Things to Consider When Starting an Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Program

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The Georgia Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Consortium (GaIPSEC) began as an informal working group of advocates, parents, school personnel, transition specialists, and university professionals committed to increasing post-secondary opportunities in Georgia. The group, managed by the Center for Leadership in Disability (CLD), came together in September 2011 and has held numerous educational activities with the aid of a mini grant from Think College awarded to the Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University. The GaIPSEC Consortium wanted to build on the success of the Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth at Kennesaw State University, which began in 2008 with support from the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Universities and colleges have long recognized the importance of a diverse student body. However, many higher education institutions are missing critical opportunities to expand diversity among students by including students with intellectual disabilities. Creating a more inclusive environment and teaching using universal design can have a multiplier effect that will, in turn, attract more students.

This roadmap is to serve as a framework for which to build your own IPSE environment. Each Institution’s foundation of philosophies and values are different. It is upon these same building blocks that the IPSE program should be constructed.

Additionally the design of the program should follow five principles set forth by Dr. Patricia Nobbie, former Deputy Director-Public Policy of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD). They are:

1. Be a truly INCLUSIVE program. The students are a part of the campus culture and student body in every respect.

2. Be an ACADEMIC program. The students are not there as a part of a special group. They are there to learn and there are to be expectations from the staff as well as the students themselves to excel academically during this time.

3. Be a program where students are ACCOMMODATED so that they can be successful in their PSE experience. The accommodations they receive will help bridge any gap that may happen between the student and their peers. This includes a student mentor to offer guidance and support.

4. Be a program that is EMPLOYMENT ORIENTED. Components of the curriculum must ensure that the student is job ready upon completion of the program.

5. Be a program that is EVALUATED. The success of students and the project outcomes need to be measured to support the case for additional funding, and to obtain accreditation.

Students with developmental disabilities, who go to college set high goals for themselves, and expect to be educated, engaged and challenged by your program. Through hard work and planning you will be best prepared to meet their expectations.
Be a truly **INCLUSIVE** program.

**CHAMPIONING**

Individual colleges/universities or the Consortium can help to identify champions to gain buy-in and support from community leaders and stakeholders for an INCLUSIVE post-secondary education program within a college/university and community. It serves the organization to have a person in this role who has existing relationships with community decision makers and who additionally has the credibility and the knowhow to create relationships with and make new connections to further support and awareness of the PSE.

Crucial partnerships for:

**College/University Supports that should be included but not limited to:**
- Interested faculty & staff
- Disability Services
- Student Affairs representative
- Deans from various programs
- Provost with access to the President (to give the philosophical message to the administration)
- Admissions representative
- Financial Aid representative
- Diversity representative

**Community Supports that should be included but not limited to:**
- GAIPSEC Steering Committee
  - Center for Leadership in Disability
  - Georgia Council for Developmental Disabilities
  - Georgia Advocacy Office
  - Institute for Human Development and Disabilities
- County Transition Specialist and Council
- DBHDD Regional Offices
- GVRA local representatives
- Providers of services for individuals with IDD
- Georgia Department of Education representative
- Center for Independent Living
- Financial institutions
- Local businesses whose support can translate into internships and future job opportunities for program graduates.
- AmeriCorps
**Be an **ACADEMIC** program.**

**PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

The development of an IPSE program should first and foremost align with your university's mission, vision and values as well as be consistent with the strategic plan of the university. When constructed in this fashion the program will make more sense and be easier to sell to university leaders and administration. Keep in mind that this program, just like others in the school, are there to benefit the university not be a burden upon it. The addition of an inclusive PSE program should attempt to fit seamlessly with other academic initiatives to make the school the most attractive to the best possible students.

**Defined Program Goals**

By building on the previously stated five principles mentioned, program goals can be created. Goals can include but are not limited to:
- Program staffing: obtaining a full or part-time paid position in the community.
- Classroom experience: what participation in classes will look like and what faculty would be best to pilot this program in their classes.
- Improving social, communication, and self-determination skills.
- Increasing the level of mobility in the community.
- Developing age appropriate recreation and leisure interests.
- Increasing use of community services and programs to assist in them becoming their most independent self.

**Curriculum**

Currently in the state of Georgia, students are non-degree seeking audit students, but students can receive credit as determined by the university.

The students in the program should have the ability to enrich their experience with all activities that are open to traditional students. These include but are not limited to:
- Sports and special interest clubs
- Groups
- Recreational and leisure facilities
- Study abroad programs

**Student Requirements**

Upon entering the program, students should meet the minimum requirements as determined by the university. Minimum requirements are negotiated by the program organizers with the university administration.
Be a program where students are **ACCOMMODATED** so that they can be successful in their PSE experience.

**MODELS**

IPSE programs can be either residential or commuter given the housing opportunities available through your college/university. It is up to the applicant and their families to decide which environment the student will be most successful in.

The length of time for the program is flexible and based upon the amount of components you wish to offer. Programs typically last between two to four years with standard holiday, summer and spring breaks.

**Be a program that is EMPLOYMENT ORIENTED.**

**EMPLOYMENT FOCUS**

This will be determined by the college/university. Partners that should be included are the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and employment providers in your local community. This is a very important component for inclusive post-secondary education, and the campus should be an environment where students are able to be employed.

