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University Park, IL,
May
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2021

Jaguar Jumps Presents to National Council on Disability



Governors State

University's (GSU) Jaguar Jumps, a pilot program that promotes age appropriate and realistic educational planning for citizens with intellectual disabilities, recently presented to the National Council on Disability (NCD), an independent federal agency charged with advising the president, U.S. Congress, and other federal agencies.

The pilot, known as the Post High School Advancement for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities or Jaguar Jumps, was hosted this spring through the School of Extended Learning (SXL) for citizens seeking options and opportunities for continuing their education and/or gaining employment and independent living. Participants benefited from the knowledge and experience of Governors State educators who have experience in special education and rehabilitation therapy.

Hosted virtually for 10 weeks, the class was facilitated by Roberta [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](#).

Their presentation to the NCD explored the inadequate national and educational infrastructure for citizens with intellectual disabilities. One law, the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), mandates that students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) start transition at age 16. While the transition plan should include partnering with local colleges and universities for employment opportunities, it frequently does not—especially in certain communities.

"This doesn't happen readily in the Southland but does happen in other well-funded areas. Inequities ever-present to the students citizens of the Southland are magnified for students with intellectual disabilities," O'Shea explained.



Led by physical therapist and co-creator of Jaguar Jumps Ann Jackson, O'Shea and Szczepanik-Sanchez walked the NCD through the process that launched Jaguar Jumps, which includes the university reaching back to the high schools to help remove barriers and smooth out the transition for student citizens. The Jaguar Jumps faculty also described the activities and resources of the program, which included identifying community resources, student clubs and organizations at Governors State, self-interest surveys, as well as workshops on resume writing and LinkedIn.

Videos of students discussing the program and GSU were shown to the council, including a video from Daniel Kyle Pop, a Jaguar Jumps attendee from this spring. In the video, Pop uses technology to voice that the program helped him to overcome his fear of college courses. He recently was accepted to Elmhurst University and plans to attend in the fall.

Looking to the future of Jaguar Jumps, the summer semester will focus on traveling and education which will see the students spending a night at [Prairie Place](#), Governors State's dorms, and traveling to Springfield. The final semester will split the attendees into two sections: those who want to transition into a career--where they will be assisted by [Career Services](#) with finding internships and job experience as well as better

understanding the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)--and those who want to attend university--where they will audit a course at GSU and work on their applications for their chosen university.

"There's an untapped population of citizens who want to enroll at university's or want to enroll in WIOA programs, but they face too many barriers to do so," said O'Shea.

"We want to help them jump into the next stage of their lives."

The National Council on Disabilities chair and members listened intently to the presentation and agreed whole heartedly with the speakers.

"They pledged their support to try to close equity gaps by investigating the issue in depth and advocating for necessary changes in policy and implementation," Jackson said. "We're excited for what the future holds."