

Universal Pathways to Employment

Max - Industrial Maintenance

"I liked my internship this summer. It taught me a lot about construction and, especially, how to lay electrical wiring, which will be helpful in my future career."

- Max

Summer Academy Supported Successful Transition to College

Max attended the Universal Pathways to Employment Project (UPEP) Summer Academy, two weeks preceding his fall enrollment at Pellissippi State Community College. The academy offered a wide variety of information regarding UPEP and academic expectations. During the academy, students reviewed UPEP forms and contracts and their parents attended an orientation. Training was provided on accessible technology, Desire2Learn online learning system, and the webmail system. Summer academy participants also learned about study skills, self-advocacy, and worked-based learning.

Once Max registered at PSCC, he met with his academic coach to implement time management and study strategies, such as effectively breaking up his workload into manageable sections. He attended a variety of different UPEP workshops and met with his career coach to craft his resume, practice his interviewing skills, and build relationships with local companies through job fairs.

Building Leadership Skills through Internship and Mentoring

Using the networking skills he learned in UPEP, Max took the initiative to find a paid summer internship with Mofitt Construction. He spent the summer learning the ins and outs of the construction business. Particularly, Max focused on learning about electrical repair and how to run power lines. During his final year, Max job shadowed an electrical engineer at Radio Systems, which was Max's employer mentor. Max was extremely excited about this opportunity, as Radio Systems is one of the companies Max was interested in working for upon graduation.

After that Max agreed to be a peer mentor to help new UPEP students transition to college. He spoke to new students about his first-year experience in UPEP and at PSCC. Many of the new UPEP students said how much they appreciated having the chance to hear him speak as well as ask questions and allay some of their anxiety regarding starting college. Max has enjoyed being a UPEP peer mentor and feels it is very helpful to new students. According to Max, *"It helps them a lot, especially if they are shy."* He added, *"UPEP helps students in every way possible—organizing homework, notetaking, test taking strategies, etc. I wish that UPEP could be available to every student, even those who don't have a disability."*

A Career in Industrial Maintenance

When Max saw the Industrial Maintenance Degree at Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC), he knew it would be a perfect fit for him. Max's father likes to build and fix things, and his grandfather is a welder, so Max's interest in building and fixing things was ingrained in him at a young age.

The Industrial Maintenance concentration prepares students for careers in large manufacturing companies as multi-craft, industrial machinery maintenance, and repair technicians. Max was anxious to enter the workforce and planned to get a job as an industrial maintenance tech and work for a while before continuing his education.

ODEP Policies in Practice:

[Youth Development and Leadership](#)

Joel - Mechanical Engineering

"UPEP has helped me find the different supports I need. They can usually find out who I need to talk to so I get the answer I need."

- Joel

A career assessment points to a new pathway

One of the first services Joel took part in at Universal Pathways to Employment Project (UPEP) was a comprehensive career assessment. The career assessment UPEP uses examines the participant's interests, work values, and their abilities. Upon completion of his career assessment, Joel met with the UPEP business liaison who went over his results with him. Joel's assessment strongly indicated that his interests, abilities, and work values were in the field of engineering. The UPEP Business Liaison suggested that Joel do a job shadowing in the engineering field to see what it was like and to make sure that he choose the right career path for himself.

Joel learned more about engineering after UPEP staff arranged for him to spend a day at Radio Systems in Knoxville, TN. Joel met with both an electrical engineer and a mechanical engineer who discussed the various aspects of their jobs. One engineer noted that the field is "a difficult discipline that takes a lot of effort to be successful. It is important for students to have the opportunity to talk to people in the field to get a better of understanding of what will be expected from them both academically in college and once they are working, to ensure engineering is the right path for them." Joel found the opportunity to speak to the engineers very interesting and helpful. He loved learning about the different skill sets needed for each job and about how the two engineers worked together. Joel found himself particularly drawn to the job duties and tools of the mechanical engineer. Upon returning from his visit with Radio Systems, he immediately changed his major to mechanical engineering.

Leveraging interviewing skills to win a scholarship

During his second year, Joel worked closely with his career coach and academic coach. He attended UPEP workshops on various topics, including time management and organization trainings. Having never done a resume before joining UPEP, Joel found learning about transferable skills and how to represent them on his resume an extremely important skill. Also, Joel found having a profile in 30 Speech, where he has thirty seconds to tell someone about himself and his career goals, to be very helpful in getting him ready to answer questions during interviews. In fact, Joel used those skills to apply for and win a \$3,400 National Science Foundation Scholarship (NSF) at PSCC. The NSF application process required Joel to do an interview with five faculty members from PSCC. Joel was able to use what he learned from the UPEP workshops and his coaches to convince the committee that he should receive the scholarship.

Launching a Career in Mechanical Engineering

When asked what the most useful aspect of the UPEP Program has been for him so far, Joel says it's the staff willingness to help. Joel wanted to do at least one internship in the field while in school and then work as a mechanical engineer in some capacity. Joel planned to get his Associate of Applied Science Degree in Mechanical Engineering and

then go on to Austin State University to obtain his Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering. It is clear that finding the right career path for Joel has been instrumental in his success at school and that career assessment and work-based learning experiences early in his academic career helped to place him on a path to success.

