

Program Resources

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From GED to College: Transition Activities for ABLE Teachers and Students

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“Transition” is a process. Many resources lay out the transition to college from high school: searching for the “right” college, applying to colleges of interest and that are attainable, and creating a career plan that includes a college degree. Fewer resources for the returning adult student take the angle of career planning, selecting a college, and applying to a college. The GED-to-college transition focuses on attaining the GED while reaching beyond adult basic education to a life of learning. This article is for those adult educators and administrators who believe that the transition from GED to college begins in adult basic and literacy education (ABLE). Adult education students not only aspire to pass the GED, but are learning to transform their perspectives to match their values, interests, and skills for continued formal and informal learning beyond attaining the GED credential.

Not all adult education students desire formal learning beyond the GED, but the majority do. According to the GED Testing Service (2002), 65% of the adults who took their GED test in 2001 indicated a desire to continue their education. Although “continuing their education” may mean a college, vocational, or job training context, studies show that between 28 and 30 percent of GED recipients enroll in 2 and 4 year colleges and universities. Those who obtain a bachelor’s degree will earn between 60 and 90 percent more income per year than those with either GEDs or high school diplomas (NCES, 1998).

With the importance of transition, the number of GED test takers who desire furthering their education, and the economic benefit of a bachelor’s degree in mind, this article lays out three components in the transition-to-college process and activities for ABLE teachers and their students. The three components are the career plan, college selection, and college application.

Activities for the Career Plan

Purposeful transitions require a plan. Like a road map, a plan identifies the destination and the turns needed to reach the destination. In a career plan, the destination is the career goal, and the turns include relevant training, skills, and experience needed for the career. Mapping Your Future, Inc. (2002) provides a career plan example where the career goal is

to become a civil engineer. The goal is supported by the objectives of a civil engineering job: to design, plan, and supervise the construction of buildings, highways, and rapid transit systems. Relevant training for a civil engineer includes a bachelor’s degree and accreditation by a licensing board. The skills needed for licensing and success on the job are the ability to work on a team, creativity, presentation skills, writing skills, analytical thinking, the capacity for detail, and knowledge of the physical sciences. Experience needed to become a civil engineer includes employment in a construction company, experience working as a team, and high grades in mathematics courses. Table 1 shows an example of a career plan with the career goal of a special education teacher.

Table 1: Career plan with the career goal of a special education teacher

<p>Career goal: <i>Special Education Teacher</i></p> <p>Job objectives: <i>To become a specialist in intervention for children and youth in the school system who have a variety of disabilities.</i></p>

What is needed	Plan to obtain what is needed
<p>Requirements</p> <p>Bachelor's degree, completion of an approved teacher preparation program, license</p>	<p>How to obtain requirements</p> <p>Enroll in and complete a baccalaureate degree special education program, earn licensure</p>
<p>Skills and knowledge</p> <p><i>Skills:</i> planning, problem-solving, organization, teamwork, good written and spoken communication</p> <p><i>Knowledge:</i> preparation and implementation of curriculum; good relationships with students; different types of intellectual, physical, and emotional disabilities; human behavior; availability of community and family support services</p>	<p>How to obtain skills and knowledge</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work in teams in college courses 2. Create work plans and organization methods in college courses 3. Practice writing and speaking with a purpose and audience in mind 4. Develop and carry out curriculum plans 5. Be in situations with different types of thinkers 6. Become familiar with community and family support services 7. Earn good grades in special education coursework
<p>Experience</p> <p>Work in a school system and with students with disabilities</p>	<p>How to obtain experience</p> <p>Engage in field experiences and student teaching; work or volunteer as a teaching assistant or substitute; tutor students with disabilities in different age groups and contexts</p>

The creation of a career plan begins with the investigation into skills and interests and continues with the match to a career field. Skills are specific abilities that are developed over time. For example, a student with high ability in perceptual organization may have a developing skill designing web pages using specific integrated software. However, if the student does not have an interest in developing websites, s/he may not have developed the skill. In this case, questions about what the student does on a daily basis (e.g., speaking publicly, repairing appliances, engaging in group sports) may assist in determining a direction of another skill that could be developed to match an area of interest.

Another student may have an interest in becoming a psychiatrist. This interest may be matched through employment as administrative support in psychiatric hospitals. However, the student's achievement and motivation in the disciplines of biology and chemistry have been consistently below average, reflecting a possible inability to develop the skill to a level of performance needed on medical college admission tests. In this case, human service professions such as a psychiatric nursing, counsel-

ing, social work, or rehabilitation may be a better match for the student's record of achievement.

