

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST TO EXPAND THE REALIZING EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER HOPES (REACH)
PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

Actions Requested: Approve the request by the University of Iowa to expand the REACH Program by providing a Third Year Option.

Executive Summary: The REACH Program is a two-year post-secondary educational certificate program for young adults (18-26 years old) with intellectual, learning, and other cognitive disabilities. After almost three years of successful implementation, the REACH Program is positioned to respond to family and student appeals for a Third Year Option. With an experienced staff, tested curriculum and implementation practices, broad university faculty involvement, and existing community partnerships, the REACH Program is ready to create a Third Year Option. The expanded REACH addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priority to provide “educational excellence and impact.”

Background:

◇ **Description of program.** The REACH Program provides an array of learning opportunities across multiple living-learning contexts to students with developmental disabilities. Learning occurs in REACH courses, integrated academic classes, residence halls, university and community clubs and events, internships, and service activities. REACH staff, advisors, faculty, and student mentors provide support and guidance in these learning activities.

◇ **Success of program.** In less than three years, the REACH Program has become a successful, well-respected program on campus and across the nation as evidenced by a recent five-year, \$2.5 million federal grant, corporate and individual gifts/endowments of more than \$1 million since 2008 when the first cohort of students arrived on campus, and student applicants from as far away as California and Vermont.

Staff, families, and assessment data confirm substantial gains in the self-confidence, interpersonal skills, work-related skills, and independent life skills of REACH students. Their growth in self-determination, self-advocacy, and independence is amazing and rewarding for everyone.

Sixteen students earned the REACH certificate in May 2008. Approximately 12 students are employed and/or continuing their education at a community college. The majority are involved in community volunteer work. One REACH alumnus moved away from home, has a full-time position at a VA hospital, and is making payments on his student loan. Several graduates have part-time employment and live in their own apartments. The majority keep in touch with other REACH alumni and students they met at the university.

In 2010, the REACH Program received the University of Iowa Catalyst Award “in recognition of innovative and distinctive efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion at the University of Iowa.”

- ◇ Need/demand for an expanded program. Many families have repeatedly urged REACH staff to offer an extended educational experience for their sons and daughters. In fact, some families have declined the REACH Program during the interview process and selected a four-year program in another state because they deemed two years as insufficient for the maturation, education, and experiential learning that their students needed.

- ◇ Elements of the Third Year Option. The students in the Third Year Option will receive educational programming similar in format and schedule to that provided in the existing certificate program. Coursework will extend and deepen career development, workplace experience, and life skills content. The Option will contain the following elements:
 - ☑ The student must have completed the REACH Certificate Program.
 - ☑ The student must apply for the Third Year Option but no application fees will be required.
 - ☑ The student will follow the same academic schedule as the university.
 - ☑ The student will live in the residence hall.
 - ☑ The student will take 12 or more semester hours of coursework per semester.
 - ☑ The student will take four semester hours of internship.
 - ☑ The student will take 2-4 semester hours of career development/leadership coursework.
 - ☑ The student will be actively involved in campus and/or community life.
 - ☑ The student will receive person-centered planning and individualized advising.
 - ☑ The student will pay the program fee in effect for the semester in which they start the Third Year Option. For Fall 2011, the fee is \$14,083 for resident students and \$29,084 for non-resident students. Students will also pay mandatory student fees and Housing and Dining fees.

- ◇ Relationship of Third Year Option to institutional mission. The Third Year Option of the REACH Program is responsive to the expressed needs of Iowa families and students. It will provide unique and valuable educational programming which will positively affect young adults with disabilities, their families, and communities. The Third Year Option enables traditional students at the university to get to know and learn about their peers with disabilities and, in many cases, improve their skills and knowledge as they prepare to be teachers, counselors, therapists, business owners, and community service providers. The Third Year Option provides opportunities for faculty and graduate students to participate in activities that develop and document best practices in meeting the post-secondary educational needs of students with intellectual and other learning disabilities.

- ◇ Duplication. There is no on-campus program similar to the REACH Program and the Third Year Option at another Iowa institution of higher learning.

- ◇ Relationship of Third Year Option to existing programs. The Third Year Option will provide opportunities for faculty, students, and staff to have informal and formal relationships with this special population. Currently, faculty, staff, and students from throughout the College of Education participate in the REACH Program in a variety of ways – TEACH admissions committee; as class mentors in traditional university classes; as practicum students and interns; as tutors and peer mentors; as supplemental program providers; and as activity leaders. REACH has a formal partnership with the LEND Program (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities) and informal relationships with many faculty, departments, and university centers and services, including the Center for Excellence on Disabilities; Iowa Center for Assistive Technology Education and Research; Center for Research in Undergraduate Education; and Wendell Johnson Speech and Hearing Center.
- ◇ Unique features. The University of Iowa is uniquely positioned to efficiently deliver a quality Third Year Option for REACH students because it will be an extension of the current program. The students who will participate are known to staff; these students already know how to access most university services, such as student health, student counseling, and recreation center. The families of students who will be in the Third Year Option also are familiar with the campus and REACH staff; they have established positive relationships with other families and students.
- ◇ Value of program for graduates. Results from a large scale (n=36,691) comparison of individuals with intellectual disabilities who did/did not receive post-secondary education (PSE) as part of vocational rehabilitation services found that those who did receive PSE were more likely to be employed (45% vs. 32%) and earned significantly more (\$316/week vs. \$195/week) (Migliore & Butterworth, 2008). Zafft and colleagues (2004) report similar results when they compared matched cohorts of people with significant disabilities with and without PSE experiences.

REACH students who complete the Third Year Option will be better prepared to return to their home communities, enter the workforce, and live with greater independence as a result of the extended residence hall living experiences, campus and community involvement, internships, and coursework of the Third Year Option.

Although the number of REACH students is small (a maximum of 25 per cohort or 50 total students in the program in a given year), the positive impact of these individuals living with greater autonomy and being employed across their lifetimes should not be underestimated.
- ◇ Enrollment. The enrollment for the 2011-2012 academic year is projected to be 2-6 students with an increase to a maximum of 10 in any given year.
- ◇ Resources for Third Year Option. No new faculty, facilities, or equipment will be necessary for the Third Year Option. The Third Year Option will draw on existing staff and resources supported by the annual program fees and the REACH OUT (REACH Outcomes) grant funded by the U.S. Office of Postsecondary Education in October 2010. The main focus of the grant is to provide post-program support for REACH alumni as well as to improve and extend current program components, such as student life, academic enrichment, and career development. The grant will support additional staff, including an assistant director, a career development and transition counselor, a transition outcome specialist, and a student life counselor, as well as undergraduate and graduate student mentors.