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## UIS sets up program to help disabled get jobs

By **CHRIS DETTRO**  
**GateHouse News Service**

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A program designed to improve the transition from college to employment for disabled graduates is being introduced at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Called "Journey2Jobs," it includes mentoring, instruction on issues related to employability, and job-related volunteer service and internship opportunities. The program will include eight to 10 students each year beginning in the fall semester. Students can sign up for the program after their first year on campus.

"We're doing a marketing match now, rolling out the program so people will know about it," said Suzanne Woods, visiting director of the Office of Disability Services, which is administering Journey2Jobs.

The program is being funded by a \$25,000 first-year grant from an anonymous trust fund.

"The grantor asked us to come up with something innovative that could be replicated at other colleges," Woods said, noting that a handbook is being put together for use at other universities wanting to build a similar program.

The mentoring aspect will bring together disabled students with disabled graduates who have successfully negotiated job seeking, the application process and employment. During the first year, mentors and staff members will develop a handbook to help community members.

The ultimate goal is to give students a more motivated attitude toward future employment, Woods said.

"Such a mentoring program helps students think about what jobs they might like and succeed at, learn to articulate their skills, gain self-confidence in their abilities and market themselves," she said.

It also will provide workshops, seminars and discussion groups on employment topics — when to disclose disabilities, dealing with employer and co-worker concerns, proving one's value on the job, getting along with co-workers, interview skills, legal rights and more.

Disabled students frequently are behind other students in job-seeking skills and need targeted workshops to help them gain confidence, Woods said.

"They often have to put all their efforts into schoolwork and may not have much work experience," she said.

Job-related volunteer opportunities and internships that provide experience in the kind of work students want to do after graduation helps build their resumes and adds experience, she said.

"We had a pizza party looking for students who were in their first year at UIS," Woods said. "Others who couldn't make it that day have asked for information. They are excited about getting some kind of really concrete help in these areas."

After graduation, the Office of Disability Services will track students' progress and experiences. Eventually, if they stay in the area, students who were involved in the program will be invited to participate as mentors themselves.

Chris Dettro can be reached at 788-1510.

### Employment difficulties for the disabled

The percentage of people with disabilities in the labor force in February 2009 was 23 percent, according to the U.S. Office of Disability Policy.

The Center for an Accessible Society found that for graduates of four-year colleges, the employment rate for both men and women has been 89.9 percent. For college graduates with disabilities, the employment rate is 50.6 percent.

"These dismal disparities offer universities a tremendous opportunity to improve disabled college graduates' transition into employment," said Suzanne Woods, visiting director of the Office of Disability Services. "At UIS, we would like to take up this challenge."

### Want to know more?

For more information, contact Suzanne Woods in the UIS Office of Disability Services at 206-6666 or [swood06s@uis.edu](mailto:swood06s@uis.edu).

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