

What Should I Know About Inclusive Higher Education?

The Basics

Inclusive higher education programs provide students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) the opportunity to continue their education after high school. These programs focus on preparing students for employment, independent living, and community life. Students participating in inclusive higher education programs typically take classes, have internships and jobs, and participate in social activities with peers on campus.

Tennessee has nine inclusive higher education programs:

- Access ETSU at East Tennessee State University
- Eagle Access at Dyersburg State Community College
- EDGE Program at Union University
- FUTURE Program at University of Tennessee
- IDEAL Program at Lipscomb University
- Next Steps at Vanderbilt University
- Tiger Access at Chattanooga State Community College
- TigerEDGE at Tennessee State University
- TigerLIFE at University of Memphis

Myths

Myth #1: Students participating in inclusive higher education programs will not get a true college experience

Students will take classes, get an internship or job, learn how to take care of themselves, and become friends with other students. Students will also participate in activities across campus. These opportunities will provide access to the same college experiences other students at the college have.

Myth #2: My young adult must start an inclusive higher education program in the fall after they graduate or exit high school

Students do not have to start an inclusive higher education program immediately after high school. Students between the ages of 18 to 26 can apply to an inclusive higher education program.

Myth #3: There isn't financial aid for inclusive higher education programs

Some of Tennessee's inclusive higher education programs are designated Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP) for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Qualifying students can use federal financial aid to help pay for the cost of attendance at a CTP. Students may qualify for other financial aid including Tennessee scholarships or grants, funding through Vocational Rehabilitation or Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES, private scholarships, etc.

Myth #4: My young adult needs to live at home while they attend an inclusive higher education program

Some inclusive higher education programs provide opportunities for students to live on-campus. Programs also provide ongoing support to help students live independently and adjust to living on-campus. Every program has their own policies regarding on-campus housing, so be sure to check with each individual program.

Myth #5: My young adult needs a regular high school diploma to attend an inclusive higher education program.

Students do not need a regular high school diploma or SAT/ACT scores to get into one of these programs. Students will need documentation of disability and support needs.

What Questions Should I Ask?

When you contact an inclusive higher education program, here are some questions you could ask:

- How many years is the program?
- Does your program offer housing?
- What kind of opportunities will my young adult have in your program?
- What classes will my young adult take while in the program?
- What does a typical day look like?
- Will my young adult participate in an internship or a job?
- How will my young adult socialize with other students?
- What kind of support is in place for my young adult?
- How does my young adult apply to the program?
- What is the cost of the program?
- What financial aid or support is available?

Need More Information?

For specific questions about one of the nine programs:

[Access ETSU at East Tennessee State University](#)

Email: accessetsu@etsu.edu

Contact Person: Dr. Melody Blevins, Associate Director

Phone: 423-439-7697

[Eagle Access at Dyersburg State Community College](#)

Email: erickson@dsccl.edu

Contact Person: Nikki Erickson, Director

[EDGE at Union University](#)

Email: rholloway@uu.edu

Contact Person: Rebecca Holloway, Director

Phone: 731-661-5382

[FUTURE at University of Tennessee](#)

Email: futureut@utk.edu

Contact Person: Dr. Emma Burgin, Director

Phone: 865-974-8493

[IDEAL at Lipscomb University](#)

Email: ideal@lipscomb.edu

Contact Person: Halle King, Director

Phone: 615-966-5098

[Next Steps at Vanderbilt University](#)

Email: nextsteps@vanderbilt.edu

Contact Person: Hannah Oakley, Admissions and Administrative Program Coordinator

Phone: 615-322-3978

[Tiger Access at Chattanooga State Community College](#)

Email: tina.gower@chattanoogaastate.edu

Contact Person: Tina Gower, Program Coordinator

Phone: 423-697-4472

[TigerEDGE at Tennessee State University](#)

Email: amcgaha@tnstate.edu

Contact Person: Dr. Anita McGaha, Director

Phone: 615-963-7480

[TigerLIFE at University of Memphis](#)

Email: umid@memphis.edu

Contact Person: Dr. Chrisann Schiro-Geist, Director

Phone: 901-678-4303

For general questions about inclusive higher education:

[Think College](#)

[TN Inclusive Higher Education Alliance](#)