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3-5-2021

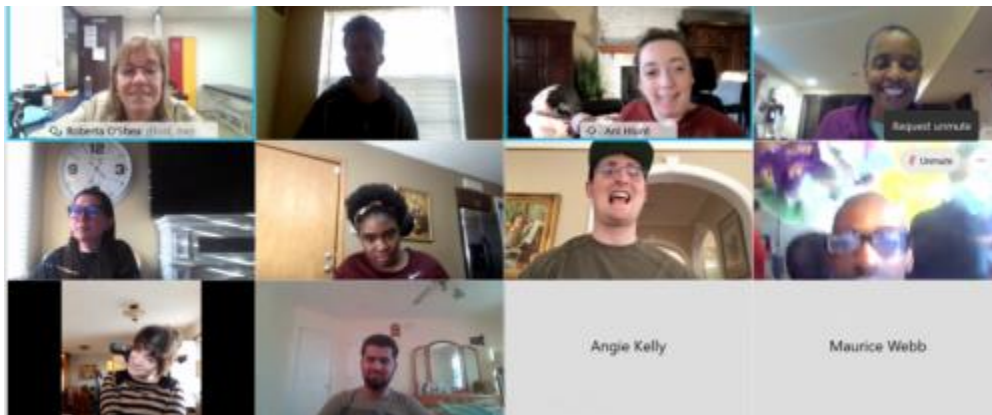
GSU Helps Individuals With Disabilities Transition to Adulthood

Office of Marketing and Communications

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University Park, IL,
March
05,
2021

GSU Helps Individuals With Disabilities Transition to Adulthood



[Governors State](#)

[University's Physical Therapy](#) Professor Roberta “Robbie” O’Shea loves working out a good problem and overcoming stubborn barriers. She cringes, however, every time a particular question surfaces among her beloved young adult clients with disabilities.

“What now?”

This is the query to which responses are often limited – especially in the Southland. Options in the area include joining a day program or finding an entry-level job, but not much else.

Governors State is now positioned to offer another option and help young adults with intellectual disabilities transition to higher education or employment opportunities.

The 10-week pilot program, known as the Post High School Advancement for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities or Jaguar Jumps, is available through the [School of Extended Learning](#) (SXL). Attendees of the program will benefit from the knowledge and experience of Governors State educators who have experience in special education and rehabilitation therapy.

Hosted virtually on Wednesday nights, the class is led by [O'Shea](#), a longtime advocate and professor in the [Department of Physical Therapy](#), and Angela Szczepanik-Sanchez, GSU's Director of [Access Services for Students with Disabilities](#).

Designing the program structure

As children with disabilities become adults, they lose eligibility for state and federal programs that support learning and socialization. GSU's program targets people with intellectual disabilities who want to continue growing or to develop a career path, whether or not that involves college coursework.

"The students who signed up for this course are not appropriate for a day program or a one-task job," O'Shea said. "There is a breadth of individual abilities among students in the program. Maybe they're interested in pursuing higher education, or they're having difficulty finding a job that interests them."

In the GSU course, students identify their strengths and goals while enjoying socializing and practicing good habits that will benefit their work or school life. As part of the course, which ends next month, enrollees become full-fledge Governors State students, complete with photo IDs and opportunities afforded to all the university's students.

Working with SXL allowed organizers and partners to offer the course as an option that students could enroll in without having to pass placement exams and the program limited the barriers that can impact opportunities for these individuals. "It just makes the course more affordable and flexible," Szczepanik-Sanchez said. "SXL is a good home for our program as we hope to continue to grow."

Solid expected outcomes

Regardless of what paths they choose in the future, the course gives students a chance to see how well a college environment suits them. Students experience what it's like to prepare for class, including collecting materials, logging on, and caring for personal needs beforehand.

O'Shea said the practical lessons are good. "We're training their bodies to sit in front of the computer for 90 minutes and be accountable for work and/or school outcomes," she said.

Lasting community partnerships

As their worlds expand into the workplace or higher education, students also need links to resources available inside and outside Governors State. A central part of the pilot program involves connecting students with community and university resources and bringing outside institutions into the fold.

GSU resources such as Access Services for Students with Disabilities can provide services and specific support for student needs, including:

- Extended Time on Tests
- Reduced Distraction Testing area/room

- Recording of Lectures
- American Sign Language Interpreters
- Textbooks in Alternative format
- Reader and/or Scribe for Test Taking
- Accessible Seating Arrangements

Szczepanik-Sanchez and O'Shea said the course teaches students how to advocate for themselves to meet a broad spectrum of needs, from identifying and accessing state education financial aid and accommodations to request for success to teaching them about public transportation and ride-sharing services.

The program also offers adult literacy and comprehension assistance from Prairie State College, a Governors State [Dual Degree partner](#). Students from the Occupational Therapy department at a nearby university host a bonus Tuesday night session for socialization.

Putting an umbrella over these services, institutions and resources will position GSU as a leader in consolidating assistance for people with intellectual disabilities looking for future opportunities or those who age out of childhood programs.

“As one culmination of this pilot program, we would like GSU to be a hub of information,” Szczepanik-Sanchez said. “We would like to find a way to bring everything together under one space and have GSU bring in the broader community of resources to provide programming and opportunities for these individuals who want to continue their education, have a career path, and live independently.”

O'Shea said one unique aspect of the pilot program is its individualized approach. It doesn't direct students into a singular course of study, job track, or future. It does, however, encourage them to move forward with intention — even if that means re-enrolling in the course to further hone their plans.

Eventually, students will move on from the program, O'Shea said. With a definitive endpoint, it's not meant to be a “forever” program. Instead, they want to help students move to the next stage of their lives. These include partnerships with local colleges in our dual degree program and collaborations with employment focused partners including New Star and Work Together Chicago. It's the same thing professors do for all students, O'Shea said.

“We have an obligation to the citizens of the Southland. As Governors State University strives to be a pinnacle of the Southland, we recognize that includes everyone,” she said. “These students just want to have a college experience like any other. And there's a lot of talent that's still untapped.”

For more information on Jaguar Jumps or other resources for students with disabilities, please contact O'Shea at roshea@govst.edu or Szczepanik-Sanchez at aszczepanik-sanchez@govst.edu.