

2025 Inclusive Futures Program-Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee/Fiscal

Research Division Report

University of North Carolina Wilmington

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Inclusive Futures Program Executive Summary

The Inclusive Futures Program (IFP) at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) is a comprehensive postsecondary education program for individuals with intellectual disability in Southeast North Carolina. The program is designed to provide an inclusive opportunity for participants to continue their education, increase independence and self-determination, and achieve competitive employment through evidence-based practices and community partnerships. The IFP is a 2-year, 55-hour, non-degree certificate program that culminates in the Inclusive Life Skills and Career Development Certificate. The program will offer residential and commuter options to participants.

Coursework in the Inclusive Life Skills and Career Development Certificate is offered on the main UNCW campus to provide many opportunities for enrolled students to access inclusive opportunities of college life at UNCW. Students in the IFP will complete courses in three areas, including (a) Foundational Curriculum Core to increase personal independence and knowledge; (b) Career Specialization to increase knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a career; and (c) Career Development, with coursework and a supervised experience in a work setting, to facilitate successful competitive employment upon completion of the certificate.

The Foundational Curriculum Core requires students to complete at least 22 credit hours. First, all students in the Inclusive Futures Program will complete UNI 101: First Year Seminar, a three-credit course completed by all UNCW undergraduate students to support a successful academic, social, and personal transition to UNCW. Next, students in the Inclusive Futures Program will complete two three-credit courses specially designed for college students with intellectual disabilities, including IFP 101: Skills and Knowledge for Greater Independence and IFP 102: Relationships and Human Sexuality. Also, students in the Inclusive Futures Program

will complete at least 13 credit hours in inclusive UNCW courses alongside peers without disabilities selected with IFP advisor.

The Career Specialization requires students to complete at least 15 credit hours. Working on the Career Specialization, or “major,” students in the Inclusive Futures Program will complete 15 credit hours related to a preferred Career Specialization in inclusive, traditional General Education UNCW courses selected with IFP advisors. After identifying career interests, IFP advisors will develop a course of study for the student to take classes in preparation to work in that field of study.

The last area of study of the Inclusive Life Skills and Career Development Certificate is Career Development. Students in the Inclusive Futures Program will complete two three-credit courses specially designed for college students with intellectual disabilities, including IFP 103: Career Development: Exploration and IFP 104: Career Development: Preparation and Participation. Both IFP 103 and IFP 104 will serve as a prerequisite and will investigate individual career interests and prepare individuals to work. Both courses are built on Pre-Employment Transition Services (ETS). After completing IFP 103 and IFP 104, students will then begin a work experience with an official internship. In conjunction with the students assigned internship, students will take IFP 105 Career Internship I and IFP 106 Career Internship II. A requirement of IFP 105 and IFP 106 is working at least 5 hours per week at the student’s assigned internship. In addition to the minimum work requirement, students will meet in this class weekly to review their work experience and reinforce Pre-ETS topics.

While career development and competitive employment is one goal of the Inclusive Futures Program, IFP provides an opportunity for individuals with intellectual disability to participate in all aspects of UNCW as a full-time college student. Students in IFP have access to

activities across the campus at UNCW. Students attend UNCW sporting events. Students may also access and use the Recreation Center, Outdoor Adventures, intramural activities, and various clubs or organizations (e.g., Best Buddies, Campus Christian Fellowship, College Democrats, College Republicans, Debate Club, Entrepreneurship Club, Financial Literacy Club, Marine Quest, Running Club, Seahawk Outreach). IFP offers the opportunity for its students a full campus life experience. Ultimately, attending IFP will allow students the opportunity to gain and increase independence and self-determination while learning with their typical peers.

Legislative Report

As outlined in House Bill 259, progress of the Inclusive Futures Program must be submitted to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Fiscal Research Division no later than March 15th, 2025. This report includes steps taken, admission requirements, support services, the number of participants, additional scholarship costs, and CTP status.

Steps Taken

There are several steps taken to establish the Inclusive Futures Program at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. The first step, and the largest step this year, is the creation of the program credential or certificate. The culmination of the program results in the students earning the Inclusive Life Skills and Career Development certificate. The program has worked to establish this certificate through the university's traditional approval process in Academic Affairs. To do this, the IFP has partnered with the Watson College of Education and the Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle, Literacy, and Special Education (EEMLS) department where the certificate will be recognized when approved. This process involved three primary areas

progressing through the university's curriculum system. The three areas include approving the IFP prefix, request to establish, and program specific courses (i.e., six courses mentioned above). To begin this process, the certificate was developed, as outlined above, and syllabi for each program specific course were created. The program director has presented and answered questions during the approval process beginning at the EEMLS department level and then working through the Watson College of Education where it was presented to the college's Curriculum Committee. Next, the certificate (i.e., each of the three areas described above) was presented to the University Curriculum Committee. After the University Curriculum Committee, the certificate was presented to the university Faculty Senate. While a presentation was required for the areas mentioned, other approvals were required between those steps and presentations. The program certificate is approximately 80% through the approval process with the goal of full approval by the end of May 2025.