ODEP Policies in Practice:

[Career Preparation and Work-based Learning Experiences](#)

Nathan - Video Technology

"Nathan has a very engaging personality that complements his self-directed manner in working steadily to complete projects. He could be qualified to work in any position at any organization that requires skill and attention to details in video production, digital editing, and/or animation."

- *Supervisor, Community Television*

Academic and career development builds confidence

Utilizing the academic services of the Universal Pathways to Employment Project (UPEP), Nathan was able to get crucial time management and study skills that helped him improve his grades. Nathan noted, "UPEP helped me get my GPA up a lot and gave me the encouragement to do better and improve myself." Nathan also attended UPEP workshops and meet with his career coach. Nathan commented that his career coach has been "outstanding" in helping him learn vital career skills, such as resume writing, interviewing, and self-advocacy. He began practicing his interview skills by mastering a 30 second speech in which he has to tell an employer about himself in a clear and concise manner. After that, he worked with his career coach to get ready to participate in the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP). The WRP is a federal program that connects college students and recent graduates with disabilities to federal and private sector employers who have summer or permanent jobs available. When asked how he felt about the WRP interview process, Nathan said, "It was nerve-wracking at first, but the more I talked, the easier it became, and the more confidence I had."

Skill building through an internship in community television

During Nathan's last semester at PSCC, he participated in a semester long internship in his field of video technology. He began an internship in Community Television (CTV) where he assisted CTV in creating animated public service announcements (PSAs). The PSA promoted the TV station's upcoming Knoxville Neighborhood Treasure Hunt & Online Auction.

Also, Nathan conducted some video interviews with professionals who work with people who are challenged with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). He planned to use the footage he obtains to produce some educational programs and PSAs to promote an upcoming MS walk. When asked what growth Nathan's supervisor at CTV has seen in him, the supervisor's response was glowing. *"In the relatively short period of time Nathan has been here, he appears to have become more comfortable interacting with the staff, including suggesting ideas and sharing available resources to get work done. He has demonstrated great interest in the assignments he has been given and a great sense of urgency to get the work done."* Nathan loved the internship and the ability to use all the skills he has learned in his classes at PSCC.

Launching a career in animation

Having the opportunity to do work-based learning at CTV and completing his course work, Nathan felt confident that working in animation is the right career path for him.

Upon graduating from PSCC, Nathan planned to enroll in a four-year program in animation at one of the state schools in Tennessee. He felt that getting a bachelor's degree in animation would provide him with even more opportunities to get a great job in the animation field. When asked if he would recommend the UPEP Program to other students with disabilities, Nathan said, "Absolutely, without a doubt! [...] *The UPEP staff have been remarkable. I honestly don't think I could have done it without them. They care, which is a first in my school career.*"

ODEP Policies in Practice:

[Career Preparation and Work-based Learning Experiences](#)

Carol – Early Childhood Education

"Carol is a hard worker, who takes critique with grace and uses it as a learning tool to improve her teaching. She truly strives to become the best teacher and employee she can become."

- *Supervisor, Goddard School*

Self-awareness and self-advocacy are key

Carol joined the Universal Pathways to Employment Project (UPEP) while enrolled at Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC). Carol's ultimate goal is to own her own daycare center.

Carol was asked what advice she would give to a student with a disability about to start college. She mentioned the three most important skills she felt she learned while participating in UPEP: don't procrastinate, plan your assignments, and learn to self-advocate. She also wants students with disabilities about to enter college to know that, *"You can do it but you have to want it. You have to be here [in college] for yourself and nobody else."* Very astute advice from a UPEP student who knew what she wanted and, with the help of UPEP, got where she wanted to be.

A four- year degree and teaching experience

While Carol did not originally intend to obtain a four year degree, the encouragement of UPEP staff and her academic success at PSCC inspired her and gave her the confidence to continue her education. Carol made the Dean's List each semester and graduated cum laude with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Early Childhood Education from PSCC in the summer of 2018. She also received institutional honors and departmental honors for her exceptional academic achievements.

After obtaining her associate's degree, Carol was able apply credits toward her future education at East Tennessee State University, participating in their Elementary Education 2+2 Cohort Program. The 2+2 programs streamline approach to complete course hours and hands on experience in her classroom placement.; Carol's interactions with the children and families, and especially her confidence, greatly improved.

Launching an early childhood career

Her supervisor hoped that Carol would one day work for them as a co-lead teacher when a vacancy becomes available. While s a student participating in UPEP, Carol obtained a job at the Goddard School, working with preschool students part-time. During her final semester, Carol interned at a local Head Start preschool, while continuing to work at the Goddard School. Her supervisor at the Goddard School felt that Carol's knowledge in early childhood grew greatly.

