



**Best Practices to Include Students with Disabilities in Higher Education as well as Postsecondary Programming Supporting Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE); A Project that Supports Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA)**

**A Postsecondary Inclusion Subcommittee White Paper for the Orange County Local Partnership Agreement (OCLPA) Steering Committee**

**This project was a collaboration between the OCLPA and the Intellectual Disability (ID) – Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Interest Group of the California Association for Postsecondary Education and Disability (CAPED)**

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## INTRODUCTION

### **OCLPA: Introduction for Best Practices to Include Students with Disabilities in Higher Education (written by Stacy Eldred)**

The subcommittee partnered with the Chapman University Thompson Policy Institute to find a graduate student researcher who could complete a literature review. Research focused on identifying instructional practices and services that support the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. The initial recommendation was to focus on studies identifying current practices and any research that has been done that highlights best practices.

Stacy Eldred, Ph.D., Professor at Saddleback College, and a member of the OCLPA Steering Committee, agreed to complete a literature review as part of her work as a graduate student. The following is an excerpt from what she reported:

In the United States, there has been a recent expansion in postsecondary educational opportunities and improved access for students with disabilities due in part to the

authorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) (Griffin et al., 2012). Including individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in postsecondary education (PSE) is a relatively new phenomenon (Butler et al., 2016). With the passage of the HEOA in 2008, attending college became a reality for some students with IDD (Grigal & Hart, 2010). However, the idea of inclusion of students with disabilities in postsecondary education is not clearly defined (Singh & Gilson, 2020).

There are various conceptualizations, definitions, and language described in the literature and across college campuses related to supporting neurodiverse students including students with IDD and other cognitive disabilities. According to Bumble et al (2019), the literature on Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) suggests a wide variation in the size, scope, configuration, and curriculum available to students with IDD in IPSE. For example, “inclusion” on some campuses is limited to coursework and a subset of campus activities; others extend students’ involvement in residential life, employment experiences, student organizations, and other aspects of student life.



Three commonly used criteria for inclusiveness identified in the literature are based on whether programs are labeled as substantially separate, inclusive, or a hybrid model. In addition, PSE for students with IDD and other cognitive disabilities can refer to (a) education on a college/university campus that occurs after high school (Blumberg et al., 2008), (b) a program located on a college/university campus for students who are still receiving education as mandated by IDEA (2004) through the age of 21 (Neubert & Redd, 2004), or (c) a program that supplements other education and/or transition services being provided by a local school district or adult service agencies (Kirkendall et al., 2008). Attempts to categorize these programs have focused on the degree to which students with disabilities interact with peers without disabilities (Neubert et al., 2001), which may not be the most critical distinction regarding the inclusiveness of a program (Thoma et al., 2011).



Rather, some researchers have suggested focusing on “how educational institutions can create access, systems, and practices that support and enable people with disabilities to live and learn in their schools and communities without such participation being predicated on ‘overcoming’ characteristics associated with disability” (Bacon & Baglieri, 2021, p. 29). Furthermore, in the context of postsecondary education, instead of asking how well a person with a disability can fit into the college environment as it currently is, Bacon and Baglieri (2021) suggested that programs reframe the question to ask how an environment can be recreated to encompass disability.

The concept of inclusion in research and practice is broadly defined and loosely interpreted in PSE settings (Thoma, 2013). It is challenging to construct a cohesive definition to encapsulate the complex philosophical concept of inclusion. The extent to

which one student feels included may be vastly different from another student and it is important to take into consideration the individualized nature of an inclusive experience (Gilson, 2020). In addition, students with disabilities face barriers and challenges in IPSE environments (Adams & Brown, 2006). These barriers and challenges include structural, organizational, behavioral, and attitudinal but all are underpinned by a society that, despite the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation, still does not fully embrace the inclusion of people with disabilities (Adams & Brown, 2006). According to a 2019 report by Think College, currently there are 271 IPSE programs across the United States, with 105 offered at four-year public colleges or universities (Think College, 2019). In short, although progress has been made by legislative mandates, little guidance exists regarding how inclusion could be applied in the higher education contexts (Gilson, et al., 2019).



Another relevant dimension related to inclusiveness, success, and educational opportunities for students with disabilities is related to disability discourse in PSE. As noted in Linton (1998), there is a continuing misunderstanding of the mandatory elements included in the idea of diversity. Within the postsecondary learning environment, diversity has come to represent race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and, at times, disability. For example, disability discourse in PSE is focused on compliance rather than being part of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Consequently, disability remains under the misconception that it is of lesser value than other elements of diversity within the understanding of student diversity in higher education (Darling, 2013; Davis, 2011; Devlieger et al., 2007). If diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are crucial to the educational mission of institutions, are faculty, administrators, and staff supportive of an inclusive college experience? Do they believe neurodiverse students including students with IDD and other cognitive disabilities can benefit from an inclusive college experience? Are faculty willing to fully engage in supporting students with disabilities in their classes? Answering such questions represents an area of potential research.



The initial recommendation for this report was to focus on studies and any research that identified or highlighted current best practices. The results of this search found that there is a dearth of research regarding specific instructional practices and services that support the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. Although there is scant research on this topic, researchers in the field have argued that the intention of providing educational opportunities for neurodiverse students, including students with IDD and other cognitive disabilities, is to be given the same equitable and accessible opportunities for success as neuro-typically developing students. It is notable that students with IDD continue to be excluded from post-secondary education despite continued efforts toward their inclusion (Uditsky & Hughson, 2012). An upcoming literature review included in a dissertation by Stacy Eldred titled, *Exploring Community College Faculty and Administrators Work Providing Educational Opportunities for Students with IDD: An Integral Framework for Inclusive Postsecondary Education*, outlines some related research and identifies areas that might be advantageous for future research.

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## PURPOSE OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE

The purpose of this subcommittee was to identify services that currently exist, services that are needed, promising program models, and research that promotes the transition, inclusion, persistence, and success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education and employment; and to provide recommendations for best practices and implementation to the Orange County Local Partnership Agreement (OCLPA) Steering Committee.

