



PERSONAL COMPETENCIES

for

COLLEGE & CAREER

SUCCESS

WHAT COLLEGES CAN DO

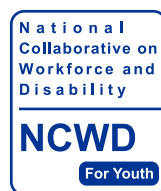


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INTRODUCTION

Successfully completing college requires much more than obtaining academic knowledge and skills. A wide range of personal competencies and non-academic factors have an impact on students' chances of persisting and completing a postsecondary credential or degree (Karp, 2011; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Many of the competencies that students need for college success are also critical to career readiness and success (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2015; College and Career Readiness and Success Center [CCRSC], 2013). For example, the College and Career Readiness and Success Center emphasizes the importance of five core social-emotional learning skills to perform well in both college and careers. These skills include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013).

Yet, many students enter college lacking the personal skills, knowledge, and attributes they need to make it through college. For this reason, postsecondary institutions' efforts to increase student retention, completion, and career read-

iness need to include youth development and leadership opportunities that help students build personal competencies. This guide provides suggestions about various strategies postsecondary professionals can use to assist students in developing personal competencies that will increase their chances of success. Part I of this guide provides an overview of personal competencies that all students need for college and career success as well as additional competencies for students with disabilities. Part II describes what colleges can do to build student competencies.

Postsecondary institutions can also make use of [*Making My Way through College*](#), a related guide developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth). *Making My Way* highlights actions that students can take to practice many of the competencies discussed in this current guide. College professionals may find it useful to share *Making My Way* with students to facilitate conversations about what they can do and what they need from faculty and staff to build personal competencies.

A WORD ABOUT YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & LEADERSHIP

Youth development and leadership opportunities are one of five *Guideposts for Success* that the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) and the Office of Disability Employment Policy have identified as critical to preparing all young people for successful transition into adulthood. The *Guideposts* were developed through an extensive review of research studies, demonstration projects, and lessons from successful programs in the fields of education, youth development, and workforce development. Learn more about the [*Guideposts for Success*](#).



Part 1

UNDERSTANDING HOW PERSONAL COMPETENCIES CONTRIBUTE TO COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS

Determining the best ways that college professionals can help students build personal competencies requires considering which skills, knowledge, and attributes have a significant impact on college students' success. Both research evidence and experiences of college students indicate that the following competencies are particularly important for all students:

- Self-awareness
- Decision-making skills
- Goal-setting and planning skills
- Self-advocacy skills
- Communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Self-management skills
- Leadership skills

- Ability to seek out and use assistance
- Ability to develop supportive relationships
- Confidence in one's abilities
- Perseverance

Students with disabilities need to develop these core competencies to increase their success, just like other college students. At the same time, college students with disabilities must develop additional competencies specific to navigating postsecondary education and transitioning to employment with a disability. These disability-specific competencies include the following:

- Knowledge about one's rights and responsibilities as an individual with a disability

- Ability to determine whether, when, and how to disclose one's disability in different situations
- Ability to find, request, and secure supports and accommodations along with an understanding of their use, not only in an academic environment, but also how they may be adapted to a work-based environment

Developing these combined sets of competencies will help students with disabilities to effectively practice self-determination. Research has found that self-determination links to successful employment outcomes after high school (Wehmer and Palmer, 2003). For this reason, it is especially critical that colleges employ strategies that build self-determination skills among students with disabilities to increase their postsecondary outcomes (Oertle & Bragg, 2014).

In the following discussion about these competencies, insights from college student interviews accompany findings from research to illustrate their significance to student success.

Self-Awareness

The development of an adult concept of self-image is a major component of adolescence. Through social interactions and introspection, young people develop a model of who they are, how they look, and what abilities and interests they have. Their growth requires meaningful opportunities to experience what the world has to offer. In adolescence, self-awareness is clouded by insecurities, lack of experience, and physical and emotional changes. This can cause significant challenges for students entering postsecondary education. An influencing factor in students' initial success relates to how they view themselves as a learner (Bickerstaff, Barragan, & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2012).

For young people who have disabilities, gaining self-awareness can feel even more daunting. They may not have exposure to the same activities that promote self-awareness, may feel that they are limited due to their disabilities, or may not access important services crucial to their success because they do not want their peers to know that they receive support. One student described her hesitance in accessing services: "I was always thinking this is an unfair advantage."

Self-awareness requires students to make personal assessments of their skills and strengths. Encouragement and support for students with disabilities can lead to a stronger internal locus of control and to a more positive understanding or awareness of self. For these students, a major component of self-awareness is disclosure. They must learn whether and how to disclose information about themselves and their disabilities in appropriate settings and at appropriate times. Students with disabilities must also develop an individualized understanding of what it means to have a disability. The experience of having a disability in today's society may also cause distortion of self-image, which sometimes comes from conflicting feedback from others. One student described this: "I got to a point where I did feel a sense of defeat, and it's like, 'What am I doing? I can't do this on my own.'" For a variety of reasons, young people may not receive appropriate interventions or accommodations in school. This can result in students failing to advance academically or believing that they are not intelligent.