Many free and for-pay online assessments are tools to investigate skills and interest for discussion in the adult education classroom. One free assessment is the Job Style Inventory (JSI), available at www.improvenow.com (2000-2003). The JSI is divided among four types of work styles. The scores are in the ranges of very high, high, moderate, or low needs in the work style domains of *interpersonal harmony*, *affective expression*, *behavioral action*, and *cognitive analysis*. The JSI lists general characteristics and types of work tasks that match each of the four work style behaviors. For a fee, a more in-depth report is available. The Personal Style inventory (PSI) is a second free assessment available on www.improvenow.com, relating a person's *general personal orientation*, *typical strengths*, *common difficulties*, and *reactions to job stress*.

At www.assessment.com, the Motivational Appraisal of Personal Potential (MAPP) guides people to understand motivations, interests, and talents for work. The free sample narrative limits the content of each of the nine assessment domains, but provides

at least ten of twenty possible job matches from the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook (International Assessment Network, 2002). The domains in the MAPP are labeled as follows:

- *Interests*— the preference for a job content,
- *Temperament*— motivation for the interest,
- *Aptitude*— combination of motivations with interests and skills,
- *People*— interpersonal skills,
- *Things*— the manipulation of materials and processes,
- *Data*— preferences and priorities of specific kinds of mental activities,
- *Reasoning*— how the thinking preference would be applied to a job,
- *Mathematical capacity*— talent for math and where it occurs, and
- *Language capacity*— the language traits that cover basic activities that utilize words.

The Self Directed Search (SDS, Holland, 2001) is a for-cost popular paper assessment tool that has recently become available online. A free preliminary assessment with Holland's career domains is available on www.careerkey.org (Jones, 2003). The Career Key assessment matches interests, abilities, views of self, and values with Holland's career domains of *realistic*, *social*, *investigative*, *enterprising*, *artistic*, and *conventional*. After identifying the area that shows the highest score, the test taker chooses job interests from groups of jobs associated with the domain. For a fee, the full SDS assessment and report matches interest and skill types with occupations, fields of study, education that is typically required to complete training in the field, and leisure activities. This service is available at www.self-directed-search.com.

Another popular published interest scale is the Strong Interest Explorer (Consultant Psychologists Press, 2001), which categorizes student interests in order to define a career direction, select classes and activities, and choose a major or technical program. Each paper copy of the scale is self-scorable, takes 10-15 minutes to complete, and costs under \$5.00. The scale is available at www.cpp.com.

Using the free and for pay inventories that investigate skills and interests can drive discussion activities in the ABLE classroom during the creation of a career plan. The skill and interest questions in Table 2 can be used as a discussion or writing guide as students begin to uncover and search skills and interests for a career direction.

Table 2: Skill and interest questions for discussion or writing

Skill Questions

1. For what reasons have co-workers approached you for help in the job?
2. What is challenging for you in a work situation?
3. What are three things that you have accomplished in the past five years?
4. What are your academic, personal, and social strengths?
5. Do you think your schooling accurately reflects your academic skills and abilities? Why or why not?

Interest Questions

1. What do you like to do? Consider school, religious, social, or sports activities.
2. What are 10 activities that you have enjoyed doing over the past 10 years?
3. What did you like about these activities?
4. If you were left for an hour in the library, what materials and topics would you find yourself reading?
5. When you were a child, what did you like to play?

The Occupational Outlook Handbook (2003) is a free resource to use during the discovery and investigation into skills and interests. Published by the U.S. Department of Labor every two years, the *Handbook* outlines a large number of occupations including the nature of the work, working conditions, training and educational requirements, career advancement, job outlook, and earnings potential. Available at libraries and provided online at no cost (www.bls.gov/oco), readers can view significant points about a profession, the nature of the work, working conditions, employment, qualifications and advancement, earnings, related occupations, and sources of additional information.

As students begin to consider different types of postsecondary education to get to their career goal, they can visit the College Entrance Examination Board's (2002) career browser tool on www.collegeboard.com. The career browser lists the nature of the work, working conditions, qualifications, and job outlook. The website was created for the purpose of assisting in the transition from high school to college and contains links to the programs and entrance requirements of America's colleges and universities.

