



ADA Live!

EPISODE 29: SUPPORTED AND INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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Presenters: Barry Whaley, University of Kentucky - Human Development Institute

Host: Sally Weiss, Southeast ADA Center

VOICE OVER ANNOUNCER: Welcome to WADA ADA Live Talk Radio, brought to you by the Southeast ADA Center, your leader for information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act. And here's your host.

SALLY WEISS: Good afternoon and welcome to WADA, ADA Live! On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network welcome to the 29th episode of ADA Live!. The topic of today's show is Supported and Inclusive Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. This episode is a continuation of last month's episode on Post-Secondary Education for Students with Disabilities.

ADA Live! listening audience, you can submit your questions about Supported and Inclusive Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities at any time on ADALive.org.

My name is Sally Weiss, and I am the Director of Knowledge Translation at the Southeast ADA Center. Our speaker today is Barry Whaley from the Human Development Institute at the University of Kentucky where he is the research project director working of the Supported Higher Education Project. Barry is also the Employer Outreach Specialist for the Southeast ADA Center.

Barry, we are delighted to have you with us today.

BARRY WHALEY: Hi, Sally. Thank you so much for having me.

SALLY WEISS: Let's begin our conversation talking about inclusion in higher education. Until recently, there have not been many opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to have access to post-secondary education. Recently however, we have seen a movement of inclusion in higher education with a shared belief that all students should have access to post-secondary education opportunities that lead to employment and independent living. What group of students are we talking about?

BARRY WHALEY: Sally, the individuals that we're talking about, the students here, are those students who would be eligible for free and appropriate public education under IDEA, so specifically, we're talking about students between the ages of 18 and 22 who continue on in a high school program after all their peers have graduated and moved on to other things.

SALLY WEISS: How do you define inclusion for these students?

BARRY WHALEY: Well, that's a very good question, because we felt it was important to develop a statement on inclusion. So, we feel that inclusion is a human right, and it involves belonging to a diverse community and having access to equal opportunities, living a self-determined life, being actively engaged with and alongside others, and most importantly, being valued for what someone brings to the interaction.

So, when I talk about equal opportunities, you know, when students turn 18, typically, the expectation is those students will go on to a vocational school or they'll go on to college or they'll enter the workforce. However, students with intellectual disabilities remain behind in high school.

So, the first point of our inclusion statement is equal opportunities. People want to be into what everybody else is into, they want the same opportunity for a college experience, for instance, as their peers that they went to high school with.

We also talk about a self-determined life. You know, a lot of times, decisions are made for people, and this is, we feel that it's important for students to have the opportunity to make their own decisions, to be more independent. One of our students commented, I want to do what I want to do, I want to eat what I want to cook, and I want to go where I want to go, and isn't that true for all of us?

Our students also want to be engaged, they want to be alongside others, they want to have the opportunity to contribute, and most importantly, as I mentioned before, our students want to be valued. You know, one of the common themes that I hear from our students is, you know, when I was in high school, I was bullied, I was taunted, I got into trouble, but when I got to college, it was easier, I was accepted for who I was, I

was accepted for my opinions, and that's very important for all of us, and specifically for our students.

SALLY WEISS: Barry, my next question for you is what has been the spark for inclusive higher education? IDEA, and before that, PL-94142 – The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, focused on helping students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools. You're talking about the next step for these kids.

BARRY WHALEY: I am. You know what we saw in the early 2000's. Sally, is we see a variety of projects emerging on college campuses. Some were integrated, however, many were very segregated in nature. So we thought we probably needed to investigate, we need to research what works for students. So this led to, in 2008, the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). That's public law 110315.

One of the highlights of the higher education opportunity act was the establishment of Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs) for students with intellectual disabilities. These programs are set aside, they are federally approved programs that enable students who perhaps graduated with an alternate diploma or graduated with no diploma at all to enroll in a college program.

So, there are several features that HEOA requires in order to be involved in these comprehensive transition programs, or CTPs. The first, the student has to meet the definition of intellectual disability. Essentially what we're saying there is that if you were eligible for services in the secondary school under IDEA, then you would be presumed eligible for post-secondary education.

