cognitively disabled vary substantially; some are more inclusive than others, some lead to a certificate or associate’s degree, others don’t.

Some advocates are designing programs to address four basic needs: employment training, socialization, independent-living skills and academic growth in order to assess what works best for this new crop of students. Through a mix of remedial reading and writing courses, exposure to creative experiences like drawing and acting and, eventually, more challenging coursework, information is being gathered that will be used to develop program models that can be used across the country.

Students on the Spectrum

Valerie Kaplan has an aptitude for math, and scored a perfect 1600 on her SAT. When her high school classmates applauded the announcement at lunch, she was pleased. But less obvious signals—a raised eyebrow or impatient glance at a watch—elude her. In an advanced course at Carnegie Mellon that problem caused classmates to sidelong her in group projects. And during a critical meeting to win approval for her customized major, electronic art, she intently circled the freckles on her arm with a marker.

Miss Kaplan’s behavioral quirks are agonizingly familiar to students with an autism spectrum disorder. Simply put, their brains are wired differently. Children with classic autism have language delays or deficits and difficulty relating to others; they display rigid, often obsessive behaviors; deviation from routine disturbs them. Some are mentally retarded. Those with milder conditions on the spectrum—Asperger’s is one of them—exhibit some or all of these characteristics to lesser degrees. But Asperger’s is also distinguished by average or above average intelligence, an early acuity with language and singular passions. People like Miss Kaplan have a disability, but to others they can seem merely gifted, or difficult, or odd.

A top expert estimates that one in every 150 children has some level of spectrum disorder, a proportion believed to be rising steeply. With earlier and better intervention, more of these children are considering college, and parents, who have advanced them through each grade with intensive therapies and unrelenting advocacy, are clamoring for the support services to make that possible. It is said that twenty-five years ago, the stereotype view was that these kids were not very bright and not college material. Today, changes are rippling across campuses as colleges scramble to figure out how to accommodate this new, growing population of disabled students.

Community colleges are particularly unsettled. Scores of students are turning up, hesitant about their ability to handle four years of college. “Colleges call us all the time in a panic, and the calls are increasing,” says Lorraine E. Wolf, clinical director of disability services at Boston University and a consultant on the topic.

Some assume conventional learning-disability programs will do for such students. But that’s a mistake, experts say. Students on the spectrum need help chopping course loads into manageable bites. They need to learn how to act appropriately in class and with social issues.

“That’s a little bit different from what administrators normally do,” says Richard Allegra, director of professional development for the Association on Higher Education and Disability. “If a blind student needs books in Braille, they know how to do that.”

Colleges are devising programs that try to integrate students on the spectrum into the academic and social fabric of the campus. At Keene State College, in New Hampshire, fellow students act as “social navigators.” (Their assignment: change their charges’ “outsider” status by introducing them to their friends.) The mentors get $10 an hour (and sometimes course credit in psychology) by helping students on the spectrum make small talk, and date. Some 50 undergraduates have participated in the program, which Professor Larry Wilkowitz, who helped create the program, calls “the single best intervention—I just know it because of how I have seen their lives change.” In turn, he says, the mentors develop new understanding. “We’re learning about ourselves,” Professor Wilkowitz says.

Colleges are legally required to ensure equal opportunity for academically qualified students. Accepted adjustments include note-takers, extra time for tests, and single dorm rooms for students for whom normal noise or the flicker of a fluorescent light amounts to sensory overload. Social skills training, however, is assistance of a personal nature and is, therefore above and beyond what is considered to be appropriate support at the college level.

Complicating the situation is a scarcity of data on best practices in a college environment. Jane Thierfeld Brown, director of student support services at the University of Connecticut School of Law, is helping to create a pilot program for the University of Minnesota and Boston University that will assess its own success rate. “Once we can prove the program increases the students’ graduation and retention rates,” she says, “it can be replicated at other colleges.”