Some parents may deny that their child has a disability or gloss over its impact. Well-meaning individuals may provide misinformation or suggest that youth can outgrow or overcome disability through increased effort. Additionally, families and school staff may inadvertently undermine students' abilities by overproviding accommodations and modifications; this overpro-

tection may prevent students from challenging themselves. In some cultures, it is taboo even to talk about disability.

It is important for students to hear and be comfortable with disability as a part of their identity. This can be done by making it relevant to students and helping them recognize that being a person with a disability does not equate to having a lack of capacity but rather a gap between the person's strengths and the environment. As one student described an experience with on-campus disability services, "I liked the way they view it. Not, there's something wrong with the person, but it's the environment. They try to diminish or eliminate the barriers so I can be at the same level as other students in the class. To level the playing field."

Decision-Making Skills

The process of analyzing all possible options and choosing the best one is the crux of good decision-making. Before entering college, many students are not the sole decision-makers for large, important decisions. Big decisions, like what college to attend, may be influenced by other people, such as guidance counselors and parents and family members. Other factors, such as cost and location, can also affect these decisions.

When students get to college, however, they must make many more decisions independently, or seek out advice or help when they need it. They are responsible for deciding which classes to take and when. If a student has a disability, he or she must decide whether and to whom to disclose. Students must also decide whether and how much to work while in school, which student organizations to participate in, how to balance time between academics and social or recreational activities, how to manage their

money, what and when to eat, and how to get from place to place. Asking for help when and if it is needed is tough for some students. One student shared, "I was nervous about accessing disability services. I didn't want anyone to see me go in there and think there was something wrong with me. But I knew I needed help. No one else could go in and ask for it except for me."

Another component of decision-making is informed choice, which involves the process of choosing what is best for an individual from among available options based on accurate and thorough knowledge. Individuals making decisions must consider potential intended and unintended consequences and accept responsibility for outcomes resulting from their choices.

Goal-Setting & Planning Skills

College students often need to develop the skills necessary to plan, set, evaluate, and achieve goals. Because goals are frequently set for students while they are in high school with little input from the students themselves, they may not have learned how to set goals on their own.

Developing skills in goal-setting and attainment requires learning how to

- identify specific long-term goals;
- break goals down into smaller, short-term objectives;
- articulate goals and the steps needed to reach goals;
- monitor progress made toward reaching goals;
- adjust strategies used to achieve goals;
- update goals as necessary; and
- set new goals when appropriate (Schunk, 2002).

It is important that students' goals reflect high expectations for themselves and from adults and peers around them. Students also need to think through concrete steps for achieving goals, develop ways to evaluate progress, and determine whether a change of course or a new goal is needed.

To prepare college students for goal-setting, students should be exposed to a wide variety of activities and coursework they may be interested in and may not have had access to in high school. Before college, some young people may not have received encouragement to try new things and take appropriate risks in an effort to protect them from harm. In other cases, students may have experienced systemic barriers to participating in certain activities, including low expectations of their capabilities or a lack of disability-related accommodations. All youth need to be able to take appropriate risks, experience difficulties, and learn from their mistakes. Not accomplishing a goal does not mean the student has failed, but rather that they have had the opportunity to learn what does not work, re-evaluate the goal, and try again. One student reported that she picked a really hard goal but one that was important. The first time she took the exam, she got a zero and wanted to quit. Yet, she kept studying and taking it again. On the fourth try, she passed, as she explained, "It was so validating that I could pass it. I had the abilities."

Self-Advocacy Skills

Self-advocacy refers to taking action on one's own behalf. It includes seeking out options, deciding what goals to pursue, determining rights and responsibilities, and knowing when and how to speak out (Timmons, Wills, Kemp, Basha, & Mooney, 2010). When individuals make decisions about their lives, they must have the

skills to voice their decisions to others and act on them. Self-advocacy guides students to take a proactive role in the management of their college experience.

Research indicates that self-advocacy has a significant impact on the success of college students with disabilities (Lombardi, Murray, & Kowitt, 2016). Once they enter a postsecondary education setting, students with disabilities must exercise self-advocacy to obtain accommodations; colleges need only provide accommodations to students who choose to identify themselves as having a disability and who make an official request. One student mentioned the importance of self-advocacy numerous times, commenting, "It's all back to advocacy. It may sound repetitive, but it's so important."

Self-advocacy builds on the concepts of self-esteem and self-efficacy—the beliefs that individuals have about their own skills and abilities. Students with disabilities need to understand how to access accommodations and be able to identify and articulate which accommodations are critical to their success. They also need to know how to explain the impact these accommodations have on their academic performance and to extrapolate how those accommodations could be adapted to support their success in a work setting. Self-advocacy requires expressing one's thoughts in a way that persuades others to listen to them and to respect their views. One student shared, "People would never assume I struggle with mental health issues. When they know about it they ask, 'Do you really?' I have to explain how it relates to the accommodations I get in class."

