

Inclusive Advising: Strategies to Facilitate Academic Advising for Dually Enrolled Students with Intellectual Disability

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Many students, between the ages of 18-21, with intellectual disability (ID) are now receiving their transition services in higher education settings across the nation and, as a part of these services, are taking college classes. Typically college students select their courses with the guidance of an academic advisor; and these professionals also play a key role in guiding students with ID. Skilled academic advisors can promote student success by encouraging their advisees' full engagement in campus life, inside and outside the classroom.

Effectively advising students with ID involves a comprehensive understanding of the student's goals, preferences, strengths, and interests, as well as the student's disability. It also requires recognition of some institutional obstacles that may impact student access to desired classes. In addition, advisors must also be familiar with the resources and services at the college that can support students in pursuing their academic, personal, and career goals.

This brief provides an overview of academic advising strategies to support dually enrolled students with ID in higher education while addressing some advising challenges.

ADVISING STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

The academic advisor is essential in creating a sense of community and connecting new students to the college. From the moment a transition to college begins, advisors provide students with connections to staff, resources, and supports to become engaged members of their campus community. Developing a strong advisor-advisee relationship early on will encourage students to stay connected throughout their course of study, be active participants during the advising process, and seek guidance on career paths.

Key Components of Inclusive Course Access, Advising and Registration

- A. The dual enrollment team advises the students on developing a schedule that includes academic, employment, and campus activities.
- B. Students' course of study is coordinated and supports acquisition of skills and knowledge related to their desired academic and career goals.
- C. The college provides opportunities for the inclusion of students in credit and non-credit courses with their college peers.
- D. The college has developed a protocol to ensure early course registration for dually enrolled students.
- E. The college officially admits students with dual enrollment status.
- F. Students register for classes that are fully integrated, college-catalogued courses with departmental designations, course descriptions, numbers, titles, and credits.
- G. Students' goals are reviewed each semester by the student and dual enrollment staff and are modified as needed to reflect changes in student interests and preferences.
- H. The college records courses successfully completed on official college transcripts.

Understanding that dual enrollment student goals may differ from goals of matriculated students is essential for college advisors. Dual enrollment students often choose classes for personal enrichment or career development, rather than to fulfill the requirements of a major or of a degree. Students with ID may need additional support and guidance when making the decision to take classes for audit or credit. Advisors can help by encouraging students to discuss their credit and audit options with faculty, educational coaches, transition staff, and their family. For students pursuing matriculation, identifying which prerequisite or developmental classes to take will prepare them for their program of study.

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Advisors who become familiar with the challenges of a student’s disability can implement sound advising practices. For example, if a student is taking medication, the advisor can help the student to determine the best time of day to take classes: when the student is most alert or when the time does not interfere with medication administration. Knowledge of a student’s standing appointments for physical, speech, or occupational therapy will ensure there are no scheduling conflicts when selecting courses.

Knowledge of various disabilities is also important in determining if the college has structural or environmental barriers for students. Awareness of the campus geography is important when calculating the amount of time needed for students to pass from one class to another. Students with mobility challenges might have difficulty getting to class on time if their classes are scheduled one after the other in different buildings, or if they need access to elevators or ramps not located nearby.

Students with ID and autism may have weak executive function skills, making it difficult for them to plan, maintain focus, remember or follow instructions, and multitask. Matching students with instructors who break information down and present material in step-by-step sequences will enhance learning outcomes. Advisors who familiarize themselves with instructors’ teaching styles and identify faculty who use universal design for learning will be better equipped to enroll students in classes that will be a good match for their learning style.

Advisors should encourage advisees to develop competencies in self-advocating for the accommodations and instructional strategies that meet the challenges of their disability. Fostering the partnership between student and instructor promotes student independence and facilitates accessible instruction across all college classrooms.

Advisors who develop collaborative relationships with faculty, disability services offices (DSO), counseling, career services, and academic learning centers will be able to refer students to resources and natural supports on campus. Connecting students with the DSO in particular is essential to ensure that each student receives the accommodations they need and for which they are eligible.

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC ADVISING SESSION

The time students spend with their advisor is valuable, so students should come prepared for their academic advising session. Prior to meeting, students should discuss their postsecondary goals, interests, and commitments with their educational coaches, transition specialists, and families. Students also should familiarize themselves with course offerings, and bring questions about specific courses. Advisors should confirm that information about how to access online course selection options is available to all of those who may help a student prepare for an advising session.

Establishing and maintaining high expectations for students throughout course selection and registration facilitates inclusive course access, student engagement, and

higher levels of self-determination. Course registration presents numerous learning opportunities as students navigate the process, examine their own interests, find a class that matches an interest, adhere to registration deadlines, meet timelines of enrollment set by their IEP team, and make credit or audit decisions.

Advisors who encourage students to self-reflect during this process will assist their advisees in developing a better understanding of their unique abilities and skills and the actions they can take to shape their college experience. The advising meeting also serves as an important tool for engagement, during which students employ an array of social executive functioning skills, such as processing novel information, responding to nonverbal cues, modulating emotions, and providing context that is meaningful to the perspective of others. Skilled advisors will recognize opportunities to model these processes and skills, and make “thinking about thinking” a visible part of the advising meeting.

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO ADVISING

Students with ID, unlike others, have many people involved in their advising process. Therefore, academic advisors need to assist in planning a flexible and balanced schedule in collaboration with the sending district, family, and service providers. This is different from the process for students without disabilities, whose educational history is not so heavily shaped by legal special education requirements and team-based IEP and transition planning.

Advisors who are able to co-facilitate person-centered plans with the sending district during the initial enrollment process can bring together

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ADVISOR CHECKLIST

- Review the advisee’s past advising history, including advising notes, transition goals, and/or person-centered plans, prior to the appointment.
- Develop follow-up questions based upon this review.
- Schedule at least one hour for each advising appointment.
- Provide a wide assortment of appointment slots during key advising times so advisees can take advantage of priority registration, if possible.
- Email advisees planning worksheets several days before their advising appointment.
- Send appointment confirmation reminders to advisees.
- Help advisees clarify and develop education and career goals.
- Assist advisees in using online career resources and course catalogs to plan a program of study consistent with their abilities and interests.
- Review planning worksheet, discuss anticipated course workload, and brainstorm how to balance it with other commitments such as homework, employment, transportation, and free time.
- Encourage advisees to select from a broad range of courses that connect with their career aspirations and personal interests.
- Identify professors and courses that match an advisee’s learning style.
- Encourage advisees to try taking the course for credit first. If they do not feel prepared to fulfill the course requirements after the first 2 weeks, suggest a change to audit.
- Monitor advisee progress toward education and career goals by providing opportunities for advisees to assess and track skills development.

all of the key stakeholders and assist students in identifying their postsecondary education, career, and personal goals. Continued collaboration and communication with all members of the team will enable the advisor to be well informed of any updates, and to react quickly to changes while supporting their advisees' goals.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Academic advisors must continually evaluate and update their practices and strategies to support students with ID in learning the necessary skills to achieve their academic, personal, and career goals. By using proactive advising strategies, including early and frequent connections with students, recognition of the importance of interactions between the student and the campus environment, promoting student voice, and a focus on person-centered planning, academic advisors can better support dually enrolled students with ID to successfully access college courses and achieve their goals.



The Think College Transition Model Project, in collaboration with three Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment partnerships developed and implemented a college-based inclusive dual enrollment transition model for students with intellectual disability and autism between the ages of 18-21. To learn more about the TCT Project visit: www.thinkcollege.net

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