



Effects of Trained Personnel Providing Employment Supports in Higher Education on the Employment Experiences of College Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disability: A Quasi-Experimental Study

Background and Purpose

Postsecondary education (PSE) is considered a beneficial and at times required pathway to employment. Engaging in PSE and working while in college provides opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and networks that can lead to a successful transition into the world of work. Inclusive higher education (IHE) programs continue to grow across college campuses and are providing students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) greater access to PSE. While students with IDD are accessing PSE at higher rates than before, they still are not obtaining employment outcomes while enrolled nor post-graduation at the same rates as their peers (Grigal & Papay, 2018).

Challenges

Working while enrolled in college provides a paycheck, builds a resume, and provides opportunities to develop needed skills. Additionally, research indicates that working while in college is a predictor of post-graduation employment outcomes (Grigal et al., 2019). However, about 81% of part-time, traditionally matriculated, undergraduate students work while in college (Zhang et al., 2020), but less than 50% of students enrolled in IHE programs work while enrolled (Grigal et al., 2019). The employment outcomes of students with IDD enrolled in IHE are even lower; only 36% of students with IDD obtain employment at or near graduation (Grigal & Papay, 2018). IHE program staff play an integral part in ensuring college students are obtaining paid campus employment opportunities and transition into competitive integrated employment. The challenge is that not all program staff are adequately trained to address the lack of paid campus employment opportunities.

Study Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the implementation of an online course, coupled with a year of technical assistance delivered to inclusive higher education staff who provide employment support on paid employment and/or internship opportunities for college students with IDD. We are also interested in the impact of increased paid employment and/or internships for college students with IDD on their post-graduation employment outcomes.

Research Questions

We are looking at 2 primary research questions:

1. Does providing online training and technical assistance for college personnel increase the number of paid employment and/or paid internship opportunities for students with IDD?
2. Does the increase in paid employment and/or paid internship opportunities lead to greater employment outcomes for students with IDD post-graduation?

Methods

Participants

We enrolled one cohort to participate in the course and obtain technical assistance. The inclusion criteria to register for the course included: (1) must work in a PSE program for students with IDD; and (2) should provide or have influence over employment support and programming. Inclusion criteria for enrollment in technical assistance included completing the entire course. We registered 51 participants for the course with a 50% completion rate (n=26) for the course. Some of the attrition was due to the course beginning in March, 2020 as COVID-19 began causing shutdowns and programs had to adjust. In total, 13 different states, including a mix of 4-year and 2-year colleges and universities, were represented in the participants that completed the course.

Online Course

A 6-week course, averaging 5 hours a week for a total of 30 hours, was implemented based on evidence-based employment practices designed to increase paid employment opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The 6 lessons for the course are: Career and Student Assessment/Person-Centered Planning, Job Development, Customized Employment, Job-Site Training, and Transitioning from college to Community Integrated Employment. Each lesson included a series of content videos and additional readings and resources. Each lesson also included a quiz surrounding lesson content and an in-depth discussion supported by the course facilitator. There were also optional assignments to build upon lesson content, but these assignments were ungraded and not required (facilitators provided feedback if submitted). Upon completion of the course, students receive a \$50 gift card and 30 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credits.

Technical Assistance

At the conclusion of the course, participants are offered a year of technical assistance at no cost. Technical assistance is provided by study staff and is determined by a needs assessment. The needs assessment is meant to unite participants and their program staff as they determine the needs of their program surrounding topics from the course. In the needs assessment, participants were asked to describe their current college program and the career development activities they are providing. In this description, participants were asked to include examples of the work-based training, internships and other employment related activities their program is providing to prepare college students with IDD for competitive integrated employment upon graduation.

Results

We continue to collect and analyze data from our first cohort. We provided all participants who completed the course an assessment that targeted areas of need in technical assistance. In total, 20% of the participants completed the needs assessment, the results of which emphasized 4 areas of technical assistance to increase paid campus employment and post-graduate employment. These areas included networking, improving job-site training, customizing employment, and negotiating to increase paid employment.

Several themes emerged from the course discussions surrounding additional needs of program staff to effectively implement paid campus opportunities. Some of the themes included: moving from unpaid to paid opportunities, opportunities that align that are interest-driven, how to effectively network and build connections, how to talk to employers about their programs and students to gain buy-in, improving data collection and evaluation processes, and connecting and building relationships with vocational rehabilitation personnel. Finally, the theme that emerged as COVID-19 persisted involved participants inquiring about how to engage in these activities virtually.

Technical assistance is currently being administered for cohort one. Results of technical assistance will be reported in future developed research reports.

Conclusions

During the first cohort, the study was adjusted to an exploratory case study design. We will continue to gather information through interviews, observations, and document reviews on the first cohort to develop a robust case study.

The study is entering into its second cohort of training IHE program staff through the online course and technical assistance. For this next cohort, we will:

- Recruit at least 8-12 programs to participate in the course and technical assistance
- Run the facilitated 6-week course starting summer of 2021
- Implement fidelity procedures for cohort 2
- Begin technical assistance for participants who complete the course
- Disseminate information gathered on the training and support needs of participants and the outcomes of enrolling in the facilitated course and technical assistance

References

Grigal, M., & Papay, C. (2018). The promise of postsecondary education for students with intellectual disability. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2018(160), 77-88.

Grigal, M., Papay, C., Smith, F., Hart, D., & Verbeck, R. (2019). Experiences That Predict Employment for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Federally Funded Higher Education Programs. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 42(1), 17–28.

Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., & Dilig, R. (2020). *The Condition of Education 2020 (NCES 2020-144)*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.



VCU

This brief was prepared by Jaclyn Camden, Aliza Lambert, Elizabeth Evans Getzel, and Susan McKelvey. For more information, contact Jaclyn Camden at jlcamden2@vcu.edu.

transition.vcurrtc.org

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number #90RTEM0002). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this publication do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.