This project is intended to support Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA) efforts throughout Orange County and California. OCLPA and the California Association for Postsecondary Education and Disability (CAPED) are committed to increasing the opportunities for individuals with disabilities to access higher education and competitive, integrated employment. This population has the lowest rates of inclusion in postsecondary education and the highest rates of unemployment and under-employment. Our membership seeks to clarify and communicate strategies we believe will lead to much greater access to higher education and employment for individuals with disabilities. Identifying promising practices, promoting them, and making suggestions for future research are all critical aspects of this project.





The Orange County Local Partnership Agreement (**OCLPA**) is a collaboration of over **70** agencies and over **200** individuals, committed to employment and post-secondary education to support career pathway development. This steering committee seeks to secure community-wide commitment. The Orange County Local Partnership Agreement (OCLPA) Steering Committee Advisors include the Regional Center of Orange County (RCOC), the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), and the Chapman University, Thompson Policy Institute on Disability (CUTPI). LPAs were established as part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), 2014.

The purpose of the Orange County Local Partnership Agreement (OCLPA) is to enhance partnerships that promote preparation for and achievement of competitive integrated employment (CIE) for youth/adults, 14 years old through 30 years+, with disabilities and related “At Risk” populations including individuals with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities (ID/DD). The OCLPA was established in 2017 and includes representatives from the following stakeholders, agencies, and organizations.

<b>Local Education Agencies</b>	<b>Disability Resource Agencies</b>
<b>Workforce Development Programs</b>	<b>Families</b>
<b>Individuals with Disabilities</b>	<b>Disability Advocacy Organizations</b>
<b>Post-Secondary Education</b>	<b>Foundations &amp; Non-Profits</b>
<b>Adult Service Providers</b>	<b>Career Pathway Programs</b>

Additionally, once the OCLPA has identified a need and a group of interested individuals make a commitment... an OCLPA Work Team is developed, implemented, and made operational. At the current time, the OCLPA has seven Work Teams. Specific to this report, the **Post-Secondary Disability, Equity & Inclusion Services & Support Work Team** is spearheaded by Adam Gottdank, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Disability Support Services at North Orange Continuing Education. The members of the Postsecondary Education (PSE) Inclusion subcommittee include K-12, DOR, RCOC, families, adult service providers, Orange County PSE, and additional California community colleges. The purpose of this subcommittee is the identification of student needs, services that currently exist, services that are needed, program models and research that promotes the transition, inclusion, persistence, and success of students who have disabilities with consideration of intersectionality factors in postsecondary education and employment; and provide recommendations for best practices and implementation to the OCLPA Steering Committee.



Current efforts include the development and distribution of an “Inclusion Survey” to relevant PSE stakeholders to identify effective and needed PSE services and supports to promote success and positive outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities. This survey was translated into Spanish and Vietnamese by the Chapman University Thompson Policy Institute.

Additionally, the PSE Inclusion Team Members conducted a review of 23 PSE Sites in California and throughout the country, with robust disability-related programming and services. Once the interview format and questions were developed and finalized, members of the sub-committee were assigned to PSE Programs. Interviews were conducted and individualized site summary reports were written.



The initial idea for the white paper originated from a conversation amongst OCLPA members about the need to provide better services to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in Orange County, California, and ultimately to the successful transition of these individuals to competitive, integrated employment (CIE). The OCLPA inclusion subcommittee reached out to CAPED and their ID-ASD interest group for their expertise, and to collaborate on developing this white paper.

The focus of the subcommittee is on services, supports, and resources that go beyond what is required by law. Generally, all institutions of higher education provide access, accommodations, and services as required by federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. California colleges and universities are required to follow Title 5 of the Education Code. OCLPA sought to identify programs that have implemented innovative and promising programs that go beyond what is required by law to better support the inclusion of students in higher education and CIE.

The PSE Inclusion Subcommittee initially met seven times between March 2021 and September 2022. The team first established the purpose of the committee as identified above, then collaborated on the development the “Best Practices for Inclusive Education Survey,” and the “Postsecondary Program Interview Guide.” Survey distribution focused primarily on constituents in Orange County, California as this county boundaries overlap perfectly with the OCLPA’s region. The survey was shared with some statewide partners and CAPED’s ID-ASD Interest Group who provided support for the project. The inclusion subcommittee worked together to identify programs and institutions of higher education in California and across the country that appeared to provide services, resources, and supports beyond what was required by Federal and State law. Subcommittee members and partners volunteered to interview one or more of the identified programs. The Inclusion Subcommittee re-convened in the Spring of 2024 to review the survey and interview responses, and to finalize this report.

### Data Collection Phases

1. Surveys.
2. Program Interviews.

## **SURVEYS**

### **Survey Development**

The PSE Inclusion Subcommittee developed a survey on best practices to include students with disabilities in higher education. The project assumed that all students with disabilities in higher education already have access to ADA/Title 5 accommodations (academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and services) because these are already required. Therefore, the focus of the inquiry was on services that go beyond ADA, Section 504, and Title 5.



Survey items were developed by the inclusion subcommittee. Higher education institutions in Orange County have already implemented many programs and services that go beyond legal requirements. The subcommittee first identified these current practices in Orange County and used them as the primary source for survey items. The inclusion subcommittee invited disability support services (DSS) colleagues from CAPED to participate in subcommittee meetings and requested additional feedback on survey items. CAPED is the organization in California that provides professional development to DSS faculty, staff, and administrators throughout California's institutions of higher education. CAPED also provides statewide advocacy in support of individuals with disabilities. The subcommittee invited CAPED members based on their history of providing inclusive services beyond what is required by law on their respective campuses.

The survey process was an affirmative process in that all items were already identified as likely to be good practices. The survey was then intended to shed light on the OCLPA's initial assumptions by affirming that given practices are, or are not actually "best practices" based on the views of constituents in Orange County, California. Survey items were developed such that respondents would rank the perceived power of a given practice. This enabled the subcommittee to draw conclusions about which practices were deemed better than others.