**Be a program that is EVALUATED.**

**EVALUATION**

Evaluation should be at the center of all planning and implementation of IPSE programs. This will assist in funding and curriculum development.
Other things to consider

RECRUITING
The challenge for new programs will not be finding applicants; but being able to choose from such an amazing group of young people with PSE ambitions. Successful programs have a continuous stream of excellent candidates interested in their programming.

ADMINISTRATION/STAFFING
The staff of the PSE program is comprised a team (size may vary) that manages and serves as liaison for scheduling, advisement, housing, mentorships, recruiting and community championing and relations.

An example of a PSE staff can be seen in this staff breakdown from the Academy for Inclusion and Social Growth at Kennesaw State University:

One full time Program Director - Job description

One part time Program Coordinator –
The PSE coordinator will support the university staff in making adjustments to syllabi to be more easily understood by students.

One full time Employment Counselor - Job description

One full time Operations Coordinator - Job description

Student mentors - Mentors help the students to time and schedule management for their new obligations. As PSE students progress in their time at the university they will look to the mentors less as support and more as friends.

The size of your staff and the roles that they assume will vary depending on the amount of students enrolled in the program and the contribution of staff from the managing department.

FUNDING
Costs for start-up and continuation of the PSE programs can be found in the form of grants, braided /blended funds, state budget allocation, private donors and sponsors. These funds cover staff and student mentors. Enrolled students pay traditional tuition, fees and housing costs plus added fees for additional supports. It is up to the individual institutions to find a stream of funding that works best for them and will allow for the creation of the best programming possible.

Additional funds stem from students in the form of
- Tuition
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Medicaid waivers
- Family supports
- AmeriCorps

APPLICATION PROCESS
Program applications have to be developed and approved through the department that will govern the program. Applications and deadlines should follow same dates as those as traditional students. While each individual school will have their own rules when it comes to the application process, several steps should be taken to assure the process is easy for potential students and college administrators alike.
Suggested documentation applicants should provide:

- All standard information needed from traditional applicants.
- Supporting disability documentation as proof of disability and to receive assistance from school disability services department. Examples of that paperwork include: (i.e., IEP, 504 plan, ITP, etc.)
- Any other additional academic/disability paperwork (i.e., high school transcripts, psychological testing, learning disability assessment, etc.) that would enable the program to assess the ability of the student to be an asset to the university and to the PSE program.
- Applicants should be prepared to identify their preferred learning style and to use technology to assist them in communicating and scheduling their post-secondary experience.
A Letter from Cate Weir

Hi everyone: A few have asked for information about this in the past few days – so here are some thoughts on getting started and some ways to use the Think College website to get more information. Do others on the list who have done this have other suggestions for getting started?

We have some resources about starting a program that you can find in our resource library – some are very specific, like examples of MOU, and things like that. Others are more general and give tips and resources to use when getting a program started. Try searching the library with the search term “Program Development” http://www.thinkcollege.net/resources-database

We did a webinar a few months ago on how to get started – you can listen to that on our webinars archive page. http://www.thinkcollege.net/training/webinars

As far as basic strategies I can suggest right now-- Most efforts begin with a motivated student and some supportive advocates - - and then a conversation with the campus. It may be the Disability Services office, or maybe a Dean or faculty member in the Education department, a Dean of Students – but it has also been a baseball coach, a provost, a doctoral student... it takes someone on the inside that is willing to listen and brainstorm about what is possible. Some have put together a formal presentation on what they are asking for, and then gotten an appointment with someone on campus to make the pitch . It really does help to have an intro from someone on campus who can make that appointment happen – maybe the Disability Services office in this case. CU Boulder sponsors a Disability and Technology Conference every year called Accessing Higher Ground (you probably know that) so I wonder if someone who works at the college that is associated with that conference would have some ideas.

We encourage folks to look at ways that whatever is created is aligned with what is already on campus, so look for ways in which other community members who are not fully matriculating students access classes. Sometimes there is a program for older folks from the community, or high school students, other "special student status" things that already exist that you can tap into. My advice is to know what you are looking for from the college, but make it as "ordinary" as possible. Point out the ways in which what you are asking for is a benefit to the college. Some benefits that are mentioned by the colleges that support these kinds of experiences are:

* It makes the campus more diverse, which aligns with college mission statement
* It is a way to serve our community members
* It offers opportunities for preservice teachers, rehab counselors and others to interact with peers with disabilities, which is good for their personal and professional development
* When programs bring resources, such as training in Universal Design for Learning that is a benefit to all students and to the faculty
* It aligns with changes to the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which now outlines the aspects of a program that supports students with intellectual disability, and provides for those students to access financial aid.

Not all campuses are going to see this as a benefit that is for sure. But more and more are listening and trying to figure out how they can offer these learning experiences to young people who have been routinely excluded from any formal learning after high school.
Another good first step is to visit a campus that has an inclusive program – or at least call someone to chat about what they are doing and how they got started. This field is full of folks who are very willing to share their experiences, and it can be good to talk to someone in your part of the country, if possible. Visit our College Search page, and check out a few program websites. This will give you a feel for what they are doing, and list a contact person. 
http://www.thinkcollege.net/?Itemid=127

Hope this is helpful,

Cate