Danny is 18 years old and has been in high school for 4 years. He has worked on his individualized education program (IEP) goals in general education and special education classes. He has participated in community-based instruction once a week on Fridays for the past 2 years. He has had unpaid work experiences in the school cafeteria and at a local gas station, and just recently started a part-time job in the grocery store on the weekends. He has expressed an interest in working with animals. Danny likes to listen to rap music, loves his dog MJ, dreams of being a basketball star, and is probably not too different from many of the students you work with every day. Danny, however, has a significant disability; (see box “What Is a Significant Disability”) according to his IEP, he will remain in high school until he is 21 years old, when he will exit with a high school certificate of completion.

What’s wrong with this picture? Danny, like many other students with significant disabilities, will remain in high school for 3 years longer than his classmates who leave with a general high school diploma at age 18. Although public school support for students like Danny is vital to a successful transition to adult life, this support does not have to be provided in the confines of the high school campus. There are other ways that public school special education services can be provided that allow students with significant disabilities the opportunity to participate in meaningful, age-appropriate learning experiences in postsecondary settings during their final years of school.

Through our work with On-Campus Outreach (OCO), a federally-funded outreach grant, we have provided technical assistance to 17 programs in 11 local school systems in Maryland and other states serving students with significant disabilities between the ages of 18 and 21 in postsecondary settings (see box). This article is based on observations, interviews, and experiences gained through this work. We will describe the goals of these educational services, where services are being provided, and what it takes to make them happen.

What Are the Goals of Providing Educational Services in Postsecondary Settings?
The overall goal of providing services in postsecondary settings is to give older students with disabilities age-appropriate settings for their final public education and transition experiences. Specific goals are designed through a person-centered planning process to meet the needs, preferences, and interests of the individual students.

These goals may include the following:
- Obtaining employment in a full- or part-time paid position in the community.
- Participating in college classes.
- Increasing mobility in the community.
- Engaging the support of adult service agencies.
- Improving social and communication skills.
- Improving self-determination skills.
- Developing friendships with other people of similar ages.
- Developing age-appropriate leisure and recreation pursuits.

Figure 1 shows a schedule for Danny that indicates how his goals could be met in a postsecondary college setting. Many of the students’ educational goals are met by providing services on college campuses where some students participate in general college classes. Other students may audit classes or take

What Is a Significant Disability?
A student with a significant disability is defined as an individual who requires extensive ongoing support in more than one major life activity to participate in integrated community settings and to enjoy a quality of life that is available to citizens with fewer or no disabilities. Support may be required for life activities such as mobility, communication, self-care, and learning as necessary for independent living, employment, and self-sufficiency (TASH, 2000). Students may have a variety of disability classifications including, but not limited to, mental retardation, learning disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, orthopedic disabilities, autism, or behavior disorders.
noncredit or continuing education courses. Participation in classes depends on level of course content, student interest, and class schedule. Students who attend college classes continue to receive support from school system staff in much the same way they would in inclusive high school situations.

Public school personnel who are planning to provide services in postsecondary sites must make sure that students are integrated in campus and community life. In the past, adults with significant developmental disabilities who participated in programs at colleges were often segregated from the general student population (Neubert, Moon, Grigal, & Redd, 2001). Providing students access not only to classes, but also to other college resources such as the library, career center, computer lab, fitness center, and student activities center will allow students with significant disabilities to become an expected and accepted part of the campus community. For example, Danny’s schedule shows that he participates in two classes, weight training, and ceramics, and he regularly uses the student union and library.

**What Is a Postsecondary Setting?**

Postsecondary settings can include just about any setting adults have access to after high school, including 4-year colleges or universities, community colleges, and various locations in the community (e.g., businesses, apartments, and community rehabilitation programs). Participation in each type of setting, described here briefly, requires a great deal of planning by school and community personnel. Each setting has its own benefits and challenges.

