

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

Technology/computing

Virginia

Spencer came to Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) ACE-IT in College program interested in coding and programming, with the goal of working in the technology industry. He knew that many career opportunities in the technology industry require some type of credential, certification, or degree.

VCU's ACE-IT in College is an inclusive certificate program for transition-age adults with intellectual disability. The program is accredited by the Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation Council (IHEAC). Students earn a Certificate of Completion from the VCU School of Education after fulfilling the requirements of their Academic and Career Plan. The Academic and Career Plan includes 20+ VCU course credits, campus employment, and an internship. Students audit 2-3 VCU classes per semester with individualized support provided for participation in employment, college classes, and campus activities.

In addition to earning his Certificate of Completion from the VCU School of Education, Spencer was able to complete the Office of Continuing and Professional Education (OCPE) Digital Badging credential program with an individualized academic plan. To earn this credential, Spencer was required to take four courses related to computer programming, software engineering and web development, data science, and cybersecurity skills for credit. Traditionally, ACE-IT students audit courses, but to be considered for admission into the credential program, Spencer had to take each class for a grade. He had to score a C or higher in all of the courses, and Spencer finished all the courses with a B or higher.

ACE-IT staff developed strategic partnerships with employers on campus and in the community that resulted in positions that allowed Spencer to practice the skills he learned in class. Spencer had paid student employment at the VCU Labs and Classroom Computing department as a Support Technician and as a Junior Network Analyst at the VCU Network Services Office. During his final semester at VCU, Spencer completed an internship with the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.

The credential and certificate opened employment opportunities for Spencer after graduating from VCU. Since graduation, Spencer continued his internship at the Federal Reserve Bank for the summer and has put his cybersecurity and data management skills to work at Dominion Energy, a national energy supplier based in Richmond, VA.



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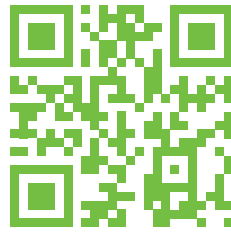


Why are postsecondary education credentials important?

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.



Read more credential
pathway stories



Learn more about inclusive
postsecondary education



See the data on employment
outcomes of students with
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

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