Great Websites

For Students and Parents

Kids As Self Advocates!
Youth with disabilities who model leadership and the power of self-advocacy in schools, communities, families and places of employment. www.fvkasa.org

ThinkCollege.net
Provides information and links for students, family members and professionals interested in finding out more about college and career possibilities. www.thinkcollege.net

Eastern Alliance
Promotes the participation of students with disabilities (grades 9-16) in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics academic programs and careers. www.eastalliance.org

HEATH Resource Center
A national clearinghouse on postsecondary education for students with disabilities with information on educational support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, and opportunities at American campuses. www.heath.gwu.edu

The PACER Center
A parent network that fosters educational opportunities and enriched quality of life to youth and young adults with disabilities. www.pacer.org

NCSET
The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, offers technical assistance and disseminates information about transition options for youth with disabilities. www.ncset.org

For Educators

Association Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD)
Serves the educational, information and networking needs of its members who are largely disability service providers. www.ahead.org

The New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE)
Promotes greater educational opportunities to assist leaders in the assessment, development, and implementation of sound education practices and policies. Also provides leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the economic well-being of New England. www.nebhe.org

College Ready New England Initiative
A program of NEBHE that unites businesses, government and education in all six New England states to develop strategies to increase economic competitiveness and well-being of our region through expanded college participation and success. www.nebhe.org/content/view/125/146

Nellie Mae Education Foundation
Promotes accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of education, especially for underserved populations through grants and technical assistance to programs focused on improving academic achievement. Also sponsors research and conferences that examine critical issues in education in order to advance knowledge within the educational field and influence policy at the state, regional and national level. www.nmefdn.org

Careers

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth)
Assists state and local workforce development systems serving youth with disabilities. www.ncwd-youth.info

Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities
Bridging the gap between Career Services, Disability Services and employers, for students with disabilities. www.cosdonline.org

ENTRY POINT!
A program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) offers paid, 10-week internships and semester co-ops in major companies throughout the United States to students with disabilities. www.entrypoint.org

Rights and Advocacy

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights
Seeks to ensure equal access to education through enforcement of civil rights. www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr

Financial Aid

Resources on financial aid for students with disabilities.
www.heath.gwu.edu/PDFs/Finaid2004.pdf
www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/financial-aid.html
www.scholarshiphelp.org
ADA and Section 504

Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities (Revised, 2006)

This excellent pamphlet contains information for high school students with disabilities who plan to continue their education in postsecondary schools. For copies, contact OCR: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html

The Americans with Disabilities Act: The Law and Its Impact on Postsecondary Education

Brochure available at www.ahead.org/publications.php

Accommodations*

Princeton Review the K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder

by Marybeth Kravets, Princeton Review Staff, Imy F. Wax, Imy F. Fox (September 2005)

The experts at The Princeton Review have thoroughly researched college programs across the country to help students and their families find the best match to suit their needs.

Survival Guide for College Students with ADD or LD

by Kathleen G. Nadeau (January 2006)

This useful guide provides the information needed to survive and thrive in the college setting.

Going to College: Expanding Opportunities for People with Disabilities

by Elizabeth Evans Getzel (Editor), Paul Wehman (Editor), Paul Wehman (Editor) 2005

This book suggest ways in which counselors, administrators, educators, and parents can prepare those students for college.


Patty Carlton, Krista Winger and Kera McClain, The Ohio State University; Gerri Wolfe, Nicole Wentworth, Patti Zettek and Karen Kalivoda, University of Georgia

Reflecting best practices in disability services, this reference provides detailed information on testing accommodations at the postsecondary level.

*All accommodation publications available through www.barnesandnoble.com

ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments

On December 5, 2006, the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice issued the first installment of a new technical assistance document designed to assist state and local officials to improve compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in their programs, services, activities, and facilities. The new technical assistance document, which will be released in several installments over the next ten months, is entitled “The ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments.”

The Tool Kit is designed to teach state and local government officials how to identify and fix problems that prevent people with disabilities from gaining equal access to state and local government programs, services, and activities. It will also teach state and local officials how to conduct accessibility surveys of their buildings and facilities to identify and remove architectural barriers to access.

While state and local governments are not required to use the ADA Best Practices Tool Kit, the Department encourages its use as one effective means of complying with the requirements of Title II of the ADA.

To access the kit, go to: www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/pcatoolkit/toolkitmain.htm
Off to College Alone

Students with Mental Illness

The transition from high school to college, from adolescence to legal adulthood, can be tricky for any teenager, but for the increasing number of young people who arrive on campus with diagnoses of serious mental disorders — and for their parents — the passage can be particularly fraught. Standard struggles with class schedules, roommates, and social freedom are complicated by decisions about if or when to use campus counseling services, whether or not to take medication and whether to disclose an illness to friends or professors.

Keeping a psychiatric disability under control in an environment often fueled by all-night cram sessions, junk food and heavy drinking is a challenge for even the most motivated students. In addition, the normal separation that goes along with college requires new roles and boundaries with parents, the people who best know the history and contours of their illness.