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**Figure 1: Danny’s Schedule for Spring Semester at State University**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Danny rides city bus to college campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>Functional Academics with Special Education Teacher in classroom on college campus</td>
<td>Career Planning or Self-determination skills class with special educator</td>
<td>Free time—Danny gets to campus in time for Weight Training Class</td>
<td>Career Planning or Self-determination skills class with special educator</td>
<td>Functional Academics with Special Education Teacher in classroom on college campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Weight Training Class at Fitness Center</td>
<td>Ceramics Class in Art Building</td>
<td>Weight Training Class at Fitness Center</td>
<td>Ceramics Class in Art Building</td>
<td>Independent Study and tutoring from Special Education Intern at Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Computer Tutorial with Special Education Intern (peer tutor)</td>
<td>Travel Training/Community skills training with teaching assistant and 2 other students</td>
<td>Computer Tutorial with Special Education Intern (peer tutor)</td>
<td>Travel Training/Community skills training with teaching assistant and 2 other students</td>
<td>Lunch with fraternity brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Lunch with other students and/or best buddy at student union food court</td>
<td>Lunch in community</td>
<td>Lunch with peer tutor at student union food court</td>
<td>Lunch in community</td>
<td>Review schedule for following week with special educator in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00</td>
<td>Go to city bus stop on campus, go to job site</td>
<td>Travel Training and go to SPCA for volunteer work with teaching assistant and 2 other students</td>
<td>Go to city bus stop on campus, go to job site</td>
<td>Travel Training and go to SPCA for volunteer work with teaching assistant and 2 other students</td>
<td>Go to city bus stop on campus, go to job site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>Works part-time at PetSmart</td>
<td>Works part-time at PetSmart</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Works part-time at PetSmart</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A friend picks Danny up from work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00</td>
<td>Parents pick Danny up from work</td>
<td>Parents pick Danny up from work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four-Year Colleges or Universities

One option for serving older students with significant disabilities is a 4-year college. In some states, like Maryland and Kentucky, school systems have established programs at 4-year universities, which serve from 5 to 17 students with disabilities ages 18-21 (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2001; Hall, Kleintert, & Kearsn, 2000). In other states, like New Hampshire and Massachusetts, students with disabilities may attend a university by working with their families, the school system, the college, and others to coordinate individual supports to meet their needs at the college, rather than attending a “program” (Hart, Zafft, & Zimbrich, 2001; Weir, 2001).

Benefits. Four-year colleges provide many opportunities for integrated experiences for students with significant disabilities. These institutions offer coursework such as ceramics, stagecraft, and Tai Chi that students with significant disabilities may not have had access to in their high school. Colleges and universities have a variety of social outlets and organizations, such as fraternities, sororities, hobby clubs, Best Buddies, and religious groups, which provide students with significant disabilities the opportunity to engage in nonacademic activities alongside same-age peers without disabilities who have similar backgrounds or interests. For example, Danny became an honorary member of a fraternity on campus, and took part in some of the activities they sponsored (see Figure 1).

Another benefit of 4-year colleges or universities is that they generally have departments in social sciences, education, speech, and occupational and physical therapies. Students in these fields of study are often in need of practical experiences. By collaborating with the faculty in these departments, high school personnel have helped students form partnerships that serve both the students with significant disabilities and the college students. Students may work with one another in classes, field placements, and student service-learning experiences. For example, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Danny receives tutoring in the computer lab and the library from an undergraduate student interning in special education.

Four-year institutions also provide housing for college students. This arrangement affords access to a constant student population during the daytime, evenings, and weekends that may be absent in a community college. It may also offer an opportunity for some independent-living experiences for students with significant disabilities.

Challenges. One of the challenges of providing services to students with significant disabilities ages 18-21 in a 4-year setting is that these institutions are less prevalent than community colleges and may not be located in areas that are easily accessible by public school transportation. Accessibility is also affected by the admission requirements and application process of many of these institutions, which may necessitate a high school diploma and scores from tests such as the SAT to attend general college classes.

A final challenge of providing services to students with significant disabilities in this setting is that many of the faculty and staff at the college or university may have difficulty understanding why students with significant disabilities should be at a college. This attitudinal barrier is one that takes time and patience to overcome. It is important to engage the support of personnel who are in positions of authority like a President, Provost, or Dean to help provide information to faculty and staff about how and why students with significant disabilities can benefit from experiences in a college environment.

Community Colleges

Community colleges are attractive locations for providing programs and experiences to students with significant disabilities ages 18-21. These institutions often have open door policies, which may facilitate access for nontraditional students. In addition, these institutions are more prevalent and closer in proximity than many of the 4-year institutions. Community college is the first postsecondary experience for many students exiting high school and provides a natural setting for students with significant disabilities to have integrated experiences with students without disabilities, perhaps even students from their home high school.

Benefits. The costs of tuition and fees at community colleges are lower than those in 4-year colleges and universities and therefore, more affordable to families. Many community colleges also have a policy of waiving tuition for senior citizens and individuals with significant disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Students with significant disabilities may be able to benefit from this policy and need only pay for their student fees. This setting also provides access to continuing education courses. These nonacademic courses provide a chance to learn about many new topics such as ethnic cooking, dance, and art, and may encourage students to pursue other continuing education courses after they exit public school.

