



College Steps partners with colleges and parents to advance the social, academic, independent living, and career aspirations of students living with a social or learning challenges. College Steps individualizes supportive learning options for college students age 18-26 for whom navigating college is challenged by social, academic, or learning barriers.

The primary goal of College Steps is to prepare students for meaningful careers and increased autonomy after graduation. Therefore, College Steps places a strong emphasis on self-advocacy, employment training, and independent living skill development. Each of our programs is coordinated by a full-time, on-campus, Program Coordinator. This Master's Level special educator supervises and trains a network of Peer Mentors, who are highly trained and paid graduate and undergraduates interested in supporting the needs of College Steps scholars. College Steps students are supported via our signature framework of supports, including the following four core content areas outlined below:

- 1. Academic Enrichment:** No two learning styles are the same. Therefore, academic support is customized to the student's preferences and needs. The College Steps team first works closely with each student to understand and identify areas of academic challenge and then collaboratively creates an individualized academic support program perfectly calibrated to respond. This may include support with note taking, group participation support, study skills sessions, time management guidance, test taking strategies, and homework support. Via College Steps' model of peer-based support, much of the academic enrichment College Steps provides is offered through College Steps' award-winning peer mentor system. However, on each of the campuses with which we partner, College Steps also works in close collaboration with Student Support Services, Disability Services, Academic Advising and Campus Tutoring to ensure optimal supports are in place and seamless communication occurs.
- 2. Social Integration:** For many students, the prospect of cultivating new social connections in college can feel intimidating. Yet social and extracurricular involvement in college is shown to be a key element of student overall success and happiness. Therefore, College Steps offers students the support of our peer mentor network. Peer mentors are there to lend a hand and help College Steps students feel more comfortable as they navigate the college social network. Peer mentors are carefully selected, trained, and closely supervised by College Steps' professional staff. The peer mentor network is central to College Steps' natural support model and has proven to be a vital component in helping to guide College Steps students through the nuances of social life on campus including forging friendships and encouraging involvement in new social activities. Peer Mentors help link College Steps students to the social element of college life via introduction to new clubs or activities, social groups, extracurricular events, and weekend activities. In addition, College Steps also incorporates more structured social learning opportunities via an evidence-based curriculum focusing on the advancement of social cognition, social awareness, and social thinking.
- 3. Living and Independence:** From foundational skills like navigating public transportation and maintaining a healthy diet to more complex skills like managing personal finances, the development of independent living skills is an essential element of success during and after college. Therefore, College Steps works to incorporate the development of these skills into each student's ICP. The refinement of these skills has the secondary benefit of enhancing a student's self-advocacy skills, communication skills, and overall level of self-esteem. The advancement of this component of the ICP is embedded into many facets of the services College Steps provides. In addition to fostering the development of these skills via on and off campus activities, College Steps also offers weekly independent living courses at each of the colleges in which we partner. This coursework pulls upon local professionals to present on their areas of professional expertise for the benefit of College Steps scholars (e.g., nutritionists, finance experts, personal trainers, etc.).
- 4. Internship Experience:** Increasing the skills necessary to achieve gainful employment after graduation from college is a cornerstone of our work. College Steps professional skill development begins with core objectives such as learning resume development, professional etiquette, time management and communication styles within the workplace and progresses to more advanced skills such as job interviewing. During the first year in College Steps, all students have the option to take part in on-campus job shadowing or internship experiences. In the second year and beyond, the College Steps team works with the student to convert their foundational experiences into off campus internships and part-time employment.

For more information about College Steps, visit us at <http://www.collegesteps.org/>
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