

Transition Preparation

College to Career

For

Students with Disabilities

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Introduction

A growing number of students with disabilities (e.g. learning disabilities, health impairments, mobility impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorders, psychological disabilities, sensory impairments) are taking advantage of postsecondary education, as shown by statistics (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). The successful completion of college is an important goal, but in reality a milestone in moving closer to the ultimate goal – obtaining a position in an area of interest that makes use of a student's education.

“Education remains the most successful job strategy in a globalized, technology-heavy economy” (Leonhardt, 2013). The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics released a report on May 3, 2013 stating that the unemployment rate of college graduates in April 2013 was “3.9% compared with 7.5% of the workforce as a whole” (Rampell, 2013). In addition to the lower unemployment rate, in 2012, an employee with a bachelor's degree earned 79% more than an employee with no more than a high school diploma (Rampell, 2013). These statistics emphasize the importance of collaboration between disability services and career services in assisting students with disabilities in becoming stronger candidates for employment after receiving their undergraduate degrees.

The transition from college into the employment world may be less challenging for those individuals who during their college careers...

- Enhance their self-advocacy and career-decision making skills.
 - Understand their disability.
 - Know their strengths and limitations and can articulate both.
 - Can set realistic and attainable goals.
 - Persevere toward their goals.
- (Hitchings, Luzzo, Ristow, Horvath, Retish, & Tanners, 2001).

This guide begins with some “real life advice” from alumni who attended a 4-year public college.

Components of the guide include information on self-determination; career preparation; various aspects of employment (e.g. disability laws, disclosure); and a variety of online resources.

It is hopeful that this guide will provide information on successfully moving beyond the college years for students.



Alumni

Several alumni who were connected with a Disability Services office were enthusiastic in sharing their experiences relating to how they prepared for their transition to graduate school and/or employment and what they are currently doing. For confidentiality purposes, their names were not disclosed.

Graduate A -- Background:

Disability: Visual Impairment

Graduated with BA in Sociology with a Human Services concentration; completed several internships during undergrad

Went to grad school; earned MSW in Social Work; completed more internships

Thoughts on transitioning: Had the "right tools – internship experience, self-advocacy skills and a good relationship with my professors."

What are you doing now? "I'm working for a company whose goal is to assist individuals with disabilities return to work after being out due to medical reasons ...secure the right supports such as counseling to make the transition easier."

Did you disclose to your employer? Disclosed because "accommodations are vital in order to perform all aspects of my position ... I was anxious about disclosing but I felt confident because of my qualifications and self-advocacy skills." The employer was "very receptive to my needs and provided the requested accommodations. "My position is extremely rewarding" and she sees herself "growing" in her position.

Graduate B – Background:

Disability: Psychological; AD/HD

Graduated with a BA degree in Political Science with a concentration in law

Went to grad school; is earning a law degree; completed two summer internships

Thoughts on transitioning: "I expected to get a job in law enforcement after graduation, but there was not much available so I took part time jobs while preparing for the LSAT." (LSAT - Law School Admittance Test)

What are you doing now? "I expect to get my degree this year and I plan to take the boards so that I can practice law." He is considering a career in criminal law or public interest, but he does not feel the courtroom is where his strengths lie. "I found in law school that I really had to use time management strategies to get done all the reading that was necessary in my first year."

Do you think you will disclose to your employer? "I originally thought that I would not, but I'll have to see what I may be doing and whether I'll feel the need for them." He believes he knows what he has to do to perform successfully without requiring accommodations.

Graduate C – Background:

Disability: Learning Disability

Graduated with a degree in Sociology with a concentration in Human Services; 3 internships during undergrad; one related to foster care.

Your thoughts on transitioning: "I was happy to be done with school, but it was hard to find a job because of the economy. One of my last internships was in a nursing home as a recreation assistant and they offered me a position when I graduated. Because of the economy I took it and spent some time in that position." She did say that she "missed the guidance and feedback" that she received from her professors.