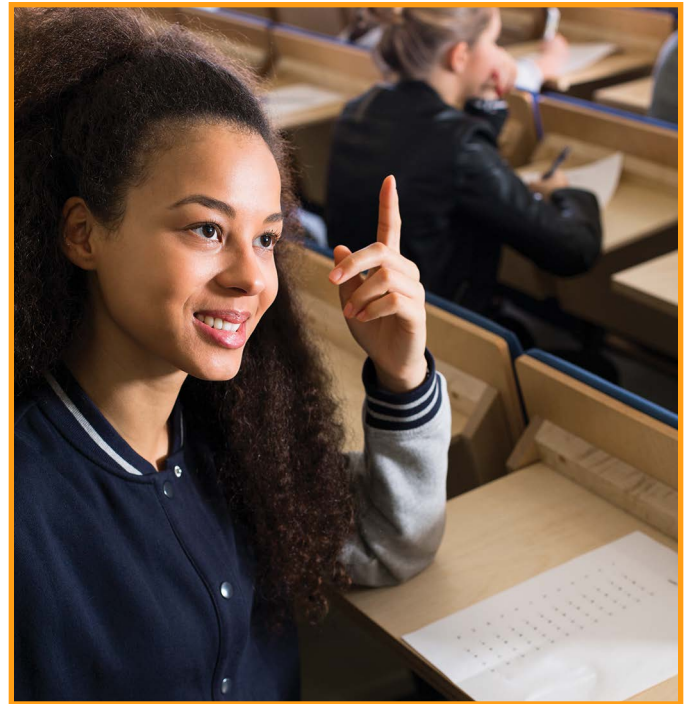
To effectively learn self-advocacy skills, students should be provided with opportunities to practice them within a supportive environment. Role-playing activities and real-life experiences are both useful in helping youth to

develop self-advocacy skills. The student above shared how his coach at disability services provided support by encouraging him to make an appointment at least once a term to review his progress and accommodations. If he didn't make that appointment, the coach would email and check in with him to schedule another time.

Communication Skills

The ability to communicate with others is essential to all areas of life, including employment. Communicating effectively with others involves not only conveying information, but also negotiating, appropriately asserting oneself, and problem-solving. Throughout their postsecondary educational experience, students will likely have the opportunity to practice various forms of communication that naturally occur through completion of their coursework. Providing feedback on their effectiveness in communicating can help students to hone these skills. Although some students with disabilities struggle with communication as a part of their disability, assisting all students with disabilities in developing these skills can be particularly critical to their success if they will need to ask for accommodations in the classroom and/or the workplace.

Conflict resolution is also an important component of effective communication. Students need to begin to understand that not only is it important for them to know what they want, it is also important to know how to negotiate and compromise. One student shared how a misguided teaching assistant (TA) caused her to experience an anxiety attack in class. By accessing disability services, she was able to have a conversation with the TA and professor to make sure all parties understood the impact of what happened and to work together to find an acceptable solution.



Problem-Solving Skills

As with decision-making skills, a student's ability to solve problems independently may have inadvertently been hindered due to a lack of experience or overzealous but well-meaning adults in life prior to college. It is not uncommon for parents, teachers, or other adults to try to "fix" problems for high school students in the interest of time or being protective. This can leave students ill-equipped to solve problems on their own once they arrive at college. Many students may be accustomed to doing the first thing that occurs to them when faced with a challenge. They may not effectively problem-solve by stopping and thinking through a situation to determine what their choices are before acting. Students who are learning to solve problems competently on their own without prior experience may need to be taught these steps explicitly.

Self-Management Skills

Effective use of self-management skills enables students to become more self-reliant and in-

dependent once they enter college. Studies of children and adolescents indicate that learning self-management skills and other social-emotional learning strategies correlates with improved academic performance and other positive outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Self-management consists of “regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; and expressing emotions appropriately” (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013). Some skills involved in self-management are independently completing tasks, monitoring and reinforcing one’s own behavior, setting goals, managing one’s time, and reflecting on how one is doing and adjusting where needed (University of Kansas, n.d.).

Students often experience some challenges learning to adjust to the demands of college-level courses. At the same time, students living away from home for the first time have to adjust to the increased level of responsibility that comes with having the freedom to do what they choose. For students with disabilities who may have had a lot of support at home, this often means learning to take care of all their personal needs while managing their academic responsibilities. One college graduate who has a chronic health condition described finding it challenging to keep a focus on her academic work while also making time to find a doctor, schedule appointments, and take care of her health. Students’ own expectations of their abilities may affect their ability to self-regulate. Psychologists have indicated that students who do not expect to achieve success are less likely to engage in positive, self-regulatory behaviors related to academic performance (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006).

Leadership Skills

Leadership is most commonly associated with interpersonal relationships, such as having a formal position of influence or authority within a group. However, serving as a leader also requires leading oneself. NCWD/Youth uses a two-part definition of youth leadership that recognizes the significance of personal leadership as young people make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Youth leadership is

- “The ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinion and behavior of other people, and show the way by going in advance” (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998); and
- “the ability to analyze one’s own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem to carry them out. It includes the ability to identify community resources and use them, not only to live independently, but also to establish support networks to participate in community life and to effect positive social change” (Adolescent Employment Readiness Center, Children’s Hospital, n.d.).