Young adults approach the move to a new life differently, some with defiant independence, some with avoidance. Each approach, say psychiatrists, counselors, dormitory assistants and other campus leaders, comes with its own risk. The students who are most dependent on their parents may be dangerously unprepared for the inevitable stresses of college life. On the other hand, students who are adamant about doing everything on their own may be afraid to reach out for help when they stumble.

For parents, the anxious pride at seeing children go off to college is often tinged with fear that their child might fall apart, spiraling into depression or becoming suicidal. Are they going to therapy as they promised? Are they taking the right dose of medication at the right time? Should they as parents inform the school that their child has an illness? Is a fight with a roommate part of a normal transition to college life or a sign of impending trouble? Does an emotional e-mail message written at 3 a.m. represent a transitory moment of turmoil or a reason to get on an airplane?

Once teenagers legally become adults, which in most states happens at age 18, they, not their parents, assume control over decisions about therapy and medication. If trouble arises, parents may or may not hear about it because college counselors are bound by confidentiality when dealing with adult students.

Separation

In a 2005 national survey of the directors of college counseling centers, 95 percent of counseling directors reported an increase in students who were already on psychiatric medications when they came in for help. While universities grapple with how to serve the growing number of students with mental disorders, students are taking the initiative by helping one another. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has 30 campus affiliates, with 18 more in formation, groups that are set up as student clubs and are financed by school activity budgets and fund-raisers. Programs like the Jed Foundation, a suicide prevention program, and National Depression Screening Day, held each October, offer additional resources.

While the overall message from the groups and programs focuses on the potential for success, students who have been through the transition of leaving home for college say it is also important to be honest about the challenges.

Dr. Richard Kadison, chief of mental health services at Harvard, said there were things students with mental illness could do before starting college to increase the chances of a manageable transition. Most important, he said, is establishing local health support on or near campus. Maintaining a relationship with a counselor from home can be helpful, but “you don’t want to end up in an emergency talking to someone at school that you have never laid eyes on,” Dr. Kadison said.

Days after enrolling as a college freshman, David Carson had to admit to a stranger that he couldn’t spell the name of the school he was attending.

An employee watching him struggle to write out a check couldn’t believe he needed her help to spell “Indiana,” “University” and “Pennsylvania.”

“Just write IUP!” she snapped, flashing a look so cutting he remembers it to this day.

“I felt very small,” says Carson, who took to carrying a prepared list of the spellings he’d need to survive each day. “I thought I was dumb.”

Turns out he had a learning disability affecting his spelling, one that drove him from IUP and two other schools but one he overcame in time to graduate from La Roche College in 1992 with a near-perfect grade average of 3.91. Now a college recruiter who speaks to those with similar disabilities, Carson is watching as this latest group of once-excluded students becomes increasingly visible on America’s college campuses.

He knows their growing ranks mean more will ultimately succeed. But he also knows many will struggle with self-doubt and embarrassment as he once did, or simply give up.

About one in 25 college students is learning disabled, up sharply from the 1980s, as more students who have been diagnosed with such disorders set their sights beyond high school, according to a June report by the Washington, D.C. – based Institute for Higher Education Policy. The most common among this group of disabilities is dyslexia, a difficulty acquiring and using language that often translates into poor spelling, writing or reading.

Nationwide, students with learning disabilities are the fastest-growing segment of all disabled students in college and are part of what some say is the newest wave of campus diversity. Just as laws brought more working-class students, racial minorities and women onto campuses, disabled students are gaining access they were once denied.

But unlike other disabilities, those that involve learning are “invisible,” experts say. Some argue that, once on campus, the biggest obstacle these students face is skepticism as to whether they are using special classroom accommodations as a crutch or, worse, want to game the system.

Judging by sheer volume of programs, colleges and universities are doing more than ever to accommodate – and in some cases actively recruit – these students. A 500-page guidebook published by Thomson-Peterson’s profiles 1,100 campuses that offer help, ranging from tutors to special software to substituting a class most at odds with a disability.

But others argue that even as these programs proliferate, the quality of help varies widely. And what limited information exists on the subject indicates these students are significantly more likely to drop out.

Forty-six percent of them did compared with 33 percent of students without a disability, according to one study by the U.S. Department of Education.

Experts say that student with learning disabilities tend to go from college to college and almost always go to more than one school because they are not successful.

Under law, certain classroom accommodations are available, including extra time to take tests, books on tape and help with note-taking, but only if a student with a documented disability identifies himself as such and seeks help.

