Thinking of Expanding Opportunities for Students with Disabilities?

Why not Think College?

Nationally, over 220 colleges and universities offer a college experience to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Serving and supporting this population benefits not only the student with I/DD but has far-reaching and often surprising benefits across campus and in the classroom. This document is intended to be used as a tool to help interested stakeholders get started with an initiative in their community.

I. First steps...Questions to consider

A. Whom do you want to serve?
   1. Students still in transition age 17-21?
   2. Adult learners over 21?
   3. Both groups?
   4. Students with a diploma, without a diploma, or both?
   5. Students with behavioral difficulties?

B. What do you want this college option to provide to students?
   1. What is the primary goal?
   2. Why is this important?
   3. What are the outcomes you want for students who participate in your initiative?

II. Take an inventory of what is already available on the college campus

A. What supports and services does the college already have in place?
   1. What supports/services are already available for students with disabilities/ for all students? E.G. tutoring, career counselling, etc.
   2. Of the above services/supports, which ones could be expanded upon to provide support for students with ID? E.G. curriculum modifications if a student audits a class?

B. Look at the academic offerings, certificates, campus activities, facilities, residential life, and other aspects of campus to identify the possible opportunities for recreation, employment, education, etc.

C. Consider looking at the professional interests of the instructors/professors to see if any align with the goals of the initiative. Are there specific departments that may be interested?

III. College infrastructure

A. What could admissions look like for a student with ID, who may not matriculate through the usual channels?

B. What courses would be available to students?

C. What would support look like? Who would provide the support needed?
   a. Consider the use of peer mentors for academic and social support. A peer mentor component is a great way for the college to benefit from an initiative.
IV. Who are your allies?

A. Whom do you need to buy-in to the idea?
B. How can you access the decision-makers to discuss the idea of a college initiative? Think about who has a relationship with this person. Use social connections and networking to “gain access” to this person.
C. Who needs to be included in discussions about funding and other aspects of the initiative?
D. Be ready to share success stories – there are many on the Think College website. 
   www.thinkcollege.net

V. How do you envision your model?

A. Use the Think College resources and network to explore the different models already in place around the country. www.thinkcollege.net
B. What model fits best in your community and with the students you plan to serve?
C. Think College created a conceptual framework to guide the development of inclusive college options. Consider using these research-based and proved standards, quality indicators, and benchmarks as you envision and develop your model.
   http://www.thinkcollege.net/topics/think-college-standards
   a. Essential components include:
      i. Academic access
      ii. Career development (including internships based on student interest and skill)
      iii. Campus membership
      iv. Self-determination
   b. Other key components that may affect the success and longevity of the program:
      i. Aligning with College Systems and Practices
      ii. Coordinating and collaborating with key people/departments at the college
      iii. Sustainability
      iv. Ongoing evaluation of the program and outcomes for students
D. In order to be able to offer federal financial aid to your non-degree seeking students, make sure to learn about becoming a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP).
   http://www.thinkcollege.net/topics/becoming-a-comprehensive-transition-program

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