Throughout college, students benefit from mastering leadership on both personal and interpersonal levels. This includes leading others in informal ways to accomplish the student’s individual goals and solve problems. For example, a student with a disability uses leadership skills while self-advocating and in influencing others to take action on their behalf to secure or provide an accommodation or modifications. In the same way, any student may need to use the art of persuasion to acquire services or opportunities they want or need. One student shared, “As I joined student organizations, I developed

more leadership skills, as well as self-advocacy. I needed to express what I needed in order to participate and ended up as a leader in the organization because I could explain how things impact each other, which I learned advocating for my accommodations.”

Ability to Seek Out and Use Assistance

Recognizing when one needs help and knowing who and how to ask for it is an important part of exercising independence in college. Researcher Melinda Karp (2011) describes the need for students to develop “college know-how,” which includes “knowing how to ask for help, how to participate in class appropriately, and how to navigate bureaucratic systems to access resources, such as financial aid” (p. 2).

Learning to seek out assistance is particularly critical for students with disabilities. Unlike in secondary school, once they are in college it is up to them to initiate requests for assistance. One student with a disability described his initial hesitation and eventual decision to ask for support: “I got to a point where it was like, ‘Okay, I can suffer in silence or reach out to my peers and friends and roommate as well.’ They’ve always offered assistance in the past. It was time for me to buck up. Otherwise, I realized my grades would be affected and it would be a mess on my emotional well-being, so I decided to reach out to them. I came to the realization that there’s only so much I can do on my own. I’m going to have to rely on others. Even then, I’m still independent because I’m initiating assistance.”

Ability to Develop Supportive Relationships

Segregation and isolation are frequently con-



cerns for youth with disabilities in high school and in postsecondary education as well. Peers may avoid, bully, or tease youth with disabilities. Other people may ask them questions they do not want to answer or do not know how to respond to. One youth described why she did not take advantage of testing in a private room to reduce anxiety: “I was proactive and went to disability services, but again I didn’t use the service. I had it in place but part of it was that socially having friends in class. At the beginning of the semester I was like, ‘Yeah, I’m going to use this,’ but then once you start to develop friends in class you feel like, ‘This is awkward, they’re going to notice I’m not there.’”

Developing relationships with other students as well as college faculty and staff can significantly contribute to student persistence in postsecondary education. Tinto’s well-known research on college student persistence indicates that “the more students are academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff and peers, the more likely they are to succeed in college” (Tinto, 2012, p. 7). This is best demonstrated by stu-

dents' self-reports of what makes a difference to them. For example, low-income and minority community college students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions credited individual staff or faculty members with providing advice, motivation, and information that was critical to their success (Bensimon, 2007). In addition, studies have found that participating in extracurricular activities and campus-based organizations has a positive effect on academic, psychological, and civic outcomes (Aud, Ramani, & Frohlich, 2011; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

Confidence in One's Abilities

Confidence in one's abilities, or academic confidence, can be defined as students' certainty in their ability to meet the academic and social demands of college (Sander & Sanders, 2006). The level of confidence that students have in their ability to be successful in college has an impact on their performance. Social psychologists and cultural sociologists have long suggested that students' self-perceptions, as shaped by social interaction and personal history, relate to behaviors associated with academic performance. In particular, students' self-efficacy and confidence may link to their aspirations, their level of motivation, and ultimately their persistence (Bandura, 1993; Cech, Rubineau, Silbey, & Seron, 2011).

Knowing what to expect in college prior to beginning class may help make students feel more confident; this can result in more successful transitions (Bickerstaff et al., 2012). As Bickerstaff and colleagues further explain, "Academic confidence can impact student motivation and academic behaviors that are associated with success...Our findings suggest that student confidence is shaped in part by past academic experiences and expectations of college upon entry, but continually shifts as a result of student

interactions with peers, faculty, and others" (p. 2). The researchers go on to describe how positive interactions with professors and experiencing success can build this confidence.

Perseverance

Perseverance in education refers to a student's staying in school and completing a course of study despite challenges, obstacles, and barriers encountered. Many factors influence a student's ability to persevere including cultural differences between home and school, academic and interpersonal validation, and meaningful social relationships (Ogbu, 1992; Portes, 1999; Rendon, 1994; Karp, 2011). Students who continually persist in school, without large gaps or periods off, are more likely to remain engaged and complete a course of study than those who are absent from school for long periods of time.

Students with disabilities, just like other students, may become discouraged or disengaged if they struggle academically. Some students with disabilities may perform better in their courses by using available accommodations. After several failures, one student shared how she was able to overcome her resistance to using necessary accommodations by viewing her education in a business sense: "I just told myself, 'You're paying for a service. You are paying for the service of learning, whether you are using it or not.' I would not pay for other services I don't use, so I took that step and got the help I needed because I was determined to finish [my degree]."

Knowledge About One's Rights and Responsibilities as an Individual with a Disability

For youth with disabilities, knowing about one's rights and responsibilities under laws such

as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is important to both their academic and employment success. In postsecondary education, students may not have an understanding of the types of services they can access and the kind of available supports they can receive, and also may not know about how the non-discrimination provisions of these laws may apply in workplace settings. One student shared, "I didn't realize services existed. I didn't even realize mental health issues were considered a disability."

