## Locations of Inclusive Postsecondary Education Programs in Institutions' Administrative Structures

*By Kathleen Becht, Cate Weir, and Caitlyn Bukaty*

When developing your inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) program, it is important to decide the program's location and affiliation within your institution's administrative structure. This decision is unique to each institution. You can determine the IPSE program's location by considering:

- the diversity of institutional structures
- faculty support from the various academic units, departments, and divisions
- the culture of the institution
- the philosophy of the IPSE program

In 2022, Think College reached out to staff at IPSE programs for students with intellectual disability (ID) to learn more about program location in college and university administrative structures. We have summarized their responses in this Fast Fact. To supplement this information, we provide data from the Transition and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID) projects in 2019–2020 and 2020–2021. Together, these two data sources illustrate the variability in administrative locations that exists with IPSE programs and provide some of the rationale for those locations.

This information may be useful for colleges or universities determining the appropriate location for the IPSE in their administrative structure. Program Accreditation Standards (Think College National Coordinating Center Accreditation Workgroup; 2021) require college programs for students with ID to be a recognized part of the institution.

### ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF 15 IPSE PROGRAMS

In June 2022, Think College reached out to staff at IPSE programs through individual email and the Think College Program Staff Facebook group asking them to share information about the administrative location of their program within their institution. We received 18 responses. We categorized these responses by the type of institution (two community colleges and 13 universities). Table 1 summarizes the program locations within the administrative structure of the institution. Of 12 programs initially housed in the College of Education (COE), four moved out of COE to another location, while two programs moved into the COE from other locations. In the following sections, we provide the responses from each program categorized by their current administrative location.

### Community Colleges

- Our program is within **Student Accessibility Services within Student Affairs.** We have the most champions here to start the program—student life, student disability support, career services, advising, etc. Workforce Development/Continuing Education was explored as an option, [didn't show the same goodness of fit…] Being on the Student Affairs side has its challenges, such as the program being viewed as a side project or non-academic program to opt out of or disregard (by some faculty and at times Academic Affairs).
- Our program is under the **Instructional Workforce Division within Continuing Education.**

> Having champions within each academic department and working with the deans and associate deans is essential and a continual effort. I think the [program's] location is whatever makes the most sense for the program and college campus / culture.
>
> **—An IPSE administrator**

## Universities & Colleges

### College of Education

- We are our own department within the **College of Education and Behavioral Science.** We are an interdisciplinary program in that we collaborate with Occupational Therapy Speech/Language Pathology, Psychology, and Education.

- We are housed in the **College of Education.** We moved recently from the **Division of Student Affairs** to increase our academic support, grow our program's academic options, increase research support, and expand accessibility to more inclusive courses. Moving from a division to an academic department was an adjustment.

- We are located in the **Division of Education**—mostly because that is where we originated, and we have yet to identify a better "home." It does give us the academic autonomy needed with our courses and provides us more leverage with the Academic Dean's office when we run into issues in the classroom. However, there are some difficulties being considered a branch of an academic unit when we are so much more.

- Our program's office is in the **College of Education.**

- We began in the **School of Continuing Studies.** It was a great fit. That school was charged with creating pathways for nontraditional students. The dean was an excellent advocate and really understood what we were trying to do. The program eventually moved to the School of Education. Our program's office is in the College of Education.

- Our program is currently in the **College of Education** and plans to move to the **Office of Student Affairs.**

- Our program's office is in the **College of Education.** I would rather not be in the College of Education as we are not an academic unit, but an office that provides services to students with disabilities to access the university. My plan is to **relocate us to the Office of Student Affairs** as the Disability Services Office is located there and we provide services to and collaborate with the entire university.

- We started as a department in **Academic Affairs** and it was too broad; we needed a "home." The **College of Education** treated [us] as any other academic program, but with our own set of policies/procedures. In the College of Education, we also have access to and assistance from the special education faculty.

- We are a recognized program within the **Department of Educational Studies in the College of Education.** We have benefited by using the existing infrastructure of the department (admin support, HR, grants office, development office) at no additional cost, and the advocacy of our department chair and dean across university systems. However, we are not an academic program and the college's policies and procedures do not account for the unique considerations of our program staff. The expected turnover of any college administrator brings the question of whether we will be seen as an asset or liability to the incoming administrator.

