October 2017

Examination of Access to Postsecondary Education for Students With Disabilities in Virginia

STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER
EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to articulate a baseline assessment of information on the access to and persistence of individuals with disabilities in higher education programs in Virginia. The idea originated from the Disability Commission during the 2014 General Assembly session, where the Commission sought to improve "access to higher education for students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities." State Senator David Marsden, a member of the Commission, sponsored SJ10, a Senate Joint Resolution requesting that the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) study this specific issue.[1] The study was tabled, but due to subsequent consultation among SCHEV, VCU and Senator Marsden, it was agreed that it would be productive to attempt a comprehensive look at postsecondary access for students with disabilities. Such an effort would constitute a baseline articulation of information about access and persistence for this population of students, whose challenges in pursuing higher education are not always well understood among the general population, or even higher education policy-makers. The report has particular relevance given SCHEV's commitment to improving attainment and reducing educational disparities, as expressed in The Virginia Plan for Higher Education, which has advanced the goal of having Virginia become the best educated state by 2030.[2]

To facilitate work for this report, an ad hoc advisory group of experts from public and private higher education institutions and state agencies was convened twice by SCHEV. The advisory group provided valuable information on topics such as data collection, student services, documentation requirements, barriers to access, student and institutional challenges, and model programs within the Commonwealth. These discussions confirmed the potential value of a report that would focus on students with disabilities generally, rather than solely on students with a specific disability. SCHEV staff also attended meetings through the end of 2016, including meetings of the Virginia Collaborative for College, and meetings convened by the Virginia Department of Education focusing on the graduation and dropout indicators for students with disabilities. Updates were presented to the commission itself, which provided valuable feedback. These updates included a description of the purpose of the in-progress report, major topics and themes, and a summation of the various challenges faced by students

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[1] https://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?ses=141&typ=bil&val=sj10

[2] http://schev.edu/index/statewide-strategic-plan/overview

with disabilities in their efforts to access and persist in Virginia's institutes of higher education.

The remainder of this report is divided into four sections. Part one summarizes big-picture issues relating to access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, with some reflections on costs of barriers to access. Part two offers an overview of challenges experienced by students in accessing and persisting in postsecondary education, with emphasis on experiential aspects of gaining and using accommodations. Part three discusses accommodations and services from an institutional perspective, including challenges involved in preparing for different sub-populations of students with disabilities. Part four offers concluding recommendations for steps the Commonwealth can take to include students with disabilities more comprehensively in its deliberations about postsecondary attainment.

Students With Disabilities Accessing Higher Education

This section aims to identify certain trends of traditional students, including specific data on students with disabilities who are accessing postsecondary education. It is difficult to address with complete precision the question of how many students with disabilities are enrolled in postsecondary education, since data are unavoidably incomplete. Data that do exist are not collected uniformly across the nation, which can make drawing conclusions or comparisons among data sets difficult.[3] Keeping this in mind, information provided below outlines some of the national trends and Virginia-specific data on students with and without disabilities.

While advanced learning is associated with improved outcomes for all individuals, the impact of higher education on individuals with disabilities is particularly evident. It is well-known that higher unemployment rates and lower earnings are associated with lower levels of educational achievement. General enrollment rates can give the big picture of student enrollment; however, there are important differences among characteristics of individuals who complete postsecondary education. While more students with disabilities are transitioning to college, they are still less likely (46% vs. 63%) to enroll at all in postsecondary education than youth in the general population.[4]

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[3] (Leake, 2015)

[4] (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010)

In the general population of adults 25 years or older, approximately 28% had completed college; however, individuals with disabilities completed at less than half this rate.[5] The economic reality is that postsecondary education credentials—of whatever type—yield higher earnings for individuals who have earned them in comparison with those who have not.[6] College is a critical pathway for all individuals seeking economic stability. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' June 2016 release, "Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics – 2015" the employment-population ratio is much lower for persons with a disability than for those with no disability in all age groups, and unemployment rates are higher for persons with a disability than for those with no disability among all educational attainment groups.[7]

Traditionally Matriculating Students Accessing Postsecondary Education

Traditionally matriculating students are defined as individuals who enter college through the totality of a higher education institution's established application, acceptance and enrollment processes. The data provided in this section treat student enrollment measures in totality and do not break out students according to specific disability status.

Nationally

In April 2014, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released information detailing the college enrollment and work activity of high school graduates of the class of 2013.[8] In October 2013, 65.9% of 2013's high-school graduates were enrolled in colleges or universities. This number represents approximately 2 million of the nearly 3 million students who graduated from high school between January and October 2013. Of that 65.9%, 93% were enrolled on a full-time basis. "Overall, the 65.9% of 2013 graduates accessing higher education was down slightly from 66.2% the previous year and was the lowest figure in a decade. The high point came in 2009, when 70% of new high school graduates had gone on to college."[9]

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[5] (World Health Organization, 2011)
[6] (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011)
[7] (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016)
[8] (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014)
[9] (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014)

Virginia

According to data available on the website of the Virginia Department of Education, 81,300 students from the class of 2013 earned a federally recognized high school diploma, i.e., an advanced studies diploma, standard diploma, or international baccalaureate diploma.[10] Of those students, 72% enrolled in an institution of higher education within 16 months of graduation; 32% enrolled in a four-year public institution, 11% in a four-year private institution, and 29% in a two-year institution.