Ability to Determine Whether, When, and How to Disclose One's Disability in Different Situations

College students with disabilities frequently choose not to disclose due to stigma and may shun using accommodations because they want to try to be as independent as possible. It is critical that they understand the value of accessing available accommodations and how using them can assist in achieving postsecondary success. Each term, students with disabilities should consider what they believe the challenges in the courses will be, whether or not to disclose and to which professors, and which accommodations may be useful. One student shared how he sends his disability letter to professors at the beginning of the semester via email and includes a request for an appointment. He described how this enabled him to explain and help his professors understand how his disability affects him in the classroom: "I was such a high achiever in high school. I wasn't doing well in college, and I realized I needed support."

Students also need to be prepared to respond assertively if faculty react negatively to requests for accommodations. Another student shared, "When I asked about accommodations, I was asked, 'What's your end game?' I was able to go to mediation, and they talked to another professor who was very validating, but it was hard to even ask and then with the reaction I got, I didn't want to ask again."

Ability to Find, Request, and Secure Supports and Accommodations and Understand How They May Apply in Both Academic and Work-Based Environments

If students with disabilities need supports and accommodations, it is important that they know where to go to receive assistance with obtaining them and what steps are involved. This includes understanding that it takes time to arrange accommodations so they need to plan ahead and request any accommodations at the beginning of a term. Moreover, the student needs to understand there may be a need to revisit that determination in the event that the accommodation does not appear to be working, or the severity or manifestation of the student's disability changes. They also need knowledge about different accommodation options and which ones work best for them. Research studies have found that receiving assistance with the accommodation process from caring individuals is the most critical factor in college students' success (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004; Balcazar et al., 2012). Finally, developing competencies related to accommodations and supports must include learning about how they may apply or be adapted to a work-based environment.



Part 2

EIGHT THINGS COLLEGES CAN DO TO HELP STUDENTS BUILD PERSONAL COMPETENCIES

Students enter college with varying levels of personal competencies described in Part 1. Given these variations, postsecondary education institutions should integrate personal competency-building opportunities (sometimes referred to as youth development and leadership opportunities) into all aspects of students' college experiences. By taking the following actions, postsecondary education institutions can boost student retention and completion rates and prepare students for transition to employment.

1 Engage Students in Self-Assessment and Reflection Activities

Self-assessments and other activities that encourage self-reflection are useful strategies for

helping students build self-awareness. Students can benefit from a wide range of self-assessment tools that college staff can recommend. Postsecondary institutions can integrate these tools and activities into a college's orientation, advising and counseling functions, and courses. It is important to ensure that any self-assessment tools recommended be user-friendly and universally accessible, which can be determined in part by asking students with disabilities, including users of assistive technology, to test selected tools and provide feedback.

While many colleges already provide tools for assessing career interests and skills, students may need assistance in assessing their strengths, values, learning styles, and personalities. In addition, students need to identify what's challenging for them and the types of supports, strategies,

or accommodations that work best for them to address these challenges. Some students with disabilities may have limited self-knowledge regarding what their disability is and what accommodations or supports work best for them. The college's disability services office can play a critical role in helping students learn about their disabilities and what accommodations and other strategies fit their needs.

Conversations are also an important part of supporting students through the self-reflection process. While some reflection could be facilitated as part of a peer group or class activities, some students may be more comfortable talking with staff one-on-one. This is especially true when it comes to discussing confidential, personal issues. Ask students what they already knew about themselves prior to completing any assessments, whether they agree with the assessment results, and what, if any, new insights were gained. Discuss possible implications to their college, career, and life plans, and ask what would help them be successful.

RESOURCES

- [O*NET](#) (See Ability Profiler, Interest Profiler, and Work Importance Locator tools), U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
- "[Know Yourself](#)" section of *Self-Advocacy Handbook for Students with Disabilities*, Colorado State University

2 Engage Students in Individualized Planning

Many students could benefit from receiving assistance in learning how to develop and manage individualized plans for achieving their goals. While in high school, many students

with disabilities relied on teams of school staff and family members to lead this planning process. At the same time, some schools are becoming part of the growing national trend for students with and without disabilities to have individualized learning plans at the secondary level (see [Individualized Learning Plans](#) for more information). Although some students may have had exposure to individualized planning in high schools, for others college may be the first time that they assume primary responsibility for creating plans for their education, career, and life goals.

Supporting students in creating a plan is a great way to help them develop planning skills. Some postsecondary institutions have adopted online student planning tools similar to the ones that are increasingly being used in secondary schools. Access to a planning tool, however, is just one part of what students need to develop a well-informed plan. Prior to beginning the individualized planning process, students should engage in self-exploration and career exploration to ensure that they know themselves and are aware of a range of career and education options so that they can make informed decisions. Postsecondary institutions can start this comprehensive career development process during orientation and continue it once students are enrolled through student success courses, learning communities, student advising, and career services activities. Colleges that provide online student planning tools should verify their accessibility by engaging students with disabilities in pilot testing, providing their feedback to software vendors, and requesting that any barriers identified be addressed.

