

Let's Talk About College



*What Students with Intellectual and Developmental
Disabilities Say About Postsecondary Education*



Inclusive Higher Education: The Door is Open

More colleges across the United States are opening their doors to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities thanks in part to provisions in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA).

Many students enter college through the traditional door. But over 250 colleges across the country offer an alternate door through which students with intellectual and developmental disabilities can access college.

An Alternative Pathway to College

Traditional/ Matriculated

↓
Placement
Tests,
Essays,
Degree
Seeking

Reasonable
Accommodations

↓
Independent Living, Employment, Social
Network Growth, and Self-Determination

Alternate/ Non-Matriculated

↓
Person-Centered Planning,
Alternative Credential/
Certificate/Degree
Seeking

Individual Supports and
Plans, Employment Goals,
Mentors

↓
Independent Living, Employment, Social
Network Growth, and Self-Determination

Why go to college?

Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities choose to attend college for the same reasons other young people do. College is a place to learn new skills, explore interests, meet new friends, transition into adult life, and launch a career.

Research has been done on the impact of college for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in particular. Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who attend college...

- Increase their social networks and self-determination (Grigal and Hart, 2010)
- Earn a 73% higher income than those who do not go to college (Migliore, Butterworth, & Hart, 2009)
- Are 26% more likely to get a job (Migliore, Butterworth, & Hart, 2009)



For more information about the national inclusive higher education movement, please visit Think College, the national headquarters for innovation in inclusive higher education:

www.thinkcollege.net

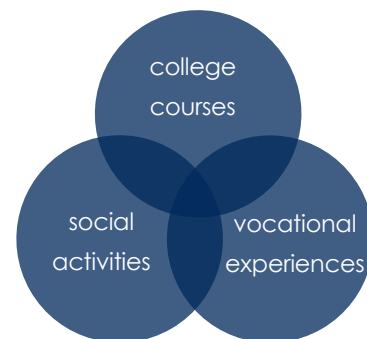
For more information about the rich inclusive higher education opportunities in New York State, please connect with us at the Center on Disability and Education at the University of Rochester's Warner School of Education:

www.rochester.edu/warner/cde

What does college look like?

College involves more than taking classes on a campus. Each college will look a little different, but all will focus on academics, life skills, networking, community building, and vocational experiences that prepare students for employment.

Colleges often partner with school districts and/or adult disability agencies. That means a diverse team of individuals is able to support students in the various components of their college experience. From peer mentors and academic coaches to professors and staff members, students have support to participate in the academic, social, and vocational aspects of college.



Who can attend college?

Some colleges are supportive of all students, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Each and every college looks different. But it is important to remember that a high school diploma is not necessarily a prerequisite for going to college. Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities can grow, learn, socialize, and find a career through the experience of going to college.

But don't just take our word for it. Here at the Center on Disability and Education, we have the opportunity to partner with a number of colleges in New York State. We held focus groups with students at the following four colleges in Western New York: Monroe Community College, Keuka College, Roberts Wesleyan College, and University of Rochester.

In 2015, we began working with five additional campuses at The City University of New York. Those five campuses are Borough of Manhattan Community College, College of Staten Island, Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, and Queens College.

Each college partners with AHRC New York City or the New York City Department of Education. Partnering with CUNY and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), AHRC New York City developed the Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program and pioneered the work of fully including students with intellectual disabilities within CUNY in 2007. CUNY Unlimited is a credential program in development through a grant partnership with the University of Rochester, AHRC NYC, the NYC Department of Education, and the JFK, Jr. Institute for Worker Education.



What should high school students know about college? Do you have any advice?

"It's not as scary as it seems. The reason I say that—there's a lot of support. If you're stressing out, there's support. There are ways you can accomplish your goals. Teachers take it step by step."

—University of Rochester student

"I was nervous before I came here. I knew no one. It's perfectly normal to feel nervous. Once you get used to your routine, it's not as bad as what you were afraid of. I would tell people in high school that it's a lot of fun being able to be with different people, like peer mentors and students."