Students with Disabilities Accessing Postsecondary Education

Nationally

The National Center for Special Education Research released a report in 2011 titled "The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults With Disabilities Up to Eight Years After High School." According to this study, 60% of students with disabilities continued on to a higher education institution within eight years of leaving high school. Students with a disability were more likely to enroll in a two-year institution than a four-year institution, and were typically enrolled on a consistent and full-time basis.[11]

Virginia

The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) requires each state to submit a performance plan that includes baseline data, targets and improvement activities for indicators developed by the United States Department of Education. To collect data for "Indicator 14," local school divisions attempt to contact all high school students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in effect at the time of their exit from high school. This survey is conducted one year from the student's exit from high school via telephone interviews, and attempts to determine whether the student is:

    A. Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school.
    B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school.
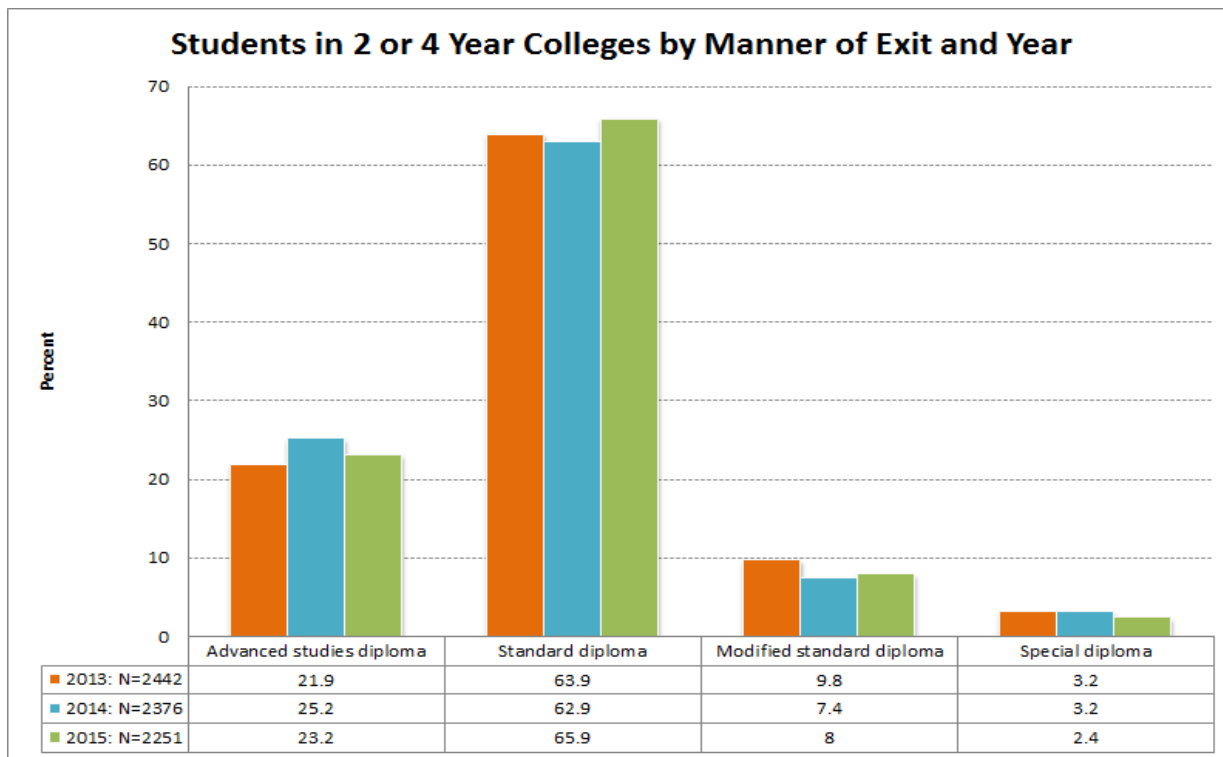
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[10] (Virginia Department of Education, 2013)
[11] (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010)

C. Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.[12]

Indicator Number 14 data provide a representative sample of students with disabilities exiting schools according to ethnicity, gender, and disability category. Percentages reported are based on students with disabilities completing one semester and do not reflect postsecondary education completion rates. It is possible, however, to gain a picture of completion rates for individuals with disabilities. According to data reported by the U.S. Department of Education (2014), 57% of the general population entering college as first-time full-time students completed a degree within six years. For students with disabilities that figure is 34%.

As shown by the table below, the proportions of diploma types earned by Virginia students with disabilities have remained fairly consistent over time. (There are additional certificates that students with disabilities can earn, but the percentages of students earning these remain at the level of 1% or lower.) Over the period 2013-15, students with IEPs have earned the Standard Diploma at the rate of 62-66% and the Advanced Diploma at the rate of 22-25%. There is not a discernible upward or downward trend.

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[12] *What is Indicator 14?*, The National Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, available at, http://www.psocenter.org/content_page_assets/content_page_3/What%20is%20I14.pdf.

Students in 2 or 4 Year Colleges by Manner of Exit and Year

	Advanced studies diploma	Standard diploma	Modified standard diploma	Special diploma
2013: N=2442	21.9	63.9	9.8	3.2
2014: N=2376	25.2	62.9	7.4	3.2
2015: N=2251	23.2	65.9	8	2.4

The next table provides the breakdown of enrollment in postsecondary education by disability category: students with autism (AUT), emotional disabilities (ED), other health impairment (OHI) or specific learning disabilities (SLD). Students with emotional disabilities access college at about the same rate as students with other disabilities.[13] Those who are identified as having a specific learning disability are almost 1.46 times greater than students with other disabilities to attend college, and students with OHI are 1.29 times greater. Although the data fail to include students with ID, 25% of these students identified as exiting secondary education for the indicator data reported in 2014. Students with ID are significantly less likely to access college than students with other disabilities.

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[13] (Virginia Department of Education, 2014)