**Survey items.** The survey started with directions for the respondent. This survey should take approximately 5-8 minutes. Instructions:

- Answer questions 1-3

- Directions for questions 4 - 31: For each possible best practice below, choose from a ranking of 1 to 10. A ranking of 1 indicates that the item would not be considered a best practice. A ranking of 10 indicates that the item is one of the most important best practices.
- Notes: 1) You are rating all-inclusive practices based on your understanding of the practice - You do not have to have personal experience with implementing these practices. 2) You can assume all students will already have access to ADA/Title 5 accommodations (academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and services) - these are already required. 3. An inclusive practice is an activity or service that supports a student with a disability who is taking classes with students who do not have disabilities.

The survey asked individuals to share their name (optional), title/role (all that apply; Student/Program Participant, Parent, Support Staff (education), Support Staff (program), Teacher, Counselor, Administrator, Community Partner, Other), and if the respondent was a participant in the OCLPA subcommittee on inclusion.



Respondents then ranked the following 23 survey items from (1) Would not be considered a best practice to (10) One of the most important best practices:

1. Person-Centered Planning/Interactive Process (a planning process where the focus is on the individual who has a disability and their hopes, dreams, and goals for their life. The individual with the disability is often given the power to make their own decisions regarding their plans for the future).

2. Specialized Counseling (counseling that specifically supports students with disabilities e.g. as they learn how to get around campus, locate campus and community resources, coordinate services that support inclusion, etc.).
3. Intrusive case management (case manager actively seeks to support the student; often there is a system in place that gives a counselor or student services staff a notification e.g. student stopped attending class, and the case manager reaches out to the student).
4. Coordination of inclusive services (a counselor or student services staff who has the primary responsibility of identifying and coordinating services that support the inclusion of students with disabilities).
5. Educational Coaching (support staff who help with organizational skills, social cues, communication, scheduling, and other executive functioning (plan, focus, remembering, time management, self-monitor) skills, etc.).
6. Specialized instructional labs and tutoring (instructional resources and services that support student persistence - help students continue with their educational and vocational goals).
7. Universal Design for Learning (UDL is purposely setting up the learning environment in a way that supports all students; UDL methods promote flexibility in the ways students access material, understand instruction, and demonstrate learning).
8. Use of Emerging Technologies (new technologies that make it easier for students to access instructional materials and to learn such as SmartPens, Kurzweil/screen-readers with additional learning tools, audio recording apps, etc.).
9. Governance Policies that support inclusion (policies put in place by colleges, universities, and other educational institutions that make the inclusion of students with disabilities a high priority).
10. Create Ally Programs (identify and provide training to Instructors, Professors, and Administrators who support inclusion, including the willingness to try new programs and services that might lead to more students with disabilities being successful in school).
11. Technology training for students (general training to help students learn how to use educational tools such as electronic course management systems, website, registration, etc.; technologies that all students need to access their education).
12. Technology training for students (training on how to use technologies that support learning, persistence, and success e.g. assistive technology, Smart-pens, JAWS, Kurzweil, speech to text, audio books, etc.).
13. Peer Mentors (students or former students who can help new and current students understand many aspects of college such as where to go for services, how to find places on campus, who to talk to when they need help, etc.).
14. Teaching students how to navigate the campus (making sure new students know where things are on campus).
15. Labs that support neuro-diversity (a space or place for students to go when they need to feel safe; a space that supports the executive functioning needs of students - plan, organize, focus, remember, time management, communication, self-monitor, social skills, etc.).

16. Co-teaching model (pairs a teacher who is an expert on the class content/subject with a basic skills or disability support services instructor, e.g. IBEST model - Washington State, Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training).
17. Career Development and College Prep Curriculum (courses that provide the skills needed to advance to more advanced educational goals and employment).
18. Co-enrollment in Disability Support Services classes (classes that provide support for academic and vocational skill development so that students will have a better opportunity to succeed with their inclusive classes and employment).
19. Specialized degree or certification (for example, an AA Degree designed for students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; Students take inclusive classes with a pathway designed to support their completion of a degree or certificate that will help them obtain a better job upon graduation).
20. Transportation including mobility training for public transportation (for example, teaching students how to ride the city bus).
21. Partner with independent living programs to provide both on-campus instruction and “real world” instruction e.g. in an apartment setting (independent living programs provide services to support individuals living in their own apartments).
22. Participation in workforce development training (this can be classes that teach employment skills, or programs that provide 1:1 support to help people learn to write a resume, apply for a job online, fill out job applications, practice interviews, find employers who need to hire, and get a job).
23. (Optional) Add any inclusion activity not previously listed.



**Survey Distribution.** Students, program participants, family members, program staff, instructional faculty, counselors, administrators, community partners, and other key stakeholders in Orange County California represent the desired survey respondents. This geographic area was identified as it represents the OCLPA region. The survey was distributed to OCLPA members and partners who were encouraged to share the survey link with students, families, colleagues, and community partners. OCLPA members and partners shared the survey via email, and through organizational and regional listservs. Versions of the survey were produced in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese; however, no respondents utilized the Spanish or Vietnamese versions. Surveys were distributed at least four times between September, 2022 and December, 2023.

