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Media Relations

UNH Institute On Disability To Develop Online Employment Training

December 6, 2010

DURHAM, N.H. – The Institute on Disability (IOD) at the University of New Hampshire has been awarded a three-year, \$600,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to develop online training for professionals who support individuals with disabilities pursuing employment.

Ensuring an adequate workforce of well-trained staff has been an ongoing challenge in vocational rehabilitation. Due to lack of training in a wide variety of on-the-job strategies, support professionals are often ill-equipped to thoroughly support individuals with disabilities in order for them to achieve their fullest potential as employees. In New Hampshire, the average employment service staff member receives only about 13 hours of job training, primarily focused on organizational policies and paperwork.

In response to this need, this new project, called the Employment Consultant Training project, is developing online training modules to teach employment specialists, job coaches, and other direct-service employment staff how to maximize the social inclusion of employees with disabilities and use support strategies that are naturally incorporated into the work environment. For example, trainees will learn how to include employees in lunch and break-time social conversation, and how to show company staff how to best train the employee.

"Individuals with disabilities have demonstrated that they can be productive and even exceptional employees when provided with the right supports," says project director David Hagner, research professor at the IOD. "Well-trained staff can work in partnership with employers to provide those supports."

During the first two years of the project, project staff from New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, and New York will complete a facilitated online training module that teaches strategies for analyzing workplace cultures and planning for natural supports and workplace inclusion. Following the training, participants will implement the strategies to provide job support while completing surveys, interviews, and focus group sessions to evaluate the training's effectiveness. Participant feedback will inform revisions to the training, with the final version being made available to community rehabilitation programs nationwide.

Grant partners include co-investigator and module developer Bryan Dague from the Center on Disability and Community Inclusion at the University of Vermont. Additional project collaborators include the vocational rehabilitation and mental health and developmental services offices in New England and New York, and the community rehabilitation organizations providing employment services in those states.

For more information on the Employment Consultant Training project, visit www.iod.unh.edu/projects/employment_consultant_training.

The Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire was established in 1987 to provide a coherent university-based focus for the improvement of knowledge, policies, and practices related to the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. Its mission is to strengthen communities to ensure full access, equal opportunities, and participation for all persons.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

 
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T-hall

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