Students in 2 or 4 Year Colleges by Disability and Year

	Aut	ED	OHI	SLD
2013: N=2442	4.8	6.6	22.9	50.4
2014: N=2376	6.3	7.1	22.1	49.2
2015: N=2251	5.9	5.8	24.2	49.2
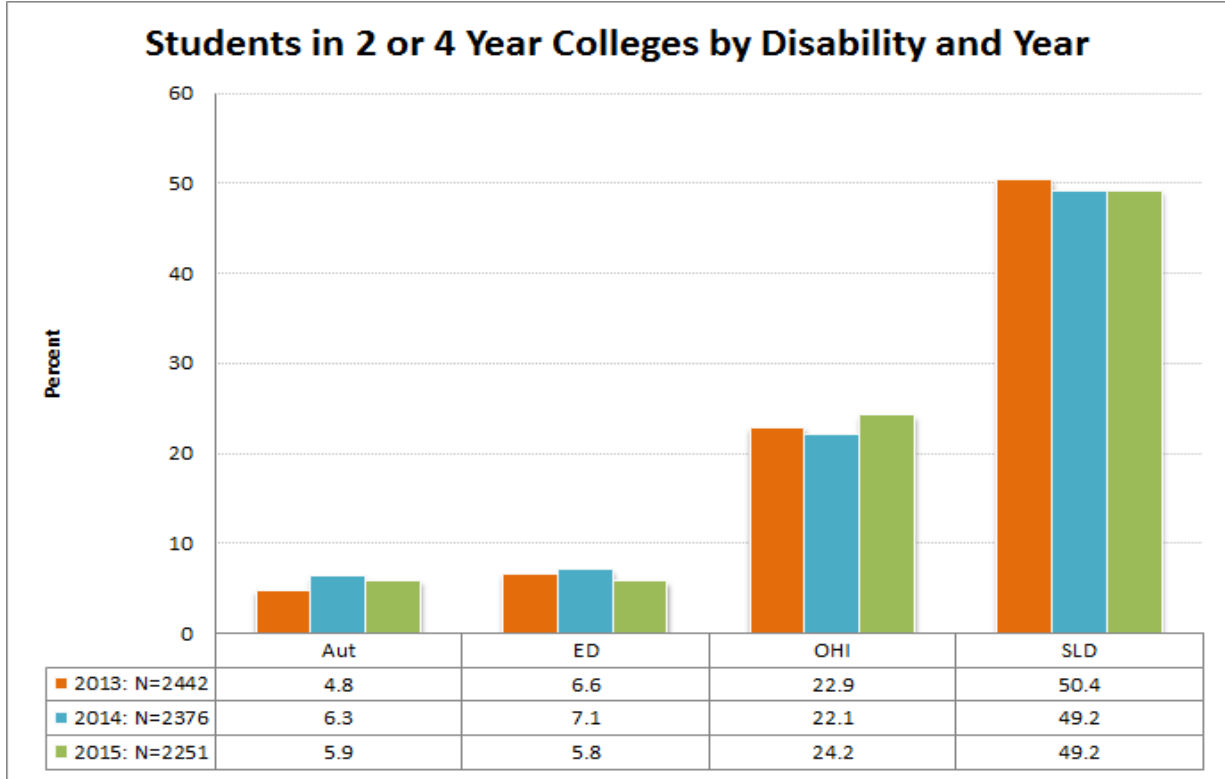
The third table below provides data on the percentages of students with disabilities accessing Virginia colleges by ethnicity. The ethnicities summarized in the table are the four largest groups identified in the Indicator No. 14 data sets over the past three years. In 2014, students with disabilities who identified as white were 1.16 times more likely to access college than students of other ethnicities. Students who identified as black/African-American were 1.5 times more likely not to go to college than students of other ethnicities.[14]

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[14] Odds ratios describe the magnitude of associations between categorical variables. According to Cohen (1988) odds ratios of near 1.5 are considered small, 2.5 are considered medium, and 4.3 or greater are large.

Students in 2 or 4 Year Colleges by Ethnicity and Year

	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	White
2013: N=2442	3.4	25.7	7.5	59.1
2014: N=2376	2.7	24	7.3	61.5
2015: N=2251	3	25.3	8.7	58.8
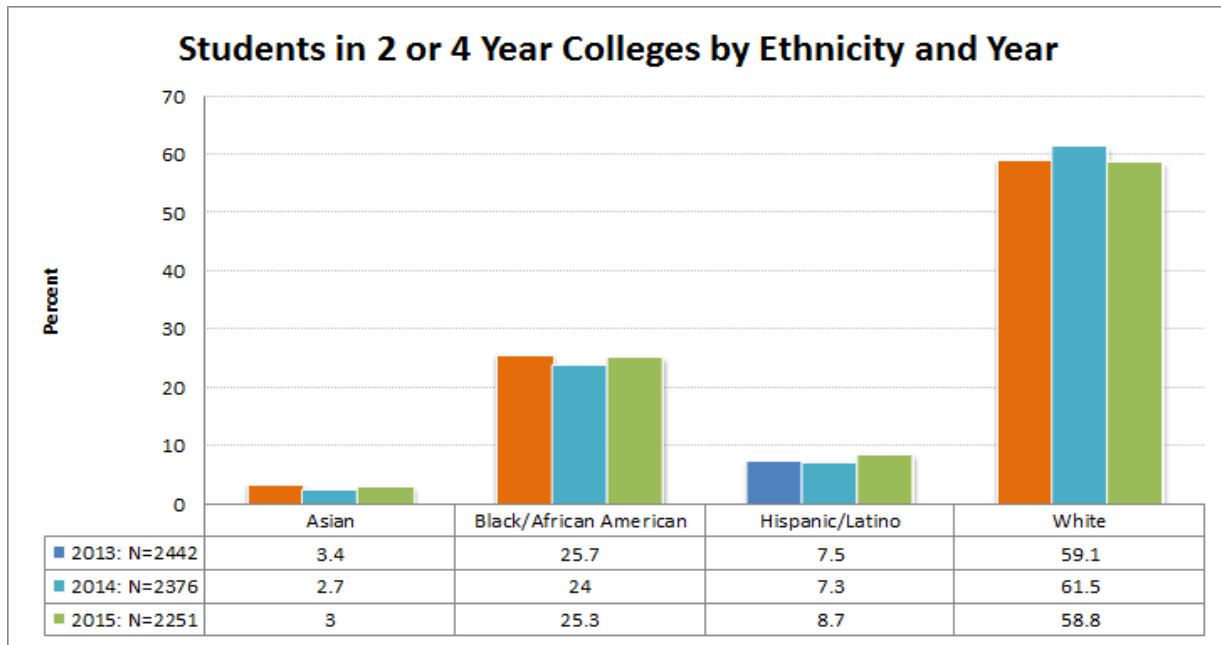
Understanding Access and Persistence

Access to College

Students with disabilities face more intensive obstacles in making the transition to college than other students. As previously stated, students with disabilities are less likely (46% vs. 63%) to enroll in postsecondary education than the general youth population.[15] As a result, only 41% of students with disabilities go on to complete some type of postsecondary credential, compared to 51% of the general youth population.

