

The University Participant (UP)  
Program: A Postsecondary Learning  
Model for Individuals with  
Developmental Disabilities

David L. Westling  
Kelly R. Kelley  
Karena Cooper-Duffy

IASE Conference  
Alicante, Spain

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### Overview of UP Program

- The UP program is a pilot program designed to provide a one-year to two-year, on-campus living and learning experience for individuals with developmental disabilities between the ages of 18 and 22
- Started with one student in the Fall, 2007 semester



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### Rationale for UP Program

- Allows Western Carolina University (WCU) to develop a leadership and model role in a nationally developing trend
- Enhances WCU's aspiration of creating "responsible citizens in a global community"
- Offers multiple benefits to UP participants, primarily learning to live in a typical community environment with their same-age peers
- Provides practical field experiences to special education majors and other college students

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### UP Admission Requirements

- Participants are between the ages of 18 and 21 at the time of admission
- Previously enrolled in a high school special education program that does not lead to completion of a regular high school diploma and that does not allow students to complete requirements necessary for regular admission to WCU
- Demonstrate adequate communication skills and socially acceptable behavior to interact with others on the WCU campus
- Motivated to learn and benefit from their participation in the UP Program

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### UP Certificate of Accomplishment

- Certificate requirements based on the successful completion of an Individual Plan for College Participation (IPCP) include:
  - Living on campus and experiencing college life with same age peers
  - Attending and auditing classes
  - Participating in social events and activities
  - Having an individual plan that outlines necessary steps of personal development for post-UP success



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### UP Certificate Requirements

Satisfactory completion of five program components:

- Personal Development
- Community Participation
- Vocational Preparation
- Social Participation
- Academic Improvement



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### Funding for UP Program

- Students pay normal tuition and fees
- Individual support is provided for students through the Community Alternative Program (CAP)
- In kind services and interagency collaboration for program coordination
- Donations from individuals and community
- Volunteers providing natural supports

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### Continued Challenges for the Program

- Limited funding and stability
- Program coordination
- Expenses for families with tuition and housing
- Social Security Income requirements competing with higher competitive employment wages




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### Notable Events in the UP Program

- First UP participant was nominated for homecoming court by his peers during fall 2007 semester
- Peers as well as professors have provided natural supports on their own time
- All of participants have joined many groups and activities on campus such as the Accessibility groups, SPED advisory board, BSU, Residence Council, sporting events, plays, etc.
- Currently coordinating the second UP participant for residential living in fall 2009




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### Highlights of the UP Program

Videos of Michael (first UP Participant) at Western Carolina University

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### UP Program Evaluation

Based on input from persons familiar with Michael (i.e., case manager, WCU faculty, friends, CAP workers, family members)

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### Five Evaluation Areas

- Personal Development Skills
  - (e.g., personal care, self-determination)
- Community Participation Skills
  - (e.g., transportation, budgeting, shopping)
- Vocational Preparation Skills
  - (e.g., specific job skills, time management)
- Social Participation Skills
  - (e.g., athletic events, social organizations and clubs)
- Academic Improvement
  - (e.g., participation/engagement in audited courses)



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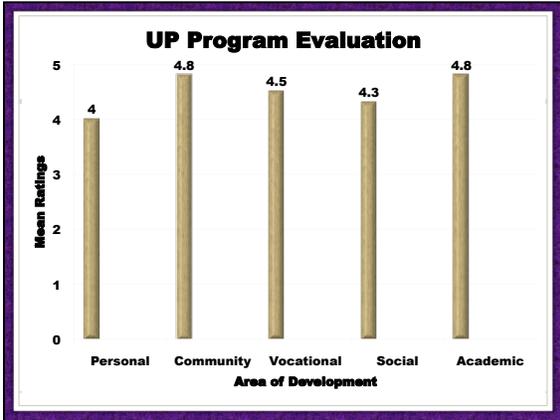
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### Personal Development

- “Michael is more expressive (if that is possible) than before his WCU experience. His speech is clearer, more easily understood. Michael’s maturity is noticeable – more independent in decision making yet appropriately dependent on his care givers and friends.” (Case manager)
- “Michael was always very approachable and friendly. He showed me what it meant to be determined a go after a dream, defying the odds.” (Natural support, WCU student)



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### Community Participation Skills

- “When I first started working with Michael we drove his van all the time. Now he takes the bus everyday and hardly ever uses his van unless he goes off campus.” (CAP worker, WCU student)
- “While I did not observe everyday life, he appears to have increased skills in budgeting especially...” (Case manager)
- “I think this was the strongest level of improvement. Michael learned bus schedules and how to keep track of what items he needed for his dorm.” (CAP worker, WCU student)

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### Vocational Preparation

- “Michael spent time with me on several occasions discussing vocational opportunities and working to find internship opportunities to match his interests.” (Disability Services Director)
- “I do believe that Michael is far more prepared for employment than before...his increased maturity, improved communication skills and more thoughtful problem solving abilities will enhance his employment opportunities.” (Case manager)




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### Social Participation

- “Michael was part of the Resident Hall Council in Norton Rd. Hall. He was very eager to participate in every event that we planned. He attended every weekly meeting and provided helpful suggestions when needed. I believe that he really enjoyed himself and he was a great asset to RHC in Norton.” (RHC President, WCU student)
- “I always had Michael at night so every time possible we would go to the basketball games. He enjoyed them very much. Other students took him to football games and other events.” (CAP worker)

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### Academic Improvement

- “I believe that Michael is an asset to his classes. The students in the class seem to enjoy him and he voices his opinion when needed.” (CAP worker, WCU student)
- “I would help Michael with his coursework and studying for tests. He is a very hard working student who takes pride in his studies.” (Natural support)
- “Michael actively sought accommodations through my office to make the class experience more accessible for him; therefore, more fulfilling and worthwhile.” (Disability Services Director)

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**Additional Comments**

- “I feel fortunate that I got to be a part of the program and meet such a great human being.” (CAP worker)
- “I believe this program has given Michael a greater self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.” (WCU faculty)
- “The program introduced Michael to new people, opportunities, skills and interests that he would not have been able to explore if he would have remained in high school.” (Disability Services Director)

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**Additional Comments**

- “It is hard to sum up in a few short words what Michael taught me while I spend time with him. Before meeting him, I had never been around anyone with a disability and he taught me not to be scared or to discriminate against those with a disability. I consider Michael to be a role model because he is very dedicated and determined. He taught me to appreciate the small things in life. I will cherish my time spent with Michael and continue to keep in contact with a good friend even after my time at WCU.” (Natural support, WCU Student)

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**Additional Comments**

- “I think this is such a great program not only for Michael, but for others with some disability. It helps them to be able to adapt and function in any setting. There may be modifications that may have to be made, but other than that, these individuals really get to see how college life is, the work load that goes with the life, and how they can make a difference after they get out of Western. I think that it should be continued for years to come. It is one of the most productive programs here at Western and I think we will see growth in the up and coming years and thanks to you all for the great support and love that you show our special friends!” (Natural support, WCU student)

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