Students will need to practice self-advocacy and self-management skills in carrying out their self-defined plans. This includes identifying what actions they will need to take on their own and what assistance or support they will need

to enlist from others. To facilitate development of self-advocacy skills, students should be encouraged to express concerns and preferences about their options and to explain the reasoning behind their conclusions.

College staff can help students to develop these skills through practice conversations and role-playing scenarios. Regular check-ins with students on how they are following through on their individualized plans will help them stay on track, while peer groups and adult and peer mentors can provide ongoing support and feedback as they carry out their plans.

RESOURCES

- [Life Map](#), Valencia College (Example of a comprehensive career development process that supports student goal-setting and planning)
- [Individualized Career Development Plan](#), Institute for Educational Leadership
- [Designing Statewide Career Development Strategies & Programs](#), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

3 Offer Student Success Courses with Opportunities to Practice Competencies

Many postsecondary institutions offer training in various “success skills” through courses or workshops. Some schools require all first-time students to complete a student success course that covers a combination of academic preparation and personal skills relevant to college success. Personal skills covered in these courses typically include time management, communication, goal-setting and planning, and how to find and

use services offered by the school. Completing a student success course links to positive student outcomes in the short-term (Cho & Karp, 2012). In addition, some research suggests that designing these courses in a way that provides opportunities for students to practice the skills may have a more lasting effect on student outcomes (Karp, Raufman, Efthimiou, & Ritze, 2015).

Personal skills may also be taught through workshops that employ active learning methods so that students immediately apply and practice new skills. Direct training combined with hands-on practice and feedback is just as valuable for learning personal competencies as academic ones. To support students in developing personal success skills, take an inventory of workshops or courses that students have the opportunity to participate in across the school and assess whether or not they include opportunities to practice skills. If some of the personal competencies described above are not covered, consider adding course content or workshops to fill these gaps. Workshops offered to students with disabilities should include opportunities to learn about disability rights and responsibilities, making decisions about disability disclosure, and accessing disability-related supports and accommodations. Encourage instructors who teach courses and workshops to use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to effectively engage diverse learners, including students with disabilities. UDL is a set of principles for curriculum development that gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn new content (CAST, 2014).

RESOURCES

- [Student Success Courses](#), Community College Research Center
- [Disability disclosure resources](#), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

- [Disability Knowledge and Identity Self-Assessment](#) and [Answer Key](#), National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth
- [Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education](#), CAST

4 Encourage Students to Get Involved & Connected

Involvement in activities beyond academics helps students to develop a sense of belonging to a community and, as discussed previously, is associated with positive postsecondary outcomes. Also, such activities also provide opportunities for building personal competencies. Campuses usually offer a wide range of activities for college students, including on-campus student organizations and clubs, athletics, campus-wide events, volunteering and service learning projects, and networking activities.

While some students jump at these opportunities, others may feel hesitant to give them a try. Encourage all students to learn about the variety of options and to pick at least one activity to get involved with outside of classes. If they have reservations, talk through what is holding them back. Discuss the potential benefits of extracurricular activities that relate to students' goals and how these activities could strengthen personal skills that will help them in college, careers, and life. Getting involved in one or more organizations or activities can be an action step in their individualized plan that will help them progress toward their career goals. Make sure students also recognize the option of starting a student organization on their own. Some students may prefer to start a club specific to their interests and practice leadership skills in the process.

Volunteering and service learning present many opportunities for developing and practicing

personal competencies. Volunteer experiences typically require communicating effectively with others, and some volunteer experiences involve analyzing problems and planning how to resolve them. Students can develop their leadership skills by taking a leading role in service projects or volunteering to serve on a community board. These experiences help students build their self-awareness and confidence as they explore personal interests, realize their strengths, and gain a sense of pride that often comes from helping others. Volunteering and service learning also build connections to success in employment following college.

RESOURCES

- [Fostering Inclusive Volunteering and Service Learning](#), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- [Youth in Action! Getting Involved in Volunteering](#), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

5 Offer Mentoring and Peer-to-Peer Support

Having social support networks and access to mentors is tied to students with disabilities accomplishing their postsecondary education goals. Developing supportive relationships, however, is easier said than done for some students especially when they are starting out at a new school. Students with disabilities may be more prone than other students to feel isolated as they represent a minority group on campus.

Structured mentoring and peer support strategies can help all students make connections. Encourage students with disabilities to participate in any mentoring or peer support opportunities that are offered to all students, including learning communities. Postsecondary institutions

can form learning communities to help students develop meaningful relationships with other students and faculty (Karp, 2011). Students in these learning communities participate in a small cohort of students who take the same set of thematically linked courses and receive extra academic and counseling support during a term (Sommo, Mayer, Rudd, Cullinan, & Fresques, 2012). The strategy is intended to help students persist in college courses by building stronger relationships with other students in their cohort and their instructors.

When designing mentoring programs, recruit potential mentors by asking college faculty and staff, local community members, students and alumni, and area employers. Aim to engage a mix of mentors with and without disabilities so that students with disabilities have the option of pairing up with either. Having mentors who are professionals working in the career fields matching their interests enables students to gain practical, “real world” insights to inform their career decisions and planning.