**Respondents.** Ninety-six individuals responded to the survey including 73 who participate in the OCLPA and 23 who do not. The following list is the number of people from each participant category:

- 10 Student/Program Participants
- 11 Parents
- 9 Support Staff Education
- 14 Support Staff Program
- 20 Teachers
- 15 Counselors
- 17 Administrators
- 15 Community Partners
- 10 Others

Examples of “Other” included: Grant Program Manager, Office Technician, Director of a specific program, Chair of a K12 District Community Advisory Committee, and Faculty of a local private university. Ten respondents indicated that they held multiple roles:

- Parent and Community Partner
- Parent and Teacher
- Parent and Counselor
- Support Staff, Administrator, and Community Partner
- Support Staff and Administrator
- Support Staff and Community Partner
- Administrator and Community Partner
- Support Staff, Teacher, and Administrator
- Parent and Administrator
- Parent, Administrator, and Community Partner





**Survey Ratings.** Respondents to the survey ranked each possible best practice between “item would not be considered a best practice” (1) and “item is one of the most important best practices” (10). Most of the practices that were considered in the survey were ranked high:

- 9.31 Person-Centered Planning/Interactive Process
- 9.16 Specialized Counseling
- 9.09 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- 8.94 Governance Policies Supporting Inclusion
- 8.92 Coordination of Inclusive Services
- 8.88 Emerging Technologies
- 8.85 Workforce Development Training
- 8.81 Technology Training for Students (general)
- 8.80 Technology Training for Students (assistive technologies)
- 8.78 Career Development and College Prep Curriculum
- 8.70 Educational Coaching
- 8.68 Navigating Campus (Teaching Students How)
- 8.67 Co-enrollment in Disability Support Services Classes
- 8.66 Inclusion Ally Programs
- 8.60 Transportation and Mobility Training
- 8.58 Neuro-diversity Labs
- 8.53 Specialized Instructional Labs and Tutoring
- 8.45 Intrusive Case Management
- 8.44 Peer Mentoring
- 8.36 Partnerships with Independent Living Programs
- 8.11 Co-Teaching Models (like the Washington State IBEST Model)
- 8.00 Specialized Degree or Certification

**Self-Reported Ideas.** Respondents self-reported other ideas as important areas for consideration:

- Access to technology.
- Internship programs.
- University workforce programs like Workability.
- Allowing students with disabilities to graduate based on the requirements at their first term of enrollment. It may take these students longer to graduate, and changing the graduation requirements along the way impede their ability to complete.
- Materials provided in language spoken at home.
- Participation in community impact projects.
- Including the input of individuals with disabilities in program development.
- Small group, hands-on training with a coach.
- Apprenticeship leading to career path.
- Social programs and connecting students with peers who have similar interests.

- Increasing opportunities to socialize with peers who do not have disabilities e.g. developing spaces where this type of socialization will naturally occur.
- Providing more access to social groups and recreational activities (social inclusion).
- Career guidance.
- Opportunities for students to share their lived experience and strengths in appropriate courses (psychology, social work, teaching credential, nursing, etc.)
- Providing inclusive exercise programs and partnering with departments like Kinesiology.
- Academic Coach.
- Campus-wide support network for educators, staff/faculty, etc. who want education on how to best serve students with disabilities.
- Independent living skills (budget, money management, consumer math skills, living independently).
- On-campus internships and district collaborations.
- Self-advocacy training and support. Encouragement and support to join an advocacy group within the education institution.
- Help with identifying the most suitable paid or unpaid positions with the most suitable organizations to match the student's skills, talents, interests and dreams.
- Teach students about how their representation and identity as students with disabilities links to social justice.
- Give opportunities for students to engage in discussion about current events that are all connected to social justice.



## PROGRAM INTERVIEWS

The PSE Inclusion Subcommittee decided to interview some postsecondary programs that offer services, resources, and supports that go beyond what is required by law to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. California programs were identified by members of the sub-committee, and other programs outside of California were identified by accessing the [Think College Website](#). Twenty-nine programs were contacted and requests for interviews were made. Twenty-three of the institutions agreed to be interviewed.

Interviews were scheduled for one hour and held via Zoom or phone. Participants included programs from 12 four-year universities, 10 community colleges, and one organization that supports families as their loved ones transition to higher education. The following open-ended questions were developed for the interviews:

1. Opening greeting, Tell us about the history of your programs?
2. How are students with disabilities included on your campus from the perspective of campus climate and culture (shared governance, board policies, campus clubs, classrooms, etc.)?
3. Tell us about inclusion on your campus.
4. What are your current practices, services, and supports to include students with disabilities (including ID/DD/ASD/neurodiverse) on your campus?
5. What challenges do you face when trying to include students with disabilities (including ID/DD/ASD/neurodiverse) on your campus?
6. What promising practices are you hoping to implement to better include students with disabilities (including ID/DD/ASD/ neurodiverse) on your campus?



## **Interview Data and Themes**

Volunteers from the OCLPA inclusion subcommittee interviewed the programs. A template was used to help guide the interviewer. The template included the open-ended questions identified previously with a text box to record notes. There were prompting questions included on the template for each of the open-ended questions. Interviewers were not required to ask the prompting questions. These questions were available to help the interviewer if the program being interviewed needed additional clarification to fully respond to the open-ended question. For example, the first question was, “Tell us about the history of your programs?” Examples of prompting questions included, “Where is your program located at your institution e.g. Division, department, program, etc.?” Or, “Where did you start with program development, and how did program development progress?” Interview data from each of the templates was pulled into a master document, and then a spreadsheet was used to track themes.

All institutions of higher education in the United States are required to provide services consistent with federal law such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and state laws like Title 5 of the Education Code in California. The institutions interviewed for this white paper were identified because of their intent to provide programs and services that go beyond what is required by law to better include individuals with disabilities in higher education and competitive, integrated employment. The rest of this section outlines emerging themes based on the interviews that were conducted.



**Coordination of services, specialized counseling, and case management.** All of the programs have faculty or staff responsible for coordination of services. There is considerable variation in titles and responsibilities, however, a key overlap is the recognition that students benefit from college and university personnel designated to helping with coordination of services. Examples of positions dedicated to this function include: Disability Support Services Counselor, Access Counselor, Program Coordinator, Career Development Coordinator, College to Career Coordinator, Transition Specialist, Support and Career Services Specialist, Campus Life Coordinator, Vocational Coordinator, and Disability Resource Coordinator.

Most of the postsecondary institutions have relationships with state agencies who help to coordinate services. For example, Vocational Rehabilitation (Department of Rehabilitation in California) provides case management services to individuals who attend institutions of higher education and who have employment goals related to their educational goals. Vocational Rehabilitation often partners directly with college and university programs to provide supports and resources for the programs. The State of California has 21 Regional Centers that provide service coordination to individuals with ID, ASD, and other developmental disabilities. Thus, many of the California programs identified in this report have students who receive case management from Regional Center Service Coordinators.



