



Valuing Students with Disabilities in Service Learning: A Project Reach Initiative

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General Description

Project Reach: Service Inclusion for Community College Students is a three-year national initiative of the American Association of Community Colleges through a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service and its Engaging Persons with Disabilities, New Special Initiatives Program. Eight community colleges and four regional mentors were selected to develop opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in service learning and learn life skills that will have an impact on their employment, careers, and personal development. The presentation will consist of a PowerPoint describing Project Reach and its objectives, a brief summary of the eight selected colleges and their projects, the mentors and the program evaluator. After the PowerPoint, there will be a facilitated panel discussion composed of five Project Reach colleges (Brevard Community College, El Camino College, Henderson Community College, Miami Dade College and Minneapolis Community & Technical College). They will provide an update on their projects, their strategies for inclusion, challenges or barriers to overcome, and success stories. A question and answer session will follow and conclude the presentation. Handouts about Project Reach and the colleges will be available.

Motivational/Foundations for the Session

Research from a national study (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2003-04) of undergraduate students in Title IV (Federal financial aid) eligible institutions, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that most students with disabilities attend public community colleges, including more than 50% of students with developmental disabilities (59%) and brain injuries (64%). Since there is evidence in the literature that service learning has positive outcomes for students, providing similar experiences for students with disabilities would impact their outlook on skills for the world of work, offer other opportunities for career exploration, and enhance their personal growth and development. Project Reach attempts to provide selected colleges this focus and direction.

Session Goals

Participants to the session will (1) learn about the Project Reach initiative; (2) develop strategies for engaging students with disabilities in service learning experiences; (3) understand the challenges or barriers to overcome when developing opportunities for students with disabilities to serve in the community; and (4) appreciate the success stories of students with disabilities as they relate to life skills that will have an impact on their employment, careers, and personal development.

Other Information

Since the selection of the participating colleges was completed in January 2006, the activities in Year 1 have been condensed. Focus of the panel discussion will provide participants with a summary of their activities to date, some of which are preparation for their Year 2 events. Future plans of the project include a national survey of disability support services at community colleges and a best practices publication that highlights model programs for other community colleges to replicate.