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REPORTS

Year One Employment and Career Development Experiences of College Students Attending Cohort 2-TPSID Model Demonstration Programs

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INTRODUCTION

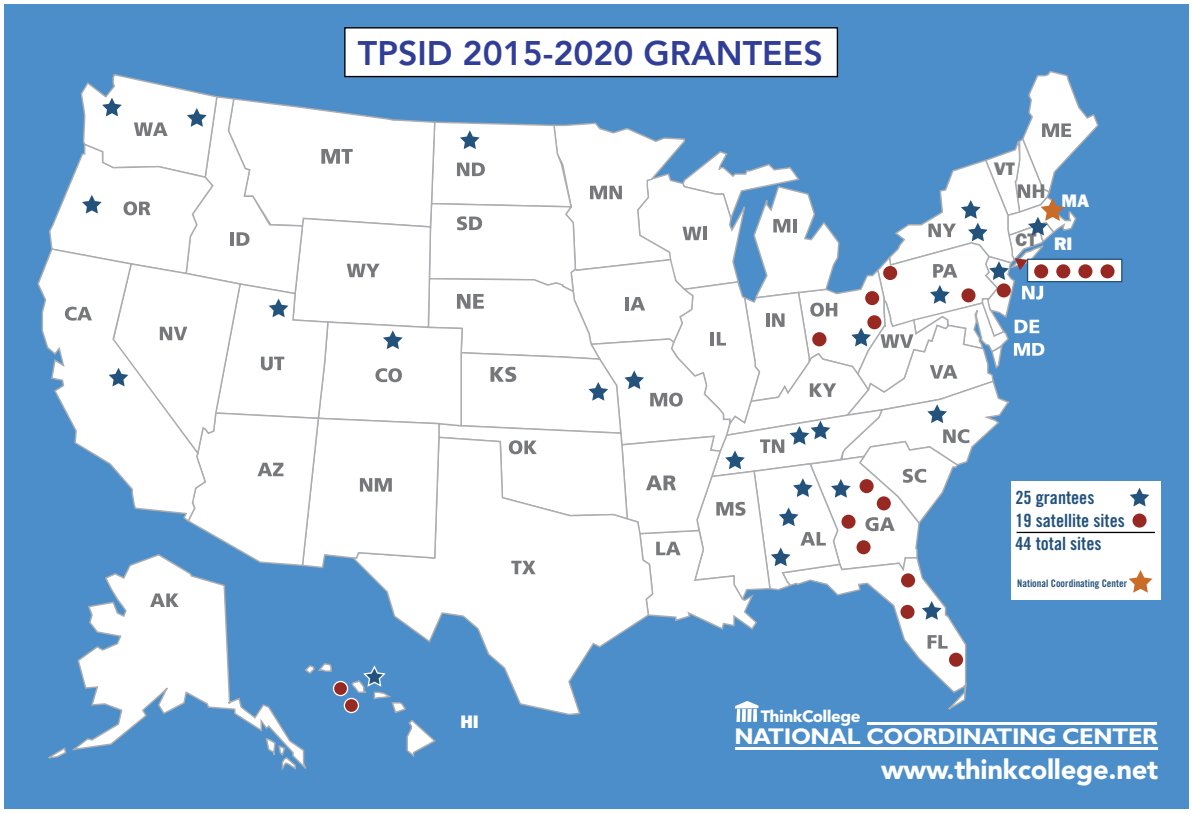
Ensuring that students with intellectual disability can access and sustain competitive integrated employment is a primary goal for institutions of higher education implementing Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSIDs). TPSIDs offer a wide range of pre-employment career development experiences and supports to students to obtain this goal. Some examples of strategies used include supporting students to participate in unpaid internships and service learning experiences, connecting students with adult service providers, supporting students in finding competitive jobs while in the program and at exit, and providing job coaches so students can retain those jobs.

Each academic year, the Think College National Coordinating Center (NCC) collects data on the programmatic strategies used to prepare students for work and to support them with finding and keeping jobs. Additionally, the NCC collects information on any career development experiences and any paid jobs students hold during the year. In this report, we summarize student participation in career development experiences and paid employment in 2015–2016.