Many do so and benefit from it. Sometimes, however, the real problem is a student’s own reluctance to seek help, say campus administrators. Intent on escaping labels placed on them in high school, some will shun the very assistance that can be the difference between thriving and flunking out.

“It’s not unusual for me to talk to a freshman who says, ‘I don’t want the accommodation. I want to do it on my own. I want to be like everyone else’,” said Larry Powell, who works with learning disabled students at Carnegie Mellon University.

Knowing they are flirting with disaster, especially on a campus with such a punishing workload, Powell gives the same advice over and over. “It’s best to arm yourself,” he tells them. “Take the accommodation.”

Source: By Bill Schackner, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. To read more, go to: www.post-gazette.com/pg/04249/373149.stm
More and more high school students with disabilities are planning to continue their education in postsecondary schools. Students will need to be well informed about their rights and responsibilities as well as the responsibilities of colleges. This will improve success and help ensure the full benefits of the postsecondary education experience.

Q. As a student with a disability leaving high school and entering postsecondary education, what are my rights?

A. Your postsecondary school is required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that it does not discriminate on the basis of disability. In addition, if your postsecondary school provides housing to nondisabled students, it must provide comparable, convenient and accessible housing to students with disabilities at the same cost.

Q. May a postsecondary school deny my admission because of a disability?

A. No. If you meet the essential requirements for admission, a postsecondary school may not deny your admission simply because you have a disability.

Q. Do I have to inform a postsecondary school that I have a disability?

A. If you want the school to provide an academic adjustment or assign you to accessible facilities, you must identify yourself as having a disability and describe what you need in order to be able to succeed. Otherwise, no.

Q. What academic adjustments must a postsecondary school provide?

A. The appropriate academic adjustment must be determined based on your disability and individual needs and may include auxiliary aids and modifications to academic requirements such as reducing a course load; substituting courses; providing note takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, and extended time for testing.

In providing academic adjustments, postsecondary schools are not required to lower or effect substantial modifications to essential requirements or make modifications that would fundamentally alter the nature of a service, program or activity, or would result in undue financial or administrative burdens. Nor do they have to provide services of a personal nature such as PCA’s, mobility aids, readers, tutors or typists.

Q. When should I request an academic adjustment?

A. Although you may request an academic adjustment from your postsecondary school at any time, you should request it as early as possible to ensure that your school has enough time to review your request and provide an appropriate academic adjustment.

Q. Do I have to prove that I have a disability to obtain an academic adjustment?

A. Generally, yes. Your school will probably require you to provide documentation that shows you have a current disability and need an academic adjustment.

Q. What documentation should I provide?

A. Schools may set reasonable standards for documentation, and some may require more than others. You may need to provide documentation prepared by an appropriate professional, such as a medical doctor, psychologist or other qualified diagnostician. The documentation should provide enough information to help decide what is an appropriate academic adjustment.

Q. What if the academic adjustment we identified is not working?

A. Let the school know as soon as you become aware that the results are not what you expected. It may be too late to correct the problem if you wait until the course or activity is completed.
Q. May a postsecondary school charge me for providing an academic adjustment?

A. No. Furthermore, it may not charge students with disabilities more for participating in its programs or activities than it charges students who do not have disabilities.

Q. What can I do if I believe the school is discriminating against me?

A. Practically every postsecondary school must have a person who coordinates the school’s compliance with Section 504 or Title II or both laws. You may contact this person or OCR for information about how to address your concerns.

Students with disabilities who know their rights and responsibilities are much better equipped to succeed in postsecondary school. Work with the staff at your school because they want you to succeed. Seek the support of family, friends and fellow students, including those with disabilities. Know what you need and be prepared to explain what works for you. Know your talents and capitalize on them, and believe in yourself as you embrace new challenges in your education.

To read the complete document, or to order your own copy, visit the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights at: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html?src=ocr

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QBTAC: New England ADA Center stays home for the Next Five Years

Adaptive Environments has been awarded the contract for the DBTAC – New England ADA Center for another five years. Adaptive Environments has been home to the ADA Center for the past ten years.

The ADA Center is one of ten regional Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACS) funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) comprising a nation-wide infrastructure to support voluntary compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Regional centers share an 800-949-4232 number and are responsible for explaining the ADA through: technical assistance, training, public awareness and dissemination of federally approved materials on the ADA.

In 2006, our responsibilities expanded to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. To that end, we have built a new set of partnerships and collaborations with the: Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, New England Board of Higher Education, Eastern Alliance in Science, Engineering, Technology and Math at the University of Southern Maine, Association of Higher Education and Disability, and Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities.

