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# Editorial

## The Power of Expectations

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The path to college and beyond is deceptively straightforward. Graduate from high school, apply to college, and go to college. Finish your degree and get a job. We all know that this is much easier said than done and that students' purposes for attending college are as varied as the outcomes students will achieve.

One constant on this path is the expectation that a young person will go to college. This expectation may be shared informally by a family member when dreaming about "someday you will go to such and such university just like your mom did," or more formally by a teacher encouraging a student to take an advanced placement class "because it will look good on your college applications." College expectations are present in subtle—or not so subtle—messages that permeate the academic and social experiences of college-bound youth throughout their secondary education experiences.

Expectations are an extremely powerful force in determining whether a young person goes to college. And they are equally, if not more powerful, in determining if young people with an intellectual disability will go to college.

The existence of a special issue of the *Journal of Policy and Practice on Intellectual Disabilities* focusing on postsecondary education for individuals with intellectual disabilities demonstrates that there are increasing expectations that people with an intellectual disability can and should be given the choice of going to college. And similar to other groups of young people who have gone to college, their path toward college and the outcomes that they seek and achieve from college will vary considerably.

But unlike other college students, the experiences of these young (and not so young) college students with ID may not merely reflect their personal preferences for and desired outcomes from college. Their experiences will also be framed by the perceptions that others have about them and about their capacity to learn while in higher education. These expectations have the power to expand access to authentic learning experiences or restrict access to specialized courses and subject matter deemed to be "needed" by students who have an intellectual disability.

Therefore, the nature of college for people with an intellectual disability may differ based upon these preconceptions about what they are capable of and what they "need" in postsecondary education environments.

As you read each article in this special issue, ask yourself "to what extent are the experiences being created in college for people with an intellectual disability the same or different from the experiences of other college students?" And more importantly, do they reflect high expectations or are they saddled, as McGrew and Evans (2004) put it, with "group-based stereotyped low expectations."

In their article, "Inclusive Postsecondary Education—An Evidence-Based Moral Imperative," Uditsky and Hughson address this issue head-on, challenging us to look beyond a label when setting the college expectations for youth with an intellectual disability. Their perspective, based upon 25 years of supporting students with an intellectual disability to access inclusive higher education in Alberta, Canada, is that segregated or separate options reflect the limitations of those planning and implementing postsecondary education services more than the limitations of the students who will access those services.

The theme of diverse expectations is also evident in Grigal, Hart, and Weir's "A Survey of Postsecondary Education Programs for Students With Intellectual Disabilities." The wide array of types of programs and the range of services and supports demonstrate that at this point, in the development of postsecondary education for people with an intellectual disability, there is little consistency among programs throughout the United States.

The inclusion of youth with an intellectual disability in higher education requires collaboration between systems, programs, and professionals in higher education, K-12 education, and state and local disability and rehabilitation arenas. In Mock and Love's article, "One State's Initiative to Increase Access to Higher Education for People With Intellectual Disabilities," we are shown the challenges of trying to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders. Their findings reflect how existing policies, practices, and beliefs support or repress access to inclusive higher education for students with an intellectual disability and the strategies that one state used to find consensus.

In some cases, the collaborations between higher education and secondary K-12 transition personnel require each to learn more about the vernacular and function of their counterparts. Folk, Yamamoto, and Stodden in their article, "Implementing Inclusion and Collaborative Teaming in a Model Program of Postsecondary Education for Young Adults With Intellectual Disabilities," describe an interagency teaming process and the impact that this process had on team members' views about including students with an intellectual disability in college. Their findings provide an added element as they also capture and share voices of students with an intellectual disability who were culturally and linguistically diverse, expressing their views about how postsecondary education impacted their lives and expectations of themselves.

Of course, students with an intellectual disability are not the only people impacted by their presence on college campuses. When faced with the prospect of creating access for youth with an intellectual disability, college personnel have responded with concerns about how their faculty and students would perceive or be impacted by the students with an intellectual disability. Often,

these concerns were not based upon previous experience but instead were based on images and related stereotypes conjured by the label of “intellectual disability” in peoples’ minds. Three articles capture the perceptions and experiences of college peers and faculty regarding the presence of student with an intellectual disability in their classes and on their campus. Griffin, Summer, McMillan, Day, and Hodapp explore the attitudes of college peers and share differences in these attitudes based upon gender and previous experience with people with disabilities. May studied the impact an inclusive course experience in a psychology class had on female college peers’ attitudes toward diversity. These studies allow us to reflect upon the true impact students with an intellectual disability have on their college peers instead of imagined impact.

The instructor perspective is also explored in O’Connor, Kubiak, Espiner, and O’Brien’s study, “Lecturer Responses to the Inclusion of Students With Intellectual Disabilities Auditing Undergraduate Classes.” Focusing on a 2-year certificate program offered at Trinity College, Dublin, these researchers capture the views of university lecturers whose classes were attended by students with an intellectual disability. Their findings reflect the impact that the college culture has, especially when the college is committed to social justice and equity for all students on their campus. Previous contact and familiarity with people with disabilities, as well as a personal desire to be responsive to the diversity of all students, were found to be prevailing themes.

Parents are a powerful force in developing a path toward college for any young person. For youth with an intellectual disability, parents have the legal authority to influence the special education process. This process should result in educational objectives that reflect both their and their child’s desires and expectations for their future. But parents often determine what is possible based upon guidance from the professionals in their lives. Thus the possibility of their child’s future including college relies heavily upon how informed the transition personnel serving those families are about current options and practices. Martinez, Conroy, and Cerreto explore this in their article, “Parent Involvement in the Transition Process of Children With Intellectual Disabilities: The Influence of Inclusion on Parent Desires and Expectations for Postsecondary Education.” They demonstrate that sometimes, high expectation can be doused by institutional lack of information, impassible barriers, and

perceived limitations of disability. The need for up-to-date information about resources and practices reflecting high expectations is imperative; however, the availability of such critical information is low. Their findings also reflect the power that inclusion can have both on parent expectations and student outcomes.

In their article, “Creating Effective Mentoring Partnerships for Students With Intellectual Disabilities on Campus,” Jones and Goble share focus group findings about the benefits and challenges of implementing a mentoring program at one large American university. The findings from this study take us full circle back to the power and influence of expectations. Jones and Goble reinforce the need for equity between students (both with and without disabilities), the value of establishing reciprocal relationships, and how important it is to continually review and respond to new issues or challenges as they arise.

As students with an intellectual disability become yet another subgroup of the diverse learners in the higher education landscape, the journey to and through college becomes all the more complex. In this issue, we sought to capture some of the many facets that impact or are impacted by this emerging college student group. We are grateful to each contributor, not only for sharing their findings in this publication, but also for focusing their considerable research skills on this nascent field. We believe the promise of higher education for people with an intellectual disability extends well beyond its power to allow for change and growth in the individual. The true promise may be seen in generations to come when people with an intellectual disability in college are identified first and foremost as students, period.

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## REFERENCE

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