



### Questions and Answers with Access ETSU at East Tennessee State University

**Q: What skills should prospective students have prior to applying to your program?**

A: Access ETSU welcomes all students with intellectual disabilities who:

- Are 18-25 years old
- Have a personal desire to continue their education at the university level
- Want to expand their employment prospects
- [Information defining and documenting intellectual disability for program participation](#)

We strive to be as inclusive as possible and are open to any prospective students who meet the above criteria. If they want to be a student here, we want to welcome them here. We will develop an individualized, person-centered program for each student based on their respective academic, vocational, and social skills, needs, and interests. Peer mentors will provide the bulk of the daily support to Access ETSU students.

If an Access ETSU student needs additional services beyond services available to all ETSU students, Access ETSU faculty will work closely with the student through the person-centered advisement process to determine appropriate services and supports and work with appropriate departments on campus (e.g., disability services) and/or community support agencies (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation) to secure the service.

We also aim to work with local schools to ensure high-quality transition education is taking place so that students are well prepared. We will support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in strategic planning to improve transition planning and instruction for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Specifically, we will provide guidance for LEAs on how to conduct a needs assessment and develop a targeted action plan for change in their LEA to ensure youth with IDD have the knowledge and skills needed to successfully transition to inclusive higher education programs.

**Q: What opportunities do you have for prospective students to visit campus?**

A: Typically in the fall and spring terms, we work with local education agencies to bring students on-campus for scheduled campus tours. Campus tours are offered weekdays to



all visitors at 9 am and 1 pm during the fall, spring, and summer terms. Visits feature an information session with an admissions counselor and a guided tour of campus led by a currently enrolled student admissions ambassador. Access ETSU staff will join for the tour to answer questions specific to Access ETSU. In early spring, we also conduct an informational night just for students and their families interested in Access ETSU to allow students to interact with faculty and students and ask questions about the program. We also work with partner schools by attending transition fairs and participating as guest speakers in secondary classrooms to raise awareness of the program.

During the pandemic, we've been working with prospective students and local education agencies to set up virtual meetings and tours and socially distanced in-person visits on an individual basis.

**Q: What does the application process look like?**

A: Prospective students may fill out an online application, including questions such as background information, supports needed, and long answer questions (e.g., Why do you want to go to ETSU and be a Buccaneer?) After submitting an application, Access ETSU team members will reach out to schedule an interview with prospective students and families virtually or in-person. The Access ETSU team meets to discuss each applicant and decides whether the student is a good fit for the program and whether to admit. There is additional paperwork from there.

**Q: What types of academic and social supports does your program offer?**

A: Access ETSU provides peer mentors (BucMates) to attend classes and social events on campus with students. These peer mentors are undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in working with the program. They undergo a training process and are prepared to support Access students in a variety of contexts.

Access students can enroll in any undergraduate course at ETSU they desire. Day-to-day academic support from BucMates exists inside and outside the classroom and includes academic planning and organization, note-taking assistance, tutoring, homework assistance, study sessions, adapting course materials, and more. BucMates utilize prompting procedures and fade prompts as appropriate to foster as much academic independence and agency as possible. We also utilize natural supports such as tutoring and study partners available through the respective university departments. We are currently in the process of hiring a full-time Access ETSU Academic Coordinator who will be responsible for assisting with academic scheduling, adapting curriculum and assignments, and ensuring smooth communication with other ETSU faculty.



BucMates provide social supports by attending events with students and providing appropriate social cues for students as needed. Each week BucMates review upcoming campus events with Access ETSU students and choose events to attend based on students' individual interests. Students and BucMates regularly discuss topics such as dating and relationships, friendships, hobbies, family, food, and everything in between. The Access ETSU Program Coordinator works with students and BucMates to brainstorm and develop any additional individualized social supports, strategies, goals, and interventions as needed.

**Q: How do you ensure your students are actively involved with the greater college community?**

A: Access ETSU students have the ability to work with BucMates, volunteers, and the program coordinator to find and attend events held on campus that are within their realm of interest. Students are also given the opportunity to create their own social groups through attending classes, clubs, and events held on campus. Students are paired with peer mentors to attend events, but as they begin to create their own natural supports, students are urged to gain independence and go to events and class with the support they build on their own. Additionally, students have the opportunity to work in on-campus internships within their fields of interest. If there's anything happening on campus that a student is interested in, we make it happen!

**Q: How does your program differ from the other Comprehensive Transition Programs in Tennessee?**

A: We are still in the early stages of our program, having just launched in 2019, and we currently have only two students. Our current size and scope allow our students to get lots of individualized attention and support. We also were recently awarded a \$2.5 million Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) grant from the U.S. Department of Education and aim to add 10 students to the program each year. We are excited about all the growth and expansion ahead. We have adopted a person-centered approach for admissions and programming. Rather than a disability, severity of the disability, health, or safety dictating where an individual can go to school and work, we plan with the student, discover their abilities, and address supports needed so the individual can pursue their goals. Power is shared, and the plans change as the student learns and grows. The focus is on the student gaining control of their life and becoming their own advocate.



**Q: What types of work experiences or employment opportunities does your program offer (paid/unpaid)?**

A: Access ETSU strives to provide paid on-campus internships within the first year of the program. We find these internships based on the students' fields of interest, aiming to suit the students' current academic curriculum. Many students are eligible for Federal Work Study employment through the university. Within the second year of the program, students seek off-campus internships and employment within their field of interest. If there aren't existing positions available on campus that align with students' interests and career goals, we work to develop those opportunities. We are currently in the process of hiring a full-time Access ETSU Employment Coordinator who will oversee and help facilitate all work-based experiences for the program.

**Q: What sorts of outcomes have alumni of your program achieved?**

A: We have no alumni yet. Our two current students hold employment and internships in the fields of Health & Recreation and Marketing & Digital Media.

**Q: Is there anything else we should know about your program?**

A: We'd love to connect with you! Check out the feature on our inaugural student here: [etsu.edu/etsu-news/2019/11-november/garrison-buchanan-feature.php](https://etsu.edu/etsu-news/2019/11-november/garrison-buchanan-feature.php)

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