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SUPPORTING TRANSITION and EDUCATION through PLANNING and PARTNERSHIPS

A Program for University Students with Learning Disabilities
**FACING CHALLENGES**

High school students with significant learning disabilities face a variety of academic, social, and life-skills challenges. The possibility of going to college – an idea that many people take for granted – can be a distant dream at best for some individuals with learning disabilities, even for those who have both the aptitude and the motivation to earn a degree.

Students with learning disabilities may struggle with maintaining a grade point average or scoring high enough on the SAT or ACT for college entry. Furthermore, they may need more comprehensive support than can be offered in most college settings.

East Carolina University is addressing this important need with Project STEPP (Supporting Transition and Education through Planning and Partnerships). Funded primarily with private gifts, this program provides a unique opportunity to a population that traditionally has not gone to college.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Project STEPP is to provide students with learning disabilities who aspire to achieve a college education and demonstrate the potential for postsecondary success with access and comprehensive support throughout the university experience.

By partnering with these students, their families, and a variety of educational communities, Project STEPP fosters a network of opportunities and resources to empower and support students from admission to graduation from East Carolina University.

**STEPS TO SUCCESS**

Project STEPP is a collaborative program that partners East Carolina University’s College of Education with other colleges and departments on campus, area high schools, and community resources. The program offers comprehensive academic, social, and life-skills support to a select number of students who show the potential to succeed in college.

Meeting the needs of these students is another example of how East Carolina lives its motto “To Serve.” Project STEPP empowers students with the skills they need to earn degrees in their chosen majors, enjoy a complete college experience as members of a campus community, and achieve in life beyond their years at ECU.

**Admissions:** Project STEPP employs a unique application process that considers traditional admissions criteria in addition to alternate indicators which may more accurately predict college success for students with learning disabilities. Each application is reviewed in-depth by an advisory board, and admission decisions are rendered a full year before matriculation. Students selected to participate complete the standard ECU application process to formalize admission to the university after committing to Project STEPP.

**Transition:** During the year between admission and entry to the university (senior year of high school for traditional-age applicants), Project STEPP staff members partner with families and schools to help incoming students plan for the transition to college life. Likewise, as students approach graduation from ECU, the program assists them in looking beyond the degree and preparing to transition to a career or graduate school.

**Extended Program:** Students participating in Project STEPP take a reduced course load during their first few semesters. The program’s design allows most students to complete a bachelor’s degree in five years and includes optional summer support for those who desire to accelerate their timeline.

**Support Network:** Project STEPP connects students with an extensive network of professionals across ECU’s campus. This support system includes advisors, instructors, mentors, tutors, counselors, professors, specialists, and other experts.

**Program Course Work:** In addition to the standard curriculum, students take a parallel Project STEPP course series designed to equip them with skills necessary to succeed in their other coursework. These courses, which are strategically scheduled during key college transition points, focus on practical strategies in areas including time management, organization, study skills, goal setting, learning strategies, and campus resources.

**Campus Living:** Placement in a designated residence hall and Living-Learning Community helps first-year students cultivate campus connections in spheres beyond academics and provides opportunities to meet students outside of Project STEPP.