Descriptive and evidence-based research will be conducted driving new insights and practices allowing people with disabilities across the spectrum of age, culture and ability to thrive in their academic and work lives.

The new DBTAC focus arrives just in time to sound a regional alarm bell to identify solutions that link success-in-learning to success-in-work for people traditionally left behind. New England’s comfortable educational Mecca with a host of cutting edge businesses will not be recognizable in 20 years unless the region bridges the gap between an aging advantaged population and a poorer, younger population commonly failed by the current higher educational system and unable to take advantage of good work. The timing is ideal. There is no aspect of the ADA more urgently important to address than the equal opportunity to work and thrive.

Another aspect of the new scope of work is that the DBTAC will integrate expertise about Universal Design along with the ADA into our work with Higher Education and employers.

We look forward to discovering innovative solutions for improving future employment prospects for people with disabilities and improving understanding and implementation of the ADA in New England.
Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Office on Disability regularly works with, or on behalf of post secondary students with disabilities. Although many calls are from students who feel they are encountering barriers that are either architectural or programmatic, just as often, we receive calls from administrators of institutions who want to take proactive steps. We have found that communication plays the key role. Very often the administration is unaware of the existence of the barriers, and is very willing to remedy the problems once they are identified.

MOD receives many calls from students who are having difficulty receiving accommodations that have already been deemed appropriate. MOD’s advocates work with them and the administration to make sure the accommodations are put in place in a timely manner.

One university had undertaken a major renovation of a building to provide features that were architecturally pleasing, such as very tall doors and unique ramp designs. However, when people with disabilities tried to use these features, it quickly became apparent that the designs didn’t work. The tall doors were very heavy and difficult to open. The ramp designs, while aesthetically pleasing, were curved resulting in difficult slopes. MOD was able to work with the university to remedy the issues.

Many of the barriers faced by post secondary students with disabilities can be resolved when they have an opportunity to work with an advocate. MOD has the advocates and the expertise to help them.

New Hampshire

Last fall the NH Governor’s Commission on Disability, along with a number of state agencies and organizations, sponsored the first of what we hope will be many Regional Job Fairs that are accessible to people with disabilities. The Fair was held at the centrally located National Guard Armory in Concord. In addition to the Commission, the planning team consisted of the State of New Hampshire Division of Personnel, New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED), New Hampshire Employment Security, New Hampshire Works, New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation (NHVR), the Concord Regional Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

More than 50 businesses and companies participated and over 300 potential job seekers attended. It was a huge collaborative effort that included supports such as VR counselors, job coaches, and sign language interpreters as well as Spanish interpreters. Tables were provided for potential employees to use for filling out applications on the spot.

To assist students with disabilities in entering the world of work, we are tentatively planning to collaborate with the University of New Hampshire and the NH Community Technical College System, in addition to other institutions for higher learning, to conduct training sessions on topics such as (1) whether or not to disclose a disability, (2) reasonable accommodations, (3) preparing a resume, and (4) preparing for a successful job interview.

Maine

Bowdoin College welcomed two freshman students who use wheelchairs this past fall, making it the first time the school community has counted mobility-impaired persons among its full-time students. Since last spring, when these students confirmed they would be attending Bowdoin, the College has made a number of significant accessibility improvements to the buildings on the campus.

At the request of the College, AO architects Denis Pratt and Bill Bisson performed the on-campus facilities study and accessibility designs for the improvements. To this point, the work has included constructing a ramp to the Dudley Coe Health center, modifying the seating in the VAC auditorium, adding handicap-accessible door-opening buttons to Kanbar Hall, installing handrails along the entry ramp to the dining level of Moulton Union, reducing the heights of public computer desks at a number of public campus buildings, providing better access to a number of outer campus student houses, and making public toilet room improvements throughout the campus. Improvements were strategically made to specifically accommodate the academic, social, and living needs of the two new students; further improvements are planned in the near future.
Vermont

The move to on-line information and learning creates new opportunities and responsibilities for colleges. Digital learning offers an opportunity for flexibility and personal customization, impossible with traditional dependence on print materials. Deborah Lisi-Baker, Executive Director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living recently met with administrators from Vermont Institute for Technology at Champlain College to discuss use of accessible technology and universal design principles in their on-line services for both campus-based and long distance learning.