What are you doing now? "I now have a position as a Case Worker for a foster care agency. I love my work and actually having a disability, I feel, is a strength in this job because I work with many children with disabilities and I feel I can really relate to them." She says that she has found mentors where she works and those relationships help her just as her relationships with her professors helped her in college.

Did you disclose to your employer? "I did disclose to my employer, but not because I was requesting accommodations, but because I was comfortable enough with my

disability.” Her employer was “very receptive and appreciated the disclosure.”

Graduate D – Background:

Disability: Learning Disability

Graduated with a BA in Psychology. Considered going on to graduate school but decided to find employment; had an internship during undergraduate working with adolescents with “social and/or emotional challenges.”

Your thoughts on transitioning: He “was happy to finish my studies,” and he found a job, but he is still looking for employment in line with the Psychology degree he attained that he can “turn into a fulfilling career.”

What are you doing now? Works with individuals with developmental disabilities and also as a part-time college campus minister. He “really enjoys this role and would eventually like to become a full-time college campus minister.”

Did you disclose to your employer? He didn’t disclose to his employer at the time he started, but he found “some of the responsibilities of the job required more time than was expected by his employer.” His employer brought up the issue and so he disclosed. The employer was more than happy to provide the necessary accommodations that would allow him to finish his work on time (especially in light of the area he was working in).

Graduate E – Background:

Disability: Learning Disability

Graduated with a BA in History. Considered teaching, but realized it wasn’t for him after internships of observing and assisting teachers in the K-12 setting in various school districts.

Your thoughts on transitioning: The path he has taken was not where he originally thought he would be. He realized teaching was not what he wanted to pursue. “My GPA was very high which helped me get into graduate school.”

What are you doing now? “I’m enrolled in a Disability Studies master’s program.” He

enjoys the program because of its flexibility regarding taking specific classes pertaining to one's interest and goals. He hopes to obtain a position in Disability Services in higher education upon completing his degree.

Do you think you will disclose to your employer? He does not think he will need to disclose his disability and request accommodations from his future employer as he has found various strategies that are effective. He thinks disclosing his "disability with students might be helpful as it shows empathy." He also believes it is one way he can connect with students.



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The Impact Self-Determination has on Employment



What is Self-Determination?

Transition is not easy for most individuals, but adjusting to new situations can be even more challenging for those with disabilities. Entering college for the first time or embarking on his/her first job interview is inevitably an exciting yet anxiety-provoking experience. Both experiences are more likely to be rewarding if the individual meets these periods of transition with confidence (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003).

Self-Determination is about the WHOLE person because it has so much to do with the individual and who he/she becomes. Self-determination is the development of an individual to find the energy, expend the effort, and stick with the business of life and work. It can be motivated by things as specific as a reward, grades, or an evaluation or by something as intangible as curiosity, values, or one's interests (Self-Determination Theory, 2013). Being self-determined can be beneficial in identifying short and long-term goals. Being self-determined can encourage understanding that some goals can be reached independently, while also recognizing the need to seek out others when help is needed (National Collaborative on Workplace and Disability for Youth, 2005).



Who Are **YOU**?

Question	Yes	Sometimes	No
1. Do you understand your disability?			
2. Do you feel your disability is only a part of who you are?			
3. Do you know what your learning style is?			
4. Do you know when to ask for help?			
5. If there was a need would you feel comfortable disclosing your disability to others?			
6. Do you understand the term "Reasonable Accommodations"?			
7. Can you explain your strengths to others?			
8. Do you set realistic and attainable goals for yourself?			
9. Have you developed strategies or skills that make a positive difference for you academically, socially, and/or professionally?			
10. Do you take pride in your accomplishments?			
11. Have you chosen an academic major that focuses on your strengths?			
12. When you consider a future career, are you basing that on your interests and strengths?			

Adapted from: National Collaborative on Workplace and Disability for Youth (2005). The 411 on disability disclosure workbook. Washington, DC. Institute for Educational Leadership.

