

OCTOBER 2023



Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

News Brief

October is Disability Employment Awareness Month

Taking a peek into some of the work environments where our students are excelling!



Seth
Media Services
Southeastern
University



Derrick
Campus Cafe
The College of the
Florida Keys



Bianka
Share Wear Store
Santa Fe College



Amir
Culinary Lab
Ft. Myers Technical
College



E.D.
Employment Solution
Broward College



Daniela (right)
Buff City Soap
Florida Atlantic
University



Taylor
Kindergarten Teaching
Assistant
University of South
Florida

CREATING MORE WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES



October is Disability Employment Awareness Month – a time to celebrate individuals with disabilities, both visual and unapparent, who are involved in the workforce and successful, says Joseph D'Souza, senior vice president of The Able Trust.

“We want to showcase and uplift those employers that have taken the first step and have started to employ people with disabilities,” he said.

The rate of employed individuals with disabilities has continued to increase each year.

According to data gathered and reported by Kessler Foundation and the University of New Hampshire, individuals with disabilities made up 37% of the workforce in 2022; in 2023, individuals with disabilities made up 40% of the workforce.

Across the state of Florida, many businesses, both major and small, local businesses, have begun to make strides to create work environments where individuals with disabilities are welcomed to the company.

Berry Fresh Café, located in Jupiter, FL., is a small local café that has employed students from the Academy of Community Inclusion program at Florida Atlantic University for the past three years, where they work as hosts and hostesses and other roles.

Krystal Raneri, manager of Berry Fresh Café, said that working with the students in the café has been a phenomenal experience for the students, café employees and the community. She sees customers speaking with the students and telling them what an amazing job they do at the cafe.

“I love it. It’s just incredible,” Raneri said.

While students primarily focus on food service-related tasks at Berry Fresh Café, there are opportunities to be involved in special projects. Raneri shared a story about one student who loved graphic design. The student pitched an idea for a special bulletin announcing the Fourth of July specials and worked with the staff to create the special bulletin.

This is an example of the importance of bringing a wide range of employees onboard, including those with intellectual disabilities, Raneri said.

“There’s so many more things that they are talented at that you don’t know until you bring them onboard, and you get to know them,” she said.

Continued on the next page...

Continued from the previous page...

The Tampa Bay Rays, who won the Inclusive Employer Award during the 2023 Florida Postsecondary Education Program Planning Institute, is another company that strives to create a workplace for all employees.

Sarah Edeker, the Senior Coordinator for Fan Experience with the Tampa Bay Rays, says that it is important to understand that individuals with disabilities are no different from their peers in the workplace.

"Their disability does not define them," she said. "They are a Fan Host and we see them as a working member of our team."

Edeker says that seeing the students learn more about their interests and strengths through their work experience is one of the most rewarding aspects of her position.

Some of the students have strong connections to the Tampa Bay Rays baseball team and Tropicana Field. One of the students, Samuel, took his graduation pictures at the stadium in his regalia, and one of the photos now hangs at Edeker's desk – a reminder of his growth, as Edeker recalled when Samuel first started working, he was very shy and kept to himself. These stories and experiences are the reasons that businesses, and the community as a whole, should celebrate, support and raise awareness for those with disabilities to be a part of the workforce.

While a lot of progress has been made over the years, there is always room for more growth and to create more opportunities, D'Souza says.

"People with disabilities are in the workforce, they are part of Florida, they're part of our fabric, our culture," he said.

THINK HIGHER, THINK COLLEGE



Think Higher.
Think College.

Campaign Shines Spotlight on Employment Outcomes During National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Written by

Think College Network Staff

As we celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the "Think Higher. Think College." Campaign raises awareness of the strong connection between postsecondary education and employment outcomes. In the United States, there are more than 420,000 school-age students with intellectual disabilities, yet fewer than 2% are likely to attend college after high school. However, those who do attend postsecondary education experience remarkable outcomes: 65% find competitive, integrated employment compared to the overall 19% national rate and 51% earn higher wages than those who did not access postsecondary education.

The statistics paint a clear picture: higher education can be a game-changer for individuals with intellectual disabilities. It's a pathway to independence, better employment opportunities, and improved quality of life. However, to make this vision a reality for all, awareness and access to college must be expanded.

Continued on the next page...

Continued from the previous page...