BACKGROUND

Significant disparities exist between the employment outcomes of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and those who do not have IDD. Recent analyses of large national datasets, such as the United States Census Bureau American Community Survey, show the employment rate for working-age adults without disabilities in 2015 was 73.6% (Winsor et al., 2017), whereas only 17% of working-age adults supported by state IDD agencies in the community were employed in a paid job in the community in 2014–2015 (National Core Indicators, 2015).

In contrast to these low rates of employment, individuals with IDD have demonstrated a clear desire to fully participate in the typical labor force, and competitive employment is increasingly stated as an intended outcome of formal education (Barrows et al., 2016). The benefits of competitive integrated employment include higher wages, access to benefits, greater independence and economic self-sufficiency, greater integration with people without disabilities in the workplace and the community, more opportunities for choice and self-determination, expanded career options, and increased job satisfaction (Wehman & Scott, 2013). Students who enroll in TPSIDs are provided with career development and employment experiences aimed at helping them reap these potential benefits.



METHODS

As part of its charge to evaluate the TPSID model demonstration projects, the NCC developed a set of common measures and established a data reporting protocol, called the Think College Data Network. The Data Network is aligned with the TPSID Government Performance and Reporting Act (GPRA) performance measures (required for all federal grants), as well as with the Think College Standards for Inclusive Higher Education (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Data were collected annually from TPSIDs on program structure and student activities, including employment. A map of TPSID 2015-2020 sites is shown on page 2. Data reported here were collected from program staff at 21 TPSID grantees that served students at 36 institutions of higher education (IHEs) in 2015–2016, the first year of the 5-year grant.

TPSID staff reported information about each paid job and any unpaid work experience held by students while enrolled in the program. These data included jobs that students may have started before beginning or while enrolled in the program, as well as jobs that were not associated with their status as a TPSID student (i.e., jobs that were not internships or work study placements on campus).

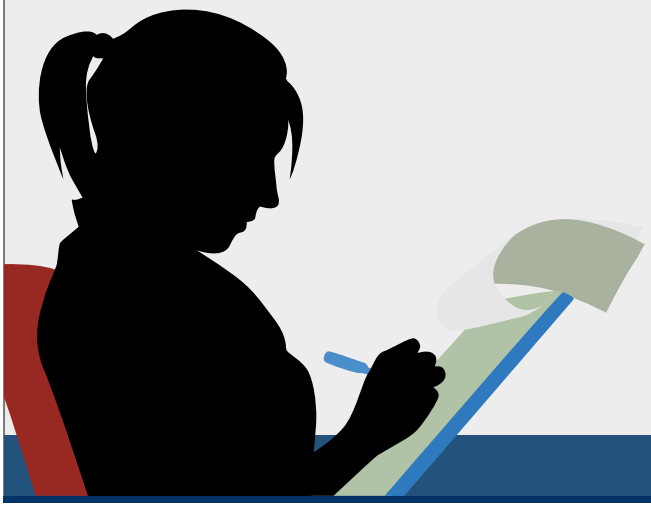
FINDINGS

Paid employment in 2015–2016

Of the 449 students who attended TPSID programs in 2015–2016, 192 (43%) held a total of 282 paid jobs (i.e., some students had more than one job). Seventy-seven of the 192 employed students had more than one paid job during the year. To provide some context for this level of employment, the percentage of employed students attending TPSIDs (43%) is the same as the percentage of full-time college students who were employed in 2015 (43%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

56% of the employed students attending TPSIDs had never held a paid job prior to entering the TPSID.

Students attending TPSID programs compare favorably in terms of employment when compared to other subgroups of people with intellectual disability. Specifically, the 2014–2015 National Core Indicators data show that only 17% of people with intellectual disability were employed at a paid job in the community (National Core Indicators, 2017). This is especially noteworthy as 56% of the employed students attending TPSIDs had never held a paid job prior to entering the TPSID.



43%

Students attending TPSIDs in 2015-16 who had a paid job.

VS.

17%

Working-age adults supported by state IDD agencies who had a paid job in 2014–2015

(National Core Indicators, 2015).

43%

Full-time college students who were employed in 2015

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Types of jobs

Paid internships were the most common type of paid job held by students (46% of jobs), followed by individual paid jobs (39%), work training sites (7%), and jobs where the specific job type was not indicated (7%). The level of student participation in individual paid jobs is particularly encouraging, as these kinds of jobs are in the competitive labor market, where students receive at least minimum wage paid by the employer.