A highlight of these comprehensive transition programs, again, I mentioned they're federally approved, and what that means is that our students have access to federal financial aid; pell grant, work study grant, for instance, are available for students who enroll in the CTP programs.

Now, I want to be careful here, because that does not include student loans, we're only talking about federal financial aid, you know, grants that, you know, and our students would complete a financial aid form every year, as any other student would, and would be eligible for that. So, it offers the opportunity for students to have federal financial aid, to enroll, and at the end of these comprehensive transition programs, students will graduate with a meaningful credential from the college or university.

These comprehensive transition programs, if I can go on, as I mentioned, they're approved by the Department of Education, and they're designed to support students who want to continue their academic career in independent living, but also to have preparation for gainful employment.

So, what we're saying here is that there's a vocational tie-in at the end of this, that students who consider themselves life-long learners can continue in a college program and can study something that is of interest to them, and at the end of that, they'll graduate with a meaningful credential, and they're more ready to go to work.

SALLY WEISS: Barry, that's fascinating. ADA Live listening audience, you can submit your questions about post-secondary programs for students with disabilities or any other ADA Live programs at any time on ADAlive.org, and now a word from our sponsors.

VOICE OVER ANNOUNCER: The Supported Higher Education Project known as SHEP, is a project of the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute. SHEP is based on the understanding that education for all students is a lifelong endeavor. SHEP is currently serving students at the various Kentucky Institutions of Higher Education including: Northern Kentucky University, Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Eastern Kentucky University, Western Kentucky University, and Murray State. The goal is to offer services to all students throughout the state. Learn more about SHEP at www.shepky.org

SALLY WEISS: Welcome back to the second part of our program. We are talking with Barry Whaley, employment outreach specialists for the Southeast ADA Center and a research project director at the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute. Our topic today is supported and inclusive higher education for students with intellectual disabilities. Barry, please tell us more about comprehensive transition programs, or CTPs. Do they all look the same, or do different institutions create their own?

BARRY WHALEY: They don't. They all have different structures to them, Sally, and also, consequently, there are different levels of integration. One of the things that we have tried to do with our Kentucky programs, because the HEOA really only required integration at 50 percent of a student's day, we wanted to go beyond that. so we ensure, for each student that enrolls in the CTP program in Kentucky, that they will have the opportunity for 100 percent integration in regular college classrooms. They attend class with other students without disabilities or other disabilities, they have the opportunity to participate. This ties back into our inclusion statement. We want this to be a meaningful college experience for people. but we certainly realize that there are challenges to our students being successful in the classroom.

So, for instance, as was mentioned on last week's program, if you are a student with a disability, you have the opportunity to receive support from the disability service office at the institution, at the college or university. so what will happen is, if you go to your disability service office, you have accommodations, and those accommodations might

include extra time on tests, it may include a quiet testing environment, you know, typical accommodations that students receive. One of the hallmarks of these comprehensive transition programs is that it allows us to go beyond accommodation and look at modification for students with intellectual disability. So, we can look at the course syllabus, for instance. We might alternate the course or reorganize the course in a way that it fits the learning style of a particular student in order for them to better understand the course content.

We can also modify testing format. For instance, on multiple choice tests, we may be able to eliminate two of the answers to narrow the choices for students. We may be able to change testing so that it's fill-in-the-blank instead of essay, for instance.

However, it's important that this is real college for these students, and in order to continue receiving federal financial aid, students need to be able to show satisfactory academic performance. Every college or university has a, what's called an SAP policy. So, what we can do with students with intellectual disabilities who are enrolled in comprehensive transition programs, we can look at developing alternate scoring rubrics using goal attainment scaling, and the scoring rubrics allow us to assess the satisfactory academic performance of a student in a way that's meaningful and in a way that reflects their particular learning style so their satisfactory academic performance is based on their performance, not a reflection of their performance as compared to everyone else in the class.

