

RESEARCH FINDINGS BRIEF

APRIL 2000 • STUDY AREA 4a, VOLUME 8

Overview of RRTC's Purpose

The purpose of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) is to conduct a strategic program of research, training, technical assistance, and information dissemination focused upon educational supports that increase access and improve outcomes for persons with disabilities in postsecondary education programs and subsequently, in the labor force. Addressing this priority, the primary goals of the RRTC are as follows: 1) To identify the nature and range of educational supports 2) To identify new technologies that improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities; 3) To identify effective supports and models of support delivery that contribute to improved outcomes for students with disabilities; 4) To investigate methods by which the supports in postsecondary programs can be extended to the employment environment, including students with severe disabilities; and 5) To provide training, technical assistance and information to educational support personnel, public and private rehabilitation personnel, career placement specialist, and students with disabilities concerning the effectiveness of specific educational supports and models of delivery in improving postsecondary educational and career outcomes of the people with disabilities.

Topical Review – Comprehensive Career Planning: The VCU Career Connections Program

AUDIENCE Postsecondary career counselors, disability service providers, rehabilitation counselors, higher education administration, special education teachers, and transition coordinators.

ISSUE

Individuals with disabilities who complete postsecondary education programs must be prepared to plan and direct their long-term careers. Despite recent legislation, students with disabilities exiting higher education continue to face obstacles such as negative employer attitudes, architectural barriers, and lack of necessary services and supports when attempting to access employment and pursue their careers.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What are some barriers that students with disabilities face when pursuing employment in their chosen professions?
- What components enhance the employment success of postsecondary students with disabilities?

METHOD

This article raises awareness about the career attainment rates and transition needs of students with disabilities who are exiting college and seeking employment. A comprehensive career-planning

program designed to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities as they graduate from higher education is described, highlighting the key components of the program with the use of case examples.

KEY FINDINGS

Barriers that students face:

- Lack of work-experience opportunities, networking skills, and job seeking skills.
- Lack of needed information about available careers, knowledge on how to identify what modifications are necessary to perform a job, knowledge on how to request needed modifications from an employer.

Components that enhance the employment success of students with disabilities:

- Develop an individualized career plan to focus on the employment preparation needs of students and the services and supports to help students attain their goals.
- Identify effective learner accommodations.
- Provide a variety of work experience opportunities and access to employers.
- Provide direct assistance in the job placement process.
- Provide post-employment follow-along services.

IMPLICATIONS

- There is a need for comprehensive career planning for students with disabilities to coordinate services and supports necessary for student success
- There is a need for the extensive involvement of employers in the career planning process for students with disabilities by providing a variety of work experience opportunities.
- There is a need for continuous student directed career planning throughout each student's academic experience.

REFERENCE

Getzel, E.E., Briel, L. W., & Kregel, J. (2000). Comprehensive career planning: The VCU Career Connections Program. *Work*, 14, 41-49.

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The RRTC on Postsecondary Educational Supports is supported by grant #H133B980043 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) within the U.S. Department of Education. Opinions and perceptions as shared in this document are those of the researchers involved and no endorsement is implied by the funding agent.

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