

# The story

## Headline:

Headlines are different from labels or titles. They should include a strong verb and be concisely worded.

Enabling, not disabling

KUTPE program sparks discussion about high school special education training, definition of success

## Current story draft:

This is where all of your writing should take place -- from the first sentences of your first draft until the last grammar correction of your final draft. Use tabs at the start of paragraphs.

During the summer and fall of senior year, many seniors hunker down in front of their computers for hours of laboriously filling out college applications. Similarly, Jacob Hammer, class of 2016, is pondering the benefits of college.

While at Free State Hammer participated in special education courses from work experience courses to Intrapersonal Skills classes. Although Hammer believes he benefitted from the job training the work experience courses gave him, he does not feel fully academically prepared for a college setting.

“To be honest, I've been kind of scared of college,” Hammer said. “In high school I didn't do some of the classes that would have prepared me for college. I did do a couple science classes though, and one class was more stressful than the other, so I guess you could say sometimes I think that I'm not prepared for college.”

The program Hammer is considering is the Kansas University Transition to Postsecondary Education program. KUTPE is for KU students with intellectual disabilities ages 18-25. The program is non-degree seeking, meaning the students seek a two-year certificate instead of a degree and don't have to submit ACT and SAT scores.

“I don't know if I have made up my mind to do the TPE program,” Hammer said. “I think it's my only option that'll let me get to college since I haven't done the ACT test. Because of my disability, I've thought about just working and not attending college, but I do want to learn more about the subjects I want to have as a career.”

The KUTPE program of study consists of four required classes and four electives, but the students can take more classes if they choose to. Six credit hours each semester is the minimum requirement.

According to KUTPE academic adviser Megan Gentry, going on to postsecondary education is a critical time in young adult's lives for gaining experiences academically, but, in her opinion, the more important gains will be on social and emotional levels.

“All of us who go to college learn far more than academics,” Gentry said. “A lot of the

early research does show that students who are participating in programs like [KUTPE] are coming out with more independent skills [and] increased self determination which is what we all kind of go to school to look for. I don't think [success] has to be measured by a degree at all ... some of them are interested in pursuing a degree, and they absolutely can go on and get that degree, but it's them realizing that they can do all of those things that matters."

Realization of potential is an area that Dr. Mary Morningstar, Associate Professor of Special Education at KU, believes high school special education programs can focus on in order to prepare students for life after graduation.

"Schools and families should hold the expectation that these young adults can go to college, but they have to really be prepared for that, and that's a part of high school," Morningstar said. "What we're finding is that the students who are not as prepared don't have the problem solving skills, and part of that is because they haven't been allowed to face problems. If you have students whose experiences have always been with a paraprofessional or with a staff, and they're never allowed to experience a fully inclusive social studies class, then they not only don't have the academic experiences they need, but they may never have taken a test before, or they may not have had experience in expressing their opinion about a topic. They also are likely to not have some of the critical thinking and problem solving and communication skills. There are so many of the soft skills that are needed to be successful in adulthood. It's not just how to be successful in college, it's how to be successful in a job in adulthood, and it starts in high school."

Inclusive environments for students with disabilities can also be described as the integration of special education students into general education classes.

"Rather than being pulled out to go to the special ed. room to get their academic instruction, the special education teacher and the paraprofessionals push in and provide the supports and services in those academic classes," Morningstar said.

"[Paraprofessionals] are not there to be the staff members who stand right beside the students and do all the instruction with the students, we'd rather see all the adults in the room working with all the students and facilitating learning and supports for all students which would include a student with a significant disability."

Free State's special education program is ability based, meaning the students are placed in classes that support their individual needs. This ability based program helps to meet the needs of students and celebrate their individualities, according to special education teacher Curtis Field.

"In special ed, every kid has an IEP which means Individualized Education Program, so each student that I work with is different," Field said.

Federal law mandates students are placed in their least restrictive environments which can result in the integration of special education students into general education classes, according to Field. Special education teacher Rachael Statler supports inclusive

environments for her students.

