

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:
ELISE MCDANIEL

This interview first appeared in the May 2021 National Coordinating Center Newsletter.

Elise McDaniel is a young woman with ID. Emma Burgin is the coordinator at the FUTURE program at University of Tennessee. The two attended the State of the Art (SOTA) Conference together in Reno, Nevada, in November 2019. Elise and Emma both learned so much about inclusive higher education and met so many great people in the field. They both love to travel, to learn, and to be involved, so when they heard about the Disability Policy Seminar at SOTA, they immediately wanted to be a part of it. Elise and Emma are members of the Think College Policy Advocates program.

What is your name, where are you from, and what college are you attending?

My name is Elise McDaniel. I am from Knoxville, Tennessee and I am attending the University of Tennessee.

What classes are you taking, and which is your favorite?

I'm taking a sign language class, a CFS class and a Career Life Planning class. I don't have a favorite one, maybe my sign language class.

What do you like to do when you're not attending class?

I like to hang out in my dorm in Tabletown. I hang out with friends sometimes. I also listen to music sometimes.

What's good about college?

I like having classes in person because it is good to hang out with more people and have the college experience. I also like living on my own because I like being free from my parents, but I still miss them some of the time.

How has COVID affected your college experience?

Since COVID, we have had Zoom classes instead of in-person classes. I can do this, but I like it better in-person. I do hate wearing my mask, but I have to.

What do you hope to do after college, after you graduate or get your certificate?

I hope to get a job at the Tennessee School for the Deaf. I also would like to start a program for deaf adults who aged out of the Young Life outreach and camp program. I also want to be an ambassador for Best Buddies (an organization that promotes and supports inclusive living for individuals with IDD.)



Elise and Emma at the SOTA conference.



Elise is a great example of someone who has taken full advantage of all FUTURE has to offer. She lives on campus among her same-age peers, is a member of Boss Dance group, Young Life, and Student Government.

—Emma

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If you or someone you know would like to be interviewed, contact sheila.johnson@umb.edu for more information.



What advice do you have for young students with disabilities who aren't sure about college?

You can do this! You can have the college experience. I believe that because I did it. You can get into a college, you just need to find one you want to get into.

Do you have any advice about college for parents of students with disabilities?

Parents, let your child go to college of their dreams. Let your child have the college experience.

Do you have any hobbies?

I sing, dance, color, watch movies, play ukulele, play Nintendo Switch, go out to eat, go on the boat and tube behind it. I hang out at home a lot. I also listen to music a lot. I go on trips with my family but haven't gone anywhere because of COVID. I also like Broadway shows. I used to go to them until they closed because of COVID. I like to swing on the swing sometimes. I also swim in the pool.

Why did you apply to be a Think College Policy Advocate?

I wanted to participate because I want to learn about the disability policies. I want to know what they are, so we know if they are working for people with disabilities. If they are not working, we have the power to change them.



The University of Tennessee's FUTURE Program

[FUTURE](#) is a [comprehensive program](#) that helps young adults with ID make a successful transition from high school to adult life. It provides students with specially designed FUTURE classes, the opportunity to audit undergraduate courses, and an internship on or off campus.

[Watch this video about the FUTURE program featuring Elise and Emma.](#) It was created by Think Draft, a media production company in Knoxville, where Elise just finished an internship.



ThinkCollege.Net Resources for Students

[College Search](#)

This page has information on 300+ college programs for students with ID.

[Student Stories](#)

These stories are about students' experiences before, during, and after college.

[Handouts in Plain and Clear Language](#)

These publications are written so they are easy to read and understand.



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