- Our IPSE program is housed in the **College of Education under the Special Education Department** and listed as a College of Education undergraduate certificate. The dean and college leadership are supportive of the program and advocate for the program with the university leadership, especially legal counsel.

### Offices or Divisions of the Institution

- **Academic Affairs** is our overarching home, but we are housed and supervised by the Education Department.

- We started as part of the **College of Education and Human Services.** We have since been located organizationally within the Multidisciplinary Studies and Honors College, now called University College under the Associate Provost's Office.

- We were housed in the Department of Educational Psychology in **the College of Education and Human Development** as an academic department with one faculty lead. Being housed in COEHD helped us connect to faculty and degree-seeking students and facilitated students receiving their certificate from the university. With changes in the college administration, it became unsustainable, and the IPSE program is now housed at the **UCEDD** [University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities]. The expectation is that at the UCEDD, the program will have permanence regardless of leadership changes.

## TABLE 1. ADMINISTRATIVE LOCATION AT TIME OF REQUEST BY INSTITUTION TYPE
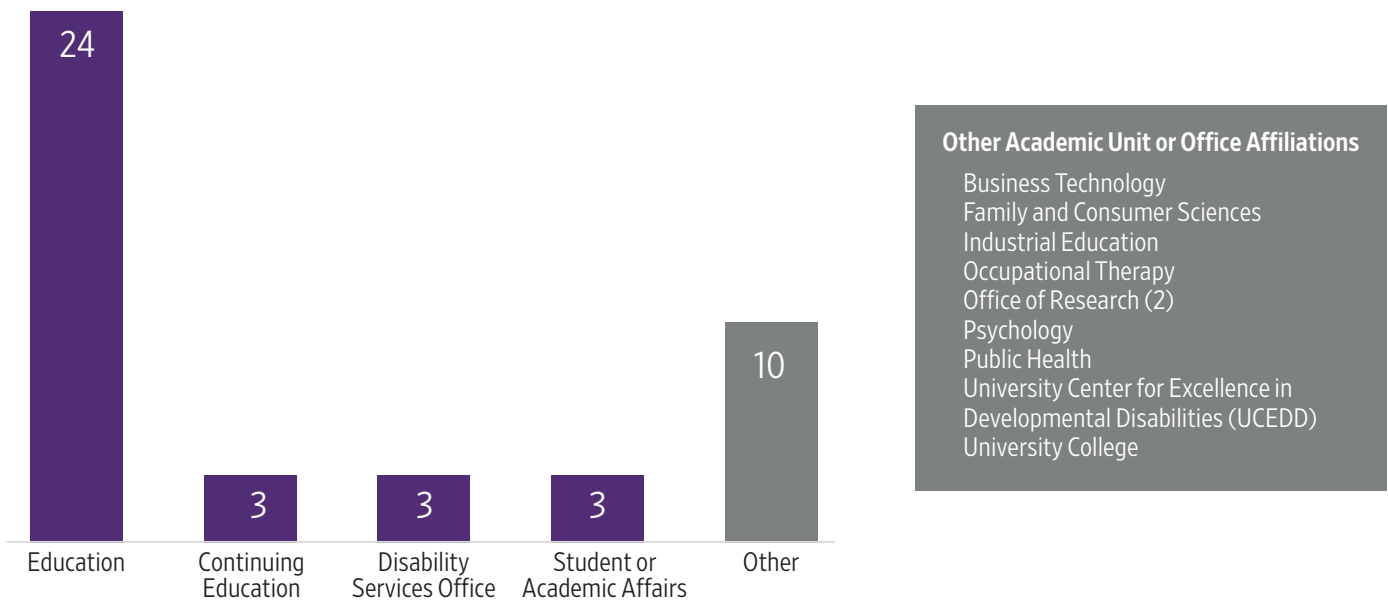
| Administrative Structure Location | University or College | Community College | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **College of Education (COE)** | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| **Office of Academic Affairs (AA), Disability Services Office (DSO)** | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| **Multidisciplinary Studies & Honors College** | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **Continuing Studies / Continuing Education** | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **UCEDD** | 1 | 0 | 1 |

Note: Twelve PSE programs were initially housed in Colleges of Education, four programs moved out of the College of Education into other units or colleges (two moved to DSO and one each to Honors College and UCEDD), and two moved into the College of Education (from Academic Affairs and Continuing Studies.)