**Mentoring and Educational Coaching.** At least 18 of the programs interviewed provide some sort of coaching or mentoring or both. Examples of mentoring and

coaching include: Independent living assistant, peer mentor, volunteer, paid support, life coach, academic coach, tutor, student worker, pathway coach, social mentor, career coach, paid mentor, residential coach, educational coach, success coach, ambassador, and job coach. Many of the program staff interviewed emphasized the need for 1:1 support to help with onboarding, persistence, educational success, and transition to employment. Mentoring and coaching is used to promote friendship development and inclusion in social activities.

**Instruction.** Almost all of the programs provide at least some instruction specifically designed to support adults with disabilities. Example of this instruction include: Transition, employability, functional academics, independent living, social skills, leisure, self-advocacy, relationships, community participation, self-determination, self-regulation, literacy, social media safety, mobility, decision making, problem solving, time-management, conflict resolution, health living, and career planning. Program staff indicated that these courses laid the foundation for students to transition into inclusive instructional programs, independent living in the community, and integrated employment.



At least 18 of the programs have implemented programming that specifically supports the inclusion of students with disabilities in general credit and noncredit instruction. Inclusion often focuses on instructional programs that lead to vocational certificates and employment in a given field of work. Some of the programs have focused on skill building classes and using course “audit” policies to provide access to students who participate in inclusive classes without the pressure of grading.

**Neurodiversity programs and labs.** Five of the schools conveyed that they developed labs such as neurodiversity labs, tutoring, learning and career centers to support

inclusion. Other programs indicated that tutoring, learning, and career centers were already established on their campuses for general use by all students.



One school established neurodiversity labs on three of their campuses. The labs were originally designed to support the increase of students with ASD transitioning to college. They were intended to be a place where students with ASD could go if they were feeling overstimulated or simply needed a safe space to relax. Labs focus on executive functioning, social skill development, communication, and skills needed to persist on a college campus. The labs began to focus on general wellness, and have been open to all students. There were over 7,100 visits to the lab in the past year.

**Universal Design for Learning.** Sixteen programs indicated that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is promoted on their campuses with a handful of campuses sharing that UDL is part of their organizational policies and procedures. Training of faculty in the development and use of UDL was identified as a critical need by some of the programs interviewed.

**Emerging Technology.** Seven of the programs expressed the need to work closely with alternate media specialists and high tech centers to best understand emerging technologies and to provide the support that both students and faculty need to learn and utilize technology that can support student success.



**Ally Programs.** Many organizations, including institutions of higher education, have utilized Ally programs to support a variety of affinity groups. Only two of the schools who were interviewed talked about this type of support. One school recruits general education students to promote awareness of their inclusion programs across the greater campus. Another school is working on an “Inclusion Ally” program. The Inclusion Ally program will recruit faculty and staff across the college district who want to better support the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes. The program will provide training to these faculty and staff, and will be used to help guide students who want to take inclusive classes to faculty who are open to trying novel approaches to supporting student with diverse learning challenges. The Inclusion Ally program will be used to train coaches who can assist students with developing social connections across each of the district’s campuses.

**Independent Living.** Most of the programs provide at least a little bit of instruction that supports the skills necessary to live independently in the community, with a few schools providing more extensive training. Seven of the institutions have options to live on campus or near campus, and provide support for the development of independent living skills.





**Workforce Programs.** The provision of employments skills training and the support needed to attain competitive, integrated employment is universal. All of the programs that were interviewed provide employment skills training and job development. Very often these programs are supported with funding from State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. Not all of the schools indicated that they provide job coaching, and those who do provide job coaching tend to provide it at the beginning of employment and fade the service quickly. In California, these workforce programs have the opportunity to refer to other agencies who provide ongoing job coaching which is funded by the Regional Centers.

Employment skills training typically includes skills such as learning to: Write resumes and cover letters, use employment platforms, navigate application processes, network, identify possible employers, and interview. Individuals often complete vocational assessment that help students identify career interests, their skill sets, and the skills they need to develop to pursue the jobs that interest them.

Many of those interviewed indicated the use of paid and unpaid internships and work experience. These programs prove very beneficial in particular to students who do not have a lot of work experience. Schools often use their own campuses to develop internships and work experience for students.

**Customized Employment.** Customized Employment was not identified during the development phase for the surveys and program interviews. Several OCLPA members have received training and have begun using Customized Employment (CE) since the data collection phase ended for this white paper. OCLPA would like to identify CE as an emerging, promising practice.

Customized Employment is a strategy that considers the relationship between an employer and an employee when developing a pathway to competitive integrated employment (CIE). The process is intended to meet the needs of employers and employees. The focus is on the interests of the employee, their strengths, and the skills they have that will benefit an employer. Job developers utilizing CE seek to understand the needs of employers, the skill sets of employees, and to create a “customized” employment opportunity based on these factors.

**Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities.** Almost all of the programs who participated in the interviews do include a focus on serving students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. All students are eligible to earn a degree (AA/BA) or certificate if they achieve the standards established by the college or university.

Some of the schools have developed or are trying to develop additional options for students who may not be able to achieve at the same level as other college and university students. Examples of award options include: Certificate of Postsecondary Education, Certificate of Accomplishment, career-focused certificate (e.g. Child Development, Office Skills Worker), Postsecondary Certificate, noncredit certificate, certificate of completion, and Career Development College Preparation certificate. Programs that support students with ID/DD are often housed in noncredit programs or university extension programs. There appears to be a need for the development of more inclusive graduation options for students with ID/DD.

