

Financial Aid for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

A review of financial assistance available to assist qualified students with intellectual disabilities who are enrolled in certificate-based, approved university programs.

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Executive Summary

Three of North Carolina's public universities provide inclusive post-secondary education programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These programs are intended to facilitate the transition of intellectually disabled persons from secondary school into adult life by creating an inclusive learning environment that allows intellectually disabled students to benefit from an on-campus living and learning experience. The university certificate programs currently available to North Carolinians include the Students with Diverse Abilities (SDAP) Program at Appalachian State University, The University of North Carolina Greensboro Beyond Academics Program and the University Participant (UP) Program at Western Carolina University.

Students enrolled in the Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP) are eligible for most Federal Title IV funding; however, they are not qualified for North Carolina's student aid programs because State financial aid programs restrict funds to residents enrolled in degree programs. Through new legislation, the North Carolina General Assembly could broaden the definition of eligibility for the major State financial aid programs to include North Carolina residents enrolled in Comprehensive Transition Programs recognized by the Federal Department of Education. Alternatively, the General Assembly could create a new aid program to assist CTP students. Specifically, the options for expanding financial assistance to participants in these programs include:

- 1) Amend student eligibility for funding from the UNC Need-based Grant; and
- 2) Amend student eligibility for funding from the NC Education Lottery Scholarship; or
- 3) Create a new state program specifically for participants in comprehensive transition programs.

While the first two options, UNC Need-based Grant and the NC Education Lottery Scholarship, require students to demonstrate financial need, the third option could expand eligibility to students who do not demonstrate financial need. However, new eligibility criteria would need to be established in consultation with campus program coordinators to prioritize the funding allocations among students if demand is greater than funding availability.

Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities

Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Programs for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Three North Carolina public universities have established residential Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP), as defined in the Higher Education Act of 2008, to facilitate the transition of intellectually disabled persons from secondary school into adult life. The aim of these programs is to create an inclusive learning environment allowing intellectually disabled students to benefit from an on-campus living and learning experience providing them with necessary skills for personal empowerment, gainful employment and independent living.

Scope

This report provides an overview of the post-secondary education options provided by three constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the current financial assistance available to enrolled students and discusses potential strategies to provide State financial aid.

Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP) in North Carolina

The Comprehensive Transition Programs currently available at the public universities in North Carolina include the Students with Diverse Abilities (SDAP) Program at Appalachian State University, The University of North Carolina Greensboro Beyond Academics Program and the University Participant (UP) Program at Western Carolina University.

The Appalachian State University and Western Carolina University programs provide two-year certificates to participants who complete 1,800 hours and meet program requirements. The University of North Carolina Greensboro program is a four-year certificate program requiring 120 credit hours, a capstone project, an internship and service learning hours.

The University of North Carolina Greensboro model also differs from both the Appalachian State University and Western Carolina University programs in that it is a partnership between The University of North Carolina Greensboro and a non-profit organization, Beyond Academics. Enrolling their first students in 2007, Beyond Academics has grown to over 50 students and established partnerships with many state and community organizations to leverage assistance for students.

Table 1 provides a summary of the three CTP programs.

Table 1: Comparison of North Carolina Public University Comprehensive Transition Programs

University	Program	Certificate	Cost	Additional Funding	Students Served	Age for Admission
Appalachian State University	Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program (SDAP)	Two-year certificate: SDAP Collegiate Achievement Award (1,800 hours)	Follows ASU's tuition and fees schedule plus \$1000/semester for additional supports	TPSID funded FY 2015 – P407A150046; funding period is five years.	Serving six students; grant funding needed to expand services to ten services by Y5 of funding.	18-25
University of North Carolina - Greensboro	Beyond Academics	Four-year certificate: Integrative Community Studies Certificate (120 credit hours, capstone project, internship and service learning hours)	Follows UNCG's tuition and fees schedule plus tiered support fee schedule	Beyond Academics is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit partner of the university.	Approximately 50 students	At least 18
Western Carolina University	WCU University Participants Program (UP Program)	Two-year certificate: UP Certificate of Accomplishment (1,800 hours)	Follows WCU's tuition and fees schedule; additional supports must be provided by the family	TPSID funded FY 2010 – P407A100004: Y1 - \$500,000; funding period was five years.	Served two students during 2007 pilot year. Expanded to four students in 2010-11 academic year.	18-25

All three programs have specific admissions criteria (noted below in Table 2) and meet the federal requirements for Comprehensive Transition Programs. In general, these programs focus on students with a documented intellectual disability (defined by an IQ of ~70 or lower) between the ages of 18 and 25 who have not completed a traditional course of study leading to a high school diploma. The average student in a CTP program also has a desire to gain skills that would allow him/ her to live independently and find gainful employment. All North Carolina institutions providing CTP courses of study defer to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) for the definition of intellectual disability.

