



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report on Model Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability: A Path to Education, Employment, and Community Living

The National Coordinating Center Accreditation Workgroup

September 30, 2016

REPORT TO:

THE HONORABLE JOHN B. KING, JR., UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS

THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND INTEGRITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) enacted in 2008 created exciting opportunities for students with intellectual disability (ID) to access federal financial aid, and authorized both new model demonstration programs and a National Coordinating Center (NCC). The NCC, administered by Think College at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, is charged with providing technical assistance, coordination, and evaluation of model demonstration programs.

The NCC is also required by HEOA to convene a Workgroup to develop and recommend model criteria, standards, and components of higher education programs for students with intellectual disability. The National Coordinating Center Accreditation Workgroup issues this report in response to that statutory requirement.

The National Coordinating Center Accreditation Workgroup is composed of 15 members representing diverse expertise as required by Congress. From Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 through FY2016, the Workgroup consulted with experts, developed draft model accreditation standards, compared the draft standards to federal law and regulations, obtained public input, and finalized model accreditation standards for higher education programs for students with ID. This is the first time that accreditation for these programs has been addressed, and this undertaking will lead to oversight, accountability, and an expectation of continuous improvement.

Establishing accreditation standards will create benchmarks that will be useful for quality assurance and improvement of higher education programs enrolling students with intellectual disability. The model standards will be valuable for institutions of higher education, federal student aid offices, accrediting agencies, as well as students with ID and their parents. The implementation of model standards will validate and strengthen programs and provide guidelines for colleges and universities considering establishing high-quality programs.

A list of the model accreditation standards can be found on page 34 of this document. The list of standards contains a discussion, guidance, and “next steps” for each standard when appropriate.

The model accreditation standards represent five years of analysis, public input, and effort by the Workgroup. Model standards have been developed in each area required by the federal regulations for the development of accreditation standards ((20 U.S.C. §1140q(b)(5)).

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In addition, the Workgroup makes the following recommendations to the Department of Education:

- Consider the role of the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) approval process established for Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs), if any, once program accreditation is implemented.
- Provide guidance to school districts, comprehensive transition programs, and families about the determination of “intellectual disability” with respect to admissions, and the requirement that only students with ID may receive financial aid under these provisions of the law. While this information is included in the HEOA Title IV regulations, there is some confusion about these issues.
- Support collaboration with and channels of communication among accreditation agencies and the Workgroup.
- Fund the development and dissemination of resources and strategies to use in determining what an individual student with ID is expected to learn, and how to assess progress in traditional courses, based on best practice. Such resources and strategies are needed to determine student progress in all areas (academic, career or technical, and independent living).

This report and these standards reflect a significant step forward in creating not only authentic but also high-quality higher education opportunities for students with ID. The implementation of model accreditation standards will move us forward on the path to inclusive higher education opportunities that lead to competitive integrated employment and community living.

The next Workgroup convened by the National Coordinating Center will engage in the following activities:

- Transmit the report as required, and request briefings on the model standards for the Secretary of Education, Congressional committees, and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) .
- Broadly disseminate the report through presentations at conferences, meetings, and the Think College website (www.thinkcollege.net), and email a digital version to relevant organizations.
- Conduct outreach to accrediting agencies to share the report and ascertain interest in accreditation of Comprehensive Transition Programs.
- Develop a technical guidance document to support implementation of the model accreditation standards.
- Develop and implement a plan to work with the field on guidance and a protocol for implementing the standards.
- Research and consider feasibility of creating a new accrediting agency.
- Update recommendations for the model standards if needed due to field testing, public input, or any changes to the Higher Education Act or other relevant laws that could impact the standards, such as WIOA or IDEA.

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Model Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Programs for Students With Intellectual Disability

Mission Standard 1:

The mission is consistent with the Higher Education Opportunity Act requirements that the program “is a degree, certificate, or non-degree program at an accredited institution that is designed to support students with intellectual disabilities (ID) who are seeking to continue academic, career and technical, and independent living instruction in order to obtain” competitive integrated employment and/or further education.

Mission Standard 2:

The program has a written mission statement that guides activities, policies, program evaluation and allocation of resources. This statement is communicated to faculty, students, staff, prospective students, and the public, and is evaluated periodically.

Student Achievement Standard 1:

The program has an inclusive program of study that is consistent with its mission, admission requirements, and anticipated outcomes.

Student Achievement Standard 2:

The institution has established a Satisfactory Academic Progress policy that clearly states achievement standards and competencies and includes criteria for evaluating student progress and impact on student advancement.

Student Achievement Standard 3:

The program maintains and provides students with a written report at the end of each “academic unit” (semester, trimester, etc.), accessible to the student, that clearly indicates evidence of student progress.

Curriculum Standard 1:

The inclusive program of study aligns with the statutory and regulatory requirements for a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) in the Higher Education Act.

Curriculum Standard 2:

The program provides students with intellectual disability with access to a wide array of postsecondary level courses from multiple disciplines and departmental/college units that are part of the curriculum for degree or certificate programs.