Most of the programs interviewed acknowledged that there is a need to engage parents and family members who have a loved one with ID/DD who attends an institution of higher education. Programs indicated the need to educate parents about their changing role from K12 to postsecondary e.g. from advocate to supporting their adult child with self-advocacy, or from being the decision maker to teaching their adult child how to be a decision maker. Many of the individuals interviewed recognize the need to establish typical college boundaries with parents e.g. the parent does not have the right to make decisions for the student, nor do they have the right to access information about the student. These are examples of healthy boundaries that generally benefit a student’s ability to develop skills that lead to a more independent life. At the same time, many of those who were interviewed valued family involvement and are intentional about how they involve families in their programming and the work they do to support students.



**Inclusion on Campus.** Participating programs provided examples on how inclusion is being supported on campus. The majority of colleges and universities who participated are actively supporting the implementation of UDL on their campuses. Many of the schools have board policies and procedures that support access, and some of the schools have promoted the participation of students with disabilities in schoolwide governance. Many campuses have dedicated time and resources as part of their diversity, equity, and inclusion plans to enact measures that provide more access to individuals who have disabilities.

Examples of activities beyond instruction and employment where campuses are actively working to include individuals with disabilities include: Student clubs and organizations, intramural sports, student government, Greek life, graduation, dorm living, sporting events, campus eateries, student IDs, access to campus facilities such as the health center and student center, cultural events, cheerleading, sport internships, and other social activities. Programs are utilizing peer mentoring to help students integrate into

college life. All students are held to the same expectations when it comes to following standards for student conduct.

**The following chart summarizes PSE Success Strategies for Students with Disabilities Accessing Higher Education & Employment:**

<p><b><u>Coordination of Services, Specialized Counseling, and Case Management</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ College and university personnel designated to helping with coordination of services</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Partnerships with State Vocational/Workforce Development Agencies</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provides case management services to individuals who attend institutions of higher education and who have employment goals</li> <li>○ Provides supports and resources for the programs</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Partnerships with Agencies that Provide Services to Students with IDD</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provides service coordination to individuals with ID, ASD, and other developmental disabilities.</li> <li>○ Students receive case management from Regional Center Service Coordinators.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Coaching &amp; Mentoring (Paid &amp; Unpaid)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Life Coaching, Tutoring, Social Mentor, Career Coach, Education Coach, ILS Coach and Job Coach, Residential Coach. Peer Mentoring, etc.</li> <li>○ 1:1 support to help with onboarding, persistence, educational success, and transition to employment</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Specialized Instruction</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Employment, functional academics, mobility, social safety, self-regulation, problem solving, decision making, time management, conflict resolution &amp; healthy living, etc.</li> <li>○ Piloting new programs that support inclusion would be advantageous</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Inclusion Support for SWD to be Successful in General Credit and Non-Credit Classes</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Inclusion often focuses on instructional programs that lead to vocational certificates and employment in a given field of work</li> <li>○ Achieving a balance between academic skill levels and access to instructional programs</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Skills Building Classes</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use of course audit practices to provide inclusive access to classes without the pressure of grades</li> <li>○ Develop foundational courses to provide a continuum of instructional programming These courses support successful onboarding and the development of</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Neurodiversity Programs and Labs</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lab settings/learning centers used to support specialized instruction</li> <li>○ Labs focus on executive functioning, social skill development, communication, and skills needed to persist on a college campus.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Universal Design for Learning</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ UDL is part of their organizational policies and procedures</li> <li>○ Training of faculty in the development and use of UDL</li> </ul>

<p>basic academic and vocational skills needed to progress through higher levels of education and to achieve employment.</p>		
<p><b><u>Emerging Technology</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work closely with alternate media specialists and high-tech centers to best understand emerging technologies</li> <li>○ Provide the support that both students and faculty need to learn and utilize technology that can support student success</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Ally Programs</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Programs include faculty and staff volunteers who receive training on strategies that support the successful inclusion of students who have disabilities</li> <li>○ Support faculty who are open to trying novel approaches to supporting students with diverse learning challenges</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Independent Living</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide options to live on campus or near campus,</li> <li>○ Provide support for the development of independent living skills</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Workforce Programs</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Partner with community partners to access job coaching</li> <li>○ Provide classes to develop resumes, cover letters, complete applications, thank you notes, and participation in interviews</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Intellectual and Other Developmental Disability</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Programs indicated the need to educate parents about their changing role from K12 to postsecondary</li> <li>○ Be intentional with needed family involvement</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Inclusion on Campus</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Board policies and procedures that support access</li> <li>○ Promote the participation of students with disabilities in schoolwide governance</li> <li>○ Dedicated time and resources as part of their diversity, equity, and inclusion plans</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>All Students are Held to the Same Expectations for Student Conduct</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use peer mentors to help SWD integrate into college life</li> <li>○ Identify clear expectations for behavior</li> <li>○ More attention needs to be dedicated to developing pathways that lead to social supports and social networks</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Promote Activities Beyond Instruction and Employment</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ include individuals with disabilities- Student clubs and organizations, intramural sports, student government, Greek life, graduation, dorm living, sporting events, campus eateries, student IDs, access to campus facilities such as the</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>All Students are Eligible to Earn a Degree (AA/BA) or Certificate</u></b> (if they achieve the standards established by the college or university.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Need inclusive options, i.e., micro-credentials, non-credit certificates</li> <li>○ Career Development and College Preparation certificates provide a steppingstone toward</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Train coaches who can assist students with developing social connections</li> </ul>	health center and student center, cultural events, cheerleading, sports internships, and other social activities.	noncredit and credit vocational certificates
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**Challenges.** Interviews revealed many barriers for students with disabilities accessing higher education and employment. Students struggle to access fiscal resources including financial aid. Many students have challenges with social skills and communication which makes successful participation in campus life difficult. Students struggle with boundaries, personal space, and physical touching which leads to them becoming involved in discipline and Title IX processes that they may not fully understand.



Increasing the number of students taking traditional courses (inclusive) has been difficult. Achieving a balance between academic skill levels and access to instructional programs can be complicated. Supporting student enrollment in higher education through **innovative accommodations, emerging technologies, and the adoption of Universal Design for Learning are promising practices**, but there are still some faculty, staff, and administrators who believe postsecondary education is not for everyone. There are people on campus who express that accommodations provide an unfair advantage, or that students who have not yet attained certain academic skill levels should not be enrolled in college programs.

