



Access to the Future: Preparing College Students with Disabilities for Careers

Offering valuable knowledge and skills

Work-based learning experiences can help a student make career decisions, network with potential employers, select courses of study, and develop job skills relevant to future employment. Through the interaction of work and study experiences, students can enhance their academic knowledge, personal development, and professional preparation.

As future employees, college students with disabilities face unique challenges. They must find a way to meet specific qualifications of a desired job, as well as demonstrate transferable skills such as communication, trouble-shooting, decision making, leadership, and problem solving. They must also determine whether or not they will need accommodations to help them succeed in their jobs. Work-based learning experiences can help students with disabilities explore different accommodations, as well as provide opportunities to practice disclosing their disabilities and requesting accommodations from employers.

Postsecondary institutions must make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in all work-based learning opportunities they offer. These may include internships, cooperative education, job-shadowing, service-learning, and independent studies. Specific work-based learning accommodations for students with disabilities will vary based on the students' needs, the job site, and the job requirements.

Some individuals with disabilities will use the same accommodations at a work site that they used to complete academic work. For example, a student who is blind will need Braille, audiotapes, or an adapted computer system to access printed material. Likewise, a student with a mobility impairment may need an accessible workstation and/or assistive technology to complete computer-related job duties. For other students, new responsibilities and environments will create new challenges and potential barriers. For example, flexible attendance requirements for a student with a health impairment may need additional consideration in a work-based setting. Students with learning disabilities may need

to replace notetakers and outlines with requests for written memos or recorded instructions to help them organize information. Transportation to and from the work site may also create unique challenges for some students with disabilities.

Successful work-based learning experiences require cooperative efforts between the student, employer, faculty, staff, and disability services office. Career services, cooperative education, and internship programs can learn to make their programs welcoming and accessible by consulting the publication *Equal Access: Universal Design of Career Services* at www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/equal_access_cs.html. This publication includes a checklist for applying universal design principles. Below are steps that students, employers, faculty, and disability services are encouraged to take to facilitate beneficial work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities interested in work-based learning experiences need to:

- Register with campus work-based learning programs.
- Participate in available orientations, seminars, workshops, and individual counseling sessions to enhance job search skills.
- Let the work-based learning and disabled student services coordinators know what accommodations are needed.
- Access local support networks and disability-service organizations that may be able to aid in the job search process.

Employers need to:

- Update position announcements and notify work-based learning coordinators of new positions.
- Work in partnership with work-based learning centers to proactively develop strategies to encourage students with disabilities to participate in the work environment.
- Educate staff regarding diversity-related issues.



Faculty members need to:

- Encourage students with disabilities to gain work experiences.
- Invite staff members from cooperative education, career services, and other campus programs to speak to your classes.
- Encourage employers to recruit students with disabilities for work opportunities.

Disability Services Offices need to:

- Encourage students to register and participate in work-based learning programs on campus.
- Be proactive in students' academic and career planning. Let them know how accommodations are provided in the work place.
- Help campus work-based learning programs recruit and accommodate students with disabilities.

Working with Students Who Have Disabilities

One of the most common barriers to academic and career achievement for students with disabilities is low expectations on the part of those with whom they interact. Maintain high expectations for participants with disabilities. Expect that they will succeed. Career counselors, cooperative education staff, internship coordinators, and employers can help students with disabilities develop and accomplish their goals by following these suggestions.

- Consider the person with the disability your best resource when determining appropriate accommodations.
- Make no assumptions. Most likely, the student has a full life and has learned to positively meet the challenges posed by the disability.
- Speak directly to the person and focus on his or her abilities rather than his or her disability.
- People with disabilities have the same range of likes and dislikes as those who are not disabled. Talk about things you talk about with other students. Use the same vocal strength and intonation.
- If you are feeling uncomfortable about a situation, let the person who has the disability know.
- Be sure expectations such as job performance, behavior, and dress are clearly defined and that they are met.

