Implications Brief #12
(National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPES))
University of Hawai`i at Manoa

**Issue Area:** Transition from High School to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students with Disabilities; Study 12

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**Issue**
People with disabilities experience higher unemployment rates and lower earnings than their non-disabled peers. They are less prepared to meet the challenges of adulthood, more likely to continue to live with their parents after high school, and engage in fewer social activities.

As the end of high school approaches, so does the termination of a structured environment and pre-college support systems. Many young people with disabilities have few friends and limited support from peers and mentors. The impact of social isolation is far-reaching, affecting not only friendships, but also academic and career success. Although higher education can enhance their employability and vocational success, fewer young adults with disabilities participate in post-
secondary education and, of those who begin such programs, students with disabilities are more likely than non-disabled students to drop out of school prior to completion.

Students with disabilities can benefit from interactions with peers and adults with disabilities who are pursuing and participating in academic and career activities that they might otherwise have thought impossible for themselves. However, they are often isolated by great distances, transportation and scheduling challenges, communication limitations, and other obstacles that make it difficult for them to meet and interact in person. Computer-mediated communication (CMC), where people use computers and networking technologies to communicate with one another, can connect people separated by time and space who might not otherwise meet. Adaptive technology makes it possible for anyone to participate in computer-mediated communication regardless of disability. The combination of adaptive technology and Internet communication can help overcome the geographic, temporal, and disability-related barriers to establishing peer and mentor support groups and thereby reduce social isolation and allow independent access to information resources. A combination of in-person activities and CMC support has the potential to improve the postsecondary and career outcomes for young people with disabilities. Research is needed to identify the long-term impact of CMC and other supports.

Research Questions/Method
The questions to be addressed in this study are:
1. What is the impact of various aspects of a model program that supports CMC with peers and mentors, on-campus summer study programs and other supports on the transition of high school students with disabilities to higher education and employment?
2. How can other programs apply the successful practices developed in this model program in order to improve academic and career outcomes for students with disabilities?

An exploratory study, building on earlier work (Burgstahler, 1997; Burgstahler, Baker, & Cronheim, 1997), is being undertaken to examine the role that CMC, summer study programs, and other support activities can play in easing the social isolation and advancing the academic and career goals of students with disabilities.

Participants. DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) is the winner of many awards, including the President's Award for "embodying excellence in mentoring underrepresented students and encouraging their significant achievement in science, mathematics, and engineering," the Golden Apple Award in Education, and the National Information Infrastructure Award. It is directed at the University of Washington. Operating since 1992 by the University of Washington, it is primarily funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the U.S. Department of Education, and the State of Washington. DO-IT programs work
to increase the participation of students with disabilities in challenging academic
careers, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
DO-IT Scholars, college-bound high school students with disabilities, meet face-to-
face during live-in summer study programs at the University of Washington in
Seattle. Year-round they use the Internet to communicate with each other and with
adult mentors and to access information resources. A wide range of disabilities is
represented in the group, including mobility impairments, hearing impairments,
visual impairments, health impairments, and specific learning disabilities.

**Data.** In the first phase of the study, follow-up data will be collected from previous
DO-IT Scholars through an web based questionnaire to investigate long-term
impact of CMC, summer studies, and other DO-IT activities on post-secondary
education and employment outcomes.

**Findings**
The survey has not yet been conducted.

**Implications**
Implications for service providers and researchers include: (a) Identification of
effective components of Internet support services that are most likely to result in high
levels of consumer access and satisfaction in postsecondary education and
employment; (b) an exemplary transition model to help facilitate their transition
support program planning and implementation overall; (c) preparation of secondary
school students to be computer literate so they are able to use the computer as a
tool to network, search information, and so on; and (d) provision of home
computers and Assistive technology as needed for an easy access to the Internet.

**References**
Burgstahler, S. E. (1997). Peer support: What role can the Internet play? *Journal of
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