Other examples of barriers include staffing shortages for both volunteers and paid supports, helping parents shift their role from being the decision maker to supporting the decision maker, and training campus safety officers about factors they may need to consider when intervening in a situation involving a student who has a disability. Many programs that provide supports that go above and beyond what is required by law serve a small cohort of students. Thus, scaling up is a challenge with limited resources.

Many of the programs interviewed expressed concerns for the challenges related to accessing social opportunities. Students with disabilities often have difficulties accessing social activities and developing friendships as children during their K12 educational journey. However, many have formulated at least a small group of friendships with people they have known for 13 to 17 years. Transition to postsecondary campuses often leaves them with nobody they know and the need to start developing a social circle from scratch while lacking the necessary skills to develop friendships and with fewer people available to support social development.

**The following chart summarizes PSE Challenges for Students with Disabilities Accessing Higher Education & Employment:**

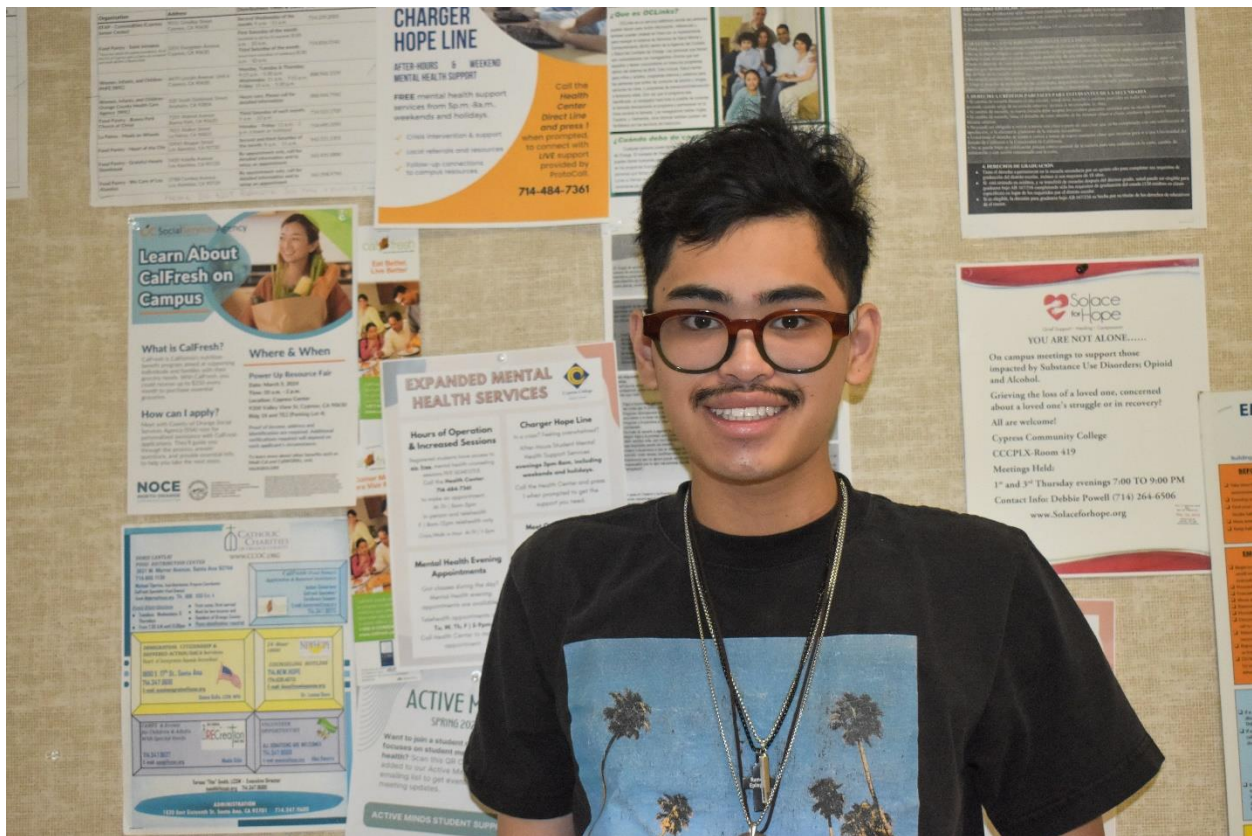
<b>PSE CHALLENGES/BARRIERS</b>		
<b>Accessing Fiscal Resources/ Financial Aid</b>	<b>Social Skills &amp; Communication</b>	<b>Boundaries, Personal Space &amp; Physical Touching</b>
<b>Taking Traditional Courses</b>	<b>Balance between Academic Skills &amp; Access to Instructional Programs</b>	<b>Faculty, Staff &amp; Administrators who believe PSE is not for everyone</b>
<b>Belief by some that accommodations provide an unfair advantage to SWD</b>	<b>Belief by some that students who have not yet attained certain academic skill levels should not be enrolled in PSE</b>	<b>Staffing shortages for volunteers and paid staff to provide services and supports</b>
<b>Helping parents shift their role from being the decision-maker to supporting the decision- maker</b>	<b>Untrained campus safety officers about factors they may need to consider when intervening in a situation involving a SWD</b>	<b>Scaling up is a challenge with limited resources needed for programming for a small cohort of SWD</b>
<b>Accessing social opportunities, few people available to support social development</b>	<b>Students with disabilities often have difficulties accessing social activities and developing friendships</b>	<b>Transition to postsecondary campuses often leaves SWD lonely and lacking the necessary skills to develop friendships</b>

**CONCLUSION**

All of the strategies surveyed scored very high, affirming that the Orange County, California community that serves individuals with disabilities would generally recommend any and all of these practices to support students. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being viewed as a completely non-effective strategy and 10 being extremely

impactful, no items scored below 8.0. This represents a strong consensus that these practices hold a tremendous amount of promise to support student success.