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUAL PAID JOBS AND INTERNSHIPS HELD BY STUDENTS IN 2015-16

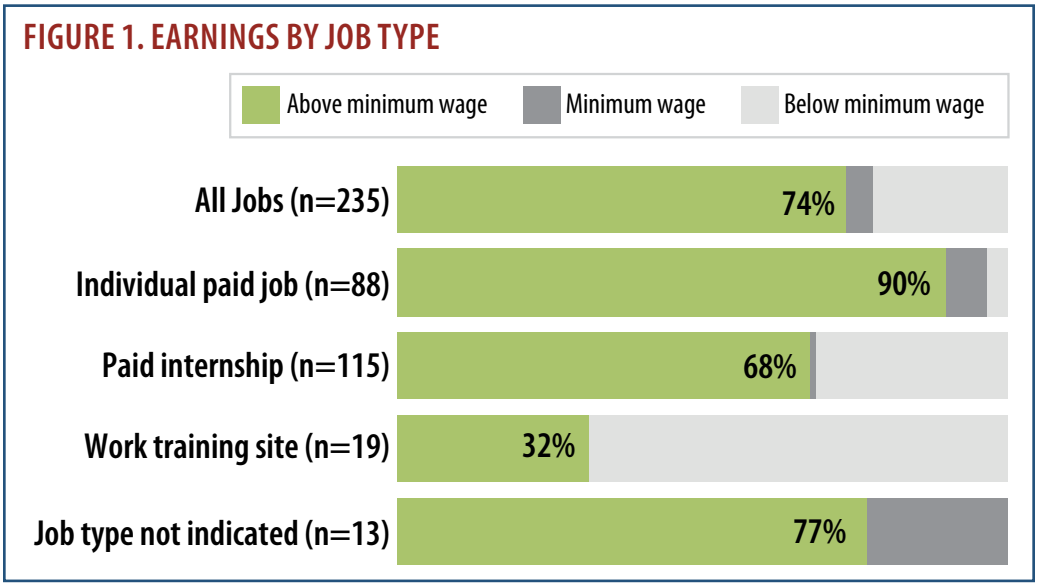
Individual paid jobs	Paid internships
• Lab assistant at a university medical center • Teacher assistant at a preschool • Technician at a veterinary clinic • Cosmetologist assistant • Certified skating coaching assistant • Paraprofessional at a high school	• Assistant mechanic at an auto shop • Print shop assistant • Teacher assistant • Library assistant at an academic library • Food service worker at a campus restaurant • Intern at a university student services office • Assistive technology lab technician

Multiple internships were common among students who had more than one paid job in 2015–2016. Of the 74 students who had paid internships, nearly two thirds (n=49) had more than one internship throughout the year. Twenty-five students had one internship, 47 had 2 paid internships, and the remaining 2 students had 3 paid internships. By comparison, only 11 of the 74 students with individual paid jobs had more than one individual paid job during the year. Table 1 provides examples of paid jobs and internships held by students.

Earnings

The majority of jobs (74%) paid above minimum wage (see Figure 1). Students in individual paid jobs earned above-minimium wage more often than students employed in other settings. Nearly one third of internships paid below minimum wage. This is not surprising, since internships often pay a stipend that is not subject to hourly minimum wage laws. The majority of jobs at work training sites paid below minimum wage.

