NEXT STEPS AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY IS A 2-YEAR, NONRESIDENTIAL, CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, PROVIDING INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAMS OF STUDY IN THE AREAS OF EDUCATION, SOCIAL SKILLS, AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING.

FOR AN ELECTRONIC VERSION OF THIS INFORMATION WITH ACTIVE LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT HTTP://KC.VANDERBILT.EDU/NSFACULTYINFO/
BRIEF OVERVIEW OF NEXT STEPS AT VANDERBILT

Mission

Our mission is to provide transformational learning experiences, within an inclusive educational setting, for young adults with intellectual disabilities. Secondarily, these transformational learning experiences extend to the other university students, faculty, staff, and community leaders.

Goal

The goal of the program is to broaden the career options and opportunities for individuals, accepted between the ages of 18 – 26, with intellectual disabilities in inclusive, age-appropriate settings. In order for these students to best meet the expectations of adults in our society, they need to have integrated educational experiences. The goals are for the students to have the “outcomes we all value -- a career, close relationships, and enjoyment....” (Hughes & Carter, Transition Handbook, Brookes Pub., 2012).

Individual Programs of Study

Next Steps at Vanderbilt is committed to the integration of students with intellectual disabilities in all aspects of the university and the surrounding community. Students will self-direct the development of their Program of Study through initial and on-going Person-Centered Planning activities. The Program of Study is a unique and customized plan for achievement in academic areas, independent living skills, career development, and university life. While Next Steps students work towards completing an individual Program of Study, they must also complete the programs requirements to earn a Next Steps certificate upon completion. - See more at: http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/nextsteps/overview/

Next Steps students are considered full-time university students averaging over 30 hours on campus each week during their two-year program. Every semester they take one university class, three core Next Steps classes that are designed to facilitate mastery in career and technology skills, self-awareness, and other skills of independence. The students have internships on and off campus each semester that prepare them for competitive, meaningful employment upon graduation.

Next Steps at Vanderbilt Program Requirements Framework
Independent Learning Agreements showing range of academic expectations
Samples weekly schedules
LEARNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR NEXT STEPS STUDENTS IN THEIR VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY CLASS

Following Associate Dean and Faculty approval, Next Steps Staff work collaboratively with the respective faculty member to develop independent learning agreements. This may include a meeting with the student and Next Steps staff during the faculty member’s regular office hours to establish specific learning goals. These goals will be based on key concepts that are critical to each respective class as noted in the course syllabus, and on goals identified for each student in the Next Steps program.

Next Steps Alum, Bud Sugg, Class of 2014

My experience in Vanderbilt classes

Having the opportunity to participate in Vanderbilt classes was a wonderful experience for me. All of the professors were so kind and nice to me. I would say that despite knowing a lot about music, American Popular Music was the class that I gained the most knowledge. Of course I did gain some knowledge in my other classes as well. In American Popular Music, I knew about the impact that Rhythm and Blues had on Rock n' Roll, but little did I know that it's actually one of the oldest forms of music ever.

Now I will admit, at first when you get into these classes, you will feel a little nervous with all the curriculum that's thrown at you. However, you're not expected to do the same amount of work that those other 20+ students are expected to do. That's why you have a learning agreement. Having said all that though, being a part of the Vanderbilt classes will be a memory that will last a lifetime. You will definitely gain some knowledge that you previously did not know before.
Next Steps students will satisfactorily complete a one hour, independent learning agreement as demonstrated by the following broad objectives:

1. satisfactory attendance at class meetings
2. satisfactory completion of individualized learning objectives or assignments
3. appropriate interaction with peers and instructor

INDEPENDENT LEARNING AGREEMENTS

The participation of Next Steps at Vanderbilt students into Vanderbilt University courses is an inclusive practice as students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities are joining their same-aged peers in university level academic coursework. When determining the amount and type of coursework each student will be expected to complete, the Next Steps students’ expectations follow best practices in inclusive education. As the staff reviews the requirements for the regularly admitted university students through each course syllabus, the development of the Next Steps students’ independent learning agreements will begin with the concept of “as is.” The assignments will be changed as little as possible. The amount of reading and writing required will be considered against the academic levels of each student. The goal will be to have high expectations for the students while providing them with assignments that will challenge, but not overwhelm them. It is important to note the students receive multiple tutoring sessions each week to provide supports as needed. As one can imagine, there is a wide-range of variability in the independent learning agreements based upon the students’ academic abilities.
SUPPORTS FOR NEXT STEPS STUDENTS - NEXT STEPS AT VANDERBILT AMBASSADORE PROGRAM

Next Steps Ambassadors play a vital role in supporting our students in all aspects of the program. These peer mentors are undergraduate and graduate students who establish one-on-one relationships with the Next Steps students. Since the inception of Next Steps, well over 100 students have participated in the program. Students from all backgrounds, with different majors and interests, have played an integral role in the development and success of Next Steps and the growth of the Ambassatore program.

