

**John's Story:
All the Bases Covered**

This series of stories aims to shed light on the transformative power of higher education credentials for students with intellectual disability. Through real-life examples, we explore how earning credentials in various fields has not only equipped these individuals with essential skills but has also paved the way for meaningful employment opportunities.

4-year university

Professional sports

Illinois

John Wrenn has always been a self-starter. He joined the University of Illinois Chicago's (UIC) Cooperative Career Experience Program, or Co-Op, seeking an active job related to nursing, sports, or advocacy—not a job that involved sitting at a desk.

The Co-Op program is a 2-year, 36-credit hour pre-baccalaureate certificate program based in UIC's Department of Disability and Human Development. Students take 12 credits of core disability studies courses, 12 credits of work-based learning and internship experiences, and 12 credits of any 100 level elective courses from around the university that are aligned with their person-centered planning goals.

John entered the Co-Op program in Fall 2022, eager to gain more knowledge and experience. After several work experiences that helped him discover more about what he likes and doesn't like, he was hired as a member of the cleaning crew at Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs.

In July of his first season John earned Associate of the Month. His supervisors noted that he shows “a remarkable blend of adaptability, learning, and positive energy. His enthusiastic contributions have notably improved team dynamics and overall efficiency.” The 2023 season built John's confidence to continue to pursue a career in professional sports as an equipment manager.

During the offseason, John continued to impress Co-Op staff by applying his learning beyond class sessions and proactively identifying opportunities to support himself on his career path. John conducted informational interviews and took relevant courses—like Turf Management—through Coursera. He independently advocated for a promotion and earned one for the 2024 season: in the 1914 Club, Wrigley Field's luxury home plate club experience that has been dubbed “the coolest seats in baseball” since it was established in 2018.

John continues to independently pursue informational interviews and other opportunities that can support him in growing a career in professional sports. He is currently working on developing a plan to work for two teams whose seasons have minimal overlap. John's Co-Op classmates noticed his growing knowledge of work in professional sports. They have begun turning to John for advice regularly and asking him to be a member of their person-centered planning teams. The Co-Op team is so proud of John and excited to see everything in store for him!



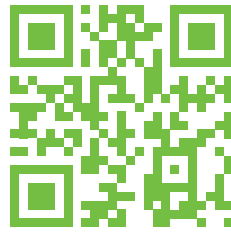
John knew he was interested in a job related to sports or advocacy, a job that wasn't a desk job, and he was successful in getting what he wanted working at Wrigley Field.

Why are postsecondary education credentials important?

Earning a postsecondary education credential creates a better starting point for students with intellectual disability entering the job market and adult life. Those who access higher education are more likely to be employed, earn higher wages, and have stronger social and professional networks. There are more than 350 colleges and universities in the US with various credential options providing college students with intellectual disability opportunities for better employment outcomes and more successful adult lives.



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pathway stories



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intellectual disability



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The Inclusive Higher Education Network is a national technical assistance and dissemination center, funded by the US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. The Network is tasked with increasing regional and state capacity, building awareness, creating strategic partnerships, and supporting expansion and improvement of higher education for students with intellectual disability through resource and training development.

Learn more about TCN at thinkcollege.net/projects/tcn

This is a publication of the Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, funded by the Office of Postsecondary Education (Grant No. P407C210001). The opinions contained in this document are those of the grantee and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders.

Recommended citation: Inclusive Higher Education Network. (2025). John's Story: All the Bases Covered. Think College Stories: Credential Pathways. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.