

# Strategies for Enhancing Students' Self-Determination and Engagement in Their Postsecondary Education

Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities  
Florida Postsecondary Education Program Planning Institute

Janice Seabrooks-Blackmore

University of North Florida

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# Purpose

- The purpose of this presentation is to share an instructional strategy that is used to support students with disabilities to demonstrate self-advocacy skills in a university setting.
- Part of a cost-free program at the University of North Florida (UNF), that is designed to support retention and successful college completion of students with disabilities.
- A major thread that runs through the program development and implementation is an emphasis on strengthening self-determination skills needed to negotiate post secondary education and daily life skills as used in adult roles.

- How do you support students to be self-advocates to strengthen their self-determination skills and actions?

# Background

- Self-determination can be described as conscious actions or behaviors made purposefully by an individual, also known as a *causal agent* (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Forber-Pratt, Little, & Lopez, 2015; Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2017).
- These skills can lead to successful PSE transition, adjustment, and retention, as well as, to adjust, and remain in postsecondary settings (Petcu et al, 2016).

# Background (cont'd)

- According to Snyder de Brey, and Dillow (2016), the number of degree-seeking students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education (PSE) during the 2013-2014 year included 12.9% of the total student population.
- Specific strategies, such as new types of testing situations (from high school), classroom instruction, social interactions, the need to organize thoughts, and knowing how their disability will affect them in college are identified as barriers to successful transition to PSE (Brinckeroff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Milsom & Hartley, 2005).

# Background (cont'd)

- A consensus in relevant literature suggests that effective transition to PSE must include person-centered goals and planning, high expectations, accessing resources of support, and collaboration with external partners (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Oertle & Seader, 2015) in order to mitigate the challenge of adjusting both socially and intellectually to postsecondary settings (Mazzotti, Test, & Mustian, 2014; Parsons, 2017).
- Successful planning includes self-determination in that the individual is able to make decisions and intentionally behave in a way that promotes self-sufficiency (Chou, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Lee, 2017; Koegel, Navab, Ashbaugh, & Koegel, 2016).

# Background (cont'd)

- Keeping in mind that self-determination is considered one of several critical skills needed for students entering PSE (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Morningstar et al., 2010; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016), **research also support the need for increased self-advocacy and self-determination training for all students, particularly for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings** (Morningstar et al., 2010; Petcu, Van Horn, & Shogren, 2016; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2013).

# Self-Advocacy Strategy

- Modified version of the Self-Advocacy Strategy (Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker & Deshler, 2007)
- Designed to empower students to participate in a variety of social situations, particularly in a university setting, that allows them to speak for themselves in a confident and goal-oriented manner.

# The Bigger Picture

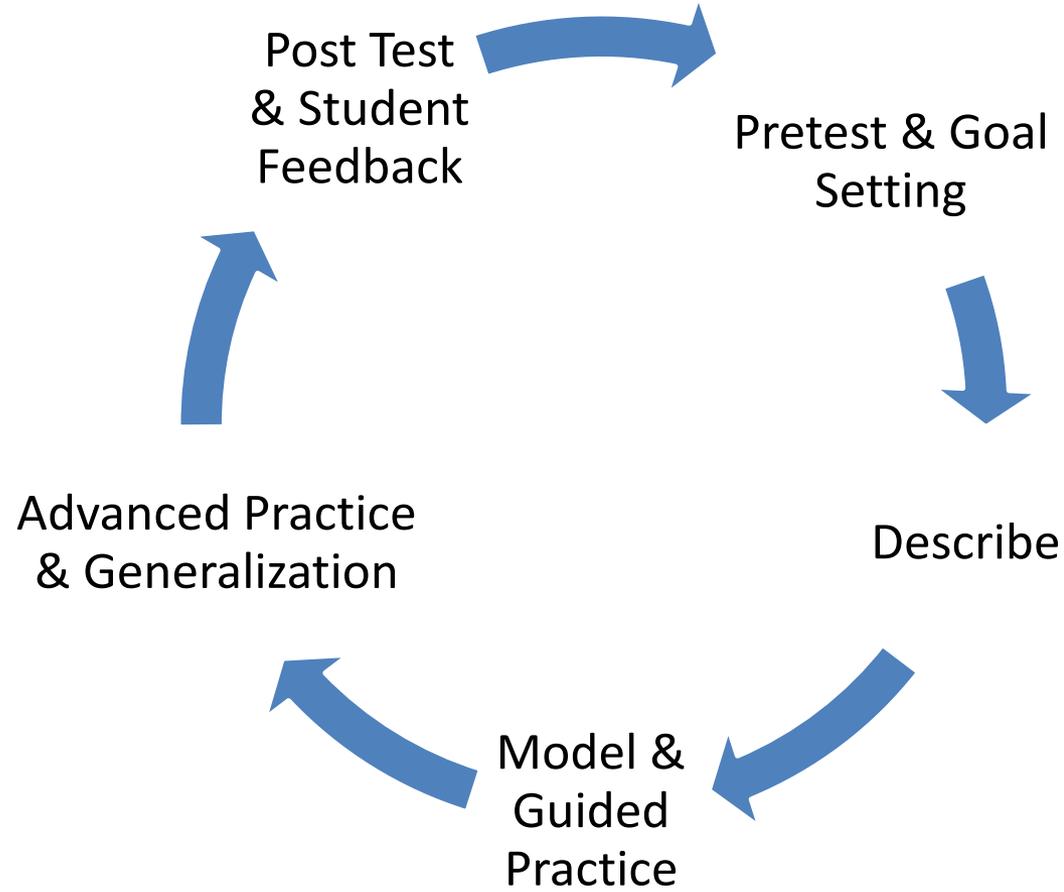
The Self-Advocacy Strategy is one of 12 instructional sessions, known as ***Boost Sessions***, that are offered through a supplemental support program at UNF called ACCESS Academy. The Academy is run through the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The Academy aims to:

- Enhance academic performance
- Build social skills
- Aid in the effective transition of self-determination, independent living, and career skills
- Empower KEYS



ACCESS Academy

# Strategy in Play



# Strategy Structure

- Facilitated small group, instructional sessions that occur over a 3-week period
- No more than 15 students
- Weekly homework and follow-up procedures

# Pre-Assessment and Goal Setting

- I usually recognize when I need help, and I am willing to ask for it.
- What type of learner are you (by which method do you learn best)?
- Do you feel that you are aware of what extra help and accommodations you need (or would you find it helpful to explore various options with a disabilities specialist at college)?
- What is a major goal you have for yourself this semester?
- Administer *AIR Self-Determination Scale* (1994)

# Describe

## IPLAN

INVENTORY Your:

- Strengths
- Areas to Improve or Learn
- Goals
- Choices for Learning or Accommodations

PROVIDE your inventory information

LISTEN and Respond

ASK Questions

NAME Your Goals

# Model through Generalization

- Inventory Scenarios
- Laws
- Personal stories

# You Try

Let's practice how you would demonstrate  
IPLAN

# Student Feedback

- Was the strategy IPLAN helpful? How so?
  - *Yes, some mentors and friends, along with the assignments at home.*
  - *Yes they were helpful because I feel like now I have a better understanding of how to request accommodations with both school and work.*
  - *The strategy IPLAN was helpful for creating a guideline of how to advocate for ourselves. Each component of the strategy was helpful for allowing us to demonstrate what accommodations we needed and how to get them.*

- Were you able to think of ways in which you could better advocate for yourself in school, work, or social settings? Why or why not?
  - *I was able to think of ways in which I could advocate for myself in school and work settings. I can advocate for myself in college by informing my professors of my disability. I can advocate for myself in work by informing my employers of accommodations that I need in order to be successful.*
  - *I am working on how my iPlan can help me with my health, nutrition and other support services and departments that I engage with on and off campus.*

Were you able to think of ways in which you could better advocate for yourself in school, work, or social settings? Why or why not? (cont'd)

- *Yes I was able to think of ways in which I could better advocate for myself in school, work and social settings. My primary focus was to better my self-advocacy skills in the workplace I will be entering at the end of this semester.*
- *Yes, I approached my professor in regards to an online book that we were scheduled to use for this semester. I personally told him that it was difficult for me to utilize the book in this format so he suggested that I print out the chapters in PDF format for better access. I can honestly say it was a tad easier being ok with asking for help when needed. Normally, I would have been a little apprehensive to have asked for this option.*

- What component(s) of IPLAN do you still use and can see using in the future? Please elaborate.
  - *I feel that Inventory is the most important component of IPLAN, a good inventory can provide the key tools to advocating for yourself.*
  - *I used “I” mostly. When I come across something I am unsure about, I identify my strengths and weaknesses.*
  - *Honestly, all of them I will manage to utilize. Because each acronym IPLAN (I) has all areas that I need to exercise. (P) This area makes you itemize everything. (L) This area for me is one that I need to focus on. I feel as if I’m a good listener but there is usually a little delay in my response, reason being I’m trying to gather the absolutely best reply. (A) Asking question when it comes to needing help is getting better. (N) Naming my goals and feeling confident about achieving them is also getting better.*

- What would you recommend or suggest for future Self-Advocacy Strategy sessions?
  - *I would like to see a Boost Session focused on improving social skills. The Boost Session would practice both verbal and nonverbal communication skills and would help students become more comfortable interacting with each other.*
  - *For future Self-Advocacy Strategy sessions, I would focus less on the IPLAN acronym and focus more the laws pertaining to individuals with disabilities. I would review each step involved in advocating for oneself and provide several examples.*
  - *The only recommendation I can think of would be more sessions added. Other than that it was great being able to talk to peers and share experiences.*

# Our Observations

- When students have the knowledge and skills to be self-determined, they still need supportive environments and opportunities to actually implement what they know and want.
- College students with disabilities benefit from systematic instructional sessions to improve their learning.
- Many students who register with the DRC did not have IEPs in high school.

# Observations (cont'd)

- Of those students who did have IEPs, few remember actively participating in the planning process.
- Regardless of previous experiences, students desire to talk among peers about their disability and how to maneuver their college and other life experiences.
- Students who repeatedly participate in the Boost Session become leaders of the group and are willing to offer examples and sage advice.

# Other Feedback and Questions