Postsecondary Resources for Students with Disabilities

On May 19, 2020, Transition Tennessee hosted a Postsecondary Resources Virtual Transition Fair. There were presentations about the differences between services in high school and college, the ways Vocational Rehabilitation can assist with postsecondary education, and how Disability Pathfinder can connect people to services in their local area. Special support program, community college, TCAT, and university disability services representatives presented within breakout rooms about the programs and resources that are available for students with disabilities in postsecondary education across Tennessee. This document summarizes information from each presentation.

Differences between High School and College

There are many differences between services students receive in high school and postsecondary education. Here are some of the primary differences and ways for students, staff, and families to prepare for this transition.

Accommodations
- The student's documentation must reflect the accommodations being requested.
- The student must be accepted by the school before they enroll for accommodations.
- However, students and families may contact the disability services office before applying to see what types of accommodations are available.
- The student must seek out accommodations with the office of disability services. Schools are not allowed to inquire about a student's disability.

Responsibility Differences
- The student becomes completely responsible for identification, assessment, programming, decisions, and transition planning at the postsecondary level.
- The student works with the college to determine programming and advocacy responsibilities.

Ways for Staff and Families to Prepare Students
- Have current medical and/or psychological evaluation information
- Help students have a good understanding of their disability
- Train and encourage students to self-advocate
- Inform students about ADA and Section 504 and what that means for their rights in postsecondary education
- Inform student about accommodations for testing
- Help student understand diploma options
- Recommend college visits

- Recommend that the student contact the college disability services early
- Encourage student to participate in transition planning while still in high school
- Encourage independence with students and practice prior to transitioning to postsecondary education

Ways for Students to Prepare

- Inquire about admissions processes
- Contact disability services office
- Ask about common accommodations for students with similar needs
- Ask about tutoring programs
- Take high school classes to prepare for college
- Practice describing strengths and challenges
- Practice independence
- Build organization habits
- Work on study habits
- Explore different career options

How Vocational Rehabilitation Can Assist with Postsecondary Education

Program Description

- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR) provides a variety of individualized services to people with disabilities in preparation for their employment in the competitive labor market. VR advocates employment outcomes for clients that are consistent with their individual strengths, resources, abilities, capabilities, and informed choices.

Postsecondary Training

- In order for VR to assist with postsecondary training, the student's career goal must require postsecondary education.
- Undergraduate clients must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year to determine eligibility for financial aid.

VR Monetary Sponsorship

- VR sets a general standard rate for universities based on the University of Tennessee-Knoxville rate.
- However, VR also looks at the general rate of universities within individual areas and may change the standard rate to reflect those schools.
- VR payment to private schools will not exceed the standard state rate for the type of institution the student will be attending.
- The standard rate for community and junior colleges is also based off the area's state community college rates.
- The standard rate for technical schools is based off the TCAT rates for the comparable area of study.

Student Requirements

- Full time enrollment
- GPA 2.0 or in "Good Standing"
- Complete all required classes in a timely manner

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Additional VR Supports

- Fees, books, supplies, tools, equipment, transportation, housing, and meals

Disability Pathfinder

Program Description

- A free, statewide information and referral system
- Includes information regarding transportation, recreation, financial assistance, future planning, advocacy, and housing
- Contact staff via online form, phone, or email
- Their online service database is searchable by service type and county/region.

Specialized Support Programs

Next Steps at Vanderbilt University

- 4-year inclusive program in Nashville, TN; most of these factors are true for all TN inclusive programs

Mission

- Committed to providing students with intellectual disability an inclusive, transformational postsecondary education in academics, social and career development, and independent living, while honoring equality, compassion, and excellence in all endeavors

Application Process

- Submit online application, personal statement, and letters of recommendation
- Complete an in-person interview
- Attend a preview day on campus
- Can apply early or regular decision

Program Components

- Vanderbilt University undergraduate classes
- Career and community studies classes
- Experiential seminars
- Peer mentor relationships and meetings
- Internships and jobs
- Extracurricular involvement

Skills to Master for Program Preparation

- Solid means of communication
- Ability to ask for help
- Total independence for personal hygiene
- Consistent phone communication
- Basic knowledge of what to do when not feeling well (emergency vs. non-emergency; who to contact)
- Appropriate use of free time