If you answered **Yes** to many of the questions, you definitely know who you are and realize what it takes to become a self-determined individual.

If you answered **Sometimes** to many of the questions, you are working hard on understanding who you are, but you have some more work to do toward becoming self-determined.

If you answered **No** to many of the questions, maybe you need to talk to those who know you for help in determining what you do well and how you can improve.

Things to Consider

What kind of career do you hope to pursue upon graduation? Does the major you have chosen or are considering correlate to your career interests and strengths?

What do you believe are your 3 major strengths?

What strategies have you developed over the years that you think you will be able to use when you obtain a career?

What strategies are you continuing to improve upon? How are you doing this?

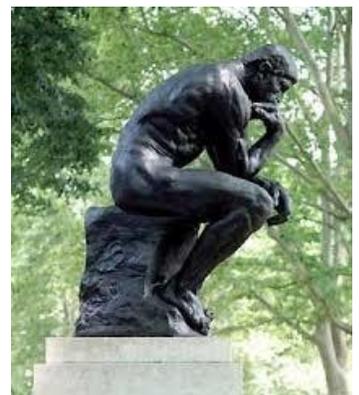
What excites you about graduating from college?

What makes you nervous about graduating from college?

What can you do now to prepare for the future?

Consider the following: extracurricular activities you are involved in; leadership roles; mentoring; volunteering/internships; classes you have taken and enjoyed; areas of interest; seeking out support from campus departments.

Adapted from: National Collaborative on Workplace and Disability for Youth (2005). The 411 on disability disclosure workbook. Washington, DC. Institute for Educational Leadership.



Career Preparation

Transition Differences

Transitioning from high school to college or from a community college to a four-year university can be challenging with unexpected hurdles (perhaps), but the emphasis remains basically the same – on academic success. The transition from college to career requires taking a step forward into a new experience where the challenges and expectations will be different. This new environment requires preparation to be successful in this next stage of life.



Suggestions for **First-Years** and **Sophomores**

- Explore possible academic majors by taking a wide range of courses related to the general education requirements.
- Establish relationships with professors, career counselors, and advisors.
- Identify any academic difficulties you have in your courses and seek help early.
- Develop short-term and long-term educational goals.
- Get involved in college and community activities and organizations.
- Find a summer job that will help you learn more about an occupation that interests you.
- Identify your interests, strengths, skills, abilities, and values by taking a career assessment offered at the Career Resource Center.
- Narrow down your choices for a major.
- Prepare a resume.
- Make plans to get some hands-on experience through an internship or a volunteer position.
- Choose a major and become familiar with its requirements.

Suggestions for **Juniors** and **Seniors**

- Seek summer employment or a volunteer position or internship that will provide you with direct experience in a field you are interested in pursuing after graduation.
- Continue to interact with past professors as part of an ongoing network for guidance.
- Update your resume.
- Do a mock interview.
- Attend Career Resource Center workshops on career exploration.
- Utilize all the services of the Career Resource Center.
- Attend on-campus and off-campus job fairs.
- Contact college graduates you know who have disabilities and talk with them about their transition experience from college to career.
- Investigate disability-related resources such as vocational rehabilitation and independent living agencies that can assist you with your employment goals.
- Ensure you have completed all requirements and procedures for graduation.
- Develop a network of potential employers.

Employment

Disability Law

It is important that students have knowledge of federal laws that protect all individuals with disabilities from discrimination, particularly two that are commonly cited on college websites under the disability services link: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These laws are applicable at the postsecondary level and in employment settings and ensure access for qualified individuals with disabilities. These laws differ from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which protects students in elementary and high school. Having knowledge of the ADA is advantageous as it allows individuals to be aware of their rights and responsibilities as well as those of the college and/or employer (Madaus, 2006).

Additional federal laws protecting individuals with disabilities exist and information on this topic can be found in the *Resources* section of this document.