I want to mention that there's another aspect to these comprehensive transition programs and inclusive education, in general, and that's the use of mentoring. We have mentoring supports that what we do is we will find peer mentors. Sometimes, they are graduate students, sometimes, they are just other students in the classroom, sometimes, they are students that we've actively gone out and recruited, and these mentors allow us to support students in a typical way and in a natural way.

SALLY WEISS: Barry, I'm curious about peer mentors. Can you tell us a bit more about how you find them and what they do?

BARRY WHALEY: Yes, Sally, I sure can. Peer mentors really are the backbone of supported and inclusive higher education. Peer mentors typically are graduate students or they are, advanced level students. Sometimes, however, we've also used students who have previously been in the CTP program, so it's not limited to one group. But, what's important is that peer mentors have the opportunity to earn college credit, they earn class credit for mentoring students, and this mentoring takes on a variety of roles.

Sometimes, we have peer mentors who go to class with our students and will take notes and will assist in the classroom environment. Sometimes, mentors are academic mentors, they provide academic tutoring, and they work with students outside of the classroom in order to better understand the material. We also have mentors who are specifically social mentors, and these mentors help engage students in the typical college lifestyle.

So, we have, for instance, a young lady at Murray State University, her name is Alexis, and one of the things that happened with Alexis is she developed a relationship with a lady who kind of became a social mentor for her, and eventually, Alexis was asked to become a member of the sorority that this lady, the mentor, had belonged to. So Alexis became a part of that sorority and pledged like any other student would.

Most importantly, we like to see relationships that develop naturally. When you meet someone, when a student meets someone in the classroom, they find a commonality, they find an interest and they strike up a relationship, and that's more important than any sort of appointed mentor could do.

SALLY WEISS: Thanks, Barry, for all this information. We will pause now for a word from our sponsors and we'll be right back.

VOICE OVER ANNOUNCER: The Southeast ADA Center is your leader in providing information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and disability access tailored to the needs of business, government and individuals at local, state and regional levels. The Southeast ADA Center, located in Atlanta, Georgia, is a member of the ADA National Network and serves eight states in the Southeast region. For answers to your ADA questions, contact the ADA National Network at 1-800-949-4232.

SALLY WEISS: Welcome back to our broadcast on Supported and Inclusive Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. Barry, I know you have a particular interest in students with intellectual and developmental disabilities that are accessing higher education. Would you tell us about some of the students you've met at the CTP at Kentucky?

BARRY WHALEY: We have had some wonderful experiences, Sally. We have had just some tremendous students who have been a part of supported higher education in Kentucky. I've been very fortunate. I tell people often, I have the best job in the state right now.

Some of the students that we have had have gone on to pursue bachelor's degrees or associate's degrees at the conclusion of their comprehensive transition program.

We've had other students who have gone to work, we've had students who have become, graphic design artists. We've had students with an interest in early childhood education who have gone on to work in classroom environments or in preschool environments.

We have one student who I'm particularly proud of, and this is kind of a cautionary tale. This was a young lady who, if you look at test scores alone, you often don't get a clear idea of who someone is. So here's a lady that we served who has, you know, a full scale IQ of maybe 65, who graduated from high school with a regular diploma. She took the ACT, and the first time, she scored a 10, second time, she scored an 11, and the third time, she scored a 12, so certainly, her scores were low, to the point where she was not going to enroll in a traditional four-year college program. However, she did. She enrolled, we worked with her to enroll at a private university. After the first couple of semesters, it became obvious that this lady was doing extraordinarily well. She had a grade point average of 3.2. It was important for her to be graded with a traditional grading format, just like any other student. So she has a 3.2 grade point average, and she went back to the college, and she said, look, I think I can do this, I want to petition the college to be admitted as a regular degree-seeking student. The college said, yeah, we'll go along with that, this makes sense. So, today, that lady is working toward her bachelor's degree, and we couldn't be more proud of her.

We have had students who, one student who is currently enrolled at Murray State University, who one of her life-long ambitions was she wanted to direct the Murray State Band, it was very important to her. Beginning this fall, she is the lady that directs the band whenever they play the fight song whenever there was a touchdown scored during the football game. You know, not only was that a tremendous opportunity for her, but she was good at it, she was amazing at directing this band.