FIGURE 1. EARNINGS BY JOB TYPE



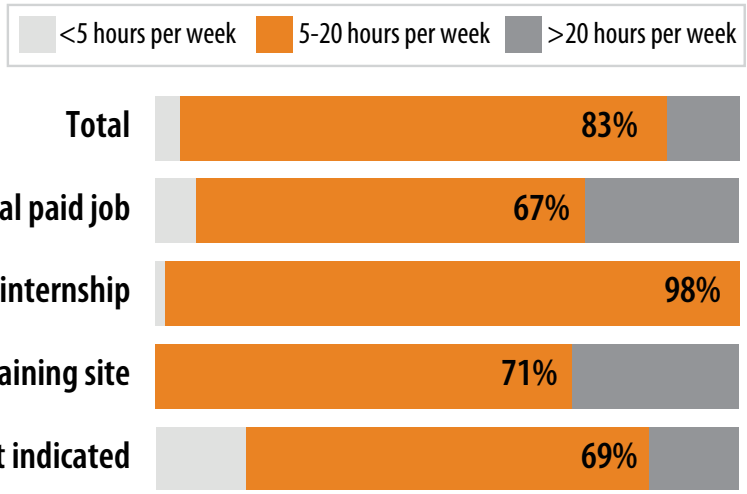
Wages at jobs held by students were most commonly paid by employers (47%), state IDD agency funds (21%), or the TPSID program (20%). Over 90% of jobs in which students were paid by either the employer or an IDD agency paid above minimum wage. In contrast, 78% of jobs in which students were paid by the TPSID program paid below minimum wage. However, nearly all jobs in which wages were paid by the TPSID program were paid internships.

At some jobs, fewer than 5 in each job type, students were paid by a vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency, by the host IHE, or with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds. The entity that paid the students differed by job setting. The employer paid the student at nearly all individual paid jobs (96%). Students in paid internships were paid by either state IDD agency funds (47% of internships) or the TPSID program (43% of internships). Students at individual work training sites were paid by state education agencies, with WIOA funds, by the employer, or by a VR agency.

Hours worked and length of time at job

At most jobs (83%), students worked between 5 and 20 hours per week. As mentioned previously, 40% of employed students worked more than one job. Students rarely worked more than 30 hours per week at a particular job (fewer than 5% of jobs). The typical hours worked per week varied by type of job (see Figure 2). Individual paid jobs were the only setting where more than 10% of the jobs had students working more than 30 hours per week. At paid interships, students typically worked 5 to 10 hours per week. In instances where students had multiple internships, they usually worked 5 to 10 hours per week at each internship.

FIGURE 2. HOURS WORKED BY JOB TYPE

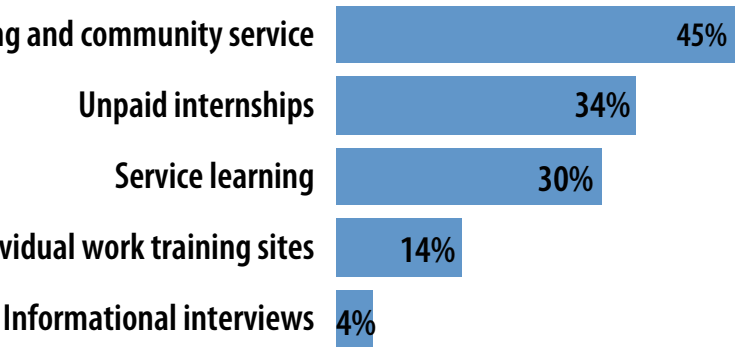


Sixteen percent of all paid jobs were held by students prior to the year of data collection, i.e., they had them prior to enrolling in the TPSID program, or they were a continuing TPSID student and got the job during an earlier year of attendance. However, most jobs (238, or 84% of all paid jobs held by students in 2015–2016) were started between September 2015 and August 2016. At two thirds of the jobs started this year (173/238), students exited the job before the year finished. This suggests that paid jobs held by students may be connected to the academic year, and as such may not be long-term job opportunities.

Career development experiences

In addition to paid employment, students also participated in unpaid career development experiences. Unpaid career development experiences are an important strategy for working with college students with intellectual disability, particularly since many enroll in TPSID programs with no experience in the workforce. Overall, 68% of students had one or more unpaid career development experience during the year. Volunteering and community service were the most frequent career development activities (45% of students), followed by unpaid internships (34%), service learning (30%), and individual work training sites (14%). Nineteen students (4%) participated in informational interviews with employers. See Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OF STUDENTS



Balancing paid and unpaid experiences

In many cases, students' schedules were comprised of both paid employment and unpaid career development experiences. Forty-three percent of students participated in career development experiences but did not have a paid job, 18% had at least one paid job but did not have any career development experiences, and 25% of students had both a paid job and career development experiences. See Figure 4.