To bring the IFP to fruition, IFP staff have met with stakeholders on and off campus over the course of the last year. On campus, staff have met with each college dean and each college's leadership team. In addition to leadership on campus, program staff have met with many teaching faculty to prepare for program students in UNCW courses. Meetings with staff will continue throughout the spring semester and throughout each year. Additionally, IFP staff have created an instructor training for all faculty who have an IFP student in their course. Program staff have also met with others on campus to prepare for supports and resources for IFP students. Preparations have been made with Admissions, Residential Life, Campus Life, Student Recreation, and the Student Health Center. Other work on campus included UNCW Admissions to create the program application. The program application went live in January and was active

until the application deadline on March 1st, 2025. Overall, preparations will continue throughout the spring and summer in advance of the Fall 2025 semester.

Communication and outreach to stakeholders off campus has mainly revolved around school districts, special schools, and community organizations. Program staff have met with classroom teachers, transition staff, district administrators, and attended transition fairs in various school districts. Meetings with stakeholders have included school districts and other community organizations in New Hanover County, Brunswick County, Pender County, and Cumberland County. Other counties and school personnel have been contacted (i.e., Columbus, Bladen, Duplin, Robeson). The program has held three informational sessions for prospective students and their families. The informational sessions took place in December 2024, January 2025, and February 2025 with over 70 individuals attending the sessions. Each session took place on the UNCW campus but was also available online via Zoom.

Specific programming has also been created in preparation for the first cohort of students. Program staff have begun to create course content for program specific courses starting with IFP 101 and IFP 103 (offered Fall 2025 semester) and will be completed in June 2025. Course content for IFP 102 and IFP 104 (offered Spring 2026 semester) will be created and completed in summer 2025. An IFP program summer camp, offered with the UNCW Freshman Orientation, will take place in June 2025, and camp content has been created. In preparation for person-centered planning, IFP has adopted the STAR Plan, specifically designed for postsecondary education programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Program staff have created the systematic structure of the STAR plans to be implemented as the first cohort of students are admitted. Additionally, the program has purchased EquipNX Software to aid in the person-centered planning approach of the program. EquipNX is specifically designed for postsecondary

education programs and students. Students in the program will have their own EquipNX account where all person-centered goals and data will be stored. EquipNX will allow the program and students to implement personal goals and monitor progress of those goals. It will also act as a centrally located resource for the program and program operations.

The biggest step remaining to create the IFP program is approval of the programs credential (i.e., Inclusive Life Skills and Career Development Certificate). In addition to the program credential, there are still steps to left to complete the Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) application. Without approval for the program credential, we cannot submit the CTP application. While these are both remaining steps, they are following the universities normal process of approval. Also, while we have met various offices on campus in preparation for students in the Fall 2025 semester, there are remaining steps to complete. These steps include finalization of housing arrangements and supports and continued conversations with faculty (i.e., student course placements and execution of faculty training).

Admission Requirements

The Director of the Inclusive Futures Program and the admission committee will determine admission based on the following requirements:

1. Has been enrolled in a high school special education program (earning High School Certificate of Attendance or Certificate of Completion) that does not allow students to complete the requirements necessary for standard admission to UNCW.
2. Age 18-28 at the time of admission with a documented intellectual disability (IQ – 70 or lower).
3. Interest in attending college to learn and grow with peers.

4. Interest in working in integrated competitive employment opportunities.
5. Family support to engage in the program (admission, goal setting, transition from program).
6. Demonstrations of emerging safety, communication, and social skills in college and community settings.
7. Meet all admission requirements above and fully complete the application and admission process by published deadline:
 - a. Attend program informational session and/or meet with program staff.
 - b. Submit official copies of transcripts from each institution attended in the prior five years at time of application including high school, community college, university, and other post-secondary education or training.
 - c. Submit two recommendations from individuals familiar with applicants' skills, disposition, career goals, and areas for future growth. One professional (e.g., teacher or other professional) One Personal (e.g., family member or friend).
 - d. Submit documentation of an intellectual disability (e.g., most recent IEP or most recent psychological report).
 - e. Submit letter of interest or verbal letter of interest in video form (preferred) indicating interest in attending an inclusive college program and intent to gain employment based on person-centered goals.
 - f. Family member completes Parent/Guardian assessment.

The program's application deadline for fall admittance is March 1st of each year. March 1st, 2025, the program received 17 applications. The admission committee has reviewed all applications and interviews are currently underway. All applicants have been invited to campus

for an admission interview. The interview includes the interested student and other stakeholders (i.e., parents/guardians) where specific questions are directed to both the student and stakeholders. To score each applicant, the admission committee created an interview rubric based on admission standards and requirements above. After all applicants are interviewed, the admission committee will meet to review applicant interviews and scores. Prospective students will be notified of a decision by April 1st, 2025.