Barriers experienced by students with disabilities in accessing postsecondary education are well known. These include academic preparation, expectations of enrolling and completing a college education, standardized placement testing, and a lack of communication between educational sectors about how differing practices are likely to affect students as they transition to postsecondary education.[16] Several of these areas are beyond the purview of this assessment, but are important for future discussion and exploration as to the specific implications they have for Virginia students with disabilities seeking higher education opportunities.

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[15] (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010)
[16] (Getzel, 2014)

According to Virginia Indicator 14 data over the three-year period 2013-15, 13% of students with disabilities identify as "unengaged," which means they are neither employed nor enrolled in higher education one year post high school. When asked what barriers prevented them from participating in higher education, the most frequently identified across the three-year period were:

A. lack of available transportation;
B. financial support; and
C. support services (personal assistance services, academic support services, assistive technology).

Admission Impediments

Most institutions still consider performance on a standardized test in the admissions process. Whether an institution relies on the SAT, ACT or a statewide placement exam, these tests may act as a barrier to admission for students with disabilities in ways that are not intended, as student performance can be significantly affected by the process for obtaining accommodations from test companies. A GAO study conducted in 2012 found that testing companies are:

A. failing to change their policies in light of changes in the laws;
B. imposing burdensome and expensive documentation requirements on students; and
C. failing to handle accommodation requests in a timely manner (a significant cause of students taking tests without justifiable accommodations).

Poor performance due to taking the tests without proper accommodations, either due to the cost of documenting a disability or the inability to overcome bureaucratic impediments, can result in low scores that prevent admission into particular institutions that might otherwise be accessible or appropriate. Moreover, extensive research on test anxiety and performance, particularly with regard to "stereotype threat" for students with learning disabilities, indicates that scores on standardized tests may not reflect these students' actual readiness for college.[17] Test-optional and portfolio-based admissions could mitigate this problem, but these practices are not widely available at

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[17] (May & Stone, 2010)

colleges and universities. Yet, there is a movement within higher education to reduce dependence on standardized testing scores. One rationale behind this shift is that admission officials are finding that by not requiring standardized test scores, student diversity can be supported without undermining academic integrity.

For students with more significant disabilities, especially students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, admission into postsecondary education can be problematic due to the type of diploma earned and such students' inability to pass entrance exams, even when seeking to take coursework primarily for audit. In a telephone survey conducted to determine the use of placement testing in other states serving college students with ID/DD, it was found that for the majority of two- and four-year colleges, placement testing was not required. However, for those institutions that did require testing, the results were used for purposes of placement rather than as a de facto admissions threshold.[18] The availability of auditing options for students with ID/DD could be a helpful means of providing access to these educational experiences in the Commonwealth.

Financial Impediments

Students with disabilities often face increased financial burdens precisely because of their disability. A prime example is the cost involved in simply *documenting* a disability in order to satisfy institutional requirements for accommodation. In this regard postsecondary students are situated very differently than when in the K-12 public education system, where expenses associated with diagnosing and documenting disabilities are by law borne by the school district. In making the transition to higher education, these burdens generally shift to the student. The student must on his/her own both document the disability and take the initiative to enter the institution's disability-related bureaucratic processes.

Institutions typically have specific requirements for how recent a student's documentation must be. The mere fact that a student had an IEP in high school is not necessarily sufficient to justify a higher education accommodation. If the school district's most recent evaluation falls outside the higher-education institution's time limits, the student must arrange for a new one. This involves a diagnostic evaluation by

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[18] Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities: https://pd.vcurrtc.org/index.cfm

an educational psychologist (or other relevant health professional), for which the costs can run into the hundreds of dollars for even the most common learning disabilities—thousands for complex cases. Not only is the transition to postsecondary education more complex and constrained for students with disabilities, it is also *more expensive*. We know from empirical studies of access and persistence that each additional cost leads to economically motivated choices on the part of students, who will go without books, tutoring, food, etc., depending on their circumstances and the amount of financial support available to them. In the case of students with disabilities, these constraints can easily translate into foregoing applying to a particular institution, or—after admission—not seeking accommodation to begin with. Each such choice diminishes a student's chances of access and ultimate success. Students with disabilities have more logistics, more complications, and greater costs just to establish the same *starting point* as their student peers.

Persistence While in College

Individuals with disabilities who complete college do so at a "statistically lower rate than people without disabilities."[19] On average, students with disabilities who complete their degrees (associate, bachelor's, and higher) are less successful at securing employment in their area of study, and, when employed, generally earn less than their peers without disabilities.[20]

Among the most relevant obstacles to consider when seeking to maximize success for students with disabilities are:

    A. expectations of increased student responsibility in college;

    B. non-standardized documentation requirements between high school and college, among different colleges, and for students with different types of disabilities;

    C. financial barriers to college that exceed those of the general population; and

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[19] (Barber, 2012)
[20] (World Health Organization, 2011)

D. psychological, interpersonal, and logistical challenges of self-disclosure and the necessity for repeated self-reporting by the student.

Expectations of Increased Student Responsibility

The process for requesting an accommodation is markedly different between the K-12 and postsecondary levels. In elementary and secondary school, students are identified by school divisions as needing special education services, and in order to comply with federal law, the school division writes an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan and provides the necessary services. The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), guarantees a "free, appropriate public education," paid for by government funds and administered through standard protocols by the school system. Once these students graduate and enroll in postsecondary institutions, however, they are left to navigate the educational support process on their own. They are no longer covered by the IDEA, but by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA's primary tool in this regard is the use of "reasonable accommodations" to ensure equal access to postsecondary opportunity, instead of ensuring a free, appropriate special education for students with disabilities, as the IDEA intends.

The ADA defines a disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment."[21] The definition does not include a list of specified impairments. The need for an accommodation is determined by evaluating the condition's impact on the student.[22] As a student with a disability prepares to transition to postsecondary education, she must also prepare to enter a system that requires *self-advocacy*. Whereas in secondary education the student's needs and accommodations are subject to mandatory and consistently applied processes, in a postsecondary context the student may bear responsibility for documenting her need for accommodation and communicating it to each individual instructor, every semester.

Students with documented disabilities must devote significant additional time and effort to conduct their academic responsibilities with accommodations to which they are legally entitled. For example, to secure and utilize an accommodation, the student may

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[21] 42 U.S.C. §12102(1).