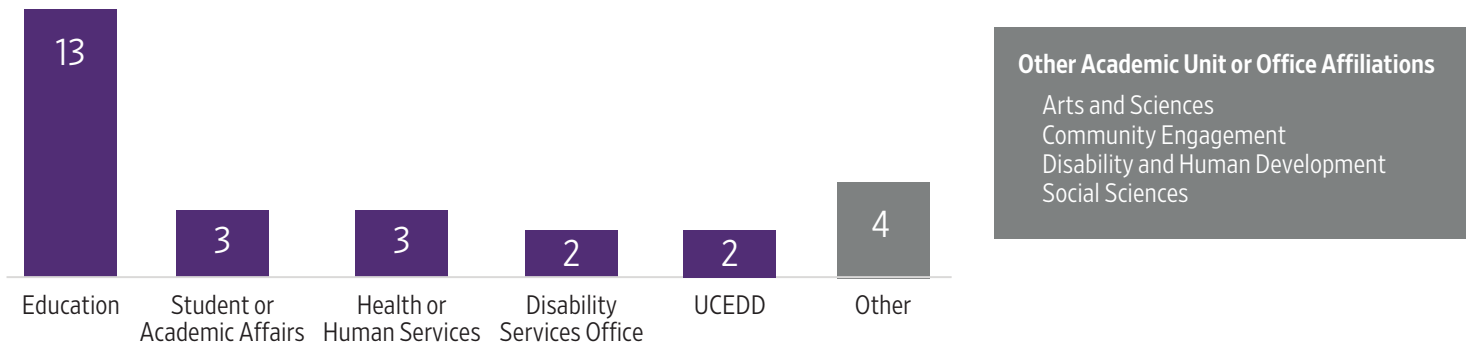## ACADEMIC UNIT OR OFFICE AFFILIATIONS REPORTED BY TPSIDS

The Think College National Coordinating Center collects data annually on TPSID program structures, including whether the program is housed within a particular academic unit or office. We conducted qualitative content analyses with data from the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 academic years to group the academic unit or office affiliations reported by TPSIDs into categories. Figures 1 and 2 show TPSID program affiliations in 2019–2020 (Cohort 2) and 2020–2021 (Cohort 3) respectively.

### FIGURE 1. COHORT 2 ACADEMIC UNIT OR OFFICE AFFILIATIONS IN 2019–2020



Bar chart values: Education 24, Continuing Education 3, Disability Services Office 3, Student or Academic Affairs 3, Other 10.

**Other Academic Unit or Office Affiliations**
Business Technology
Family and Consumer Sciences
Industrial Education
Occupational Therapy
Office of Research (2)
Psychology
Public Health
University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD)
University College

Notes: 61 programs surveyed, 40 reported one or more affiliations. 3 programs reported two affiliations.

### FIGURE 2. COHORT 3 ACADEMIC UNIT OR OFFICE AFFILIATIONS IN 2020–2021



Bar chart values: Education 13, Student or Academic Affairs 3, Health or Human Services 3, Disability Services Office 2, UCEDD 2, Other 4.

**Other Academic Unit or Office Affiliations**
Arts and Sciences
Community Engagement
Disability and Human Development
Social Sciences

Notes: 37 programs surveyed, 23 reported one or more affiliations. 4 programs reported two affiliations.

Across both cohorts, the most frequently reported affiliation was with a College/School/Department of Education (in Cohort 2, n = 24, 39% of programs and in Cohort 3, n = 13, 35% of programs). Other affiliations reported by more than one program included Continuing Education, Disability Services Offices (DSO), Student or Academic Affairs, and Health or Human Services departments. In both cohorts, one or more programs reported affiliation with a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). Some programs reported more than one affiliation as noted in Figures 1 and 2, some reported none, and some provided inconclusive responses.

## CONCLUSION

An identified location within an administrative structure is a critical component of sustainability of an IPSE program. As presented in this document, there is no single answer to the best affiliation or location for an IPSE program within its institutional structure. However, Colleges of Education are by far the most typical location, citing the support from the dean and access to academic resources and program students for support. Reasons for programs' relocation within institutions in the informal data were varied and included administrative turnover in a unit or changes in administrative support and the perceived need to be in or out of an academic unit.

### REFERENCES

Think College National Coordinating Center Accreditation Workgroup (2021). Model Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

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