Educational institutions are realizing that universal design makes good business sense. More colleges are looking at distance and web based learning as a way to attract adult learners. When students with disabilities and diverse learning styles become active and successful learners, everyone benefits. Schools and their business partners increase their market base and reach new students and future job applicants. Students with disabilities need to be included at every step of the process so that their transition from college to work can be successful.

Work on inclusive design of online services is just one aspect of Vermont’s work to promote successful transitions for youth with disabilities and increased access to employment for all Vermonters. For more information about Vermont’s transition programs or the use of technology and universal design in transition planning, educational programming or employment practices, call VCIL’s I-Line at 1-800-639-1522 or connect with VCIL online at www.vcil.org

Connecticut

In the summer of 2006, the Connecticut Department of Labor released its Industries and Occupations Forecast, 2004-2014. In reviewing this document with young adult students with disabilities in mind, issues of interest and concern arise.

The report divides employment into “industry” and “occupations”. Two areas of major industry in Connecticut that will grow significantly are the areas of Information; telecommunications; and Internet provider service. Health Care and Social Assistance, including Nursing and Residential care Facilities and Social Assistance are other high growth industries.

The report states that more than half of the 20 fastest growing occupations will require a minimum of a Bachelor’s or Master’s Degree. These include computer software engineers, personal financial advisors, and physical therapists. Other occupations will require training on the job or an Associate’s degree. The highest growth occupations in general are in the professional, technical and service occupation areas.

Like any other young person preparing for an independent future, students with disabilities seek the skills and education necessary to attain and hold a job. It is incumbent upon teachers and counselors to be aware of the jobs that are going to be “out there,” and the skills that will be required. This important document tells us the types of jobs that will likely be in demand for the next ten years. Professionals working with students can and should begin checking for interests, testing abilities, visiting and possibly job shadowing potential employers to help students with disabilities have one more successful “step up” into the world of education and employment.

Rhode Island.

In the State of Rhode Island, through services provided by the public colleges and universities, students with disabilities have equal access to a college education that persons without disabilities enjoy. Ann Roccio, Director of Disability Services at Rhode Island College, said that over 300 students utilize these types of services, ranging anywhere from academic and physical accommodations, to assistive technology, sign language interpreters, and note takers. There are also internships and fellowships that are geared towards people with disabilities, allowing them the important networking opportunities and great experience for a resume.

The Rhode Island Governor’s Commission on Disabilities offers three paid fellowships for students enrolled at any Rhode Island college or university. The fellowships include the Mary Brennan Public Awareness Fellowship, the Edward J. Schroeder Legislation Fellowship, and the G. Frank Hanaway Architectural Accessibility Fellowship. All three offer a $2500 stipend to accepted candidates, as well as a great opportunity for college credit. These programs have significantly helped to level the playing field for students with disabilities, taking away unnecessary barriers that, in the past, made it difficult to pursue a college education.
What is Universal Design for Learning?

In today’s schools, the mix of students is more diverse than ever. Educators are challenged to teach all kinds of learners to high standards, yet a single classroom may include students who struggle to learn for any number of reasons, such as the following:

• Learning disabilities such as dyslexia
• English language barriers
• Emotional, psychological or behavioral problems
• Lack of interest or engagement
• Sensory and physical disabilities
• Cognitive and developmental disabilities
• Socioeconomic class

Teachers want their students to succeed, but a one-size-fits-all approach to education simply does not work. How can teachers respond to individual differences?

More and more educators, advocates and experts such as the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), based in Wakefield, MA, are proposing a solution called Universal Design for Learning (UDL). CAST’s proposal of UDL provides a blueprint for creating flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that accommodate learner differences.

“Universal” does not imply a single optimal solution for everyone. Instead, it is meant to underscore the need for multiple approaches to meet the needs of diverse learners.

UDL mirrors the universal design movement in the built environment and product design. Think of speakerphones, curb cuts, and close-captioned television – all universally designed to accommodate a wide variety of users, including those with disabilities.

Embedded features that help those with disabilities eventually benefit everyone. UDL uses technology’s power and flexibility to make education more inclusive and effective for all.

Recent research in neuroscience shows that each brain processes information differently. The way we learn is as individual as DNA or fingerprints. In its research, CAST has identified three primary brain networks and the roles they play in learning:

**Recognition networks**
Gathering facts. How we identify and categorize what we see, hear, and read. Identifying letters, words, or an author’s style are recognition tasks – the “what” of learning.

**Strategic networks**
Planning and performing tasks. How we organize and express our ideas. Writing an essay or solving a math problem are strategic tasks – the “how” of learning.

