



CT AHEAD

Connecticut Association on
Higher Education and Disability

Meeting Minutes – March 11, 2022

CT AHEAD Transitioning Out of College

Morgan Sutton called the meeting to order at 9:05 am (24 in attendance).

The format of the meeting was a panel discussion on *Transitioning Out of College*. The three expert panelists that shared their experience, suggestions, and resources for assisting students were:

- Christine Wenzel, Associate Director at the Center for Students with Disabilities at the University of Connecticut.
- Bethany LaLonde, Job Developer for CUNY LEADS (Linking Employment, Academics, and Disability Services) at the College of Staten Island and an adjunct professor for CUNY's School of Professional Studies in the Disability Studies program.
- Preston Burger, Recruiter and Candidate Success Specialist at Integrate.

Guiding panelist questions and summary of responses:

1. What advice do you have for preparing students to transition out of 2 or 4-year college into the workplace?

Wenzel – Encourage students to think about what they are looking for in a job. Candidates should consider their ideal workforce and environment that works best for them. Once this is identified, the student can tailor their search to meet those ideals. Also, students should find someone in the field who can share their experiences to help inform them of the job.

LaLonde – Have students take a step back and evaluate what types of roles they are interested in. Encourage internship experience. Once the student is ready to launch, they need to remain realistic in the job search and aware that it can be a frustrating experience.

Burger – The work of transition starts at intake. It is important to work with students to help them reframe their academic experience to fit the workforce. Disability Service Providers should focus on listening to the student, helping them relate their educational experience to workplace technology skills (e.g., organizing emails), and leveraging their savvy with social media to help them build a network on LinkedIn.

2. What struggles have you encountered when trying to support students transitioning out of college?

Wenzel – Students can have difficulty finding jobs, and the interview is generally where things start to fall apart. UConn has partnerships with some companies to help transition students into the workforce. They work with the company to re-evaluate the rubric for the job and what are truly essential requirements of the job.

LaLonde – The process is multi-layered in finding a job and prepping students for self-advocacy and when the right time is to disclose. More natural supports (e.g., mentors) in the workplace is essential so that individuals have the resources and support they need.

Burger – This is very specific to each student. It's important to teach transferrable skills and help students know that a simple academic experience (e.g., writing a lab report) can be used

to demonstrate multiple skills in the workforce. It is also important to help students develop their confidence, so they are comfortable translating their experiences into a transferrable skill.

3. Have you encountered any hesitancy on the part of organizations that you may have been helping to transition a student into?

Wenzel – Has been fortunate in that she hasn't yet experienced this, but it is mainly because they have been on the side where companies have connected with them, specifically looking for students that they can provide a workforce opportunity to. The outreach goes beyond simply checking a box for the company; it is making sure there are supports in place for the student once they are onboard.

LaLonde – Has been proactive in forming partnerships with companies through CUNY LEADS and promoting those companies to their students, so they know there will be the support necessary. However, there are also those companies that are resistant in providing an opportunity to a student with a disability mainly due to stigma or the thought that accommodations will cost too much. She works hard to keep and develop relationships with those companies that are receptive.

Burger – Works with companies to help them be neuroinclusive and meets with managers once a week to help coach them through the process so that by the time they recruit candidates, expectations are clear. Works hard to ensure there is a good fit between the company and the individual. They are also at a point where companies are reaching out to connect with them for candidates.

4. When is the right time to disclose a disability in the workplace?

Wenzel – This is very individual, and it is up to the candidate to decide if they want to disclose or if they actually need to have an accommodation in place. She works with students to determine when a good time might be and how best to frame that conversation. Very careful in coaching the student so they don't frame it negatively.

LaLonde – Tells students it's a personal choice and does mock interviews with the student, so they are prepared and know how much to actually disclose. Has conversations regarding how, when, where, and why they are disclosing, and helps them frame the disclosure positively. Helps them with the self-advocacy skills they need to be comfortable with disclosing and sharing how they can contribute to the company based on their strengths.

Burger – The companies that go to Integrate are deliberately looking to diversify and be inclusive to neurodiverse students, so the disclosure piece is not necessarily an issue for these candidates. Applicants go through a very holistic process where they submit diagnostic testing to Integrate, submit a prerecorded interview, and then go through a zoom interview so that there is a clear understanding of who the student is, their strengths, and functional needs, so that by the time they get to the client, it is just figuring out if it is the right fit. His suggestion to clients is that if you are going to disclose, you can do it either before the interview or after the interview. He recommends not to do it during the interview because it immediately changes the dynamic of the interview. Disclosure is a very personal process, but he stresses that you need to be prepared to talk about it because, at some point, the disability will manifest itself, so be ready to discuss it if need be.

5. When a student is transitioning from college to graduate or professional school, how do we prepare them for changes that may occur in what is considered a reasonable accommodation?

Wenzel – Every institution has a different process, and since they stress the interactive process right from the beginning with the student, the concept is not unfamiliar to them. However, they discuss how some things might look differently as they continue in their education or in the workforce. For instance, attendance flexibility might not be that big of a deal in undergraduate. Still, there are some programs at the graduate level where they may have more labs or hands-on activities that could make that accommodation more challenging. They stress the importance of reaching out early to the Disability Service Provider to have these discussions and see what might be reasonable.

LaLonde – Not all accommodations can stretch into some graduate-level programs (e.g., nursing). Coaching students to have conversations early on regarding what they need and how it might help them in an educational or work-related setting is important. Also, preparing students that some accommodations might not be reasonable, but understanding what else can be done to help support them. Each conversation is individual, and it is important to dive into what each student needs.

Burger – Doesn't have a lot of experience in this, but because his focus is so targeted on autism, there are a growing number of autism focused support groups that he would encourage students to reach out to and to see if they might lend their support to graduate programs as well.

6. What more can I be doing as a Disability Service Provider to manage expectations for the accommodation request process in the workplace?

Wenzel – Having conversations with students early, and each semester helps make the transition process more seamless. They have a game where they ask students how their accommodations may translate into the workplace. Encourages conversations with students to talk about accommodations like attendance flexibility, taking a reduced course load, extended time, deadline extensions, and note-taking.

LaLonde – Provides interactive opportunities to help the students understand how to translate their accommodations to the workplace. Recommends the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) as a resource for accommodations and information on how to ask for reasonable accommodations, etc. Partners with their Career Services Center on campus as a collaborative effort to help support students and has found that this promotes inclusion on the campus.

Burger - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professionals and HR professionals want disabled talent and are making more of an effort now to hire disabled talent. Applicants should be aware that if they need accommodations in the academic space, they will more than likely need them in the workspace. Role modeling is so important. "You can't be what you can't see." There has been a cultural shift in the workforce, and there is nothing to be ashamed of anymore.

Meeting ended 10:31 am.

Respectively Submitted,

Debbie Kosior
CT AHEAD Secretary