The "Think Higher. Think College." public awareness campaign is designed to do just that - build awareness and expand access to college for students with intellectual disabilities. Our mission is to ensure that every young adult with an intellectual disability sees college as a viable option and recognizes the transformative potential of higher education, especially for employment-related outcomes.

How You Can Help (It's as easy as 1, 2, 3!)

1. Share the Video: We have created an informative video [HERE](#) that explains the importance of inclusive college options for students with intellectual disabilities. Share it with your friends, family, and networks to help us reach a broader audience.

2. Use Campaign Resources: We provide a [range of resources](#), including fact sheets, toolkits, and success stories of students with

intellectual disabilities who have attended college. Utilize these materials to educate your community!

3. Post on Social Media: Use the assets in our easy-to-use [social media toolkit](#) to post about the campaign. Use the hashtag #ThinkHigherThinkCollege to join the conversation online.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHT

**Meet Salena Montalvo,
from Okaloosa UP**



Salena Montalvo joined the Okaloosa UP program at Okaloosa Technical College (OTC) in January of 2022. She was excited to be a part of inaugural class at Okaloosa Technical College and got right to work with her journaling, academic work, and learning all she could in the Culinary Lab.

Continued on the next page...

Continued from the previous page...

Salena has never been shy about sharing what going to college means to her. One of her greatest experiences was speaking to industry partners at the Culinary Occupational Advisory Committee meeting. She told them how important going to college was for her and how much she had learned. The partners were greatly impressed with her speech.

She has earned her SafeStaff certification and recently earned the Florida Ready to Work Soft Skills Credential for demonstrating foundational soft skills in the workplace. This past spring, she started working at the local Hilton Garden Inn on Okaloosa Island, working in the towel service department after connecting with the manager of the Hilton Garden Inn during an Occupational Advisory Committee meeting.

Salena's ability to communicate and connect with people will serve as a great benefit to her future employers and employees as she progresses in her career upon graduation from the Okaloosa UP program December 2023.



Is your FPCTP information up-to-date on Think College's College Search Tool?

Think College's College Search tool is the only directory of college and university programs for students with intellectual disabilities in the US. Let's keep Florida's FPCTP information up to date!

Enter your program information today! Need your survey link? Contact Shelby at shelby.bates@umb.edu.

The Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network – Collaborative CTE Workgroup Update

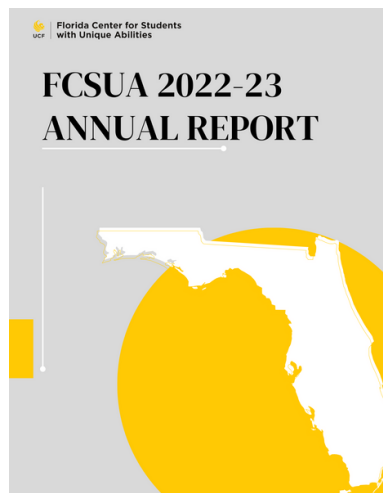
The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Collaborative Workgroup continues to expand its reach to other states by inviting those interested in seeing a program implemented to visit existing programs in our state. To that end, we are looking forward to a visit from administrators from the South Carolina Technical College System at the end of October.



[Read more](#)

OCTOBER 2023

Our 2022-23 FCSUA Annual Report and Executive Summary are Online!



Click [here](#) to read the FCSUA 2022-23 Annual Report.

2022-23 FCSUA ANNUAL REPORT **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



UCF Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities

Click [here](#) to read the FCSUA 2022-23 Annual Report Executive Summary.

Hispanic Heritage Month

Hispanic Heritage Month was Sept. 15 - Oct. 15. Throughout the month, we shared a few interesting facts about our students who identify as Hispanic/Latino on social media:



- 26% of students enrolled in an FPCTP identified as Hispanic/Latino.
- FPCTPs located at Hispanic-serving institutions include University of Central Florida, Florida International University, Florida Atlantic University, The College of the Florida Keys, Indian River State College, & Broward College.
- Florida International University had the highest enrollment of Hispanic students in an FPCTP, with 24 students, in 2022-23.
- 21% of FPCTP 2022-23 graduates were Hispanic/Latino.

Program News

Congratulations!