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- Ability to follow a schedule
- Basic email skills
- Ability and stamina to travel across campus independently

How to Help Students Prepare

- Increase awareness of strengths and areas of growth
- Explain that everyone learns differently and needs help
- Respect their point of view
- Encourage independence
- Allow them to make mistakes
- Prepare and plan for future
- Strengthen problem-solving skills

STARS Program at Christian Brothers University

- Support program for students with autism in Memphis, TN

Mission

- Assist and support college students with autism by facilitating opportunities for social, academic, and career-building skills through peer mentoring, coaching, workshops, social activities, and creative endeavors

Programs

- STARS are Social
  - Open to all students
  - Weekly events, workshops, and social activities
  - Student peers serve as friends and role models to teach social skills.
- TEAM (Teaching Employment and Academic Mastery)
  - Strengthen time management and organization
  - Encourage self-advocacy
  - Build career skills
  - Assist with class scheduling and registration
- STARS Connects
  - Work with students on vocational skills
  - Help students prepare for internships, externships, and job interviews
  - Focus on career building skills: body language, eye contact, professionalism, and business communication

Program Entry Process

- Admission to the university
- Must have documentation of autism diagnosis receive TEAM services
- Virtual visit with STARS Executive Director to discuss program

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- Complete and submit TEAM program application
- Meet in person or virtually to discuss application and responsibilities
- Students that seek services must register with Student Disability Services
- All university students are welcome to join the social program

Full Spectrum Learning Program at Austin Peay State University

- Support program for students with autism in Clarksville, TN

Program Overview

- Focus on academic success with certified tutors
- Work on transitioning to the workforce with faculty mentors
- Weekly conferences to assess goal setting, problem solving, and crisis intervention when necessary
- Peer mentor program
- Study hours with minimum distractions
- Social hours with other participants

Application Process

- Be admitted to APSU
- Apply to Full Spectrum Learning
- All incoming students will interview
- All students must register with the Office of Disability Services
- All applicants must register with the Vocational Rehabilitation Office
  - VR will cover the full cost of the FSL program for all qualified participants
- Register for FSL specific courses each semester

Skills to Master for Program Preparation

- Open and consistent communication
- Have an updated autism evaluation
- Request a 504 plan
- Plan for the future
- Encourage the development of soft skills
- Encourage life skills: safety, health, independence, self-advocacy, self-regulation, and executive functioning skills

University Student Disability Services Offices

Confidentiality

- Privacy of disability documentation and accommodations through ADA, Section 504, and FERPA
- Students do not have to share information related to disability with professors; only accommodations should be discussed.
- Students may choose to disclose disability information, but it is never required if they do not want accommodations.

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- Student Disability Services will not disclose disability information without written consent from student.

University of Memphis

Purpose:

- Advocate equal access and inclusion through Universal Design of all university programs and activities and through accommodations that remove barriers to participation
- Encourage understanding of disability by educating all members of the University community
- Promote development and independence of students with disabilities
- Assist students to establish a connect to the University of Memphis
- Improve access and use of Assistive Technology
- Increase retention and graduation rates for students with disabilities
- Promote knowledge and understanding of disabilities across the University campus
- Provide supports for success in students' chosen fields

Accommodations

- The disability services office provides reasonable academic accommodations that provide an equal opportunity or access to participate in the education process, so long as those requirements:
  - Do not fundamentally alter the nature of the program
  - Do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course
  - Do not fundamentally alter the evaluation methods/standards set forth by the instructor
  - Are supported by the documentation provided
- Accommodations are determined on an individual basis.
- Most common: exam accommodations, note taking assistance, and alternatives to print materials

Additional Services

- Priority registration, assistance with class registration, First HIRE, Career tracks, and academic coaching

University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Student Disability Services Mission

- Partner with the campus community in creating equitable access for eligible students while promoting disability-inclusive diversity
- Provide accommodations and aids
- Advocate for access

How to Register

- Schedule a welcome meeting to meet with accommodations coordinator
- Complete online registration
- Provide documentation about disability
  - Establish disability, impact of disability, and needed accommodations
- Attend welcome meeting
  - Discuss functional limitations related to disability

