

Research Summary

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Employment outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities in postsecondary education programs: A scoping review

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■ A QUICK LOOK:

Attending a college, university, or technical school for advanced training increases a person's odds of getting a job after exiting high school. Since individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are less likely than people without disabilities to be employed, receiving postsecondary education training is particularly important. Across the United States, at least 295 postsecondary education programs (PSE) exist at colleges and universities for students with IDD. A review of research was conducted to determine how PSE programs help students with IDD learn employment skills and get a job. A summary of important findings from journal articles, organization reports, and research briefs published between 2000 and 2020 is presented below. In addition, areas of need for future reporting is discussed.

■ KEY FINDINGS:

- Nearly all PSE programs in this review described use of both employment coursework and applied vocational experiences, like internships and job shadowing, to help students build work skills. However, not all programs clearly reported the amount of coursework and vocational experiences students received. Where this information was reported, the amount of each varied widely across programs.
- Most students with IDD got a job after exiting a PSE program, with a range of 50.8% to 91% reported across studies. However, most articles only reported if a student became employed without other important information such as how many hours worked, wages, industry, or if the student received employer sponsored benefits like health insurance or paid sick leave.
- Most articles did not report on processes used to connect students to adult services, such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or other adult service agencies that help with employment, either before or after student's exited the PSE program.

■ PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:

The articles included in this review indicate a positive impact of attending a PSE program on becoming employed for students with IDD. However, there is a room for improvement in how programs report, measure, and track information related to employment in the future. In particular, efforts are needed by PSE programs to more consistently report:

- Details about employment coursework and applied experiences, such as number of credit hours, internship hours, number of internships and other requirements.
- Details about the employment of individuals with IDD such as wage, hours, and benefits.
- Information about how VR or other agencies are incorporated into the PSE program or what processes are used to help connect students after exiting a PSE program.

■ MORE ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

The findings from this review have important implications for researchers, educators, and policy makers. More consistent reporting on key pieces of employment information across studies will help researchers better evaluate what parts of PSE programs help students with IDD get and keep jobs. While data in this review is limited, findings are positive and offer support for policy makers to continue to make funding available for PSE programs to improve employment outcomes for individuals with IDD. Lastly, results provide direction for educators working with PSE programs to share successful strategies for networking with adult service agencies and community businesses to promote better employment outcomes.

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■ **QUESTIONS? FEEDBACK?** Do you have questions or feedback about putting this research into practice?

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