Support Services

The Inclusive Futures Program is designed to provide support to a student throughout their time in the program. Support immediately begins with a person-centered plan where long-term and short-term goals in the areas of functional academics, career development, independent living, self-determination, and campus engagement will be identified. IFP staff will implement goals and track progress of those goals. The program staff will guide the student as they lead their own person-centered planning from semester to semester. After the first initial person-centered planning meeting, a person-centered planning meeting will occur at the end of each semester to monitor progress of current goals and identify new goals. The program will create a program of study and provide advising for each student as the student works towards the program credential (i.e., Life Skills and Career Development Certificate). The programs Academic Coordinator will lead all efforts in person-centered planning.

As career development is a major outcome of the program, career planning will begin as students enter the program. As mentioned, students will take two IFP specific courses around career development. In those courses, the students will complete interest inventories, begin exploration of career interest, and have opportunities to shadow jobs in a related career field. As students move into their second year of the program, they will complete two semesters of an

internship in a job related to their career interests. The programs career coordinator will lead career planning efforts for each student in the program.

Additionally, the program will provide both residential and commuter options for student in the program. Residential options will include the same options available to all UNCW students. Program staff are working with UNCW residential life to ensure structured support is provided to students living on campus. This includes training Residential Directors and Residential Advisors in the Residential Life department.

The program staff will also provide peer mentors who will work directly with students in the program. Peer mentors are UNCW undergraduate students who the program will employ to provide direct support in residential life, academics, and career development. A peer mentor program has been developed and piloted with two peer mentors in the spring 2025 semester. Program staff will train all educational coaches and peer mentors as they work with students in the program.

Before students exist IFP, program staff will work with the student and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition from the program. This will include partnerships and collaborations with outside providers in the event that a job is not secured. The goal of program staff is to help each student transition to an environment best suited for them. This primarily includes transitioning to gainful employment. In the last semester in the program, the student will participate in an exit person-centered planning meeting to identify actionable steps in transitioning from the program.

Number of Participants

Beginning in the Spring 2025 semester at UNCW, IFP welcomed one student as a pilot before the official cohort begins in the Fall 2025 semester. This student is currently taking two classes on campus this spring (i.e., EBD 280 Introduction to Entrepreneurship, SED 250 Introduction to Special Education). In addition to the two courses, this student is active on campus as a member of the Best Buddies Club attending activities, using the Pat Leonard Recreation Center to work out, and attending other campus activities (e.g., Career Fair, Involvement Fair, and numerous UNCW Men's Basketball games). This student has also participated in the person-centered planning process mentioned above.

Beginning in the Fall 2025 semester, the Inclusive Futures Program will welcome its first official cohort (i.e., academic years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027) of five students. While the students will officially begin classes in the Fall 2025 semester, students will participate in Seahawk Preview Day in April, Freshman Orientation in June, a program specific camp in conjunction with Freshman Orientation, and person-centered planning beginning in June. IFP students will take IFP 101 Skills and Knowledge for Greater Independence, IFP 103 Career Development-Exploration, UNI 101 First Year Seminar, and one additional typical UNCW undergraduate course based on the student's program of study beginning Fall 2025.

In planning for futures years, the program plans to admit more students in subsequent cohorts. As mentioned, the first cohort will admit five students. The plan is to admit 10 students in cohort two (i.e., academic years 2026-2027 and 2027-2028) and 10 students in cohort three (i.e., academic years 2027-2028 and 2028-2029). The program director will assess program progress to determine future enrollment numbers.

Additional Scholarship Cost

Working with the financial aid office on campus, the IFP scholarship fund has been created. Monies not used in year one of funding have been added to the scholarship fund. As outlined in Article 35A in Chapter 116 of North Carolina General Statutes, IFP students will have access to scholarships funds as they meet the eligibility requirements. It is estimated that there are enough funds available to cover the entire cost of attendance for the first cohort of students over their two years in the program. However, the entire cost of attendance for each student is not expected as students will apply (i.e., after program achieves CTP approval) for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and any awards from FAFSA will be applied to the student's scholarship package. As the program welcomes the second cohort in year two, scholarship funds would fall short in covering tuition to the programs 15 students if the full cost of attendance would be needed for each student.

Comprehensive Transition Program Status

The application to apply to become a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) has been started and is 75% complete. Sections of the application that have been started or completed include the Abstract of Program Model, Detailed Description of Definitional Components (i.e., academic, independent living, career development, advising and curriculum structure, student participation), Integration with non-disabled peers, and Program Credential. The only section not completed is Satisfactory Academic Progress. The application will be submitted when the program credential (i.e., Inclusive Life Skills and Career Development certificate) has been approved. Approval is anticipated in May 2025 with the programs CTP application to be submitted shortly after approval. The program is anticipating CTP approval Summer 2025. If approved Summer 2025, the first IFP cohort will be eligible and can apply for financial aid for the 2025-2026 academic year. However, there is some uncertainty in the field with potential

changes to the U.S. Department of Education. These changes may affect the CTP approval timeline.

Conclusion and Contact Information

Over the course of the last year, there has been a steady increase in excitement on campus for the Inclusive Futures Program. There has been a tremendous amount of support and help in building IFP. Collaboration has occurred throughout Student- and Academic Affairs. In the event there are questions from this report or if there is interest in additional general program information, please contact the Inclusive Futures Program director at the information provided below.

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