



**Proposal to Establish a Continuing Education Program
for Students with Cognitive Disabilities
in the School of Education and Human Services**

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**Submitted to
Dean Mary Otto**

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Introduction

In the fall of 2003 the Oakland Intermediate School District (OISD) began a program for students with cognitive disabilities who wished to continue their academic education beyond high school. Oakland University agreed to be the host site for this program and the Rochester Community Schools agreed to operate the program. At its inception, this program served students throughout Oakland County but as it became clear that the program was appropriate for an increasing number of students in the Rochester district the decision was made to limit the program to students enrolled in the Rochester Community Schools. Twelve students have participated in the program since its inception and the program currently serves six students.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, three students who completed the Rochester/OISD program have continued as "guest students" auditing classes and participating in campus activities. The purpose of this proposal is to secure funding to create a formal Oakland University Post-Secondary Transitions program and provide a college-based learning experience for students from all Oakland County school districts and throughout Michigan.

The Program will operate as a fee driven Continuing Education program in the School of Education and Human Services. It will consist of a variety of courses designed to meet the needs of individuals with cognitive disabilities in the 18-26 year old age group on a college campus. Where appropriate, students will reside in one of the residence halls of the University. Currently, a committee of individuals representing public school districts, the Oakland Intermediate School District, various service agencies, parents and Oakland University are working on designing the curriculum. Individuals from the Transitions Planning Team will ultimately comprise the OU Post-Secondary Transitions Advisory Board.

There are three overarching components to the program: (1) provide enhanced educational opportunities, (2) do this in a setting that strengthens social and community living skills and, (3) provide vocational opportunities in a supportive setting that promotes increasing levels of independence and responsibility on the part of the student. As such, the program addresses the three goals of successful transitions from school to work and independent living through collaboration with k-12 educators, university faculty, and community service agencies.

Participants in this program will be those students who are not generally able to pursue post-secondary education. Typically these students either remain in a k-12 environment and are served in a separate classroom or are schooled at a "center" that is specifically designed for students with disabilities. In either case, they are segregated from the general population and less likely to develop the necessary social and living skills needed for independent, adult participation in their communities. The benefit derived from this program will be the opportunity for students with disabilities to interact with same age peers, develop improved social skills, and learn community living strategies while continuing to engage in academic activities.

Relevant Literature

There has been a call for the continuation of education for students with disabilities at two- and four-year campuses from the Social Security Administration and National Council on Disabilities (2000) and from the Board of Directors of the Division on Mental Retardation and Disabilities of the Council of Exceptional Children (Zaft, Hart & Zimbrich, 2004). In addition, research studies have concluded that post-secondary experiences at institutions of higher education are economically and socially beneficial to students with disabilities (Gilmore, et al., 2001; Izzo, et al., 2000; Zaft, Hart & Zimbrich, 2004)

Very few students with disabilities have the opportunity for education beyond high school (Wagner, et al., 2005; Zaft, Hart and Zimbrich, 2004) despite the fact that more and more students with disabilities and their parents are considering a college experience of some kind as a possibility (Grigal, Neubert and Moon, 2001; Izzo, Hertzfield, Simmons-Reed and Aaron, 2001; Sitlington, 2003). The traditional educational opportunity for a post-high school age student with a disability is a training center that is either in the community or in a K-12 building. For some students this is an appropriate route to adult life. However, the impact of IDEA, has resulted in many students with disabilities being placed in mainstreamed, inclusive settings throughout their K-12 schooling only to find that an isolated and segregated classroom is the only alternative for post-secondary education. These students no longer have good role models and lose contact with their non-disabled peers; they cannot interact with students their own age, join clubs, or attend school events. As a result, they often regress in their use of the appropriate social norms of the larger community.

Rationale for University Involvement

The proposed program is designed to be housed on a college campus for a variety of reasons. First, college attendance is the normal path for further education after high school. Because of the impact of IDEA, many students with disabilities are in mainstreamed, inclusive settings throughout their K-12 schooling only to find that an isolated and segregated classroom is the only alternative for post-secondary education. These students no longer have good role models; they lose contact with their peer group of students without disabilities; they cannot interact with students their own age, join clubs, or attend school events. As a result, they often regress in their use of the appropriate social norms of the larger community.

Second, a college campus provides a supportive environment, but one that requires an ever-expanding possibility of social and community interactions. Much like all students new to a campus, students with disabilities will gradually learn to be more independent as they negotiate the process of acclimating, meeting new people, registering for classes, and joining in campus activities. The proposed program will include gradually decreasing forms of support for these students as they develop these skills.

Third, a college campus is a perfect place for students to learn to be personally responsible - whether this is in terms of remembering to attend classes, budgeting expenses, or allocating time for studying, working and leisure activities. This responsibility can also take the form of increasing sophistication in decision-making. For example, the ability to find the campus center,

order a meal, choose a seat, engage a friend in conversation is something a student with a disability can learn to do in a very natural surrounding which, once again, has many supports in place.

Fourth, most college campuses have multiple levels of residential housing available that would enable a student to learn to be successful in progressively more independent living situations. The student can start with a dorm room that includes a peer buddy as a room mate with all meals provided in the cafeteria. On the campus where this program would be piloted, on-campus apartments shared by two to four students are available where the student could learn to take responsibility for some shopping, cooking and cleaning. Ultimately, if appropriate, a student could choose to live alone and take full responsibility.