Creating the career plan transforms an adult student's desire to pursue higher education into a career goal. The career goal necessitates a specific context of postsecondary education, including job training

programs, community college, or a university. Because this article focuses on the transition to a baccalaureate-awarding college or university, the next section examines ways to search for and select a college or university before submitting an application.

Activities for College Search and Selection

College search handbooks categorize colleges according to specific characteristics that applicants may want to know. Table 3 lists questions to use when comparing institutional characteristics with other colleges and universities. For GED recipients, activities used in answering questions such as the programs of study, retention and graduation rates, and admissions criteria build background knowledge about whether the college or university is a good match with student interests and needs. Such activities include attending adult orientations, visiting learning centers and adult service centers, shadowing students who attend college, and collecting paper and online college information materials.

Table 3. Questions to ask in searching and selecting a college

1. Is the college public or private?
2. Are there two year programs, four year programs, or both?
3. What are the retention rates?
4. How many students attend? What percentage are adult students? GED recipients?
5. What are other characteristics of the student body (e.g., ethnicity, gender)?
6. What is the size of the school? What are the class sizes?
7. Who teaches the classes? Graduate students? Part-time faculty?
8. What majors are available?
9. How is the college divided (colleges, divisions)?
10. What are the application requirements?
11. What are the criteria for admission?
12. What are the costs?
13. What financial aid is available?

For many adult students, college characteristics become secondary to searching for information about support for college success. Most colleges and universities have academic support for specific populations of students, including adults, students with disabilities, students from low-income backgrounds, and students in the first-generation of their family to seek a baccalaureate degree. Visiting offices of learning support, adult services, and disability services provides answers to questions such as the types of college learning, advising, and counseling

assistance available. Although limited, some colleges and universities have scholarships and programs specifically for students with GEDs.

A college's perspective on disabilities is also an issue to consider during selection if an adult student has disability-specific needs in the areas of attention, learning, chronic illness, mobility, psychiatric disorder, speech and hearing, or vision. Since more students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder are attending college, guidebooks in college selection such as *The K & W Guide to College for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*, sixth edition (Kravets & Wax, 2001) profile support services for students with disabilities at 339 colleges and universities. The sixth edition of *Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders* (Strichart & Mangrum, 2000) cites the types of assistance available in 750 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. These volumes describe comprehensive programs such as support courses in reading and math, individual and group tutoring programs, advising, and counseling.

Websites provide immediate access to college characteristics and programs for the college search and selection process. The U.S. Department of Education's (USDE) website entitled "Think College" (www.ed.gov/students/prep/college/thinkcollege/edlite-index.html) offers links to online directories to colleges, universities, higher education agencies, and organizations that partner with the USDE. The site provides information for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The College Entrance Examination Board's nonprofit site www.collegeboard.com provides a self-managed list of college search and selection, including keeping track of colleges; organizing applications; and then investigating, comparing, contacting, and applying for admission and financial aid. A special feature on www.collegeboard.com compares location, college type, campus and student life, admission criteria, cost, and financial aid of up to three colleges.

For adults with GEDs, college choices may be limited due to a college's location, costs, and admissions criteria. For example, for GED recipients with children, college selection could be limited geographically. Child care, work, or single-parenting responsibilities become primary factors in a decision to choose a higher education setting that is nearby. For older adults, college could be financially out of reach. The ability to pay for and be admitted to a college or university becomes a primary factor in the selection process. The section that follows outlines the tools used in the process of applying to college and applying for financial aid.

Activities for the Application

Two major questions arise in the transition process: “How do I complete the application in order to be accepted to the college I have chosen?” And, “How do I apply for financial aid?” This section addresses the activities of completing both the application to the specific college and the application for federal financial aid funding. Questions to ask regarding the application requirements for specific colleges are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Questions to ask about the college application.

1. When is the application deadline?
2. Do I need to complete a personal statement or essay?
3. Do I need a resume?
4. Do I need letters of recommendation?
5. What is the cost of the application?
6. Do I need a copy of my GED certificate?
7. Do I need to submit testing (ACT, SAT) beyond the GED credential?
8. Did I indicate on my Federal Application for Student Aid to send information to this school?
9. What else is the admission committee looking for in order to qualify me for admission?
10. What else do I need to complete my application?