**Affective networks**
How students are engaged and motivated. How they are challenged, excited, or interested. These are affective dimensions – the “why” of learning.

UDL principles help educators customize their teaching for individual differences in each of these three brain networks. A universally-designed curriculum offers the following:

- Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge
- Multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know, and
- Multiple means of engagement to tap into learners’ interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn

Flexible digital media makes it easier than ever to provide these multiple alternatives and therefore customize teaching and learning.

Imagine that students who have always been left behind finally have the opportunity to learn—and to love learning. Universal Design for Learning is bringing the hopes of tomorrow alive in today’s classrooms.

To learn more about UDL, visit the Teaching Every Student website at www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent

Source: the Center for Applied Special Technology, www.cast.org

Note: Universal Design in all its facets, is at the general level and is intended to enhance the experience and performance of all users. Some people will still need Assistive Technology that is tailored to their individual needs.
Resources on Universal Design for Learning

Websites

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)
Works to expand learning opportunities for those with disabilities, through the research and development of innovative, technology-based educational resources and strategies.
www.cast.org

Publications

A Practical Reader in Universal Design for Learning Edited

The Universally Designed Classroom: Accessible Curriculum and Digital Technologies Edited

Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design in Higher Education

Universal Design for Inclusive Lectures and Presentations
Brochures available at:
www.ahead.org/publications.php

Universal Design for Instruction: What Every College (and Student!) Should Know

Universal Design for Instruction, UDI, is an approach to teaching that consists of the proactive design and use of inclusive instructional strategies that benefit a broad range of learners including students with disabilities. The Principles of UDI provide a framework for college faculty to use when designing or revising instruction to be responsive to diverse student learners and to minimize the need for “special” accommodations and retrofitted changes to the learning environment.

Traditional means of meeting the learning needs of students with disabilities have significant limitations. Classroom accommodations, such as extra time on tests or the provision of a notetaker, are typically changes that are retrofitted to a course in order to minimize the impact of the disability. While nondiscriminatory in intent, accommodations are rarely based on teaching methods that concern the best way to promote student learning.

UDI offers a proactive alternative for ensuring access to higher education changes the dialogue surrounding college students with disabilities from a focus on compliance, accommodations, and nondiscrimination to an emphasis on teaching and learning.

Learning environments can never be entirely accessible to all students’ needs since some students will continue to need individualized accommodations. But all learning environments can be made more accessible and inclusive.

Origins

UDI is based on the concept of Universal Design (UD), an idea that originated in the field of architecture to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse public. One of the important aspects of UD is that it anticipates diversity of ability, and the designing with that in mind. Its inclusive elements benefit all users, not just those with disabilities.

Likewise, Universal Design of Instruction benefits all of today’s college student population in its increasingly diverse educational background: age, culture, ability, disability, and primary language. Universal Design for Instruction integrates the “usability” features of Universal Design with research on effective instructional practices to benefit the broad range of learners. This is increasingly important, as the profile of disability changes and non-apparent conditions predominate. UD presumes everyone has access to the UDI practices.

The Principles of Universal Design for Instruction

Nine Principles of UDI have been proposed by the Center

Continued on Page 16
for Postsecondary Education at the University of Connecticut, for informing college instruction. Though they continue to be refined and validated, they provide a framework for faculty reflection that can be applied to the design of a new course or used to reflect upon practices in an existing class. They can inform a variety of teaching issues and approaches ranging from assessing student learning, to broadening learning experiences, to considering how an inclusive classroom climate can be established.

The following (From Principles of Universal Design for Instruction by Sally Scott, Joan McGuire and Stan Shaw, Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability, University of Connecticut. Copyright 2001) shows the most current research and construct for the nine Principles of UDI.

**Principle 1: Equitable use**
Instruction is designed to be useful to and accessible by people with diverse abilities. Provide the same means of use for all students; identical whenever possible, equivalent when not.

**Principle 2: Flexibility in use**
Instruction is designed to accommodate a wide range of individual abilities. Provide choice in methods of use.

**Principle 3: Simple and intuitive**
Instruction is designed in a straightforward and predictable manner, regardless of the student’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. Eliminate unnecessary complexity.

**Principle 4: Perceptible information**
Instruction is designed so that necessary information is communicated effectively to the student, regardless of ambient conditions or the student’s sensory abilities.

**Principle 5: Tolerance for error**
Instruction anticipates variation in individual student learning pace and prerequisite skills. 

**Principle 6: Low physical effort**
Instruction is designed to minimize nonessential physical effort in order to allow maximum attention to learning. 

