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Program to prepare disabled for independence

By [Brian Morelli](#)

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The University of Iowa unveiled a new program designed to fully integrate special needs students into the student body.

Called Realizing Education and Career Hopes, or REACH, the two-year certificate program aims to prepare students with multiple learning and cognitive disabilities to start a career and live independently.

Learn more

- For more information about REACH, e-mail reach@uiowa.edu or call 384-2127.

"We are embarking on a magnificent experiment," UI president Sally Mason said during a Wednesday news conference. "It will introduce a level of diversity that is not here currently."

This is one of the first major public universities in the nation to offer such a program where students partake in the academic, residential and social aspects of campus life, according to UI.

Based in the College of Education, UI is accepting applications for 16 to 20 slots in the initial class, which is set for fall 2008. As the program gets going, the class size is expected to expand to about 25 students annually.

These students, residents and non-residents age 18 to 25, would live in residence halls on campus. Courses would focus on academic enrichment, career development and life and social skills.

"The parents are the most excited about this," REACH program director Dennis Harper said.

Former Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson, whose son has autism and attended a similar program in Illinois, was chairwoman of the advisory that helped develop UI's program.

"When he left for college, he would not have been able to live on his own, shop for groceries, pay the bills and organize his life," Pederson said. "Those two years were about these very practical things, how to do problem solving, how to advocate for himself."

There are 30 to 40 employer partners throughout Iowa that will help the students get internships and mentorships, which is seen as key in launching a career.

"They will have a real opportunity to develop a career and live on their own," Pederson said.

At this point, tuition is not set, but there is funding for scholarships, and UI is trying to secure additional money for student aid. There is a March 1, 2008, scholarship application deadline for the fall 2008 semester.

UI announced \$1.4 million in private funding to help launch REACH, which broke down to \$750,000 for faculty and \$250,000 for student scholarships from Jon and Lillian Lovelace, \$250,000 from the Myron and Jacqueline Blank Fund, \$100,000 from Fred and Emily Weitz and \$50,000 from Michael and Barbara Gartner.

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