IDEA	Rehabilitation Act	ADA
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law covering special education services, for ages 3-21 or until high school graduation. The IDEA requires that each child receive an education best suited to his/her needs.	The Rehabilitation Act protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination by guaranteeing equal opportunities in Federal employment and in federally funded programs and contractors. The Act also provides funding for disability support programs and research.	The ADA protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination by guaranteeing equal opportunities in the areas of employment, education, state and local government services, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications.

Adapted from: Department of Justice – A Guide to Disability Rights Law (2012).



Questions and Considerations
Relating to Disclosure



**YOU
DECIDE!**

Experiences (e.g. personal, social, academic) and reasons behind deciding to disclose are complex for individuals with disabilities. Choosing to disclose a disability to a potential employer depends on many factors (e.g. the type of position, the employer, comfort level in sharing personal information) and may bring with it positives as well as negatives (Helm, 2012).

When to Disclose?	Considerations
On resume or application	Disclosure allows employers the option of considering whether disability is a concern. It may provide the prospective employee some comfort that he/she has been honest with the employer and that the issue has been addressed from the potential employee's perspective. If you attend a college with an established national disability honor society, that requires a high GPA, you might wish to list this on your resume as one of your accomplishments.
During employer call to arrange an interview	Disclosure is essential if you are requesting an accommodation for the interview (e.g. modified testing) or want to ensure the building is accessible.
During the interview	Disclosure allows you to explain your disability and why you are an excellent fit for the position with an emphasis on your strengths.
After receiving a job offer, but prior to accepting it	Be prepared to answer questions about your disability. Legally the hiring decision cannot be reversed, but disclosing at this point could trigger feelings of distrust on the part of the employer.
After you begin the job	Disclose if you will need a specific accommodation in order to perform your job successfully.
After experiencing a problem on the job	Disclosing your disability provides the employer with a rationale as to why you might have been experiencing a problem. Be specific in requesting an accommodation you feel will allow you to perform the job successfully.
Never	You have found strategies that you have applied in your job that make you a successful employee. Remember, however, you have rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as it relates to employment.

Adapted from: Witt, M.A. (1992) and Aase, S.A., & Smith, S.E. (1990).

Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace

In the workplace, individuals with disabilities who meet job requirements are entitled by law to reasonable accommodations in order to perform the essential job functions successfully. These accommodations might include: modified work schedules, assistive technology, or training, among other adjustments. It is important to understand that the employer is not required to provide an accommodation that requires significant expense or difficulty (Department of Justice, 2008).

An important aspect of successful employment is a consideration of what accommodations might be required.

Things to Consider

What accommodations do I receive in college?

Why are these accommodations helpful to me?

What accommodations might I need to request in the workplace?

What strategies have I developed over the years that I can use in the workplace without requesting accommodations?

Self-advocacy and self-regulation strategies also play a significant part in finding employment. Being able to articulate one's strengths and suitability for a position of interest is essential. Self-regulation strategies might include selecting an occupation that highlights strengths, called "goodness of fit," since the environment allows an individual the best use of his/her skills, allowing for a level of comfort that leads to success, without the use of accommodations (Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff, 1992).



Valuable Skills in the Workplace

A recently published research article focused on the skills that employers from various industries who were surveyed believe their employees should exhibit. Employability skills are fundamental and rated in the survey as the same for those with and without a disability. These skills are specific to the individual and not the job, and expected of everyone from entry level to those holding the most prestigious position (Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2012).

Employability skills rated highly included: **dependability; following through on an assignment in an efficient manner; and an ability to interact with others (teamwork)**. These characteristics display a sense of professionalism in the individual. Skills that were more general included the ability to **read, write, and communicate effectively**. Based on the different industries that participated in the survey, it was noted that those employers from the service and business industries rated the softer skills (e.g. socialization) higher than those responding from the science and technology fields (Ju et al., 2012).

Major reasons for not hiring an individual were lack of employability skills and experience. **This second criteria especially highlights the need for students with disabilities to participate in internships, volunteer opportunities and/or part-time employment** (Ju et al., 2012).