Fifth, most college campuses have a variety of employment opportunities available in a variety of settings. Before facing the challenges of working in an independent business in the community, a student with disabilities could hone his/her skills with the assistance of mentors, some of whom are other students and others who are experienced teachers.

Program Outline

Students admitted to OU Post-Secondary Transitions will be required to enroll in a set of required and elective courses that will lead to a Post-Secondary Certificate. What appears below is a tentative outline of a possible program design. In this iteration, the program requires full-time enrollment and the completion of 120 Continuing Education Units. Approximately half of the program courses are specifically designed to advance students' interpersonal skills and address their basic academic needs. These courses are:

- Personal Finance/Money Management I and II (4)
- Problem Solving and Self Advocacy Seminar I, II and III (2)
- Career Exploration (2)
- Communication Skills and Social Interaction I, II and III (4)
- (Creative) Writing (Skills) I and II (2)
- Reading Improvement I and II (2)
- Health, Wellness and Nutrition I and II (2)
- Computer Skills (2)
- Independent Living I, II and III (4)

The remainder of the units are elective courses intended to extend students' academic abilities, enhance their content knowledge, and provide an opportunity for individual growth in areas of interest. To meet this program requirement, students will be able to select from any appropriate course in the OU undergraduate catalog. Before registering, a student will need to secure permission of the course instructor. The extent to which the student will participate in the class and be responsible for assignments will be determined by consultation with the instructor. In some instances, it may be appropriate for a student to do no more than attend class sessions however, there is an expectation that the courses selected will provide an opportunity for further learning and challenge the student. Where appropriate, the student will have a "peer buddy" who

can assist with course assignments. The following list of courses represents an example of the types of courses that students currently in the Rochester/OISD program have taken.

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| Intro to Western Art (AH 100) | African Ensemble (MUE 345) |
| Intro to American Sign Language (COM 114) | Intro to Music (MUS 100) |
| Public speaking (COM 201) | Jazz and Blues: (MUS 338) |
| Jazz Dance (DAN 120) | Intro to American Politics (PS 100) |
| Educating children in Art (EED 316) | Communication Skills (RHT 045) |
| Intro to German and German Culture (GRM 114-115) | |

Students will enroll in 16 units of required courses and electives in the fall and winter semesters and 8 units in the spring or summer. It is expected that these courses will comprise 50% of the student's day. Another 25% will be devoted to job skills training and employment and the final 25% to social activities on, and off campus. We are considering a model in which the job skills get progressively more time with a final year (semester) that is a structured internship?

Participants

The students who choose to participate in the Oakland University Transitions Program will all be special education students with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities or multiple disabilities. These will be students who would not otherwise qualify for admission to the University. The determination whether this program is an appropriate placement for a particular student will be made by the program Advisory Board from recommendations made through a school district Individual Education Plan or a Community Mental Health Person Centered Plan. Both of these processes require the agreement of the student, parent or guardian and agency representative.

Benefit to the University

The School of Education and Human Services has a long-standing commitment to preparing teachers and human service professionals who have the skills to work with individuals with a variety of academic and personal needs. We are proud to have been among the first institutions in Michigan to offer a program leading to a state endorsement for teachers of students on the autism disorder spectrum. We are equally proud of our affiliation with the Jack's Place Foundation. Through Jack's Place for Autism we have served close to five hundred individual on the spectrum over the past three years. The Post-Secondary Transitions Program is a logical continuation of this mission.

Commensurate with our service to individuals with disabilities, the existing transitions program has had an impact on the OU general student body. More than 20 Oakland students have served as peer mentors to the students in the program – including many who have made this commitment over multiple semesters. Students from the transitions program have attended more than 90 regular OU classes in the past four years. Even using an average class size of 35, over 3,000 students have attended a class with an individual with a cognitive disability. Our students are interacting both academically and socially with someone different from themselves, are gaining an understanding of the needs of others and are, hopefully, learning how to positively assist individuals with disabilities without pitying them or assuming they are not capable.

One direct indication that the transitions program has a positive impact on campus life is the connection these students have to our student activities program. Many of the transitions students are involved in clubs, service organizations, and other extra curricular activities. The Center for Student Activities recognized their contribution by presenting the program with a Link Award last year. Clearly, our campus is a better place because of this program.

Budget Narrative

The OU Post-Secondary Transitions Program is intended to be self supporting. Budget figures have been calculated using the present undergraduate tuition per credit based on 40 credits per year. The Program Director will have responsibilities for curriculum development, recruitment of students, scheduling of classes, and chairing the Advisory Board. That person will also teach some of the specialized seminars. Salary for that position is calculated at \$25.00/hr for 20 hours in the first year and increases to \$25.75 per hour for 30 hours in the second year. That becomes a full-time salaried position in year three. Benefits are calculated at 8.65% for the first two years and 45.77% in the third year.

In the second year a half-time para-professional will be hired for 15 hours/week @ \$13.50/hr. In the third year, that position will increase to 30 hours per week with a 3% increase in salary. Benefits are calculated at 8.65% each year.

Feedback from a series of meetings with school district and community personnel indicates that we will have more interest in this program than we are forecasting in the first three years. That will enable us to be selective and insure that we are servicing students who are most likely to benefit from the program. The Planning Team is also developing a set of admission requirements, expectations for students, and criteria for completing the program. Therefore, we are confident we can meet the projected figures in the pro-forma budget. If for some reason, enrollments do not meet our expectations, adjustments can be made in the number of hours allotted to the para-professional in years two and three. It would also be possible to delay converting the director to a full-time salaried position.