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COMMUNITY LIFE ENGAGEMENT – ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS

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As colleges and universities open their doors to students with intellectual disabilities (ID), it is essential that students are afforded opportunities and the support necessary to authentically engage in their campus communities. Community life engagement (CLE) refers to people accessing and participating in their communities outside of employment. CLE may include volunteer work, recreational and social activities, as well as the many additional ways people spend their free time.

A team of researchers at the Institute for Community Inclusion at University of Massachusetts Boston identified four guideposts for supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to engage in authentic and meaningful community life. The four CLE guideposts are:

1) **Individualize supports for each person**
2) **Promote community membership and contribution**
3) **Use human and social capital to decrease dependence on paid supports**
4) **Ensure supports are outcome-oriented and regularly monitored**

In this document, we use the four CLE guideposts to inform college and university staff members on how to facilitate the development of natural campus connections and support for students with ID on college campuses. Ways to engage on campus are as broad and varied as students' interests and diversity across communities. This brief provides example strategies, student stories, and quotes from students, peers, and staff through the lens of each guidepost.

The Institute for Community Inclusion conducts research to identify the supports for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities that lead to high-quality community life engagement. See more on this research.

Originally developed for adult service providers, CLE guideposts can inform any support provider, including college program staff, as they assist individuals with IDD in finding ways to meaningfully engage in their communities. Learn more!

## GUIDEPOST 1: INDIVIDUALIZE SUPPORTS FOR EACH PERSON

Each student is unique, and the support provided to them to meaningfully engage in campus life should align with their individual needs and preferences. Inclusive higher education programs often utilize person-centered planning to outline students' preferences, interests, skills, employment, and personal goals. Person-centered planning ensures that students have a voice in outlining their personal goals, time spent on campus, and support needs. Example strategies for individualized student supports are provided in the bulleted list below.

To provide individualized student supports:

» Encourage students to identify and request supports during person-centered planning meetings
» Pair peer mentors and students based on mutual interests, motivations, and campus connections
» Identify and connect students with peers, faculty, and university staff who can serve as natural supports
» Identify natural opportunities on campus (e.g., in class, at campus events, clubs, activities) to encourage students' self-advocacy in recognizing and requesting the supports they need
» Decrease support and increase independence as a student's growth indicates

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Person-Centered Planning Meeting

A photo of Ethan at his person-centered planning meeting, where he discusses his goals and supports with his support network. Ethan is eager to apply his curious, creative, and analytical brain to courses in computer science, mathematics, and solving the puzzle of life.
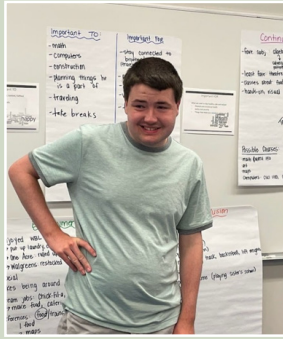
"I am happy and excited to meet new friends and go to class. I want to study art and brains."

—Ethan, East Tennessee State University student

Student Story:
Pairing Peers Based on Interest

Ben enrolled in the Introduction to American Blues and Jazz course. When it came to pairing Ben with a peer mentor, his program coordinator paired him with a music major, Shani. Together, they scheduled a time to meet after his music class for weekly tutoring sessions. As classes began, Ben was uncertain about finding his way to the music building, so he sent an email to Shani asking if she could help him. They set up a plan to walk to the music building together for class. For the first two weeks of classes, they walked to the music building together while Ben also practiced using the campus map on his phone. When Ben felt comfortable enough to make it to class on his own, he let Shani know. Later in the semester, Ben asked Shani if she wanted to attend the college's jazz concert with him. Shani said she was already going with a group of friends, who are also music majors, and invited Ben to join them.

Individualizing Support

"To ensure each students' needs are met ... I look deep into ways their interests are recognized and shared throughout the campus, and work one-on-one to provide them with the necessary knowledge that they need to make the most out of the resources on campus."

—Jenny, peer mentor

GUIDEPOST 2: PROMOTE COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION

College campuses offer a wide variety of activities, organizations, events, and services to help students connect with their interests and find belonging within the campus community. It is not just about being at an activity, but about a student's engagement in the activity: their contributions, membership, and evolving friendships. Example strategies to promote community membership and contribution are provided in the bulleted list below.