Things to Consider

What are 3 employability skills you believe you will be able to demonstrate in your career of interest (e.g. problem-solving; interpersonal skills)? How can you improve upon the skills you have?

What skills do you need to develop? How can you develop those skills?

Are you involved in any campus club or organization? How is this involvement beneficial?

Do you have any volunteer or internship experience in a field you would like to work in after graduation?

Resources

General Information

Job Accommodations Network (JAN)

<http://askjan.org/>

The Job Accommodations Network (JAN) is a free resource primarily for individuals with disabilities, employers, and other professionals. Guidance on the ADA, disability employment law, reasonable workplace accommodations, knowledge on various disabilities, etc., is available to all persons through searching the website, phone, or email.

Northeastern University and Oregon State University

<http://www.northeastern.edu/careerservices/services/job-resources-for-students-with-disabilities/>

<http://oregonstate.edu/career/resources-students-disabilities>

Northeastern and Oregon State University have resources on their Career Services website for students with disabilities. Both links provide various resources related to jobs, internships, accommodations, and disability law.

Rutgers University – Career Services

<http://careerservices.rutgers.edu/disDIS.shtml>

Rutgers University's Career Services website has helpful information on the ADA, disability disclosure, interview techniques, employment opportunities, and other internet resources.

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT): Recruiting Students with Disabilities

<http://www.rit.edu/emcs/occe/employers/recruiting-students-disabilities>

RIT's Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services offers comprehensive information for employers and job seekers with disabilities on the following topics: accommodations; disability etiquette; employment laws; programs targeting recent graduates with disabilities; professional associations; and recruiting, hiring, and training.

Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities
<http://www.cosdonline.org/home>

The Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities(COSD), housed at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, is a national professional association comprised of more than 600 colleges and universities and over 500 major national employers. COSD's goal is to improve the employment rate of college students and recent graduates with disabilities. COSD collaborates with disability services and career services on college campuses. COSD has an annual conference for college students and recent graduates with disabilities and employers.

[Disability Disclosure](#)

The 411 on Disability Disclosure – A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities
<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>

This interactive resource was designed for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. In this guide you will learn about self-determination, disclosing disability at the postsecondary level and in employment, and examples of accommodations.

University of Minnesota – Career Services
<http://www.clacareer.umn.edu/interviews/disability.html>

This resource was created by the University of Minnesota's Career Services office of the College of Liberal Arts and Science and has a page devoted to disability disclosure. Similar to the table on "When to Disclose?" in this guide, this site offers information on issues relating to disclosure, creating a script to assist in disclosing, and disclosure timing options.

United States Department of Labor – Office of Disability Employment and Policy: Youth, Disclosure, and the Workplace Why, When, What, and How
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/ydw.htm>

This website provides readers with many questions they might have about the disability disclosure process.

Specific Populations

ADA: Know your Rights. Returning Service Members with Disabilities
http://www.ada.gov/servicemembers_adainfo.html

Veterans often attend institutions of higher education after serving in the armed forces. Some veterans returning to college have war wounds (e.g. physical, psychological, learning) and have a disability under the ADA.

National Center for Learning Disabilities
<http://www.ncld.org/learning-disability-resources/ebooks-guides-toolkits/getting-job-101-adults-teens-ld>

While this website is geared for individuals with learning disabilities (LD), this downloadable e-book is relevant for all individuals with disabilities as they transition to employment.

Making Work Happen
<http://www.makingworkhappen.com/GeneralEmployment.cfm>

This website offers many resources for employers, disability service providers, and veterans with disabilities. A variety of tools are available through this website; two are hiring strategies and reasonable accommodations. One section of this website is for veterans with disabilities with resources such as disclosing a disability, reaching out for support, and requesting accommodations.

Rochester Institute of Technology's (RIT) Spectrum Support Program - Career Resources for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders
<http://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/ssp/student.php#accordion-career-resources>

RIT provides helpful information for current students and alumni with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Links available on this website include: tips on disclosure in the workplace; strategies for successful employment.



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