[22] (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2012)

have to meet with the disability services office (perhaps more than once a semester) to secure a letter of accommodation, and then he is expected to present the letter and discuss the specific accommodation he may need with the instructor of *each* class he is taking. A single college class, moreover will typically have multiple *kinds* of assignments, and depending on the details of the assignment, the specific accommodation may need to differ. Even assuming that *all* of a student's professors—potentially five or more per semester—are knowledgeable about and sympathetic toward students with disabilities, these students are faced with the prospect of having to negotiate several times more interactions with offices and/or instructors per semester than their peers without disabilities. This dynamic can introduce serious logistical issues for students, particularly in their first year in college when they are negotiating all the other transition issues that affect persistence and success for all students. If one adds anxiety, or lack of organizational and time management skills, into the mix—neither of which is an unusual issue for any 18-year-old, much less students with learning disabilities—it is easy to see that students with disabilities are hit with a double or triple "whammy" when it comes to negotiating the transition to postsecondary education. Additionally, recent qualitative findings suggest that students may struggle even with such a simple task as delivering accommodation letters to faculty because of fears that their instructors will lower their expectations of them or judge them adversely.[23]

There is an underlying assumption in these requirements that students with disabilities will be self-aware, effective at self-advocacy, motivated to seek accommodations, and possess the organizational skills and available time to be effective at securing them. Students who wish to benefit from the kinds of accommodations they may have enjoyed as a matter of course in primary and secondary schooling must now advocate through repeated and ongoing self-disclosure in college.[24] There is reason to doubt that an expectation of self-awareness and comfort with self-disclosure on the part of students aligns fully with their actual behavior. According to the National Center on Educational Statistics (NCES) survey concerning post-high school outcomes of students with disabilities, 63% of students who had been identified as having a disability by their secondary schools did not consider themselves to have a disability when enrolling in

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[23] (Hong, 2015)
[24] United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights

their postsecondary institution. Only 28% of students with disabilities identified themselves and informed their postsecondary schools of their disability.[25]

Additionally, many students are strongly disinclined to report even a well-documented disability to the campus disability office. This inclination may be due to past negative experiences, or even a kind of hopefulness that, with a new beginning in college, they may no longer need accommodations. Whatever the precise explanation, it is certainly the case that substantial numbers of students are foregoing legitimate and available help in negotiating the challenges of postsecondary education.

Documentation Requirements

The IDEA requires school districts to provide students with disabilities a "free and appropriate public education."[26] To comply with this requirement, schools must identify students who may be in need of services due to a disability. A school must also provide an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for any child the school identifies, and the plan should describe the specific disability and educational services required. Furthermore, for students ages 14 and older in Virginia, the IEP must contain transition services for post-school goals of employment, education and training, and independent living. The responsibility at the elementary and secondary levels is solely on the school to identify students in need of services and provide those services. By contrast, at the postsecondary level, the student bears the responsibility to enter the accommodations process. A postsecondary institution is not required to provide a free and appropriate public education, but instead must provide "appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that [the institution] does not discriminate on the basis of disability."[27] In order to receive these academic adjustments, a student must self-report and inform the institution of his disability and need for adjustments. While a postsecondary institution may not deny any student admission because of his or her diagnosed disability, the institution is not "required to lower or substantially modify essential requirements" of admission.[28] Misunderstandings and concerns continue to exist among faculty members and instructors regarding accommodations, to the effect

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[25] (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010)

[26] https://sites.ed.gov/idea/

[27] United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights

[28] United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights

that they reduce academic standards or require too much time and effort to implement.[29]

A postsecondary institution is permitted to determine appropriate academic adjustments, and may require a student to follow "reasonable procedures to request an academic adjustment."[30] The student bears the responsibility to know and comply with an institution's procedures, and because of the absence of a streamlined process mandated by law, it is not unusual for different institutions to have different procedures in place. Common among postsecondary institutions, however, is the need for a student to provide documentation of a disability in order to be considered for an academic adjustment. The institution uses the required documentation and "reviews the request in light of the essential requirements of the relevant [academic] program" to determine what services the institution may offer to the student. The institution may offer an academic adjustment specifically requested by the student, or may suggest an alternative, as the law does not require the institution to grant all aspects of a student's request.

In 2012, the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) released guidance on documentation practices in response to amendments to the Americans With Disabilities Act and its updated regulations. Broadly, the AHEAD guidance document recommends a streamlined process guided by individual review, a common sense standard for determining an accommodation, a non-burdensome documentation process, and the use of current and relevant information.[31] In Virginia as elsewhere in the United States, the AHEAD guidelines have been adopted in some but not all institutions (and in some but not all schools within a larger university), and, in some instances, for certain but not all disabilities. For example, students with "hidden" or invisible disabilities are often required to present additional proof of ongoing impairment while students with physical or health related disabilities are granted accommodations based on staff discretion.[32]

For this report, SCHEV reviewed all the information about disability supports and services available on the websites of Virginia public institutions. Virginia institutions

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[29] (Leake & Stodden, 2014)
[30] United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights
[31] (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2012)
[32] (Vance, Lipsitz, & and Parks, 2014)

provide a wide range of accommodations on campus for students with disabilities. A large majority of Virginia institutions provide extended time on examinations. In addition, institutions provide separate classrooms, preferential seating and alternative forms for testing and examinations as needed. Many offer books in electronic, audible or Braille format, and will provide interpreters as needed. In addition, there are other services available on campus to assist with career advice, course selection, research projects, campus orientation, stress management and organizational skills.

There is no specific procedure or process mandated by law for schools to follow when setting the standards for requesting documentation from a student in regards to his disability. Thus, requirements and policies vary by institution. Some require the student to complete a form or application; others require medical documentation, and specify the need for different documentation depending on the disability; certain institutions require in-person meetings with members of the disability services staff; several mandate that students meet individually with professors to discuss their request; and numerous programs require students to follow up on their accommodation requests before the beginning of *every* semester.