To promote community membership on campus:

- » Teach students how to search for, participate in, attend, and contribute to student organizations and campus events
- » Support students' contributions and advocacy as community members
- » Coach students to identify, understand, and pursue pathways to leadership positions or other valued roles in their campus community
- » Encourage students' awareness and use of campus offices and student support services

Student Story:
Promoting Community Membership

Jasmine grew up taking dance lessons and continued her passion in college. She was a member of the campus ballroom dance group throughout her two years at college and was elected to serve as the social media chair for the group during her final semester. During Jasmine's involvement in the dance group, she told the ballroom dance student leader that she sometimes needed to see the steps demonstrated for her more than once. The leader agreed that other members could benefit from seeing the steps a few extra times, too, and invited an additional dancer to attend meetings to model steps for anyone who needed it. Jasmine's advocacy in requesting an additional dancer was so successful in helping all the dancers that it led to long-term changes in the dance group's instruction.

Student Story:
Becoming a Leader in the Community

Alaina was accepted into the Vanderbilt Consortium LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities). As a self-advocate trainee, Alaina grew tremendously as a leader, particularly through her writing. Alaina found her voice through sharing her experiences as a person with a disability. Her cohort peers, who have plans to work with people with disabilities, have cited Alaina's perspective to be "honest, vulnerable, and humble." Not only was Alaina able to share her experiences, but she also became a stronger advocate for herself. Alaina advocates for herself now by asking questions when unsure how to do a task, being an active participant in her person-centered planning meetings, and emailing her professors to explain her learning needs before the start of a new semester.

Learn more about LEND and Alaina.

GUIDEPOST 3: USE HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL TO DECREASE DEPENDENCE ON PAID SUPPORTS

Human and social capital refers to the skills, connections, and contributions students bring to their community. Proactively supporting students to gain the skills needed to access campus activities more independently increases students' self-reliance and human capital. Similarly, supporting students to identify and connect to other campus community members (e.g., coworkers, peers, club members) develops natural support within an environment, group, or activity and increases students' social capital. Examples of strategies that assist students to build human and social capital on college campuses are provided in a bulleted list below, followed by quotes from a student and peer mentor and student vignettes.

To assist students in gaining and using human and social capital on campus:

» Support students to develop self-determination skills that allow them to be more independent on campus, such as navigating campus, deciding what they would like to do during their free time, or where to get lunch.
» Facilitate students' understanding of and engagement with existing campus resources
» Support students in developing relationships with peers, faculty, and staff who may serve as natural supports
» Encourage student growth by planned and timely fading of supports

Encouraging Student Growth

"I encourage independence by stepping aside and giving reassuring nudges to students ... applauding them for their small and big feats ... assessing how they felt after stepping out of their comfort zone, and providing insight wherever they may need."

—Jenny, peer mentor

Student Story: Gaining Human Capital to Use Campus Resources

During Tatiana's first semester of college, she connected to the disability services office for an intake appointment, where she advocated for herself by sharing what accommodations are helpful for her. After her introduction to the office, Tatiana received support to request use of her academic accommodations. Over time, Tatiana became more familiar with the disability services office process and independently used the office as a resource by emailing the office, scheduling exam appointments, and logging into the office portal. Below is a quote from Tatiana describing her experience.

"The Ross Center [disability services office] is very helpful at the campus when you get to know them. When I had my intake appointment, it was just me and Ashley [program staff] ... came with me, and I told the Ross Center lady what disability I have, what accommodations are helpful for me in class, and she understands. ... Last week, I scheduled an exam for myself, without Ashley, so the Ross Center will show you how to do that."

—Tatiana, UMass Boston student

Student Story:
Using Social Capital to Gain Employment

Terrell is interested in a career in security. He appreciates helping others and has an affinity for service careers (e.g., EMT, police, security guard). He completed several internships on campus related to this field. He happened to be socializing in the student center one day and passed by folks who worked for Axis Security, a company contracted to cover community events. He stopped and asked them what they were doing on campus that day. That connection led to a conversation and Terrell applying for a job. Because of his human capital (i.e., skills developed at his internships) and the social capital he created by striking up a conversation with the Axis Security team, he was soon working on his first gig at the Miranda Lambert concert on campus. He worked in the parking lot directing traffic and keeping individuals safe. He has since worked at several football games and other campus events. Planning for the future, Terrell has applied for security positions at some of the major employers near his home.