Colleges should also consider ways to connect students with disabilities to mentors and peers who have disabilities. Having a mentor with a disability or participating in a peer support group with other students with disabilities provides a chance for students to share challenges and strategies around disability self-advocacy, such as decisions about disclosure, ways to advocate for accommodations, and the types of support that work for them. A student’s confidence in his or her abilities may grow from seeing how others are exercising self-determination and realizing that she or he is not the only one with a disability.

Keep in mind that students with disabilities also benefit from opportunities to mentor other students and take the lead in developing peer support groups. Many students welcome

the opportunity to share their experience with others and provide encouragement. Consider this advice that an older student shared with a younger student who felt nervous about accessing services: “Think of [education] as a service. You are paying for a service. You’re here to learn and are paying for a service. To be taught, to learn, to get the resource to succeed. Try not to compare yourself to other people.” Another student shared this with students who felt frustrated about their lack of access and independence: “Again, it goes back to advocacy. Being involved means asserting for yourself. It’s not like they do it on purpose. They just have never had anyone with [a disability in class] before. It’s starting the dialogue and then just having a friendly discussion about your needs. They’re more than willing to do it. It’s just a matter of asking them.”

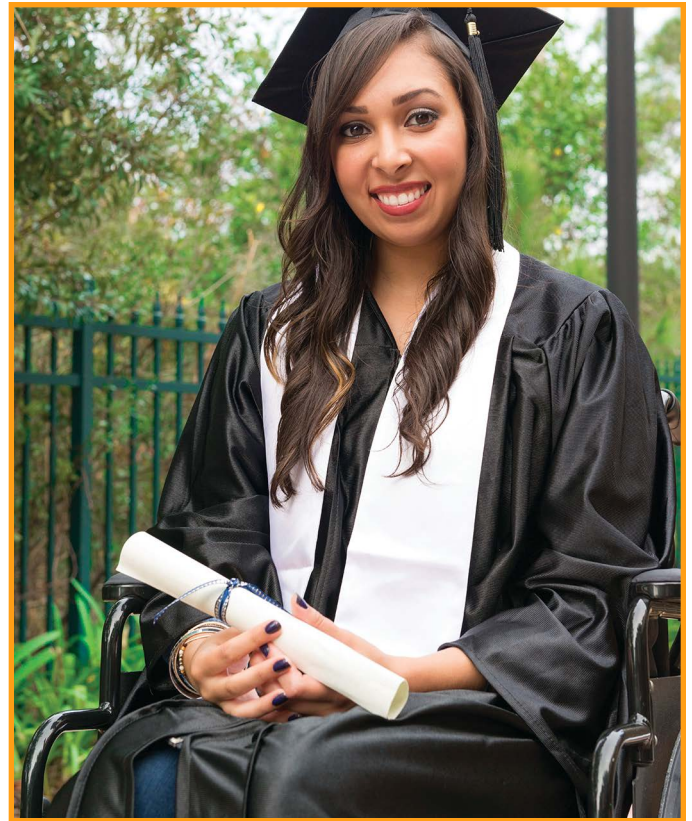
RESOURCES

- [*Youth Development and Leadership: Opportunities to Develop Connecting Competencies*](#) (See examples of mentoring and peer-to-peer support), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- [*Paving the Way to Work: A Guide to Career-Focused Mentoring*](#), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- [*Experiences of College Students with Disabilities and the Importance of a Business Mentoring Program*](#), Virginia Commonwealth University
- [*Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*](#), The National Mentoring Partnership

6 Promote and Recognize Student Leadership

Formal and informal leadership experiences help students develop various personal competencies and gain self-confidence (Karp, 2011). While research on college student leadership development confirms that students develop leadership skills and confidence through formal leadership programs and positions, several other activities also help students increase these competencies. A study by the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP) found an association between higher leadership outcomes and all of the following experiences: participating in campus organizations and clubs, engaging in community service, being mentored by peers and adults (employer mentors were especially influential), engaging in discussions on socio-cultural issues, serving in leadership positions, and participating in formal leadership programs (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Based on these findings, NCLP recommends a range of strategies for fostering leadership development at colleges, including the following:

- Engage students in discussions about socio-cultural issues to increase their awareness of different views and perspectives, explore their own beliefs and assumptions, and hone their communication skills. These discussions can happen any time, not just as part of a formal leadership course or training.
- Create avenues for students to explore leadership in relation to their social/group identity by incorporating leadership discussions or activities into programs for specific student groups (e.g., minority student clubs, women's mentoring programs).
- Talk about "leadership as a process among members" and recognize the



leadership qualities and behaviors exhibited by the members of groups, not just those who are in formal leadership roles.

- Increase the number of leadership positions within student organizations to provide more students with formal leadership experiences (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

NCLP also found a strong relationship between what students did in high school and their leadership and personal development throughout college (Dugan & Komives, 2007). By partnering with secondary schools, colleges can foster students' development of personal competencies prior to college entry, thereby increasing their college readiness.

