
News Releases

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Indiana University Program helps Students with Intellectual Disabilities Participate in College Life

Grant from IU Institute Supports INSPIRE Partnership between Franklin College and Local High Schools

INSPIRE student Richie Olopade takes a break in the Franklin College Napolitan Student Center.

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Central Indiana's [Franklin College](#) is welcoming five high school students with intellectual disabilities to its campus this semester, thanks in part to a grant from Indiana University's [Institute on Disability and Community](#) and its [Center on Community Living and Careers](#).

The institute, a partner in the [Indiana Postsecondary Education Coalition](#), creates programs on Indiana campuses that give students with intellectual disabilities a chance to participate in college life and obtain hands-on work experience before they begin applying for jobs in their communities.

This month, students participating in Franklin's new INSPIRE program took part in a meet-and-greet activity on campus that served to formally introduce INSPIRE -- which stands for Individual Needs in Special Places to Increase Relevant Work Experience -- to Franklin College faculty, staff and fellow students.

"INSPIRE will help us get experience to get a job and help us take care of ourselves for the rest of our lives," said Richie Olopade, a student from Center Grove High School.

"The students are excited to be here," said Megan Horsley, transition coordinator with Special Services of Johnson County, who began putting the pieces of the program together in October. "This whole project has just blown up in a good way. It's going wonderfully."

Most of the INSPIRE students are in their final year at a Johnson County high school. The students are able to participate in some activities on campus thanks to a Franklin College partnership with Center Grove and Franklin Community high schools, the Special Services special education unit serving Johnson County schools, and the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community.

Initially, the students are gaining vocational experiences in the campus food service and custodial departments, Horsley said. Plans are to expand those opportunities to office and groundskeeping work as

soon as they can put supports in place. In addition, the INSPIRE team is working through Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services to establish better outcomes for students. A couple of the students already have paid jobs, working off campus. Socially, Horsley added, "The INSPIRE students have lunch with their college peers every day."

"This semester the students will also be participating in various educational experiences," said Karen Burgard, chair of Franklin College's department of education. "For example, one student will be paired with a senior art major and create art in our Franklin College art studio for the entire semester. Two others will participate in a wellness and health promotion class."

Essentially, Franklin athletic training students will provide health and wellness assessments to the INSPIRE students while also giving them guidance on physical fitness and activities.

The IU grant, Horsley said, will also allow the postsecondary partnership to develop a mentor program, matching INSPIRE students with those in Franklin College's education department.

Horsley said organizers hope to increase the total number of INSPIRE students to 12 next year by opening up the opportunity to six other area school districts.

Franklin is the third Indiana college or university hoping to build a successful college/work experience program for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities. [Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis](#) works with students who are transitioning from Indianapolis Public Schools as well as those from other Indianapolis area school systems, and the [Vincennes University Jasper Campus](#) began a similar program in south central Indiana in 2012.

"Having that campus experience for eight months can really improve the outlook and possibilities for a student with disabilities," said [Jean Updike](#), project coordinator at IU's Center on Community Living and Careers. Updike has been encouraging other Indiana universities to establish postsecondary programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities on campuses around the state.

Pointing to the national program Think College, Updike said that other states around the nation have successful programs providing inclusion opportunities to students with disabilities and have found that the programs ultimately benefit not just the students themselves, but also faculty and other students on campus. Building upon that, the Indiana Postsecondary Education Coalition has its own Think College Indiana website to provide information and resources to students, families and professionals.

About the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community

The [Indiana Institute on Disability and Community](#), Indiana's University Center for Excellence on Disabilities, works to increase community capacity in disability through academic instruction, research, dissemination and training, and technical assistance. With a focus on employment, secondary education and transition to adult life and services, the Indiana Institute's [Center on Community Living and Careers](#) brings positive change to people with disabilities and their families as they work and participate in their communities.

About the Office of the Vice Provost for Research

The Indiana Institute receives support from the [Office of the Vice Provost for Research](#) at Indiana University Bloomington, which is dedicated to supporting ongoing faculty research and creative activity, developing new multidisciplinary initiatives and maximizing the potential of faculty to accomplish path-breaking work.

About Franklin College

Founded in 1834, [Franklin College](#) is a residential four-year undergraduate liberal arts institution with a scenic, wooded campus, located 20 minutes south of downtown Indianapolis. The college prepares men and women for challenging careers and fulfilling lives through the liberal arts, offering its approximately 1,000 students 36 majors, 39 minors and 11 pre-professional programs. In 1842 the college began admitting women, becoming the first co-educational institution in Indiana and the seventh in the nation. Franklin College maintains a voluntary association with the American Baptist Churches USA.