



# Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

## News Brief

Welcome to the new school year!



This issue of FCSUA's News Brief is focused on strategies for on-boarding new students to college life.

Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs (FPCTPs) aren't high school and special classes anymore! Orienting students with intellectual disabilities to a new and much larger campus and culture takes creativity and planning. Parents and students may find themselves overwhelmed with their new independence.

In the article, "First Days", we asked three FPCTPs how they orient students to college and calm the worries of students and parents.

Dr. Tara Rowe shares how to initiate a peer mentor program at the beginning of the semester in "Peer Mentoring for Student Success."

## Upcoming Events

Registration is now open!  
November 16 -19, 2021



Virtual  
The Fifth Annual Florida Postsecondary Program Planning Institute (FLPEPPI)  
#FloridaPEPPI

FCSUA offers monthly webinars on the first Tuesday of the month at 3:00 p.m. eastern time to support the development and continuation of FPCTPs.

Monthly Webinar  
Information

### State of the Art (SOTA) and Student Leadership Conferences 2021 November 8-9, 2021

The Student Leadership Conference is for high school and college students with an intellectual disability. For more information contact [kducett@syr.edu](mailto:kducett@syr.edu).

**SOTA 3rd Annual Inclusive College Fair**, Monday November 8, 5:30- 7 pm. Contact [kgrifasi@syr.edu](mailto:kgrifasi@syr.edu) by October 1st to become an exhibitor.

**SOTA Conference**, FCSUA will be presenting with Santa Fe College SAINTS on employment strategies and Tallahassee Community College Eagle Connections Program on peer mentoring.



REMINDER

**College and Career Transition Club** annual reports, applications for new CCT Clubs, and renewal for support funds are due August 31, 2021. Additional information, applications, and reports can be found on our [CCT Club](#) webpage.



# First Days

Orientation marks the official beginning of students' college adventure. The primary goal of orientation is to acclimate new students to all aspects of college life. Because students with intellectual disability have not typically been college students in the past, Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs (FPCTP) need to develop orientation programs that set a pathway toward inclusiveness and equity.



During orientation students should learn about the educational and social opportunities available at the college, how to access student services and campus resources, and the policies and procedures of the institution of higher education (IHE) and FPCTP. Policies and procedures may include learning strategies to be successful as a college student, how and why to create an academic plan, navigating the campus, and how to register for classes. Orientation gives students the opportunity to make friends, get acquainted with roommates, and become comfortable navigating the campus. Having FPCTP students included in the freshman or first year orientation allows students to be fully included in the institution.



College orientation for parents sets the tone for the FPCTP's relationship with parents. It sets boundaries that make it clear that primary communication is with students. Oftentimes, parents of students with intellectual disabilities are protective of their child which may limit experiences of college life. During individual advisement meetings with the students and families, program staff can reiterate the importance of letting young

adults experience independence.

Parent orientation should provide all policies and procedures that help parents and students have a positive experience. Topics may include financial aid, technology and computer needs, student life, health services, campus safety, meal plans, academic requirements, and campus resources. Parents should be provided the tools to support student success and create an ongoing connection with the institution. Ideally, parents will connect with other parents.

At Santa Fe College students in the SAINTS Program attend Adult Education Orientation for Success with other adult education students. They hear from various staff about the classes, career pathways, campus facilities, Santa Fe website navigation and tools, and more. During the first week, of classes the students attend a Project SAINT orientation workshop and meet individually with program staff to develop an individualized Students Transitioning to Adult Roles (STAR) Person-Centered Plan (PCP). Students learn about which clubs they are interested in by participating in campus and club events.



[Read more](#)



## Peer Mentoring for Student Success

Dr. Tara Rowe

Associate Director Student Accessibility Services  
University of North Florida

Quality information made available when students need it is critical to student retention and graduation, which is especially true for students with disabilities (Hope, 2021). It is well established in higher education that the use of mentoring can increase academic performance, campus engagement, and increase overall student success (Baier, 2018; Marshall et al., 2021). Further, targeted peer mentor programs can have a positive impact for specific student populations (Collier, 2017). One of the most important characteristics a mentor program must include is tailoring support efforts to the specific needs of distinct groups of students. By targeting specific student groups, peer mentor programs can increase facilitation of student academic and social success while increasing opportunities for students to connect with the larger campus communities. With this focus, previous research efforts in mentoring tends to center on evaluating academic progress for mentees and not on the benefits and challenges for both mentors and mentees participating in these programs (Marshall et al., 2021). Little research has been done on peer mentoring (i. e. pairing upper-level students with lower-level peers; pairing previous mentee participants with new mentees) within higher education settings (Rowe, 2021). Further, research on effective peer mentor programs lack in providing evidence-based practices specific to program success (Lucas & James, 2018).

This article seeks to highlight key needs for a successful peer mentor program as well as recommendations for improving existing peer mentor programs by discussing program evaluation, student involvement, matching mentees with mentors, addressing needed social skills, program assessment.

### Evaluating Peer Mentor Program Needs:

The first step in developing a new peer mentor program must start with an evaluation of what the purpose and focus is for the proposed program. For existing peer mentor programs, it is essential to regularly evaluate and assess program components to ensure that the program purpose and focus are being met and targeting needed changes to ensure program purpose and focus continue to be addressed throughout program components.

### Soliciting Student Involvement:

Without students, there can be no mentor program, which is why recruiting students is so important. Finding the right fit of mentors can be challenging, particularly for programs for students with disabilities. Depending on institution size and student involvement, mentor recruitment can take place virtually anywhere there are students present. Some examples of recruiting future mentors can include contacting instructors of special education/psychology courses, reaching out to program directors in need of internship/practicum hours for upper-level students, and using social media platforms to help spread the word of programmatic needs.



[Read more](#)



# Welcome New Students!

Look who we saw on Facebook!



New FAU ACI students



New Santa Fe SAINTS students



New IRSC Project STAGE students arrive on campus

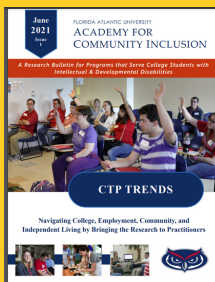


Eagle Connections at TCC invite students to Student Life Office for their Welcome Week



New roommates at SEU LINK Program

## CTP Trends



CTP Trends is a research-to-practice bulletin for programs to support meaningful postsecondary comprehensive transition programs. This research bulletin is created by the Academy for Community Inclusion at Florida Atlantic University. Check FCSUA's [Research to Practice](#) webpage to read the most current issue.

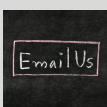
[Read here](#)



## Inclusive Employer Award

Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities is excited to announce the **"Inclusive Employer Award."** The award will recognize a business that hires FPCTP students and graduates in competitive employment. The company selected will imbue diversity and inclusion across all aspects of the business. The Inclusive Employer Award will be presented during the FL-PEPPI.

[Nominate a business](#)



We'd love to hear from you on what is happening at your institution. Please send stories and photos to [fcsua@ucf.edu](mailto:fcsua@ucf.edu), ATTN: FCSUA News Brief.

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