The remaining 14% (n=49) of students had neither a paid job nor any reported career development experiences. These students' schedules were comprised of either short-term bridge programs or course enrollment. Thirty students were enrolled in classes, on average 5 specialized courses and 3 inclusive courses. The remaining 19 students attended short-term bridge programs to orient individuals with intellectual disability to the college environment and expectations. These programs help students determine if they want to pursue additional postsecondary education.

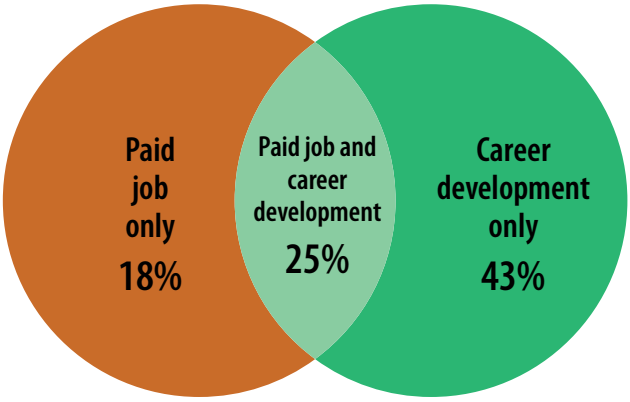
It is critical for each program to monitor access to career development and employment experiences of the students they serve to ensure that each student's course of study ensures a pathway to integrated competitive employment.

Addressing gaps in employment history

In addition to establishing career development and employment experiences, TPSIDs must address some significant gaps in students' employment history. Prior to entering the TPSID, 64% of students had never had a paid job. Given that paid employment history is a predictor of future employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Mamun, Carter, Fraker, & Timmins, 2017; Wehman, Sima, Ketchum, West, & Chan, 2015), the path toward employment for students with no job history may be longer.

These students may require additional exposure to career options, and may need assistance with job applications, disclosure determinations, and job accomodations. They may also require additional support as they learn to balance work (unpaid or paid) and their college or university's academic expectations. When interpreting career development and employment experiences of students in TPSIDs, we should remember that in some cases these college programs are making up for lost time, and are filling gaps in the employment preparations that could have been offered in high school.

FIGURE 4. PAID JOBS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OF STUDENTS



No paid job or career development 14%

At Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, we take Vanderbilt classes and we join campus activities including sporting events. We hang out with friends and with different Vanderbilt students. We also have Ambassadores who help us with classes and do things like work out with us. In Next Steps, we have internships -my internship is at Vanderbilt Sports Medicine with the Vanderbilt women's soccer team. I help with the soccer games and I also help with soccer practice.

–Diamond, from Vanderbilt

CONCLUSION

During the first year of the FY 2015–2020 grants, the TPSID model demonstration programs described in this report created opportunities for nearly 400 students to participate in employment and career development activities such as individual paid jobs, internships, and job training experiences. Nearly half of all students worked in a paid job, and more than half of the employed students who had no previous work experience got their first paid job during the year. Although individuals with intellectual disability frequently lag behind their peers without intellectual disability in terms of employment, TPSID students were employed at rates similar to their college peers across the US who did not have intellectual disability. This suggests that many TPSID programs are using effective practices to assist students to enter and remain in the workforce.

Students who attended TPSIDs were employed at rates similar to their college peers across the US who did not have intellectual disability.

As TPSIDs continue to improve the career development and employment services offered to students, each college and university should examine its successes and failures in providing the experiences students need to succeed in paid jobs, particularly after the students leave the program. Additionally, these programs should consider the balance between career development and paid employment. In 2015–2016, student career development experiences far outnumbered student paid jobs. This may reflect student needs, or it could be a reflection of the expertise of the TPSID staff.

TPSIDs have consistently indicated that one area in which they struggle is having access to staff who are highly trained in job development and customized employment strategies (Grigal, Hart, Smith, Domin, & Weir 2016). Greater staff expertise and training in these important professional capacities could lead to a greater percentage of students obtaining paid jobs while in the program and after they exit. TPSID program staff must also understand how programmatic factors such as academic work and student life influence career development. A holistic understanding of the best practices for career development will benefit not only current and future TPSID students, but also the larger community of postsecondary students with intellectual disability.

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DISCLOSURE OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The research team for this report consists of key staff from the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The organizations and the key staff members do not have financial interests that could be affected by findings from the evaluation.

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