

Preparing Students for Postsecondary Education

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[Shepherds College](#) is a postsecondary school for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities where students receive vocational, social, and life skills training, preparing them for employment and independent living. As the Dean of Education, I see students arrive with varied levels of readiness. Being prepared for college reduces fear and anxiety, increases success, and maximizes learning.

The top five skill areas to prepare students for postsecondary education include:

- Study Skills
- Daily Living Skills
- Self-Advocacy Skills
- Social Skills
- Assistive Technology Skills

Study Skills

Study skills are strategies that assist with the learning process and involve organizing, retaining and applying information, and time management. Successful students have a level of proficiency with reading and comprehension, critical thinking, written and verbal communication, and math computation appropriate to their area of study. There is benefit in having students practice study skills by managing their schedules using a daily planner, completing a learning preference assessment, and taking a strengths inventory. Students can enhance math skills as they practice liquid and linear measurement, gain employment skills as they write a resume and practice interview skills, and acquire vocational training as they work at internships.

Daily Living Skills

Daily living skills include personal hygiene, laundry, meal planning, food preparation, chore completion, and grocery shopping. In college, students will likely be expected to wake up independently, maintain personal hygiene, select appropriate clothing, dress independently, and perhaps even prepare meals. Students often participate in community-based learning activities such as going to the bank to withdraw spending money and shopping for food at the grocery store. Students will practice life skills as they live in a residential setting.

Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is the art of understanding one's strengths, identifying goals, knowing legal rights and responsibilities, and communicating needs to others. As students grow in their self-advocacy, they also grow in self-confidence. An individual with strong self-advocacy makes decisions, solves problems, and asks for help. Learning about their disability, asking for accommodations, and understanding their rights and responsibilities are tools that will bring

success in all aspects of their lives. Students will learn self-awareness as they gain understanding about their strengths and weaknesses, and are encouraged to solve problems, use conflict resolution steps, and ask for help when needed.

Social Skills

Strong social skills allow students to learn and work collaboratively with others as they make relevant contributions, work alongside others to complete tasks, set and accomplish goals, and resolve conflict. It is important that students learn how to make friends, introduce themselves, understand body language, practice public speaking, and give and accept feedback. Students need to learn about social rules, gain understanding about verbal and nonverbal communication, and apply social skills in the classroom and residential setting.

Assistive Technology Skills

Assistive technology enables individuals with disabilities to perform tasks they were unable to accomplish and to operate with a greater level of independence. For example, the use of a tablet allows a student who has difficulty with writing or typing to perform voice-to-text when writing or answering questions. Types of technology include: voice recognition software, screen readers, and specialized keyboards. Learning how to use assistive technology while in high school provides students a jumpstart at the postsecondary level. Apps are available to complete math computation during budgeting activities, allowing students to perform more independently.

Preparing students for postsecondary education involves a holistic approach providing students with opportunities to practice hands-on learning and skill development. Set high expectations for students and equip students to reach those expectations by setting incremental goals. Success breeds success. Expect students to arrive on time, be prepared, respect peers and authority, demonstrate responsibility, and maintain self-control. Encourage students to work hard, develop intrinsic motivation, foster resilience, and inspire creativity. Use teachable moments to train students to reach their fullest potential as they lead productive, well-rounded lives. A student who attends college with the above base-level skills will definitely be equipped with tools for success.

<http://www.shepherdsresources.org/articles.html>