

New Course at FAU Prepares Students with Disabilities to Join the Workforce



Lisa Finnegan, Ph.D., assistant professor, COE department of Exceptional Student Education.

Key elements of the Professional Development and Disability course include:

- An experienced job placement specialist
- Trained peer mentors to help recruit participants, maintain a social media presence, and provide pre- and post-placement support
- Internships and other work experience
- Coordination between college and placement staff from the Florida Department of Vocational Rehabilitation for eligible students
- Financial training to enable participants to begin building assets
- Work incentives information for students receiving Social Security disability benefits.



DEPARTMENT OF EXCEPTIONAL
STUDENT EDUCATION
College of Education
Florida Atlantic University

When entering the job market, college students with disabilities face more challenges than their peers, but an innovative new college course offered at Florida Atlantic University improves their chances at finding employment and succeeding in the workforce.

FAU's Professional Development and Disability course provides tailor-made job training, hands-on work experience and help finding good-paying, desirable employment upon graduation.

"This course is an amazing opportunity to support the provision of workplace skills for students with disabilities as they prepare to move from the university environment to the workplace environment," said Lisa Finnegan, Ph.D., assistant professor, exceptional student education, at FAU. "Students without disabilities who take the course have an opportunity to gain greater insight and perspective into their own future employment environment and to value greater diversity in the workplace with the inclusion of individuals with disabilities."

The course was made possible through a two-year, \$407,000 grant from the Kessler Foundation, a major nonprofit organization funding disability programs nationally. FAU Foundation received the grant on the behalf of Stand Among Friends, a nonprofit based at FAU that helps people with disabilities live to their potential.

The course builds the skills, workplace awareness and self-marketing ability that produce qualified and confident job candidates. Students are paired with peer mentors with disabilities, such as Renzo Burga, a senior majoring in Management Information Systems at FAU.

"Providing students the resources they need from others, like a peer mentor with similar traits or having someone to talk to, is the best way to build their confidence," Burga said. "Keeping them connected and motivated with the opportunities available out there will give them higher possibilities of reaching their goals of getting through college and working at what they desire and enjoy."

FAU is actively recruiting students for the Professional Development and Disability course for the spring semester, starting in January 2017. For more information about enrolling, contact Lisa Finnegan at 561-297-3287 or lfinnegan@fau.edu.



Lisa Finnegan and Renzo Burga