

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) is a legislative mandate focused on improving the employment outcomes of secondary students with disabilities. WIOA requires that funding from the State/Federal Vocational Rehabilitation System be used to ensure that state vocational rehabilitation agencies (e.g., Illinois Department of Human Services) in collaboration with schools provide pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities who qualify, or could potentially qualify, for vocational rehabilitation services. Under WIOA, vocational rehabilitation counselors and teachers are required to engage students in the following five required pre-ETS: (a) job exploration counseling, (b) work-based learning experiences, (c) counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs, (d) workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and (e) instruction in self-advocacy. This research brief will focus on *counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs*.

What is Counseling for Postsecondary Educational Programs?

Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary education programs refers to the process of providing support and guidance to students with disabilities and their caregivers regarding the transition from school to postsecondary education. Examples of postsecondary education programs include university programs, vocational-technical programs, community colleges, the military, and other training opportunities in specific career pathways. Some options in postsecondary education programs may be state specific (Fisher & Eskow, 2004; Mazzotti & Test, 2020). Special education teachers and vocational rehabilitation counselors should collaborate in providing counseling

activities that prepare students to enter these programs. Counseling activities can include, but are not limited to, working with students and families to understand their legal rights upon leaving high school, the postsecondary options available, and procedures for requesting academic accommodations during postsecondary education (Shaw et al., 2009). Ultimately, these counseling activities should be based on student interests within postsecondary education (Rowe et al., 2015).

Research on Counseling for Postsecondary Outcomes

Participation in postsecondary education is associated with lower rates of unemployment, increased wages, and independence for individuals with disabilities (Madaus et al., 2017; Phillippe et al., 2021). Students with disabilities who receive counseling in postsecondary education have greater success when entering postsecondary programs and more positive outcomes upon completion (e.g., access to competitive employment; Moore & Schelling, 2015; Papaya et al., 2017, Sannicandro et al., 2018). Counseling activities that facilitate success in postsecondary education focus on how to obtain services, empowering students to enroll in postsecondary education, and sharing information with students and families about the differences between high school and postsecondary education environments (Jacques & Abel, 2020; Petcu et al., 2017; Phillippe et al., 2021). It has also been reported that counseling activities that include the family positively impact access to postsecondary educational environments for students with disabilities (Papaya et al., 2014; Southward & Kyzar, 2017). Research suggests the need for practitioners to broaden the topics on which they are counseling (Newman et al., 2019) and increase their collaboration with other professionals involved with supporting students to transition to postsecondary education (Plotner et al., 2016).

Guidelines for Practice

The success of students with disabilities entering postsecondary education settings relies heavily on the collaborative efforts of practitioners in providing the necessary supports and guidance to their students (Test et al., 2015). Practitioners (e.g., special education teachers, transition specialists, and vocational rehabilitation counselors) need to work together to help students successfully develop skills and access activities that aid them in this transition. For example, practitioners can

support students in navigating disability services and accommodations beyond high school, provide guidance in filling out financial aid applications, promote self-determination and advocacy skills to achieve independence, as well as involve families and caregivers in the transition process (Kelly & Prohn, 2019; Newman et al., 2019; Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Table 1 provides specific examples of counseling activities in postsecondary education.

Table 1

Sample Counseling Activities in Postsecondary Education

Student Goal	Counseling Activity
Understand legal rights	Work with students to recognize the laws that protect them (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act) so that they can determine if they are receiving the rights afforded to them (e.g., protection against discrimination, access to accommodations). Help students understand their responsibilities related to the laws such as the need to disclose their disability in order to receive accommodations.
Understand various postsecondary options	Provide students with various activities that help them understand the postsecondary options available, the similarities and differences between options, and how to determine which options will help them to achieve their personal goals. These activities might include viewing websites, touring facilities, talking with representatives from each setting, and making a list of the pros and cons of each option.
Transition into desired postsecondary setting	Organize planning meetings with the student and their family to talk about the structural differences between high school and each postsecondary option. Discussion might focus on skills needed in the areas of independent living, time management, transportation, requesting academic supports, meal preparation, and managing finances.
Develop awareness of needed accommodations	Students need to be aware of the accommodations they need to be successful in various settings (e.g., academic, home, work). Help students think about the accommodations they currently receive, how those supports facilitate their success, and what would happen if the supports were missing.
Independently request accommodations	Create a task analysis with the steps needed to fill out a form to request appropriate accommodations, for example, for a university admission test, a university exam, or during a work experience. Students could also role play how they would respond to direct questions they might receive from professors or employers about their accommodation needs.

Additional Resources

WINTAC

www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/counseling-opportunities-enrollment

U.S. Department of Postsecondary Education
transitionta.org/

The National Parent Center on Transition
www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/post-secondary/

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