—University of Rochester student

"Just do it. This is a great opportunity. Just go for it."

—Keuka College student

"Be sure to try new things on campus."

—Roberts Wesleyan College student

What challenges have you faced at college? Did you have worries before you came?

"I was a bit shaky at first. I thought that I would be with lots of people I didn't know. What if they don't like me? That was my biggest worry before my interview began."

But after the meeting, the staff took me on a tour of the campus. They showed me the library, my main classroom, and other stuff. My worries went away!

I really like this program."

—Monroe Community College student

"Taking classes... They are college classes and they're hard. But you can use the mentors. You can't keep interrupting the teachers during class when you don't understand. But working with a mentor helps with any questions you have. Every person is different. For me, anything academic is a struggle. But for someone else, it could be stressful meeting new people. You take it step by step."

Everything is going to be okay. There's a lot of support around."

—University of Rochester student

What resources and supports helped you to face challenges?

"We all learn from each other and keep an eye out for each other here."

—Roberts Wesleyan College student

"The mentors are a really good thing. During my college class, they break it down into steps. It's really hard for me to take notes and keep up with my notes when the teacher is talking. But when I had my mentors, they took notes, so I only wrote down important things and then compared notes with them. With their help, I was better able to understand and succeed."

—University of Rochester student

"We had to take freshman orientation in our first year. It made me feel more comfortable on campus, socializing, and figuring out how to get around."

—Keuka College student

"We're just one big giant team. There's a lot of help. We all help each other. You turn around every corner and there's someone who will help you, even if they're outside our program."

—Keuka College student





What college courses did you take?

“Some of my courses were interesting and some were not. I took business in my first year and I didn’t like it. But I learned about the things I didn’t like, which is important. I wanted to open up a wedding store, so I took this business class. Then, this year, I took Intro to Childcare and I really liked it. I really want to work in childcare when I’m done. We learned a lot about kids with autism and I learned that I really want to work with those kids. I’ve been working with my mentor, and I just found out that I passed my test and got certified for first aid, too.”

—Roberts Wesleyan College student

“I took Speech and Interpersonal Communication. That helped me talk about my feelings, and communicate with other people.

That was a huge help. I took History of Sports in the United States—my best subject—and it was a big help. And Mass Media taught me all about different types of media. That’s a big help in my career goal to become a radio announcer.”

—Monroe Community College student

“One of my classes that I found really hard was Criminal Justice.

The tests were extremely hard, but I got help. I like to learn about crime and fighting and the law. I also took photography.

I totally got an A in that. I learned that I’m a really good photographer.”

—Keuka College student

“I took a class about teaching kindergarten. I volunteer at an elementary school and that class has helped me do better there.”

—Keuka College student

How has your time at college prepared you for a job?

“This program helped me get confidence working in an actual work environment. I ended up working at the Veterans Association. I walked to work every day and got that confidence. I learned what to expect out of supervisors. I even went to an interview to get the job.”

—University of Rochester student

“Being in college and doing my internships really boosted my confidence in wanting to get a job. I learned how to be a good cashier and do the best I could do. My mentors really worked with me to make sure I did my best and had the help that I needed. One thing that would make me a little overwhelmed was when a lot of people came in and there were big lines of people. That would overwhelm me. I wanted to make sure everything was moving along, so I had to work more quickly than I had worked before. But I did it—the lines would move quickly and everything got done the way it was supposed to be done.”

—Monroe Community College student

“While I was taking Ethics of Law Enforcement, I joined a criminal justice club as well. It was good to meet people who share my same interests. I made connections that helped me get my internship in campus security.”

—Roberts Wesleyan College student





Why do you think going to college is important?

"I think college is really your first glimpse of an independent world."

—University of Rochester student

"This gives you real-life skills. For example, we've been practicing money management. I'm not very good with money, so that helped me get that skill down better. It teaches you a variety of life skills so you know what to expect and have skills for when you go out into the real world."

