

OPINIONS

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Urging Georgia State to expand Inclusive Education

The Perimeter campuses need a program like IDEAL

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Inclusive Education is post-secondary education for people who have intellectual disabilities. IE gives people with intellectual disabilities a shot at having a college experience. The Inclusive Education program at Georgia State officially began in January 2017 with two students, and it now has grown to 11 students.

The program is called Inclusive Digital Expression and Literacy (IDEAL) and focuses on exploring self-advocacy through various media. In this two-year program, IDEAL students enroll in two academic classes per semester as well as participate in an IDEAL seminar.

The IDEAL seminar teaches independent living, covering topics such as “Skills to Pay the Bills” and “Dating and Relationships.” Non-disabled Georgia State students serve IDEAL students as peer mentors, attending the academic classes with the IDEAL students and assisting them with their coursework.

Inclusive Education is an excellent opportunity for participating students to expand their knowledge base, participate in college activities and develop greater independence in order to become “self-determining.” IE has been around for a while and the number of universities that maintain IE programs continues to grow.

There were 25 IE programs in the U.S in 2004. By 2009, that number had more than quintupled to 249, and today there are

over 260 programs at public colleges and universities. And you might think that number sounds good, until you realize that there are over 4,000 public colleges and universities in the U.S.

Shouldn't more colleges and universities offer Inclusive Education? Right now there are 11 IDEAL students at Georgia State. In a metropolitan area with close to seven million people, shouldn't more students have access to a program like IDEAL?

Every Georgia State campus should launch a version of IDEAL.

Since Georgia State consolidated with Perimeter College, Georgia State now has five other campus locations in metro Atlanta: Clarkston, Dunwoody, Decatur, Newton and Alpharetta. With all of these campuses, Inclusive Education should be available to more people closer to home.

Having the IDEAL program at Georgia State in Downtown Atlanta is great, but the program needs to be expanded beyond just the Downtown campus. There should be an IDEAL program wherever the name “Georgia State University” appears. Navigating Downtown Atlanta is not easy, and it may not be the best circumstance for all students. Other students with disabilities could really benefit from a Georgia State experience closer to their homes rather than having to go downtown.

Students who have completed an Inclusive Education program have a much greater chance of gaining employment than their peers who do not participate in an IE program. Perhaps one opportunity for employment for some of the graduates from IE programs would be to help start satellite IDEAL programs at the Perimeter campuses. It would take a lot of planning, tenacity and team effort — skills the students have already been learning through their IE programs.