Table 2: Admission Criteria for North Carolina Public University Comprehensive Transition Programs

University	Admission Criteria
Appalachian State University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be between 18 to 25 years of age at the time of admission • Must have an identified intellectual disability • Enrolled in or completed an occupational course of study (OCS) or similar program • Should have defined academic, career, and personal goals • Must have good written and oral communication skills • Must have healthy social interaction skills • Needs to be independent with personal hygiene and self-care
University of North Carolina - Greensboro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a documented diagnosis of an intellectual disability and/or developmental disability. • Completed secondary education with a diploma, certificate of completion, or equivalent before fall enrollment. • Be at least 18 years old before August 31st of the academic year. • Have basic safety skills in unsupervised settings. • Have personal desire and/or support from family to gain necessary skills for self-determination, independent living, and career development.
Western Carolina University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is typically between the ages of 18 and 25 at the time of admission • Has a documented intellectual disability (IQ ~ 70 or lower) • Completed high school but did not receive a traditional diploma • Demonstrates adequate communication skills • Demonstrates socially acceptable behavior • Is adequately motivated to learn and benefit from participation in the program • Has an expressed interest in living and working as independently as possible in the community after UP Program completion • Has strong family support

Program Cost and Financial Assistance

All three universities charge tuition, fees, room and board following the established costs for matriculated students. Additional charges for individualized support may also be incurred. With passage of the Higher Education Act of 2008, eligible students enrolled in CTPs may qualify for Federal Title IV aid, including grants and work study; however, participants are not eligible for student loans. Currently, program participants are not eligible for State aid because they are not enrolled in degree programs at the universities as required by the enabling legislation for the aid programs. While participants in CTPs do not receive State financial aid for higher education, some of the students receive State Vocational Rehabilitation funding for their programs of study.

In summary, funding options broadly available for students in Comprehensive Transition Programs include the following:

- Federal Financial Aid – determined by filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students enrolled in CTP programs are eligible for federal funding under Title IV, excluding student loans.
- Vocational Rehabilitation – State assistance may be available to eligible students through Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Private Loans – provided to students and their families by private financial institutions.

Strategies for Expanding State Funding for Individuals Enrolled in Comprehensive Transition Programs

The State of North Carolina can provide additional funding for students enrolled in Comprehensive Transition Programs through one or more of the following actions:

- 1) Amend the eligibility requirements for the UNC Need-based Grant program to include participants enrolled in CTP programs. Currently the University of North Carolina Need-based Grant is restricted to students in degree programs. Funding is limited to students with financial need and who meet eligibility for federal aid (regardless of whether student receives federal aid). Broadening eligibility criteria to include students in Comprehensive Transition Programs must be done through state legislation.
- 2) Amend the eligibility for the NC Education Lottery Scholarship to include participants enrolled in CTP programs. Currently the Lottery Scholarship is restricted to students in degree programs. Funding is limited to students who qualify for Federal Pell Grants and meet the other eligibility criteria of the Education Lottery Scholarship. Broadening eligibility criteria to include students in Comprehensive Transition Programs must be done through state legislation.
- 3) Create a new scholarship program specifically for participants in Comprehensive Transition Programs and either provide the funding to the State Education Assistance Authority to allocate to participating programs in block grants based on enrollment or allocate directly to the institutions for the benefit of students enrolled in those programs. By allocating to the Authority, funds could be reallocated among the institutions or to additional institutions if other UNC campuses initiate a CTP. If a new program is created, the Authority recommends a forward-funded model to enable institutions to notify students of funding four to six months in advance of enrollment. Students need assurance of funding prior to making an enrollment commitment. While students must demonstrate need for the UNC Need-based Grant and Education Lottery Scholarship, a new program could consider other criteria. Information regarding criteria other than financial need should be solicited from transition program administrators to prioritize the expenditure of funds between eligible students.

Definitions

Beyond Academics: A four-year program offered on the University of North Carolina Greensboro campus in partnership with Beyond Academics, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing a Certificate in Integrative Community Studies.

Comprehensive Transition Programs: Programs approved by the US Department of Education and defined as 1) offered by a college or career school 2) designed to support students with intellectual disabilities who want to continue academic, career and independent living instruction to prepare for gainful employment 3) offering academic advising and structured curriculum; and 4) requiring students with intellectual disabilities to participate, for at least half of the program, in regular enrollment in credit-bearing courses with nondisabled students, auditing or participating (with nondisabled students) in courses for which the student does not receive regular academic credit, enrollment in noncredit-bearing, non-degree courses with nondisabled students, or internships or work-based training with nondisabled individuals.

Intellectual Disability: A disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior originating before the age of 18. Intellectual disabilities affect an individual's reasoning, learning, problem solving, social and practical skills.

Scholars with Diverse Abilities Program (SDAP): A two-year certificate program offered by Appalachian State University providing an Award in SDAP Collegiate Achievement.

Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID): A program provided by the US Department of Education that "provides grants to institutions of higher education or consortia of institutions of higher education to enable them to create or expand high quality, inclusive model comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities."

University Participants Program (UP): A two-year certificate program offered by Western Carolina University providing an UP Certificate of Accomplishment.

References

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Scholars with Diverse Abilities, *Appalachian State University*. <http://sdap.appstate.edu/>

Think College! *College Options for People with Intellectual Disabilities*.

<http://www.thinkcollege.net/topics/paying-for-college>

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<http://www.wcu.edu/learn/departments-schools-colleges/CEAP/ceap-depts/stl/special-education-programs/university-participant-up-program/>

Vocational Rehabilitation Policies and Procedures for Assistance

<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dsb/VR/man/Post-Secondary%20Training.pdf>

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