Note: This principle does not apply when physical effort is integral to essential requirements of a course.

**Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use**
Instruction is designed with consideration for appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulations, and use regardless of a student’s body size, posture, mobility, and communication needs.

**Principle 8: A community of learners**
The instructional environment promotes interaction and communication among students and between students and faculty.

**Principle 9: Instructional climate**
Instruction is designed to be welcoming and inclusive. High expectations are espoused for all students.

It is important to note that all nine principles will not apply to all aspects of instruction. Nor does Universal Design for Instruction a synonym for “one-size-fits-all” instruction. Instead, when viewing a classroom as a whole, each of the principles will and should come into play.

More information about UDI and the UDI Project at the University of Connecticut’s Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability is available at: www.facultyware.uconn.edu.

**Resources on Universal Design for Instruction**

**Websites**

Center on Postsecondary Education and Students with Disabilities
Educates and supports pre-professionals and professionals in acquiring evidence-based knowledge and skills to provide state-of-the-art practices in services for students with disabilities. www.cped.uconn.edu

Facultyware: Tools for the Universal Design of Instruction:
A project at the University of Connecticut designed to provide a broad range of information and tools to enhance the design and delivery of instruction for diverse college students. www.facultyware.uconn.edu/home.cfm
Disorder. Many students have “documented” disabilities upon entry and others disclose disabilities soon after classes begin (Featherman, 2004). Of the total of New England’s institutes of higher education, it is the 74 community colleges, with an enrollment of 208,209 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2004), that serve more students with disabilities than any other segment of higher education. This is followed by four year public colleges, four year private colleges and finally two year private colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Through our five-year grant, the DBTAC-New England ADA Center is exploring how to assist colleges with this issue.

The Whiteout of New England – Aging Population

In conjunction with the youth entry into the labor market is the ‘whiteout’ of New England – or, the retirement of the baby boomers. This ‘whiteout’ accounts for over one half of all job openings (CT’s Department of Labor, 2005). Most of those jobs require a bachelor’s degree. New England has become, demographically speaking, the oldest region in the country. All six New England states rank among the 12 oldest in the nation. Maine holds the distinction of having the oldest population on average in the United States (Francese, 2004) followed by Vermont. Who will fill these jobs once the older generation is fully retired? This may be a perfect opportunity for youth with disabilities to stay in school, get training, and get those jobs. Some companies have begun mentoring programs with older workers who are transferring their knowledge and experience to new hires.

Will Youth with Disabilities Succeed in the Path of Education, Training and Employment?

During the course of our research over the next five years, the ADA Center, along with our collaborators, hopes to identify strategies to help the youth of today succeed in education and work. If youth succeed in greater numbers, they will help employers ‘shovel out’ of their labor shortage problems.

Will the youth of today choose education and work? My money is on students who can imagine a horizon of 30-40 years of employment. These students will find a way to stay in school, get the training and education and work experience necessary to obtain good employment.

References


Francese, P. (2005). Demography is Still Destiny. Journal of the Board of Higher Education Vol. XX, Number 2, Fall p. 33-34


DO-IT

Serves to increase the participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers by promoting the use of computer and networking technologies.

www.washington.edu/doit

Publications

Postsecondary Education and Transition for Students with Learning Disabilities
by Loring Brinckerhoff, Joan McGuire, and Stan Shaw (2001)
www.cped.uconn.edu/book1.htm


Universal Design for Instruction: Extending the universal design paradigm to college instruction.

An approach to inclusive college instruction: Universal Design for Instruction.
Open House, Monday March 19, 2007, beginning at 5:30pm

We invite you to visit our spacious new quarters where we have created a whole set of opportunities for learning and exchange.

In September of 2006 Adaptive Environments, home to the DBTAC New England ADA Center, began a new and exciting chapter in our 29 year history by moving into spacious new quarters in downtown Boston. All of our contact information – phone numbers and email – remain the same, but you can now find us at 180-200 Portland Street, Boston, Massachusetts, USA 02114.

This big step allows us to bring you state-of-the-art information from across the globe and to create new opportunities for learning and research.

We are downtown in Boston’s North End on Portland Street, near Causeway, just across from the Tip O’Neill Federal Building, North Station and within walking distance of the Green, Orange and Blue lines. Please join with us as we celebrate this exciting new chapter in our history.

Please visit our website for RSVP information and for more information about this event.
www.adaptiveenvironments.org

We look forward to welcoming you to our new home!