



Toward Higher Education for all Youth with Disabilities: An Efficacy Study

The RRTC on Employment Among Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities is conducting six studies to develop effective practices to improve employment outcomes for transition-aged youth. This plain language research brief provides an update on Research Study 2.

This study aims to evaluate the impact of professional development interventions for higher education personnel on support for college students with disabilities in accessing paid employment opportunities. The goal of this study is to increase paid employment and internships for college students with disabilities at 4-year colleges and universities by providing online training and technical assistance to college disability- and career-focused staff members.

Study Update: What We Learned From Those With Lived Experience

The transition from college to career is significant: full of changes, new situations to navigate, and many big decisions to make. Graduates with disabilities may require additional support during the transition to work or face additional considerations, such as impacts on benefits and learning to navigate workplace culture. To learn more about this transition, the researchers wanted to hear directly from college graduates with disabilities. In the webcast, *From College to Career: Navigating the Transition to the Workforce with a Disability*, three panelists discuss their experiences as new graduates and the successes and barriers they encountered during their transition to the workforce. Here is what they told us.

What is one thing you were surprised about or not prepared for when going from college to career?

The panelists agreed they felt well-educated and well-prepared in terms of experience when graduating from college, but they were surprised by how much they needed to advocate for themselves, despite their degrees. One panelist stated that even once they were in a job, it was “difficult to understand that my output wasn’t the only thing I was measured by.”

What kinds of supports did you have from your college that helped you with your career development and job search? What kinds of supports did you wish you had at the time?

Two panelists spoke about the valuable experiences they had with jobs and internships while in college, and that being able to see different settings helped them feel comfortable and advocate for their needs in those situations. As for needed supports, the panelists reported that peer-to-peer opportunities would have been beneficial for learning from others' experiences, and that practicing navigating the social nuances and "hidden rules" of the workplace would benefit them both during the interview stage and on the job.

Did your supports in college help you find a job after graduation? If so, how did they help you? If not, what did you do to find work after college?

In this question, each panelist described a different situation, highlighting the diversity of experiences among college graduates with disabilities. One panelist had ample support from their college program, including networking, job development and applications, and video resumes. Another panelist took advantage of college alumni networking opportunities and eventually found work through a friend's recommendation. A third carried a job that they had in college into permanent employment after graduation.

What do you believe was the most helpful thing you or someone else did for you that led to employment after graduation?

The panelists agreed that their college experiences, especially those that helped them grow their connections or network, were extremely beneficial. They advised listeners to lean on their connections and to find individuals who can act as champions, help empower them, or advocate for change on their behalf.

Is there anything we haven't discussed today that you think is important related to your career journey that you would like to share?

Each panelist offered important advice to listeners on this topic. First, the panelists emphasized a redefinition of 'success' -not by a paycheck or by getting a job, but by meaningful contributions and longevity in a position. Similarly, panelists emphasized the importance of well-being in a job or career and having a position that supports your mental health. Finally, the panelists want to encourage fellow graduates to have confidence in their experiences and capabilities. "I may not have completed the traditional route for college, but I have had a lot of meaningful experiences", says one panelist. Importantly, another adds: "I am capable and truly deserve to be in this spot in my career."

Next Steps

The panelists highlighted the need for connection and preparation for employment while in college. In the current study, researchers are providing online training and working with Communities of Practice to equip college staff to deliver informed, student-centered career services for students with disabilities. Researchers are working with two cohorts of RS2 participants: finishing technical assistance for the pilot group and completing online training for the second group. As these groups provide insight into their experiences with paid employment and internships for students with disabilities, the researchers will be able to organize their insights into themes and recommendations for future practice.

Learn More

To learn more about this study or the other studies conducted under VCU's RRTC on Employment of Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities, visit transition.vcurrtec.org.

transition.vcurrtec.org

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number #90RTEM0014). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this document do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.