The AHEAD guidance recognizes three categories of acceptable documentation sources. The first is primary documentation, or a student's self-report. The guidance notes that "the student is a vital source of information ... [and] a student's narrative ... may be sufficient for establishing a disability and a need for accommodation."[33] Documentation may also come in the form of observation and interaction. This secondary documentation is comprised of "impressions and conclusions ... from higher education disability professionals."[34] These impressions and conclusions are formed during and after interviews and conversations with a student regarding his disability. Lastly, documentation may be provided by external or third parties. This "tertiary documentation" may include "educational or medical records, reports, and assessments created by health care providers, school psychologists, teachers, or the educational system."[35] The guidance specifically includes a student's IEP as an example of tertiary documentation.

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[33] (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2012)
[34] (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2012)
[35] (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2012)

Nearly all public two- and four-year institutions in Virginia rely on tertiary documentation, but the institutions also require records and reports from a "qualified evaluator." Some institutions specifically define "qualified," and list how recent the documentation must be, but other institutional guidelines are less clear. Furthermore, while the AHEAD guidelines include an IEP as an example of tertiary documentation, Virginia institutions tend to view the IEP alone as insufficient, and require additional documentation or evaluations.

The lack of consistency in required documentation might in itself create an access barrier for some students with disabilities. For instance, a student might only apply to select schools that require the *same* type of documentation in order to be provided with an academic adjustment. Additionally, the required documentation to receive an academic adjustment at a Virginia two-year institution may differ from that required at any given four-year institution. Therefore, in addition to managing the stresses of transferring to a new campus, students must also compile the appropriate documentation to receive an academic adjustment at the four-year institution, which may differ from what that student compiled for adjustments at their former institution.

Institutional Challenges

While students must overcome certain challenges as they navigate through the admissions process and procedures for requesting academic adjustments, institutions must also respond to changing needs and requests from an increasingly diverse student population. Some key challenges that institutions need to address in order to meet an increasingly diverse student population attending higher education include: faculty and staff training, emerging technology, collaborating with secondary education, and responding to diverse populations of students with disabilities on college campuses.

Faculty/Staff Training

Institutional staff members who work directly with students with disabilities should be properly trained in support services and accommodation procedures. Many staff members are not adequately trained beyond the individuals who work in the disability services office. Faculty rarely receive training or instruction on formatting their materials for students with disabilities, or even information on educating students with unique needs in their classroom. This can lead students to forgo accommodations from faculty even though they are eligible to receive them. For example, students with

psychological disabilities have noted that faculty confidentiality was a concern no matter what accommodations they were receiving.[36] This concern can cause a student with a psychological disability to be more reluctant to discuss their accommodations with professors, while continuing to take the class with no accommodations.

Research findings report significant differences in faculty who have received disability-focused training (versus those who have not) in their understanding of their legal responsibilities and subsequent implementation of accommodations, reduction of instructional obstacles, greater awareness of campus resources, and the investment of additional time to assist students.[37] It is important to note that in addition to the need for disability-specific training, more higher education institutions are focusing faculty training on the principles of universal design to enable all students to better access course materials and information. The principles of universal design provide a context in creating accessible learning environments for a variety of learners.[38]

Responding to Emerging Technology

While current technological advancements may provide new learning opportunities for students, these advancements also present challenges for institutions in relation to educating students with disabilities. Assistive technology such as digital textbooks can prove difficult for students with disabilities, as many digital textbooks are not accessible by screen readers. This is especially burdensome for students with print-related disabilities such as dyslexia or visual impairments. These students typically use computer software that enables them to enlarge text, transcribe dictation, or even dictate text. But if the digital materials, such as PDFs or digital textbooks, are not formatted properly, the enabling software used by students with disabilities may prove incompatible, thus rendering these documents unavailable. Further information and training is needed to assist faculty members to become more cognizant of the challenges they may inadvertently place on students through the use of electronically formatted resources. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the needs of students with

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[36] (Stein, 2013)

[37] (Lombardi, Murray, & Dallas, 2011)

[38] (Lombardi, Murray, & Dallas, 2011)

disabilities in the development of online courses such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC).[39]

Collaboration with Secondary Education

As mentioned above, self-reporting can prove challenging for students as they transition from high school to college. The only way students with disabilities can ensure the receipt of appropriate accommodations is by informing the disability services office of their need and following the accommodation request procedures. However, students often struggle with the decision to report their disability. While the disability services staff is ready to assist students, oftentimes students worry about forming a trusting relationship due to the personal (sometimes perceived as invasive) inquiries a student must answer when requesting an accommodation or seeking services on campus. Finally, students may simply be unaware of services and supports available on campus, and fail even to inquire because they do not know there is something to inquire about.[40]

Transition planning from secondary to higher education can have a significant impact on students' willingness to reach out to the disability services office on campus. It is important to begin the discussion of accommodations with students while they are in high school. For example, transition planning can include a cursory examination of the disability offices and procedures at institutions students are considering. By educating students in transition planning meetings about their rights and responsibilities and the available services, high school educators can address any lack of knowledge or understanding about transition from high school to college. In turn, an increased discussion of options during transition planning can encourage students to seek assistance from the disability services office on campus before any major academic problems occur. This is a shared responsibility during the transition planning process between high schools and institutions of higher education to increase communication and collaboration.

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[39] (Cory, 2011)

[40] (Lombardi, Murray, & Dallas, 2011)

Emerging Populations

Intellectual Disabilities/Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD)

Students with ID/DD have not been afforded the same opportunities to access postsecondary education as other student populations. In fact, students with ID/DD have the lowest percentage of postsecondary enrollment of any category of individuals with disabilities.[41] Due to their limited opportunities, legislation through the Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2008 contained provisions to increase the access of higher education for these individuals. Through this legislation, Congress approved the creation of 27 model demonstration projects known as Transition and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs). The purpose of these projects was to "create, expand, or enhance high quality, inclusive higher education experiences to support positive outcomes for individuals with ID/DD."[42] Virginia Commonwealth University received one of the TPSID grants during the first cohort of grants funded.

