

# Making college life a reality

## Program reaches beyond the average UI student

By Brian Morelli

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Going to college seems like a reasonable dream for young adults, but until recently, a dream was all it was for Stephen Schumacher.

While the 22-year-old Reno, Nev., man's peers moved on to universities where they'd live on campus, his choice was the local community college.

"I have a learning disability," the 2005 high school graduate said, noting difficulties with reading, math and note-taking. "The way I learn is hands on. I have to have one-on-one help."

Despite roadblocks, Schumacher yearned for a college experience, and this year he finally found it through a new University of Iowa program called REACH.

REACH, or Realizing Educational And Career Hopes, allows 18- to 25-year-olds with learning and cognitive disabilities to experience college virtually the same as any other student. The two-year, on-campus certificate program emphasizes life and social skills for independent living, academic enrichment and career development.

REACH is one of the only such on-campus programs in the country, said Jo Hendrickson, interim director of REACH, which is housed in the UI College of Education.

Students first reported to school in August, kicking off the programs first semester. This class has 18 students, but Hendrickson sees the program growing to about 25 or 30.

Costing \$22,190 for resident students and \$34,690 for non-residents, it is a bit more expensive than standard UI tuition of \$18,687 for residents and \$32,801 for non-residents. However, there are additional costs for the intensive support the university provides these students.

"We wear many hats and play many different roles," said Janis Mendenhall, REACH coordinator of career development and an instructor.

Mendenhall has been lining up internships through area employers such as the Iowa City Veteran Affairs Medical Clinic, Rockwell Collins and Pet Central Station, to help open the doors for the students.

"We work with students in narrowing the careers they want to explore to those available in the area and those that are attainable," Mendenhall said.

Perhaps most appealing to students like Schumacher, they experience campus life. They live in residence halls, eat at campus cafeterias and attend football games, pep rallies and other campus activities.

The living situation is one of the areas Schumacher is finding challenging, but one he also is learning from.

"The hardest part for me is sharing. I have never had to share things with people," said Schumacher, who has a roommate. "I am learning to share and how to deal with things I am not used to dealing with. I have to share my ideas, share my beliefs, and I am learning how to share a room."

REACH's goal is in many ways the same as the goal of any college program: help students get a job, prepare them to live independently and teach them to advocate for themselves. Mendenhall hopes that the certificate will show employers that these students can function around many people and are capable, she said.

Schumacher wants similar things from REACH.

"I am hoping that I will be successful in life, that I have a good job or career and hopefully have my own place," Schumacher said.

Ryan Cumings, 20, a UI sophomore, is one of two REACH-trained residence assistants who live in Stanley Residence Hall with the students.

One the biggest parts of his job is checking students in at night, Cumings said. The students have an 11 p.m. curfew on weeknights and midnight on weekends.

Otherwise, it is similar to a regular RA position. Cumings helps students integrate into school, creates activities, serves as a campus information resource and resolves noise and conflict issues. The students have the typical needs and issues as any other student, he said.

"They are really capable of the same things," Cumings said.

## **Details**

- For more information about REACH, go online to [www.education.uiowa.edu/reach](http://www.education.uiowa.edu/reach)