GUIDEPOST 4: ENSURE SUPPORTS ARE OUTCOME-ORIENTED AND REGULARLY MONITORED

This guidepost involves aligning supports with individual and organizational goals. The person-centered plan, mentioned in Guidepost 1, includes students' goals. The supports identified for each student align with and help them achieve their goals. Regular person-centered planning meetings include the students' review and revisions of their supports and goals.

It is important for colleges and universities to have a clear sense of the institution's mission and vision to support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. How will students' engagement on campus reflect the institution's principles? How will students' engagement on campus reflect the program's principles? Staff members should routinely review and reflect on how student outcomes align with their campus missions. Example strategies for outcome-oriented support and review of support are provided in the bulleted list below.

To ensure that supports are outcome oriented:

» Support student exploration of campus clubs, organizations, and events that align with their career goals

» Schedule regular student check-ins to discuss their campus engagement and adjust supports as needed

» Incorporate a discussion of students' campus engagement during person-centered planning meetings and ask students for their feedback

» Regularly review outcomes of students' campus engagement as it relates to program-wide missions

WHAT ARE HUMAN CAPITAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Human capital refers to the skills an individual brings to their job or other community experiences.

Social capital is a term for someone's relationships with other people and the value their network of contacts brings them.

Read more about these terms and Guidepost 3.

Student Story:
Obtaining Feedback from Students

Miranda, reflecting on her first semester in college, was not pleased with the oceanography class she enrolled in. There were too many assignments relating to physics and biology. Miranda has a strong passion for the environment and marine wildlife. She was hoping to learn more about marine life in her class and was unable to find a marine life-related club on campus. Her program required all students to complete a survey on their course satisfaction and Miranda did, expressing her disappointment. After reviewing Miranda's feedback, program staff explored volunteer opportunities for Miranda and found a university cleanup event for students to support a local beach. Miranda was thrilled to be able to contribute to the clean-up and shared her experience in the oceanography class to encourage other students.

Student Story: Aligning Campus Engagement with Career Goals

Ewidji has found ways to align his interests in law, politics, and debate with his personal and career goals. His chosen college goals included continuing his high school debating experience by attending a college debate club meeting, advocating for students with disabilities, participating in student government, and finding a job. By Ewidji's second semester, he had applied to join the student council, was working with a peer to start a disability club, and secured a volunteer opportunity at the JFK Library. Though he's still unsure of his future, Ewidji is interested in continuing his disability advocacy work. To prepare for the workforce, Ewidji plans to enroll in a political science course next semester and wants to apply for a fellowship in an attorney's office.

Securing Employment after Attending a Career Fair

Clint secured a job after attending an on-campus career fair and applying and interviewing for the job.

"Together, everyone achieves more."
–Clint, East Tennessee State University student

"Clint has been a joy to work with. His co-workers love having Clint on their team. He is becoming more independent with his job."

–April, East Tennessee State University facilities supervisor

CONCLUSION

The four guideposts — individualized student supports, community membership and contribution, students' use of human and social capital, and outcome-oriented and regularly reviewed supports — provide promising practices in student growth and engagement in authentic and meaningful campus experiences. The four CLE guideposts, along with each student's person-centered plan, provide a framework for facilitating authentic student engagement in their campus communities. This resource provides examples of strategies to facilitate and use natural campus connections when supporting students with ID on college campuses. Included are additional resources specific to the person-centered planning process, community life engagement as an approach, and each CLE guidepost we have discussed.

Resources

Community Life Engagement (CLE) Toolkit & Plain Language Summary

The interactive CLE toolkit includes detailed information, promising practices, and additional resources related to each of the four guideposts discussed in this brief. The plain language summary explains community life engagement and its importance in the lives of people with ID.

Students Transitioning to Adult Roles (STAR) Person-Centered Planning (PCP) Process

The Florida Consortium on Postsecondary Education and Intellectual Disabilities developed a 25-minute webinar specifically for postsecondary education students.

LifeCourse Person-Centered Planning Resources

The LifeCourse Nexus Training and Technical Assistance center provides tools which can be used to prepare for and navigate the person-centered planning process.

> **The person – centered plan (PCP) is a foundational tool for individualizing student goals and support on the college campus.**
>
> **Find more resources on person – centered planning.**

References

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