In addition to the TPSIDs grant program, a number of two- and four-year colleges and universities offer programs for students with ID. There are approximately 245 programs that have been identified through the Thinkcollege.com website. Individuals can visit this website to learn about the range of offerings at higher education institutions. Another provision of the HEOA is that students with an intellectual disability may receive funding from the Federal Pell Grant Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant and the Federal Work-Study program. Colleges and universities must meet certain requirements and submit documentation of their program for approval if they: (1) are enrolled in a comprehensive transition and postsecondary (CTP) program[43] at an institution of higher education that participates in federal aid

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[41] (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010)

[42] (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012)

[43] "A CTP program for students with intellectual disabilities means a degree, certificate, or nondegree program that

    A.   is offered by a college or career school and approved by the U.S. Department of Education;

    B.   is designed to support students with intellectual disabilities who want to continue academic, career, and independent living instruction to prepare for gainful employment;

    C.   offers academic advising and a structured curriculum; and

    D.   requires students with intellectual disabilities to participate, for at least half of the program, in regular enrollment in credit-bearing courses with nondisabled students,

programs; (2) maintain satisfactory academic progress; and (3) meet the basic federal student aid eligibility requirements, with the exception that there is no high school diploma or GED requirement, nor does the student have to be pursuing a degree or certificate at the institution.[44] George Mason University and Virginia Commonwealth University are the only Virginia institutions to offer a CTP program. Appendix A provides descriptions of college programs serving students with ID/DD in the Commonwealth. The table below shows where the students with ID/DD attending college are. Few options are available in Virginia, with only 66 students with ID/DD currently accessing higher education. In 2008, the rate of employment was reported at 28%, while recent numbers show it is anywhere from 18% to 23%. The downward employment trend in this population will not improve until new ways are found to meaningfully integrate these individuals into the labor force. Individuals with ID/DD who participate in any postsecondary education experience (not necessarily earning a degree or certificate) are employed at double the rate of those with just a high school diploma. Based on national data gathered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, young adults with intellectual disabilities who participated in postsecondary education were 26% more likely to exit their vocational rehabilitation program with employment and earned a 73% higher weekly income.

- ▪ auditing or participating (with nondisabled students) in courses for which the student does not receive regular academic credit,
- ▪ enrollment in noncredit-bearing, nondegree courses with nondisabled students, or
- ▪ internships or work-based training with nondisabled individuals."

Federal Student Aid, *Students with intellectual disabilities may be able to get certain types of federal student aid*, OFFICE OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, *available at*

https://studentaid.ed.gov/eligibility/intellectual-disabilities#virginia.

[44] United States Department of Education
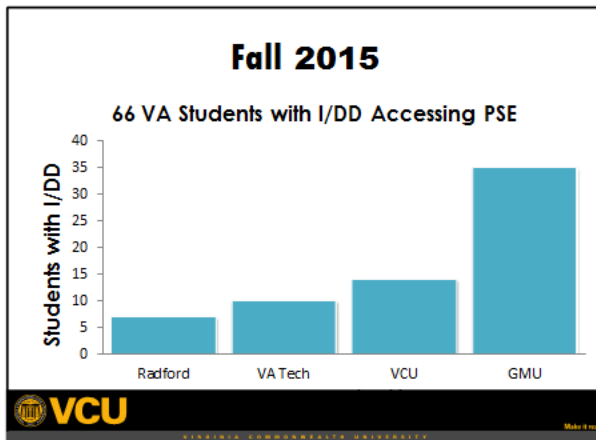
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

"Students with autism or Asperger's diagnoses are among the most recent group of students to increase" on college campuses.[45] It is estimated that approximately 35% of students with autism attend a postsecondary institution within six years of graduating high school.[46] Even though there are increasing numbers of students with ASD entering postsecondary education, research data suggests many students are leaving secondary education without the "skills, experiences, supports, and linkages that will prepare them well for college and future careers."[47]

Students with ASD face unique challenges entering postsecondary environments including learning how to interact with peers and faculty in classes, how to manage their course loads, and the social environment unique to college with roommates and increased independence.[48] The reality of this level of responsibility often is not fully realized until the student is in college. As with other students with disabilities, there is an increasing awareness that students with ASD are in need of postsecondary options and supports to further their career goals and promote long-term independence.[49] It is important to note that students with ASD bring a number of academic strengths to college. In a focus group of faculty members conducted by Gobbo and Shmulsky, participants noted that students with ASD were passionate about their interests and

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[45] (Cory, 2011)

[46] (Shattuck, Narendorf, Cooper, Sterzing, Wagner, & Taylor, 2012)

[47] (Kucharczyk, 2015)

[48] (Getzel & Briel, 2008)

[49] (Hewitt, 2011)

had a desire to obtain accurate information.[50] They also exhibited strong adherence to rules, for example coming to class and appointments on time, completing their work and closely following instructions in labs and classroom settings.

Psychological/Emotional Disability (ED)

The number of students attending college who have a psychological or emotional disability has increased since the early 2000s. In some instances, this group of students now surpasses the combined number of students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders on campus.[51] Students with psychological disabilities face unique challenges as they transition into college. Some of these challenges include self-monitoring and managing their symptoms in a new environment, making decisions about whether and when to disclose their disability, and determining where they can go to seek assistance when needed. One of the greatest challenges is dealing with stigma and discrimination.[52] Accommodations in college that have assisted students to achieve their academic goals include extended time on tests and/or taking them in a distraction-free environment to help reduce anxiety; note takers for class notes; and opportunities to take multiple and frequent breaks from class without penalty.

More recently, there has been an increase in the number of veterans with disabilities (also called "wounded warriors") enrolling in college. These increases are a result of the post-911 G.I. Bill benefits, which cover tuition and costs at the college for honorably discharged veterans who served 90 days or more of active duty since 2001.[53] While returning veterans may have a physical disability, some also have hidden disabilities that may not be prominent or documented such as traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other emotional disabilities.[54]

Chronic Illness

Young adults with chronic illness are enrolling in college at higher rates than ever before, in large part due to successful treatment and pain management techniques that were unavailable in prior decades. According to the Centers for Disease Control, approximately one in 10 Americans face major health limitations in their everyday lives

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[50] (Shmulsky & Gobbo, 2013)

[51] (Stein, 2013)

[52] (Stein, 2013)

[53] (Grossman, 2009)

[54] (Maudaus, 2011)

due to chronic illness.[55] The National Health Interview Survey estimates that 7% of American youth experience regular disruption of their daily activities due to a chronic illness.[56] Examples of chronic illnesses that increasingly affect young adults (either through advances in diagnosis or actual increases in incidents of disease) include cancer, lupus, chronic fatigue syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV, epilepsy, Crohn's disease, heart disease, diabetes, asthma and colitis among others. Increased awareness and better resources at institutions of higher education are needed to adequately address the needs of these students, and the accommodations provided need to reflect their unique health needs.[57]

Conclusion and Recommendations

The picture of issues associated with postsecondary students with disabilities that has been presented here is large, complex, and would not admit of a single centralized approach. However, a great deal of good can be done by bringing disability issues more explicitly into strategic higher education discussions at the state level. In support of that broad purpose, the following suggestions are proposed for SCHEV and partners:

I.   Establish an advisory committee, to be jointly administered by SCHEV and the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, with the broad charge of examining conditions for people with disabilities accessing postsecondary education in Virginia and recommending strategies for improving that access.

