

Recent College Graduates with Disabilities: Higher Education Experiences and Transition to Employment

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A Quick Look:

Since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, more people with disabilities attend colleges and universities every year. A college degree leads to paid employment and higher wages. However, even with greater access to advanced degrees, people with disabilities are hired less than those without disabilities. A nationwide research study in 2020 compared the college and employment experiences of recent college graduates with and without disabilities. They surveyed 4,659 people to determine what helps people with disabilities find work after college.

Key Findings:

In this study, researchers found that people with disabilities:

- Were **more likely to have earned a two-year degree at a community college**. People without disabilities were more likely to earn a 4-year college degree.
- Were **less likely to work at jobs related to their degrees after graduation**. They also reported dissatisfaction with their jobs, especially with job security and supervisor support.
- Were **less likely to obtain full-time jobs**, and more likely to be hired in part-time work with smaller paychecks and no benefits.
- Who **worked during college** at a regular job, self-employment, volunteer work, and internships were **more likely to get employed after college**.

Putting It into Practice:

The findings from this study suggest ways for college career services to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities transitioning into the workforce.

- Colleges should make sure career services, networking events, mentorship activities, and internship opportunities are accessible to any person with a disability.
- Representation is important to help students feel like they belong. Career service faculty and staff should include people with disabilities as mentors, guest speakers, and employer representatives.
- Academic advisors, career counselors, and disability service professionals should work together to help college students with disabilities better understand the link between degree programs and possible career paths.

More About This Research:

This study supports that college degrees do help people with disabilities find employment. This study did have limitations. The survey was a self-report, which means people may not have recalled their experiences accurately or truthfully. People with disabilities experience barriers to accessing career services, internships, and work in college. Future research could explore and identify strategies that people with disabilities used to overcome these barriers and find successful employment.