

UI to REACH Out to Learning Disabled Adults

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Title: UI to REACH out to learning disabled adults

IOWA CITY - The University of Iowa is planning a new educational program for young adults with multiple learning disabilities such as autism and cognitive impairments.

The program, called REACH, for Realizing Educational and Career Hopes, would focus on meeting the transitional needs of students in an inclusive university setting. Classes would work on academic skill building, career preparation, life skills, socialization and career placement following graduation.

Students in the program would live on campus in a residence hall and participate in campus activities, which is key, organizers said. Specific courses are in development for the program, and students also will be encouraged to participate in selected regular UI courses.

"The University of Iowa will become one of the first major research universities to launch a program like this," Dennis Harper, a UI professor of pediatrics, education and public health, said. "I fully anticipate we'll be inundated with a large number of requests."

UI officials said they hope to establish a two-year, noncredit program for people ages 18 to 30 with multiple learning disabilities. Those disabilities could include autism and learning and cognitive impairments.

"It's for students with multiple learning disabilities with more severe educational impact," Harper said.

The state Board of Regents said earlier this week it supports the idea, although the regents still need to vote on starting the program and funding it.

UI officials, who hope to launch the program in 18 to 24 months, briefed the board about the idea when the regents met in Cedar Falls on Wednesday. "I hope that you'll go away with the sense that this board overwhelmingly thinks this is a great idea and urges you to move

forward," Regents President Michael Gartner told the UI team. "I think this is a spectacular thing. The demand is clearly there."

Program organizers expect to admit 25 to 30 students per year to start. Tuition for such programs typically runs \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year, though a variety of federal aid programs could help offset tuition.

One challenge is start-up costs of about \$2.4 million and housing for 50 students on campus, the UI officials said.

Several regents said outside partnerships with education organizations or private corporations could provide some of the needed funding. They anticipate it will not add expenses to the UI once it is up and running.