Curriculum Standard 3:

The inclusive program of study is delivered to students physically attending the institution, but may include off-campus learning opportunities including internships, apprenticeships, or other work experiences. A limited number of courses may be delivered via distance learning, as long as the institution explains why it believes the course is applicable to, and benefits, students with intellectual disability.

Curriculum Standard 4:

The inclusive program of study includes instruction, work experiences and other activities necessary to enable students to achieve and sustain competitive integrated employment.

Curriculum Standard 5:

The program’s materials and methodologies are accessible to all learners and are developed based on the principles of universal design for learning.

Curriculum Standard 6:

Provide support to ensure student engagement in campus life and enhance student development of social and independent living skills.

Faculty Standard 1:

Staff and other professionals have education and training commensurate with their roles and responsibilities and demonstrate an ongoing commitment to professional development.

Faculty Standard 2:

Other individuals who work with students, such as teachers in training, peer mentors and job coaches are selected, trained and supervised in alignment with existing IHE policies and consistent with the skill set required by the position.

Faculty Standard 3:

Program staff receive a job description, performance criteria and evaluation in adherence to the policies and procedures of the institution.

Faculty Standard 4:

Training and technical assistance are provided to the institution's faculty and staff to develop learning environments, courses and instruction according to the principles of universal design for learning.

Facility, Equipment and Supply Standards 1:

Students in the program have access to institutional facilities, consistent with other students, which support the achievement of their goals.

Administrative and Fiscal Capacity Standard 1:

The program is a part of a department or unit of the institution, with a recognized place within its administrative structure.

Administrative and Fiscal Capacity Standard 2:

The program has an administrative structure and an advisory committee that is effective in helping the program achieve its mission. The advisory committee includes a variety of stakeholders, including parents of alumni students with intellectual disability.

Administrative and Fiscal Capacity Standard 3:

The program identifies, encourages, and supports access to appropriate professional development activities that meet the needs of faculty, staff, administrators and other individuals working with the students.

Administrative and Fiscal Capacity Standard 4:

Administrative and support staff receive a job description, performance criteria and evaluation in adherence to the policies and procedures of the institution.

Administrative and Fiscal Capacity Standard 5:

Contracts, Memoranda of Understanding and partnership agreements with third parties are in compliance with applicable laws and in keeping with policies of the larger institution. Such documents align with the mission of the program, and are periodically reviewed.

Administrative and Fiscal Capacity Standard 6:

Financial resources are adequate and available to meet obligations to students, staff and other contractual parties.

Administrative and Fiscal Capacity Standard 7:

Programs have a viable plan for fiscal and programmatic sustainability.

Student Services Standard 1:

Admissions policies are consistent with program objectives and with the mission of the program and are implemented by properly trained individuals. The policies meet the criteria for Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs) in the Higher Education Act (HEA).

Student Services Standard 2:

The program provides access to academic, employment and other advising, based on person-centered planning and in collaboration with existing institutional services.

Student Services Standard 3:

Families and students are included in the institution's general orientation programs and additional orientation is provided as needed.

Student Services Standard 4:

The program has a stated process for family engagement and communication that reflects clearly defined roles and responsibilities for parents, and staff, adheres to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Students and families are informed about FERPA requirements, student control over parental involvement, and the option for students to waive FERPA requirements and how to do so.

Student Services Standard 5:

Students in the program have access to services, social and recreational activities, consistent with other students, which support the achievement of their goals.

Student Services Standard 6:

Provide supports designed to enable students to seek and sustain competitive, integrated employment.

Length and Structure of Program of Study Standard 1:

The program aligns with the college calendar and specifies the number of weeks of instructional time and the number of semester or quarter credit hours or clock hours in the program, including the equivalent credit or clock hours associated with noncredit or reduced credit courses or activities.

Length and Structure of Program of Study Standard 2:

The program clearly describes the educational credential offered (e.g., degree, certificate, or non-degree credential) and identified outcome or outcomes established by the institution for all students with intellectual disability enrolled in the program. The program clearly specifies how students' progress through a full course of study and maintain satisfactory academic progress.

Student Complaints Standard 1:

The institution's grievance procedures are made accessible to students in the program. Support is available to students who seek to lodge a formal written complaint and is available throughout the grievance process.

Program Development, Planning, and Review Standard 1:

The program, along with its advisory group, regularly evaluates its program components, student assessment practices, student services, policies, activities and outcomes. The program implements program revisions based on the evaluation.

Program Development, Planning, and Review Standard 2:

The program provides information to the institution required for compliance with Title IV of the Act and maintains a record of compliance with the institution's program responsibilities.

Program Development, Planning and Review Standard 3:

Program staff verify that students who receive financial aid meet the definition of a student with an intellectual disability in the HEOA, including obtaining a record from a local educational agency that the student is or was found eligible for special education or related services under IDEA. If the record does not identify the student as having an intellectual disability, then the program must obtain documentation as described in the HEA regulations.

Program Development, Planning and Review Standard 4:

The program has provided a copy of the letter or notice sent to the institutions accrediting agency informing the agency of its CTP program, including information required by the HEOA regulations.