Program interviews reinforced the survey conclusions. Most of the institutions interviewed embraced Universal Design for Learning (UDL), workforce development programs for students, and the need to provide services that go beyond what is required by law. Virtually all of the institutions have established some programming specifically designed to serve students with intellectual disabilities (ID), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and other developmental disabilities, reinforcing the observations of many in the field who believe there is a strong interest in these student populations to attend college and that they experience many barriers to accessing higher education.



Interviews revealed a wide range of programming that has been implemented and some common themes for services provided. It is clear that the provision of some 1:1 support is needed to support students. Most programs provide some sort of coaching e.g. educational, vocational, social, academic, job, independent living, life, residential, success, peer mentor, volunteer, paid support, ambassador, etc. Institutions provide lab settings or learning centers to support specialized instruction, neurodiversity, and social opportunities.

Coordination supporting individual students is key but does not look the same in every institution. Funding sources may provide salary for the coordination of services, thus an organization will hire a coordinator who supports students in a particular program. Many



colleges and universities hire a coordinator for a specific role e.g. job development, housing, advisement, social activities, etc. College counselors who specialize in coordinating services that support inclusion are used by some campuses. Other schools rely primarily on large social services agencies like State Vocational Rehabilitation (Department of Rehabilitation) and Regional Centers in California to provide the coordination of services for individuals. All of the programs interviewed emphasized that without coordination students often fail to onboard, struggle to persist, and are less likely to complete programming. Like mentoring and coaching, students with disabilities need this level of 1:1 coordination to navigate higher education successfully.

A continuum of instructional programming is needed to increase the number of students who participate and successfully complete postsecondary certificates and degrees. Many of the programs designed foundational courses for individuals with disabilities. Many students have difficulty transitioning into higher education. These courses support successful onboarding and the development of basic academic and vocational skills needed to progress through higher levels of education and to achieve employment. Career Development and College Preparation certificates provide a steppingstone toward noncredit and credit vocational certificates. Students may obtain these short-term vocational certificates, transition to a higher level of employment, and persist to credit degree programs.





Support from the broader campus community is necessary to increase access and inclusion. Embracing UDL is very powerful. Another key element is identifying faculty and staff across an institution who embrace diversity and who seek new and innovative ways to help students succeed. All programs show promise and an Inclusion Ally program could go a long way toward supporting a wide range of students with learning differences. These programs include faculty and staff volunteers who receive training on strategies that support the successful inclusion of students who have disabilities. Participants often embrace the challenge of diverse learners in their classrooms and are open to consider new and promising instructional and learning strategies.

More attention needs to be dedicated to developing pathways that lead to social supports and social networks. Peer mentors and coaches who help students build skills and who help them navigate social activities on campus is necessary. Dedicated spaces like neurodiversity labs and wellness centers can serve as points of access where students can develop relationships with peers and where they can get support from faculty and staff who can help them understand and develop social skills. Administrative policies and procedures need to address the concern as well. For example, some students who participate in continuing education, extension programs, and community classes may not be permitted to participate in the broader campus student life.

**Implications for Research.** This white paper on “Best Practices to Include Students with Disabilities in Higher Education as well as Postsecondary Programming Supporting Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE)” represents a sampling of the views of

students, program participants, families, professionals, and community partners in Orange County, California. It includes some input from colleagues in California who supported the project and who have a stake in supporting students with disabilities on their campuses. Program interviews helped to convey how some institutions of higher education are already going beyond what is required by law to better support postsecondary education and employment for individuals who have disabilities.

OCLPA encourages universities and institutions who conduct research to review what has been shared in this white paper, and consider research projects that would examine the efficacy of the practices identified in this report. Conclusions drawn from the surveys and program interviews suggest that the best practices identified are likely to support the success of students with disabilities in higher education, and perhaps all students. Efficacy research on specific practices could help reinforce this conclusion, and would likely help to better differentiate between strategies i.e. which of the strategies identified hold the most promise for student success.

**DEIA Considerations.** OCLPA and CAPED seek pragmatic approaches to supporting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access. Individuals who have disabilities are an affinity group, and they are represented across all affinity groups. People who have disabilities are amongst the least included individuals accessing higher education and competitive employment. Barriers to their participation are high and there is a tremendous need for development of programming that supports their transition to higher education, their persistence, their completion, and their successful attainment of employment.

Programs currently exist that support DEIA goals, and others are in development. The research community could evaluate the efficacy of these programs. Partnerships between researchers and institutions piloting new programs that support inclusion would be advantageous. Exploring the benefit of these types of services to support all students would be beneficial, and would have implications related to the adoption of Universal Design for Learning across institutions of higher education. Research outcomes that support the efficacy of these types of programs would be impactful on legislation and resource allocation toward future program development.

There is a bottom line in this discussion. Individuals with disabilities are impacted by numerous barriers that lead to their exclusion from higher education and employment. Development and implementation of programs that help overcome these barriers is necessary for this population, and because individuals with disabilities are part of all groups, there is strong potential to support DEIA efforts for all groups experiencing exclusion.



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- **ASTEP (Advancing Students Toward Education and Employment, Minot State University)**
- **Transition Access Program (TAP, University of Cincinnati)**
- **Explorers (Cal State Northridge)**
- **University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) - TerpsEXCEED**
- **Redwood SEED Scholars Program (Supported Education to Elevate Diversity, UC Davis)**
- **UCLA Tarjan Center**
- **Wayfinders Program (Fresno State)**

- **Tiger LIFE (University of Memphis)**
- **College Autism Spectrum (Dr. Jane Thierfeld-Brown)**
- **Bakersfield College**
- **Taft College**
- **Mission College**
- **Transition to Work (Foothill College)**
- **College to Career (Santa Rosa Community College)**
- **College to Career (West LA College)**
- **North Orange Continuing Education**
- **College to Career (San Diego Community College District)**
- **Impact Program (Mt. San Antonio College)**
- **College to Career (Shasta College)**

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