—University of Rochester student

"I also think college helps you set goals. If you're not sure what you want to do... It actually took me until the second year to figure out what kind of job I would be interested in. When I got out of high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do. And most people don't! They just kind of wing it. But if you continue school, it helps you find out what interests you."

—University of Rochester student

"This program is only benefitting you. If you're stressed out, they will be able to fit your needs. If you're struggling, they will help you."

—University of Rochester student

What has college taught you about yourself?

"I'm a college graduate. I've learned a lot and have really grown from all the experiences and the many classes that I've taken and the mentors that I've worked with. They all have their own way of working with people, and you get to learn different ways people work and do their own thing. I'm really glad I did this."

—Monroe Community College student

"I've gotten better at talking in groups. I didn't really talk a lot, and I'm learning to speak up."

—Keuka College student

"Time management! You have to get projects in at a certain time, and you learn how to use homework time and free time wisely. It doesn't always work out, but you learn. Work first, play later. And you learn to multitask really well. You know, you have to get to your job on time after college, so you learn that here."

—Keuka College student

What would you say to someone who thinks that they can't go to college because of their disability?

"Our disability is actually our ability. They make us us. They make us stronger."

—Keuka College student

"My biggest piece of advice is, if people worry they can't go to college because of a disability, don't worry. There are people who will take you in and guide you. You're not alone. There are a lot of people who will support you."

—Monroe Community College student

"Don't ever be embarrassed about your disabilities."

—Keuka College student





How is college different than high school?

“Once I got here, it took me a little bit of time to adapt to a big campus. But with some help and guidance, once I let it in, all I wanted to do was take advantage of being here. I love the freedom. I love that!”

—University of Rochester student

“I would say probably the best part about college is... when you’re in high school, you don’t really have that much freedom. College is a lot different than high school, and most students don’t know that. In high school, you’re sheltered. But in college, you’re not. To give you an example, we just went to a dance. That was really fun. In high school, we don’t get a chance to do those kinds of things.”

—Keuka College student

What has your social life been like at college? Have you made friends?

“I like to go to the workout room in the gym. But sometimes I like to lounge around, go to the movie theater, go to the library... I go with other students and our mentors. It’s a lot of fun.”

—University of Rochester student

“I was in two different clubs in college. I was in “For the Kids” and “Pride.” “For the Kids” was a club started by my first mentor, and she got me into it. They go to hospitals and do fun things with kids with cancer. I also joined “Pride,” the LGBT club here on campus. That one was so fun—it was just a big group of friends here on campus. I think I spent more time on campus than I did in my own house.”

—Keuka College student

What were some of your proudest moments at college?

“When I found out I got into this program, I was overwhelmed. I never knew I could be college material. But now that I’m at college, it’s just unbelievable the experiences, discoveries, and opportunities I’ve been able to have.”

—University of Rochester student

“There are a lot of things I’m proud of. The support of them helping me get a drivers license. I was able to learn about managing money, and I got a car. I was able to look at careers and see what kind of job I wanted to have.”

—University of Rochester student

“I’m proud of the fact that I took all the tests in my classes and did very well on all the class papers I had to write. But I’m proudest about graduating and getting that certificate. I thought to myself, well, this is over and I’m done. I’ve completed everything I had to do in college, and now here comes the next thing.”

—Monroe Community College student





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About the Center on Disability and Education:

The Center on Disability and Education provides high quality information to people navigating the world of disability. The Center provides expertise, guidance, and linkage to community members, students, families, school districts, non-profit agencies, and higher education institutions.

For more information on the Center, contact us at:

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The following schools, agencies, and colleges provide coordination and resources to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to achieve their goal of attending college:

- AHRC New York City
- City University of New York
- New York City Department of Education
- University of Rochester

The U.S. Department of Education-funded Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) initiative has helped students to attend and succeed in college.