Submission of the GED credential is necessary in the application for showing that the GED certificate has been earned. In order to request a copy of the GED certificate, students may contact their GED administrator in the state department of education in their state. Students can locate their GED contact in the United States through the official site of the GED testing service, located at www.gedtest.org. To assist in writing the application and to ease the application process, “The Common Application” can be used as a model or an actual application for admission. Developed by over 250 colleges and universities through The Common Application, Inc. (2002), it can be used to apply directly online to participating colleges and universities. The application is comprised of personal data, test information, family information, and evaluations when necessary, and can be accessed online at www.commonapp.org.

The application deadlines are tied to when students are admitted. If the admission is early decision, then the application is due by December 15th for the following school year. Applications for regular decisions are due April 1 to April 15. A college with a rolling admission means that the applicant will be notified six to eight weeks after submitting

Any student seeking financial assistance for college should complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA, USDE, 2003). The FAFSA can be obtained by phone 1-800-4-FED AID, online request, and college financial aid offices. The form can also be completed online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. The USDE suggests submitting the FAFSA as early as possible within their January 1 through June 30 window, adhering to individual state deadlines. Because the FAFSA is lengthy, many students are apprehensive about completing the form. To assist in understanding the form, Table 5 shows the content of the FAFSA’s 104 questions.

Table 5: The content of the FAFSA’s 104 questions

1-34	Name, mailing address, social security number, date of birth, driver’s license number, citizenship, marital status
17-21	Full time, 3/4 time, half time, less than half time, not attending status for specific quarters/ semesters
24-26	Residency
27-28	Selective service
31	High school diploma or GED award
32	Bachelor’s degree date
33-34	Interest in student loans and work study
35	Illegal drug conviction
36-51	Income tax, investments, current cash balance, veteran’s education benefits
52-58	Birth year, dependencies, graduate education, veteran status
59-84	Parents’ information (completed depending on answers to 52-58)
85-86	Students in household (completed depending on answers to 52-58)
87-98	Schools to receive the information
99	Email address
100	Date form is completed
101	Signature
102-104	Information of preparer if prepared by outside firm

The GED certificate enables students to apply for financial aid the same as a high school diploma. Money for college can be received through grants, loans, or scholarships, some of which need completed forms beyond the fundamental FAFSA. The FAFSA and a bank application are required for three of the four federal loans: the Federal Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS) and two Stafford Loans. The PLUS loan is provided for parents of traditional-aged college students and is not based on financial need. The two Stafford Loans differ in how interest is incurred. With the subsidized Stafford Loan, the federal government pays the interest on the loan while the student is attending school and for a six-month grace period after the student graduates. With the unsubsidized Stafford Loan, interest accrues while the student is in school. The Perkins loan does not require a bank application.

Federal Pell Grants do not need to be paid back, and the award is based on three criteria: (a) a student's cost to attend school, (b) status as a full- or part-time student, and (c) plans to attend school for one full academic year or less. Two other aid programs, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) and Federal Work Study (FWS) are administered locally by a participating college's financial aid office. Awards for FSEOG and FWS are based on three criteria: (a) financial need, (b) the amount of other aid a student receives, and (c) the availability of funds at a participating college or university.

When reviewing grants and scholarships with students in the ABE classroom, it is important to also search for funds offered for GED recipients in particular. Grants or scholarships are also offered by agencies other than the USDE. Many colleges, universities, and trade schools offer scholarships for GED recipients. Students can also find money that may be awarded because of religious affiliation, ethnic background, special talents, disabilities, sports, club and organization memberships, volunteer work, hobbies, and academic major. ABE teachers can search the website www.scholarships.com with students. Created by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (2003), the website contains a scholarship search, scholarships by category, and guides for funding postsecondary education. In consultation with major education associations, the Coalition of America's Colleges and Universities (2003) launched a comprehensive website (www.collegeispossible.org) that includes funding information specifically for adults returning to school.

Where to Go From Here

The GED Testing Service reports that most of the adults pursuing their GED desire additional education. For those who aspire to college or university education, there is an opportunity to begin the transition process in the ABE context. This article reviewed the activities of creating a college plan, searching and selecting a college, and applying for admission and financial aid. One question that remains unanswered is the transition process involved preparing for college success once enrolled. A companion article to this piece, "From GED to College: Services for College Success," describes services that assist in the motivation and study strategies that aid in college achievement. For a resource on creating comprehensive programming in ABE for the GED to college transition, see the New England ABE-To-College project at www.collegetransition.org.

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