ODEP Policies in Practice:

[Career Development and Work-Based Learning Experiences](#)

John - Web Design

"If you don't understand something you need to self-advocate. Don't be afraid to ask for help. It's OK to be wrong. Just ask for help to learn how to get it right".

Learning to buckle down

John joined the Universal Pathways to Employment Project (UPEP) Program directly upon entering Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC).

When John first came to PSCC, he struggled, as many students do, with the new environment and academic expectations of a college. Procrastination and effective time management have been issues John has struggled with throughout his academic career. At the end of his first year of college, John was in jeopardy of losing his financial aid due to poor grades. John said that was his "wake-up call" that he needed to buckle down, take school more seriously, and work to improve his grades, no matter what it would take.

Success through summer enrichment and coaching

John successfully completed a course during the summer semester, which he paid for out of pocket, in order to raise his GPA enough that he could continue to receive his Tennessee (TN) Promise scholarship funds the following semester. With the help of his UPEP academic coach, John worked on improving his time management, organization, and study skills, decreasing his procrastination on course work. Also, John learned how to self-advocate and ask his professors for help when he needed it.

John's UPEP career coach taught John important soft-skills like teamwork, effective communication, networking, and problem-solving. John also learned how to write resumes and participate in job interviews. John made great strides, and, by the end of his third semester, he was on the PSCC Dean's List for academic excellence.

Leadership and work-based learning support future employment

John joined the Sigma Alpha Pi National Society of Leadership and Success. He was selected to become a UPEP peer mentor and helped new UPEP students adjust to their first year at PSCC. He also joined the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN), currently known as Disability:IN, which provided him with the opportunity to attend the annual USBLN Rising Leadership Academy Conference in Las Vegas. This leadership conference provides networking and career readiness opportunities for college students with disabilities. John notes it was a great opportunity to make important connections and to practice the communication, interviewing, and self-advocacy skills he had refined during his time in UPEP.

John began working part-time at the PSCC Disability Services Department. He worked with the PSCC disability technology specialist, learning about various assistive technologies and website accessibility issues. John exported data from Live Scribe Pens and zone editing information from Kurzweil. He also learned about universal design

principles and soon began working on creating an accessible website, something that he noted he enjoyed greatly. John's employer enjoyed working with him as well. She noted that John is "very attentive to detail." This allows him to notice things that others may not. John has honed additional skills to create fully accessible websites which he can use in future employment.

ODEP Policies in Practice:
[Youth Leadership and Development](#)

Sam - Photography Entrepreneur

"Sam took pictures for my older son's rehearsal dinner and they were beautiful! He also has taken my head shots for my business; he does the best job!"

"We had a great time at our photo shoot with Sam recently! He was great with my two children and captured some fun pictures of our family."

- *Sam's Photography Clients*

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Academic and career supports lead to success

Sam started his first semester in the UPEP Program by utilizing the academic services that were offered, such as accommodations; assistive technology training; and workshops on study-skills, time management, organization, and self-advocacy. He also attended one-on-one academic coaching sessions.

By Sam's second semester, he had begun to utilize all of the career-based services offered from UPEP. This included career exploration, one-on-one career coaching, soft-skills training, and work-based learning activities. He also participated in many UPEP workshops including: teamwork, goal setting, financial literacy, resume and cover letter writing, mock-interviewing, job search techniques, business and professional communication, business ethics, and social media in the workplace.

Sam was successful academically and made the school's Dean's List. Sam found that the UPEP program provided him with "a support system of knowing who to go to with questions," which was crucial to his success. . When asked what were the most useful features of the UPEP Program, Sam says it's the self-advocacy and confidence building aspects of the program that have help him be the most successful.

Mentoring and travel increase confidence

Sam became a UPEP Peer Mentor during his second year of the program and worked with new students to help them adjust college life. Sam also participated in the Tennessee Consortium for International Studies (TNCIS) Program and spent the summer after his second year studying photography in Scotland. The opportunity provided him with a beautiful portfolio of landscape photos and increased self-reliance. Sam shared "*I never thought I would have the confidence to do that before starting UPEP,*" s In fact, Sam was so confident after his trip abroad that he even agreed to present workshops on his TNCIS experience to other UPEP students during the following academic year.

Launching a photography business

While mentoring for UPEP and participating in the TNCIS Program were highly beneficial experiences, it was the work-based learning—in the form of a day-long job shadowing with a local portrait photography company and a semester-long internship with a local wedding photographer—that gave Sam the practical experience he needed to be successful in his field.

During his job shadowing and internship, Sam learned various aspects of photography, from the technical aspects of photography; to the practical side of scheduling events; to creating a personal portfolio of work; and how to effectively marketing a photography business. Taking the knowledge he learned from UPEP, his photography classes, and his work-based learning experiences, Sam successfully launched his own photography business during his second year of school. He created a website to showcase his work and began taking clientele, photographing client's weddings, engagements, and other events. Sam eventually created a full photo studio in his garage and continued to expand his portfolio and clientele.

ODEP Policies in Practice:

[Self-Employment & Entrepreneurship](#)