II. The advisory committee, once established, should develop a progressive and feasible work plan of measures for the Commonwealth to consider/implement, to include (but not necessarily limited to):

   a. Identify priorities and opportunities for inter-agency research that will clarify the real experiences of students with disabilities accessing postsecondary education in Virginia.

   b. Identify policy recommendations that will align the Commonwealth's priorities in education and workforce development with the needs and challenges faced by students with disabilities.

   c. Develop guidelines to help improve consistency in policies across institutions, with an emphasis on documentation.

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[55] (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2009)

[56] (Edwards, 2013)

[57] (Repetto, et al., 2012)

d. Examine the extent to which formal barriers (particularly having to do with documentation) may be creating barriers for students with disabilities accessing and succeeding in postsecondary education. The purpose of such examination and any recommendations arising therefrom should be to support student success to the greatest extent while respecting the role of institutions to determine and adhere to their own academic standards.

Appendix A

Model Programs within the Commonwealth for Students with ID/DD

While the challenges listed above place new demands on institutions, several programs exist within the Commonwealth that provide postsecondary education opportunities for students with unique learning needs.

ACE-IT in College at Virginia Commonwealth University[58]

The ACE-IT in College program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) provides postsecondary education opportunities specifically for students with intellectual and or developmental disabilities who are 18 to 26 years of age. To participate in the ACE-IT Program, a student must have a documented intellectual disability, traumatic brain injury, or autism, and have earned an applied studies (special diploma). VCU was one of 27 universities across the nation to receive a five-year demonstration grant from the United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, and the program began in the fall of 2011.

Students audit VCU classes earning up to 25 credits over four semesters. Classes are selected from VCU course listing, and they earn an existing School of Education certificate. VCU ACE-It in College student participate in the graduation ceremony with all School of Education graduates. The outcome goal of ACE-IT in College is integrated, competitive employment in the student's area of interest. This interest is determined based on courses and experiences at VCU, and students work in paid, on-campus employment sites and participate in an internship during their final semester of their program.

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[58] ACE-IT in College, Virginia Commonwealth University, available at http://aceitincollege.org/.

To gain admission into the ACE-IT in College Program, interested students may apply. If accepted into the program, students apply for VCU for admission and meet with an academic advisor. Students in the ACE-IT in College Program attend orientation, register for classes, request academic accommodations, and participate in Welcome Week activities with all incoming students. ACE-IT students are paired with an educational coach who are VCU undergraduate or graduate students helping them to prepare and participate in their classes. The students gain valuable employment opportunities through community service, mentors and part-time employment.

The Mason Life at George Mason University ("Mason Life")[59]
The Mason LIFE program provides a four-year postsecondary program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Students must begin the program between the ages of 18-23. The program is located at the George Mason University Fairfax campus. The Mason LIFE aims to "provide a supportive academic environment for students," and to supply an apprenticeship for George Mason students "to gain experience and knowledge to work with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities."

Students attend classes during the day, Monday through Friday, and 80% of the students participate in the residential housing component of the program, living both on and off campus. Students meet with the program director and university coordinator to determine class selections. Students in the Mason LIFE program are afforded a great deal of freedom on campus, so that they may navigate their way to class, meals, and activities independently after receiving initial assistance at orientation. A pilot internship experience was recently created as part of the program. Students who complete the program graduate with a George Mason certificate of completion with a catalog concentration and work specialty area.

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[59] Mason Life, George Mason University, available at http://masonlife.gmu.edu/.

To gain admission into the Mason LIFE Program, interested students may apply by January 15 of the previous year of admittance and include the appropriate documentation. Interviews with the student are conducted and the applicant is expected to spend the day on campus. Typically, the program accepts 13-15 students each fall.

Montgomery County On-Campus Transition Programs (OCTP) at Radford University and Virginia Tech[60]

In order to better prepare students for the transition from secondary to postsecondary living, Montgomery County Public School partnered with Virginia Tech, Radford University, parents and local agencies to develop their On-Campus Transition Program. The program operates using the following mission statement: In keeping with the belief that children with disabilities are entitled to educational services and supports in natural, nonsegregated environments with nondisabled peers, Montgomery County Public School's vision for students with disabilities ages 19-21 whose class has graduated is that these students will participate in an array of opportunities of their choosing in community settings that promote social interdependence, age-appropriate friendships, natural supports, educational growth and vocational security. Currently, students with developmental disabilities involved in the program receive all or part of their educational services on the college campus. The program is designed to not only serve the needs of the individual students, but to also promote inclusive, accepting communities for all citizens.

Students typically enter the program when they are 18 years old after graduating from high schools with an applied studies or modified standard diploma. Like their typically developing peers, students remain in the program for three to four years (until they transition into Project SEARCH or until they exceed the age of eligibility). Students from Christiansburg High and Auburn High School transition into the Radford

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[60] Montgomery County On-Campus Transition Programs at Radford University and Virginia Tech, available at http://services.dlas.virginia.gov/User_db/frmView.aspx?ViewId=3691&s=15.

University OCTP while students from Blacksburg High School and Eastern Montgomery High School transition to the Virginia Tech program. Each program serves up to 10 students each school year. Montgomery County Public Schools provide a Special Education teacher and enough support staff to serve all students at each site. The university offers space for the program and access to classes, jobs, and facilities on the campus through a Memorandum of Understanding.

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