Linda Mussillo was honored as the 2023 Exemplary Practice Winner by Association of Florida Colleges (AFC) for Project SAINT. As per the tradition, winners are usually expected to present at the Annual AFC Conference. However, this year, due to a forthcoming name change in the organization, they have decided to postpone her presentation to a later date. Linda will be formally recognized for her accomplishment during the AFC commission meeting in October/November.



FIU Embrace Education program is currently accepting 2024-2025 applications! Click [here](#) for the application link.



Join Project SAINT for their open house on Oct. 23 from 1-3 p.m. on the Santa Fe campus, Building S, Room 029.

Also, click [here](#) to read the latest news and happenings with Project SAINT.



Read the latest SEU Link news in their September newsletter. Click [here](#).



Albert is a student in Project SAINT at Santa Fe College. His mother recently penned a touching [thank you letter](#) to Project SAINT, expressing her gratitude for how this program has impacted her son's life.

Email Us

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

Like Us/Follow Us!



OCTOBER 2023



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.

Join us for our upcoming webinars:

Nov. 7: An Introduction to Perkins Implementation in Florida

Dec. 5: Guardianship and the Alternatives



Missed last month's webinar on "SSI Work Incentives"? Visit our FCSUA's YouTube channel for the full webinar.

Professional Development Opportunities Read, Attend, Present

THE ABLE TRUST

Webinar Wednesday Series

Throughout Disability Employment Awareness Month, The Able Trust will hold informative webinars every Wednesday to learn about important education initiatives, transition resources, talent retention and more. Register today for upcoming sessions.

Providers Training Workshop October 30 and 31, 2023

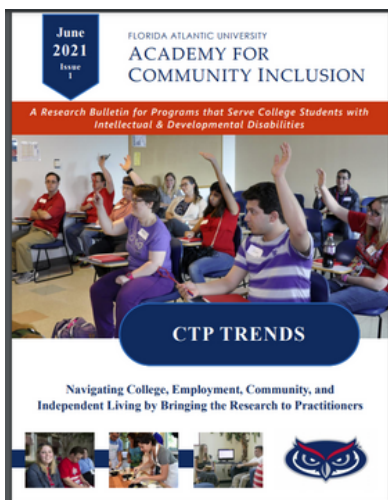
This two-day in-person workshop in Tampa teaches you how to help businesses identify their hiring needs and use your services to satisfy them.

Attendance on both days is required.

Register here.

OCTOBER 2023

Professional Development Opportunities Read, Attend, Present



Brady Bulletin 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. Visit [FCSUA's website](https://www.fcsua.com) to read the current issue.

5th Annual Inclusive College Fair

Attention students with intellectual disability!
Explore inclusive programs from around the country and learn about your options. FREE for all students, district administrators, teachers and families!

October 24, 5:30-7:30pm
UC Colorado Springs - Berger Hall

Learn more and register:
<https://taishoffcenter.syr.edu/sota/college-fair/>



STATE OF THE ART CONFERENCE
UCCS Inclusive Services
Syracuse University School of Education
IN! PATHWAYS TO INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION
ICI Think College

5th Annual Inclusive College Fair
October 24, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

DATING FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Join Us at SPC - Seminole Campus
Room LI-304

An evening for parents and guardians and
all day for self-advocates



11/30	6:00 pm - 7:30 pm	12/1	10:00 am - 2:30 pm
I WANT TO DATE! SUPPORTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS (FOR PARENTS) 11/30/23		RELATIONSHIPS, BOUNDARIES AND DATING: YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES (FOR SELF-ADVOCATES) 12/1/2023	

 <https://signup.com/go/WQfRgiS>

**Dating for People with
Intellectual Disabilities Forum**
Nov. 30, 6-7:30 p.m. (for parents)
Dec. 1, 10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. (for self-advocates)
St. Petersburg College

OCTOBER 2023

Professional Development Opportunities

Read, Attend, Present



**Annual International Division on Career
Development and Transition (DCDT)
Conference**

**Oct. 18-21
Reno, NV.**



**FL APSE Collaboration Summit:
Empowering Inclusive
Employment for All**

**Nov. 8-9
Tampa, FL.**



ACTE's CareerTech Vision 2023

**Nov. 29-Dec. 2
Phoenix, AZ.**



2024 FCPN Annual Symposium

**Jan. 10-12, 2024
Jensen Beach, FL.**



FL CASE Winter Symposium

**Jan. 30 - Feb. 1, 2024
Orlando, FL.**