- If a person appears to be having difficulty at a task, ask if, and how, you may help.
- Avoid labels for groups of people with disabilities, such as "the blind." Instead, say "people who are blind."
- Avoid emotionally driven descriptions such as "crippled," "confined to a wheelchair," "stricken with," or "wheelchair-bound." Instead, simply be descriptive, such as "she uses a wheelchair."
- Avoid euphemisms to describe disabilities. Terms such as "differently-abled," and "physically-challenged," are considered by many to be condescending. They reinforce the idea that disabilities can't be dealt with in a straightforward manner.

Working with Employers

Many employers are aware of the ADA and are interested in employing students with disabilities. Career counselors, cooperative education staff, and internship coordinators can work with employers to make successful placements for students with disabilities. The following suggestions may assist you in working with employers as you place students with disabilities.

- Inform employers that you work with all students on your campus, including students with disabilities.
- Assist employers with procuring materials in alternative formats.
- Provide employers with information on creating accessible web pages and other electronic resources.
- Alert employers to community resources that can assist them and their employees with determining appropriate accommodations.

Resources

An electronic copy of this publication as well as additional useful brochures can be found at www.uw.edu/doi/Brochures/. Short videos, *Equal Access: Student Services* and *Access to the Future: Preparing Students with Disabilities for Careers*, demonstrate key points summarized in this publication. They may be freely viewed online and purchased in DVD format from DO-IT. Consult www.uw.edu/doi/Video/ for these and other videos that may be of interest. Permission is granted to reproduce DO-IT publications and videos for educational, noncommercial purposes provided the source is acknowledged.



Accommodation Strategies

Work-based learning offers an opportunity for students and employers to determine the best accommodations in a particular work environment. Many times, the necessary accommodation will be obvious. Other situations will require some research. As you work with students and employers to choose reasonable accommodations, ask the following four questions.

1. **What does the task or assignment require?** Break down all of the components of the job. This will help you to determine the best way to fully include an employee with a disability.
2. **What physical, sensory, and cognitive skills are needed?** Compare the skills required to complete a task to the skills of the potential employee. Does a modification need to be made in order for the person to be successful?
3. **What components of the task require accommodation?** Check with the employee to see which aspects he or she feels require accommodations.
4. **What accommodation options exist?** The employee is your best resource. If he or she requires assistance with answering this question, be sure to access campus and community resources.

*The Student Services Conference Room at www.uw.edu/doit/Conf/ includes a collection of documents and videos to help you make student services accessible to everyone. Included are checklists for career services, distance learning, computer labs, recruitment and admissions, registration, housing and residential life, financial aid, libraries, tutoring and learning centers, and student organizations. *The Student Services Conference Room* also includes a searchable Knowledge Base of questions and answers, case studies, and promising practices. For more information about applications of universal design consult www.uw.edu/doit/Resources/udesign.html.*

The following resources also provide information about making career services accessible.

AccessCareers

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology)

www.uw.edu/doit/Careers/

DO-IT works to increase the successful participation of people with disabilities in academic programs and careers. DO-IT uses assistive technology and the Internet to maximize independence, productivity, and participation. It provides instructional materials regarding accessible technology and transitions from high school to college and school to work. DO-IT's *AccessCareers* pages provide content and resources on making employment accessible to people with disabilities.

Disability.gov

www.disability.gov

Disability.gov is the federal government's one-stop website for people with disabilities, their families, employers, veterans, and workplace professionals for the purpose of helping individuals with disabilities participate in the workplace and their communities.

ENTRY POINT! American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)

www.entrypoint.org

ENTRY POINT! is an internship program for college students with disabilities majoring in computer science, engineering, mathematics, or physical science.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

www.eeoc.gov

The U.S. EEOC provides enforcement guidance on reasonable accommodation and undue hardship under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

www.askjan.org

JAN answers questions about accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act for employers and people with disabilities.



Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

www.dol.gov/odep/

The U.S. Department of Labor's ODEP supports High School/High Tech, the Business Leadership Network, and other programs and provides technical assistance, resources for employers, and links to state liaisons.

Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA)

rsa.ed.gov

RSA oversees programs that help people with disabilities gain employment, such as state vocational rehabilitation offices.

The Work Site

ssa.gov/work/envr.html

Resources for employers maintained by the U.S. Social Security Administration.

Workforce Recruitment Program

wrp.gov

The Workforce Recruitment Program creates a database of screened candidates with disabilities seeking summer and permanent positions.

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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