Some students may not recognize their own leadership potential and may need encouragement to pursue opportunities to serve as lead-

ers. College faculty and staff can nurture students' self-perceptions of their leadership skills by pointing out their strengths and encouraging them to volunteer for leadership roles. Leadership opportunities can typically be found in any of the organizations, clubs, or activities that involve students on or off campus. Most organizations and clubs have officer positions or committee chairs.

As students take on leadership roles, help them refine their leadership skills by offering training workshops. Look for ways to incorporate lessons on leadership into all courses and organize discussions about qualities of effective leaders and demonstrations of different leadership scenarios. Remind students that leadership today is less about who is in charge and more about working well with others to accomplish a shared goal.

RESOURCES

- [*Instructor's Guide for Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference*](#), National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs
- [*The Competency Guide for College Student Leaders*](#), National Association for Campus Activities
- [*Student Leadership Training Booklet*](#), California State University, Northridge

7 Connect Students to Work Experiences

Work experiences offer valuable opportunities for students to develop personal competencies, while also exploring career interests and gaining experience and contacts they need for finding employment after college. Work experiences are both paid and unpaid opportunities to work and practice career readiness

skills. They can take various forms, including internships, summer jobs, youth-run enterprises, service projects and volunteer work, and part-time jobs. Work-based learning opportunities are work experiences in a supervised program sponsored by an education or training organization that links knowledge gained at the worksite with a planned program of study. Other types of work-based learning include job shadowing, employer-led workplace tours, job rotations, and career-focused mentoring. Whether short or longer term, work-based experiences can assist students in building a range of competencies that they need for success in college, careers, and life.

Some students may already be employed during college, while others may be interested but unsure of how to find opportunities. Make sure that students are aware of and know how to use any assistance the college currently offers, such as job search help at the career services office and internship or co-op programs.

Some students, including those with disabilities, may have concerns about balancing work experiences with their academic schedule or concerns regarding the comparative value of work experiences. As such, students may require help and encouragement finding and pursuing work-based learning opportunities related to their career goals as a part of their individualized plans. If finding a work experience matching their interests becomes challenging, encourage students to start with a networking activity. Ask their instructors, advisors, student services staff, fellow students, family, friends, and neighbors whether they know anyone who works in the career field that they want to pursue. Keep in mind that volunteering is a valuable form of work experience when paid opportunities are limited.

Build relationships between the college and area employers to create avenues to work-based

learning opportunities for students. Inviting employers to speak in classes, at workshops, or for student events can be a first step to gaining their commitment to provide job shadowing, a workplace tour, mentors, or internships. Help students with disabilities prepare for work experiences by discussing potential benefits of disclosing their disability in an employment setting and what, if any, accommodations or supports may be needed to help them perform their responsibilities well.

RESOURCES

- [*Engaging Youth in Work Experiences: An Innovative Strategies Practice Brief*](#), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- [*Work-based Learning Jumpstart*](#), National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- [*Guide to Internships for Students with Disabilities*](#), National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth

8 Engage Students in Community Resource Mapping

Many college students may be unfamiliar with how to find services or unsure about where and when they can ask for assistance. Community resource mapping is a useful activity for developing students' skills in information gathering and asking for help. Community resource mapping is an environmental scan used to identify what is available in a particular community or geographic area for a particular purpose or set of needs. Community-based youth programs sometimes engage young people as a group in community resource mapping to identify avail-

able resources and existing gaps relevant to specific youth interests or goals. This might involve finding safe places to go for recreation or employment opportunities for teens.

Steps for community resource mapping include

- defining the community (e.g. geographic area) to map,
- defining the purpose (what the results of the resource mapping will be used for),
- defining what information needs to be collected,
- creating a plan for how the mapping will be conducted (e.g., who, when, methods),
- carrying out the mapping activity, and
- reviewing and sharing the information gathered as appropriate.

Students can conduct this mapping individually to locate services or opportunities related to their individualized plans. It also works well as a group activity or a service learning project that produces a resource guide to share with others. Whether done individually or as part of a group, students will practice many personal competencies through resource mapping, including goal-setting and planning, decision-making, and communication skills.

RESOURCES

- [*Community YouthMapping*](#), FHI360
- [*Community Resource Mapping: Knowing Your Youth Services Landscape*](#) (See Mapping Model Three: Youth as Mappers, pp. 26-31.), School and Main Institute
- [*Community Mapping for Youth*](#), Generation On

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PERSONAL COMPETENCIES FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER SUCCESS

WHAT COLLEGES CAN DO

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. NCWD/Youth is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies. To obtain this publication in an alternate format please contact the Collaborative at 877-871-0744 toll free or email contact@ncwd-youth.info. All NCWD/Youth publications will be posted on the NCWD/Youth website at www.ncwd-youth.info. Please visit our site to sign up to be notified of future publications. This document was developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, funded by a grant/contract/cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (Numbers OD-16519-07-75-4-11 and OD-23804-12-75-4-11). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply the endorsement by the U.S. Department of Labor. Individuals may reproduce any part of this document. Please credit the source and support of federal funds.

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