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- Collaboratively determine necessary and reasonable accommodations
- Accommodations should provide equitable access and should not fundamentally alter a course

Accommodations
- Accessing:
  - Send accommodations to professors
  - Meet with professors to discuss accommodations
  - Follow procedures to access specific accommodations
  - Contact accommodations coordinator when needed
- Common Types:
  - Alternative testing, note taking services and technology, interpreting and transcribing services, alternative formats, registration, transportation, and housing
- Examples:
  - 50% more time on tests/quizzes, permission to audio record class lectures and discussions, note taking assistance, sign language interpreting, printed materials in searchable and accessible PDF formats, priority registration, T-Access shuttle, and room assignment on lowest floor possible

Austin Peay State University
Mission
- To ensure access for students with disabilities to all curricular and co-curricular opportunities offered at APSU

Receiving Accommodations
- Disclose disability to the Office of Disability Services
- Complete student application online
- Complete intake meeting with Director/Associate Director
- Request accommodations each semester via accommodations portal
- Receive accommodation letters via email
- It is recommended that student and instructor have a meeting to discuss the approved accommodations.

Examples of Accommodations
- Extended testing time, minimal distraction testing area, note-taking services, alternative formats, use of Assistive Technology, CART: communication access real-time translation- real time captioning, preferred seating, and adjustable seats/desks

Community College and TCAT Student Disability Services Offices
Southwest Tennessee Community College
Overview
- Assist with classroom accommodations
- Encourage self-advocacy skills within classroom setting

Application Process

- Students or high school staff send documentation via email or fax.
- Documentation can include evaluations and high school diagnosis.
- Application includes information to determine what services can be provided and utilized.
- Students should contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as they receive their schedule.

Steps to Access

- Office received medical documentation
- Application completed
- Student signs confidentiality documentation to begin services
- Student receives letter of accommodation to give to professors

Disclosure

- The student will disclose their disability to the office of disability services.
- The office will give the student a letter to give to faculty and professors that will detail the student's documented accommodations.
- Students are encouraged to meet faculty and professors during office hours to discuss the letter of accommodation and what services will be received in class.

Accommodations

- Note taking assistance, alternative textbook formatting, testing in a reduced distraction environment, assistance of a reader or scribe, preferential front-row seating, assistive technology usage, extended time on exams, and modification of attendance policy

Transitioning from High School

- Accommodations could be different from high school.
- Students need to be more independent than they were in high school.
- Students need to work on increasing their self-advocacy skills.
- Southwest is currently trying to start a camp for students with autism. The camp would provide campus tours, advising, and campus acclimation assistance.

Partnering with VR

- Frequently work with students who have cases with VR
- Accept funding through VR

COVID- 19

- Right now, anyone on social security can submit an award letter to receive a tuition waiver to pay a small fee and can take as many hours as they want.
- Students are currently taking online classes through the summer, and there will be a hybrid for the fall semester.

L.E.A.D. Club

- Leadership, Excellence, Advocacy for Disabilities
- Peer influence for students with disabilities to encourage and provide a spirit of connectedness and a sense of belonging

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- Provides support networks and activities for students with disabilities
- Club is sponsored by the office of disabilities services

Tennessee College of Applied Technology-Knoxville

Is TCAT right for you?

- Classes are vocationally-focused
- Self-paced learning
- Campus visits with class shadowing are encouraged

Application process

- Physician can fill out information regarding disability services.
- If recently graduated, the student can bring in documentation from high school.
- VR testing and documentation is encouraged to better assess what services will be most beneficial.
- Contact the Office of Disability Services upon receiving notification of enrollment; seek services as soon as possible for best success.
- No ACT or SAT scores required for admission

Accommodations

- Students can detail where they most need accommodations.
- Students are always encouraged to talk with professors and instructors to discuss accommodations and services.

Skills to Master for Program Preparation

- Self-advocacy, time management (nontraditional classes and self-paced), and organization skills

COVID-19

- Their classes just restarted.
- Daily questionnaires to ensure everyone's health
- Students are on staggered schedules
- Class times are different and must be flexible
- PPE required for everyone
- Limiting access to general public

Financial Aid

- Accepts federal aid, private scholarships, individual scholarships within TCAT, and VR funding.
- The American Job Center can be a good source of financial aid information.

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