Commitment: Volunteers make a semester-long commitment of 2-4 hours per week with a Next Steps student.

Training: A three hour Ambassatore training serves as orientation for new Ambassadores and provides the mentors with information about the students, the program, and strategies to support the students most effectively. Ongoing support from NS staff is available to problem-solve any issues or difficulties that may arise.

Roles: There are four Ambassatore roles that define their interactions with our students:

- Lunch buddies – focus on social skills and healthy eating goals
- Workout partners – help to increase stamina and establish exercise habits
• Academic tutors – assist students with academic work and encourage good study habits
• Daily planners – focus on organizational skills and completion of NS program requirements (journal, food log, etc.)

Program Structure

Circles of Support: Each student has 5-7 Ambassadore, who make up their circle of support. These students communicate through written notes and group meetings (two per semester) to work together to best promote student growth. Each circle has a Lead Ambassadore who facilitates communication, collaborates with Next Steps staff, and organizes at least one circle social event during the semester.

Next Steps Ambassadore Student Organization: The Next Steps Ambassadore became an official student organization in 2013. There are four officers on the Executive Board who head up several committees: recruitment, fundraising, and social event planning. The Ambassadore Social Committee plans program-wide social events for all students, Ambassadore, and graduates. These activities foster deeper friendships and further increase our students’ involvement in campus life.
“The appreciation that students in Next Steps have for being a part of a university community is something that many college students take for granted. I see my enrollment differently now; I see it as an amazing blessing, and an opportunity to make sure more people feel this way, too. All students should have access to a community that supports their dreams and works with them to achieve their goals.” – Rebecca Moody, Ambassador 2010-2014

NEXT STEPS STUDENTS’ OUTCOMES UPON GRADUATION

As of April 2014, Next Steps has graduated 18 students. The following information provides insight into some aspects of our outcomes.

Employment – over 80% of our alums have paid employment. Nationally, adults with intellectual and developmental have employment rates of less than 30%

Close Relationships and Community

All of our alumni continue close relationships with each other and have supports from their family and community members. A Next Steps Alumni Association is being formed in the fall of 2014 under the guidance of the greater Vanderbilt Alumni Association. Since we do not have a residential component to Next Steps yet, the majority of our families are from middle Tennessee. This allows them to frequently participate in alumni activities that are arranged each semester. 92% of our alumni participated in activities on campus through Vanderbilt sporting events, Best Buddies, Academy of Country Music Lifting Lives Career Exploration Series, and Next Steps social activities. The majority of our alumni also report frequent contact with fellow classmates and Ambassadors. One of our alums even flew to Boston this fall to spend the weekend with a very special Ambassador, and others have visited with Ambassadors in DC, and other locations.

Outcomes Research

In July 2014, Dr. J. Lounds-Taylor, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics; Assistant Professor of Special Education, will begin a four-year longitudinal research study, with Hobbs grant funding provided by
Mike Walther. The two questions being asked of all Next Steps alumni, current students, and students admitted in the next four years will be, 1) do young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who participate in the Next Steps at Vanderbilt Postsecondary Education Program have higher subsequent rates of employment and social participation, relative to a nationally-representative sample? and 2) do young adults with IDD who participate in the Next Steps program experience improvements in self-determination, adaptive functioning, social skills, and executive functioning.

List of places of employment of Next Steps graduates

ACCOUNTABILITY AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Next Steps students are afforded the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities as other Vanderbilt students with some conduct regulations that are noted in the Next Steps at Vanderbilt Student Program Guidelines. These regulations are in place to provide the supports and supervision needed for the program students.

In all other instances, Next Steps students must follow the Vanderbilt Student Handbook for information, regulations and policies.

Next Steps Program Student Guidelines

RESOURCES

The Next Steps staff is always ready to support Vanderbilt faculty in regards to all aspects of the Next Steps students, Ambassadors, and the specifics of the program.

Tammy Day, Program Director, 343-0822, tammy.day@vanderbilt.edu

Elise McMillan, Faculty Advisor, Co-Director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, 343-2540. Elise.mcmillan@vanderbilt.edu

The Iris Center

Funded by OSEP and the U.S. Department of Education, the IRIS Center (http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/) creates free online resources for use by college faculty and professional development providers. These resources—which are designed to improve education outcomes for children and young people (from birth through age 21)—touch on a wide variety of disability related topics, including vision impairments, evidence-based practices, secondary transition, assistive technology and classroom accommodations, and many more.
The following materials are hyperlinks that are on the Next Steps website. They are listed in the order in which they are referenced in the body of the document.

1- Next Steps at Vanderbilt Program Requirements Framework
2- Samples of Independent Learning Agreements
3- Samples of weekly schedules
4- Next Steps Program Student Guidelines
5- Student work samples
6- Faculty perspectives
7- Research summary on professor attitudes towards class participation of students
8- Enrollment procedures of Next Steps students
9- List of Next Steps alumni places of employment