Challenges. One drawback of providing services to students with significant disabilities in a community college setting is that the student population in community colleges is often transient. They come to the campus to attend their classes and may leave campus soon after class has ended. This may limit opportunities for social interactions and participation in clubs and organizations on campus and impact the opportunities to access college students to serve as peer buddies. Despite this drawback, the community college remains an excellent option for providing services to students with significant disabilities and one which is being used by school systems in many states (Grigal et al., 2001; Highhouse, 2001).

The Community

The community offers many potential environments for students with significant disabilities who are 18 or older to receive educational services. Because community-based instruction is a common element of the curriculum used to teach students with significant disabilities in high schools, a natural progression of this practice is to increase a student’s access to community settings during the final years of high school.

One possibility is to provide services to students in a business setting. One local school system in Maryland provides students with significant disabilities with services in the Sheriff’s Department, which is located in a shopping mall.
and collaboration with members from the local community may be a good alternative to college experiences, increased use of public transportation, accessing community employment).

- Determining potential partners (Vocational Rehabilitation, Office of Mental Retardation or Developmental Disabilities, local community providers).

- Locating potential settings (local universities, community colleges, vocational/technical schools, businesses, community rehabilitation programs, apartment or housing complexes).

- Setting a preliminary budget (staff, equipment, and materials; and other costs such as rent, transportation, and tuition).

- Creating a process for students to access services (referrals, person-centered planning, application packages).

**Step 4: Decide Where Services Will Be Provided**

Based on the information gained from the Needs Assessment and Action Plan, the committee must then make a decision about where and how services will be provided. Some school systems have developed programs on college campuses or in community settings that serve a group of students with significant disabilities who have similar needs and goals. Others have developed individual supports, which allow students to receive educational and community supports outside of high school without attendance of a program. Examples of this option can be found in New Hampshire and Massachusetts (Hart et al., 2001; Weir, 2001) and are illustrated in case studies in the literature (Tashie, Malloy, & Lichtenstein, 1998).

An important point is that we need not view program-based and individual support models as mutually exclusive. These two models complement one another by providing a group of students with similar goals the opportunity to access a new environment through the development of a program, while offering students with
School: ___________________________  School Year: 20__-20__

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SSI or SSDI Eligible</th>
<th>Receiving a high school certificate or non-standard diploma</th>
<th>Included in general education</th>
<th>Not included in general education</th>
<th>Paid job experience</th>
<th>Unpaid job experience</th>
<th>Participated in recreation activities in/out of school</th>
<th>Received travel training</th>
<th>Require 1:1 assistance</th>
<th>Interested in new option(s)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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</table>

Note: SSI—Supplemental Security Income; SSDI = Social Security Disability Insurance. For a copy of the complete Needs Assessment Tool, please go to the On-Campus Outreach (OCO) Web site at www.education.umd.edu/oco and click on Resources.
other interests a chance to attain a goal outside of the normal realm of that program by providing them with individual supports.

**Step 5: Deal With Logistics**

As with the provision of any new service, the hardest part is often the logistics. The planning committee must address many issues when trying to provide services outside of the high school. Here are some important issues:

- **Staffing** (secondary special educators, transition specialist, or job coaches with experience in transition planning, inclusive education, job placement, and community instruction)
- **Hierarchy and protocol of new setting(s)** (policies, procedures, who’s who)
- **Transportation issues** (availability, cost, location, use of school or public systems)
- **Graduation participation** (students will or will not participate in graduation ceremony)
- **Recordkeeping** (where student records will be kept, how attendance will be reported)
- **Administrative issues** (who is administrator in charge of program or services, where IEP meetings will be held, how free and reduced lunch will be provided)
- **Medical and emergency procedures** (how students will receive medication, the procedures for medical emergencies and disruptive behavior)
- **Scheduling** (inclement weather, schedule discrepancies between school and other settings)

**Final Thoughts**

The five steps we have outlined show how school systems, families, and students with disabilities can explore the possibility of providing services in post-secondary settings to students with significant disabilities between the ages of 18 and 21. These steps, however, simplify what can be a complicated and challenging process. Developing options for students in postsecondary settings takes a great deal of time, cooperation, flexibility, and a firm commitment to the idea that students with significant disabilities can benefit from age-appropriate experiences in postsecondary settings.

**References**


