



MINNESOTA STATE
Board of Trustees

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

NAME: Academic and Student Affairs Committee

DATE: January 29, 2025

TITLE: Models of Support for Students with Diverse Abilities

Action

Review and Discussion

This item is required by policy

PRESENTERS

Annette Parker, President, South Central College

Kristin Underwood, Director of Customized Workforce Education, South Central College

Alyssa Klein, Youth Services Coordinator, MN DEED – Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)

Jon Morgan, Machine Tool Technology and UAA Faculty, South Central College

Kumara Jayasuriya, President, Southwest Minnesota State University

Derek Klinkner, Wheelchair Basketball coach, Southwest Minnesota State University

PURPOSE

The presentation will cover cognitive and physical disability programming at Minnesota State institutions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Southwest Minnesota State University - Wheelchair Basketball Team

The Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU) wheelchair basketball program has a storied history marked by competitive success and a commitment to inclusivity in adaptive sports.

Historical Highlights:

- **Founding and Early Success:** Established in 1969 by Coach Lew Shaver, the program quickly became a powerhouse in collegiate wheelchair basketball. Under Shaver's leadership, SMSU secured national championships in 1981, 1983, and 1986, and finished as national runners-up six times.

[SMSU](#)

- **Coaching Legacy:** Coach Shaver's tenure spanned 26 seasons from 1969 to 1995, with a return from 2009 to 2013, culminating in 376 career victories.

marshallindependent.com

- Notable Alumni: The program has produced exceptional talent, including Josh Turek, a 2002 alumnus and the most decorated player in SMSU wheelchair basketball history. Turek's illustrious career includes multiple Paralympic appearances, highlighted by a gold medal in 2016 and 2020.

[SMSU](#)

Recent Achievements:

- 2023-2024 Season:
 - *Player of the Year:* Junior Emmanuel Fuentes Cervantes was honored as the NWBA Intercollegiate Division Player of the Year, leading the team with averages of 22.5 points, 13.8 rebounds, and 9.0 assists per game.
 - *All-American Honors:* Freshman Fermin Wingerter earned a spot on the NWBA All-America Second Team, contributing significantly with an average of 15.3 points per game.
 - *Season Record:* The Mustangs concluded the season with a commendable 19-9 record, securing seventh place at the NWBA national tournament.
- 2022-2023 Season:
 - *All-Rookie Team Selections:* Three Mustangs—Joshua Brown, Emmanuel Fuentes Cervantes, and Mackenley Laguerre—were named to the NWBA All-Rookie Team, underscoring the program's focus on nurturing emerging talent.

Program Impact:

SMSU's wheelchair basketball program continues to be a beacon of excellence and inclusivity, providing student-athletes with opportunities to excel both on the court and academically. The program's rich history and recent accomplishments reflect its ongoing commitment to adaptive sports and athlete development.

For more detailed information on the program's history and achievements, you can visit the official SMSU Athletics website.

[SMSU Athletics](#)

South Central College - Uniquely Abled Academy

History

Dr. Parker, President at South Central College (SCC), heard about the Uniquely Abled Project at the National Coalition of Advanced Technology Centers (NCATC) Annual Conference in 2019. Mike Bastine (Regional Director, Advanced Manufacturing and Uniquely Abled Academy CNC Program, College of the Canyons, Santa Clarita, CA) and Greg Surtman (Workforce Education Strategist, Tooling U-SME, Cleveland, OH) presented on the Unique Solution to Tackle the Shortage of CNC Machinists.

Background

The Uniquely Abled Project oversees, supports, and consults with Uniquely Abled Academies (UAA) across the nation. According to the Uniquely Abled Project website, "Our focus is the creation of vocational opportunities for the uniquely abled by matching their unique abilities to jobs in demand. We are different from other jobs programs, because we have a business conversation with companies and provide an extraordinary solution to a need that businesses

have.” Originally, UAAs have been focused on people with autism and preparing them for careers in Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machining. The founder of the Uniquely Abled Project had personal experience with autism and was alerted to the fact that CNC machining may be a great fit for the natural abilities of someone with autism.

Currently there are 16 academies in 12 states with 8 academies coming soon. Most academies focus on CNC, but there have been pilots with robotics, general manufacturing, and soon there will be one at SCC for print press technicians. SCC currently has the only established UAA in MN though Hennepin Tech is gearing up to begin their first program in summer 2025.

Funding

In November of 2020, SCC was awarded \$98,210 from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), Disability Services Division. The contract was extended to June 2023, and the total amount was \$115,512. This money was utilized to start up the UAA-CNC at SCC in the summer of 2022. COVID and transportation issues were a big contributor as to why the program could not get off the ground until 2022.

The DHS funding was utilized in conjunction with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)-Vocation Rehabilitation Services (VRS) funding for the second cohort in 2023 and tuition was completely covered by DEED-VRS in 2024 for students who enrolled in their free services (all students enrolled).

Funding is being reviewed for 2025 as DEED-VRS may not be able to fund or fully fund this program. We are currently looking into additional funding sources as well as running only one UAA cohort which would be Print Press Operator.

Partnerships

The most established partnership for SCC’s UAA is with DEED-VRS. The biggest growth area for the program has been developing this partnership to ensure the success of students during and after the program. Currently DEED-VRS assists with recruiting applicants, interviewing and selecting candidates, offering wrap around services throughout the program, job readiness and placement after completion of the program, and funding tuition.

This past year, Taylor Corporation, a locally situated, but nationally facing organization, partnered with SCC to donate funding to develop curriculum for a UAA-Print Press Operator. Their company noticed a gap in their workforce and saw UAA as a great opportunity to build a pipeline of skilled, retainable employees. The program is set to run in summer 2025.

Holistic Support Model for Students

The Uniquely Abled Project clearly defines its expectations for UAAs, one of which is to provide in-class support and as wrap around support services focused on the outlining tenets below.

1. Match the Individual to the Job
2. Establish and Manage the Training Program
3. Market, Recruit, Select, and Onboard Trainees
4. Provide a Vocational Training Curriculum

5. Provide a Job Readiness Curriculum
6. Provide Resources for UAA Instructors
7. Provide Job Development
8. Support Employment
9. Provide External Support Systems
10. Provide Funding

To ensure job readiness and success in the classroom, SCC hired a Student Success Coach to assist with behavioral interventions in the classroom, help the faculty understand how to work with people with autism and other unique abilities, teach the job readiness curriculum, manage communication with students and parents in the program, and coordinate DEED-VRS wrap around services.

Curriculum/Course Outcomes

Originally, SCC's UAA program was a 12-week program with 10 weeks focused on the Right Skills Now curriculum from SCC's Machine Tool Technology program and 2 weeks focused on Success-abilities (i.e. job readiness and soft skills).

For the second and third cohorts, the College shifted to a 10-week program with 8 weeks focused on the CNC portion of the Right Skills Now curriculum and 2 weeks focused on Success-abilities.

In addition, the third cohort in 2024 integrated an industry-recognized credential—NIMS Machining Level 1: Measurement, Materials, & Safety—into the curriculum. The Cohort celebrated a 100% pass rate at the end of the program.