So, these are some of the outcomes that we see, that students are accepted, that they contribute, that they are a part of the college environment.

SALLY WEISS: I have another question for you. How can students, school counselors, and parents find out about the CTPs in their area? We've been talking about Kentucky. Are there CTPs available elsewhere?

Barry Whaley: There are CTPs. As we mentioned at the onset, there are a number of inclusive higher education programs. Some are Comprehensive Transition Programs, some are not. The best resource that I think I can point people to would be at the University of Massachusetts at Boston is the National Coordinating Center for Inclusive Higher Education, and that is Think College. Their website address is www.thinkcollege.net, and there is a wealth of material on that site, all dealing with inclusive higher education and how to be involved and what's available in each state.

SALLY WEISS: Barry, can you talk a bit more about why students with intellectual disabilities should go to college?

BARRY WHALEY: You know, as we mentioned at the start, there's kind of that weird area when students are between the ages of 18 and 22 and they're still in a secondary school environment, for instance, and as they continue in that environment, they have less and less in common with people in the high school. So that's one reason why it's important.

But, you know, Sally, it's most important, I believe, because everybody deserves to have a good life, right? I mean, they deserve to have a self-determined life. There's the cultural expectation that people go to college, that they're apart of the college environment.

We mentioned before job outcomes. You know, it's important that students have better job outcomes, that they lead more valued roles than an employee and working for something that you feel is important to you.

Plus, you know, it comes down to higher expectations. If we have higher expectations for people, then people rise to that level of expectation.

I want to leave you with a story. A student of ours, her name is Megan, and my boss, Dr. Kliner here at University of Kentucky. He retired this year, and they had testimonials for Dr. Kliner one afternoon. Megan was asked to do a testimonial. Now, she is a student that had been involved in inclusive higher education, she earned an associate's degree, and she's now at University of Kentucky studying for a bachelor's degree, and she's still a student of ours. And you know, Megan said in the testimonial, Dr. Kliner, I'm very thankful for you for introducing me to the entire HDI community, Human Development Institute, and I am looking forward to any opportunity I get to strengthen my skills as an educator. That is very powerful, Sally. Here is a young lady who doesn't identify as having a disability, doesn't identify with a lot of constructs that we can put on her, but she identifies herself as being an educator. What better way to have a good life than to be able to identify with those valued roles?

SALLY WEISS: Barry, we've been talking about some specifics, as well as these amazing personal stories and outcomes. Let's go to a broader picture. What are the one or two things that you would like our listeners to take away from this program about inclusive higher education for students with intellectual disabilities?

BARRY WHALEY: Well, I think the most important thing to take away, Sally, is that inclusive and supported higher education is a new alternative, and it's here to stay, and it's growing, and, it's giving students the opportunity for something more. For those

students who are life-long learners, who want a better job, who just want that college experience, this is a tremendous resource for them.

And as I mentioned before, this issue of employment outcomes cannot be overlooked. You know, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 10.5 percent, but that's only half the picture. If you look at labor force participation, less than 20 percent of people with disabilities participate in the workforce, so over 80 percent of people are sitting on the economic sidelines. So, this is an opportunity to not only better yourself academically, but to get a better job.

We know that students with intellectual disability who are involved in higher education, they're 25 percent more likely to exit an inclusive higher education program with a paid job than if they only use voc rehab services alone. We also know that those students are 70 percent more likely to have a higher income than their peers.

SALLY WEISS: Thank you, Barry. And thank you, also, to our ADA Live! listening audience. The Southeast ADA Center is grateful for your support and participation in this series WADA ADA Live! broadcasts. Remember, you may submit questions about any of our ADA Live! topics by going to ADALive.org. A resource section is also available. If you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact your regional ADA center at 1 800 949 4232. All calls are free and confidential. Join us next month on Wednesday March 2nd at 1:00 Eastern for another episode of ADALive!

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