“I fully believe in integrating students with exceptionalities into core classes with support from special education teachers who co-teach with general education teachers,” Statler said. “Students benefit from seeing peers model appropriate behaviors in general education classes. If students pursue a higher education they will need to have classroom social skills mastered.”

Gentry agrees with Statler that peer influence can have positive outcomes for special education students as they are integrated into core classes.

“I think that we all learn by being around our peers,” Gentry said. “I know even just from KUTPE, those students have peer mentors, and the students that are in the KUTPE program very much want to hang out with those students and kind of mimic them socially, and it’s how they’re picking up and learning things just like other students on campus. I think that is a huge benefit for students with disabilities, and I think it’s great for people without disabilities to be involved with that population.”

To make the integration of students with disabilities and their peers a priority Free State has Interpersonal Skills classes where regular education students mentor special education students. Some of Hammer’s fondest high school memories are from his IPS class experience.

“I loved IPS because it was a great way to meet people and make new friends,” Hammer said.

Senior Kylie Stancliffe is actively involved with IPS. She has seen the benefits the class has on the students with disabilities as well as the positive impact the class has had on her life.

“I’ve learned how to communicate with people who aren’t like me, and that’s just so important for life in general,” Stancliffe said.

Stancliffe hopes to pursue some form of special education training in college. Similarly, Field’s interest in a special education career also started in high school.

“I just thought that it would be good to find a way to help students who were less fortunate than I was growing up and help students find a way to focus on their abilities rather than their disabilities,” Field said.

Similarly to Stancliffe, senior Caylee Irving recognizes the need for regular education students to not be isolated from their special education peers to learn to communicate.

“We get to come together, and it’s like a mentor-mentee class, but when we get into the class we’re just peers; we’re all the same,” Irving said.

The work experience courses and vocational training program focus on teaching students

what are known as “soft skills,” such as being on time, being hygienic, being attentive to an employer and performing tasks. The work experience coordinator, Patrick Dipman, also helps the students find volunteer work and paid jobs.

“One of my first students started with the work experience program, and he started volunteering somewhere with [Patrick] Dipman, and now he works full time for them,” Field said.

Although Morningstar understands the ideals of vocational training, she believes high schools should reorganize their approach to it.

“We used to believe that we had to get students ready to have a job, so we would work on pre-vocational skills in the high school,” Morningstar said. “I have no problem with working on school based learning around career development in high schools, but what we ended up doing is we had them do jobs that are demeaning, and that’s setting the expectation that those kids are not capable of anything [else].”

Gentry agrees students of all capacities should be able to pursue what they are interested in, and vocational training is beneficial if it supports those ambitions.

“I agree with students getting to pursue what they want to do, and sometimes their career choice does lead them down a path of vocational training, but I think that students with intellectual disabilities can pursue four year degrees or two year certificates and pursue a career in that,” Gentry said. “I think that it really just depends on the person’s interests and the training that they need.”

Although Gentry advocates for the pursuit of postsecondary education, she understands that college is not an option for every student. Similarly, Stancliffe sees college as an optional stepping stone rather than a definition of success.

“I don’t think that success is a college degree at all,” Stancliffe said. “Sometimes [college] is just not feasible even for kids that don’t have special needs, so I don’t really base that as success in general. For [students with disabilities], I think success is that they’re prepared to move on after high school, no matter what that is.”

Hammer’s ambitions have not stopped after graduation from high school. He hopes to pursue film, music, language, history and theater.

“I think anyone can attend college,” Hammer said. “It doesn’t matter what disability they have, and they should have the right to choose.”

Free State’s special education program is home to students who possess various backgrounds, characteristics and goals, and they all have teachers who are working hard to equip them for personal success in their futures.

“I love the daily challenges of working with unique individuals with unique needs,” Statler said. “It takes creativity to create meaningful opportunities for those who see

the world differently than many of us.”

## Breakout box information:

Have extra information that didn't fit in your story? Put those great quotes, step-by-step instructions or other goodies here.

Mary Morningstar:

“I am trying to improve the lives of young adults with intellectual disabilities by making positive and inclusive transitions from high school into adult life. So just like you, as you make your decisions about where you want to go and what you want to do in your future, I'm doing similar things both in my work as a teacher educator, so training teachers to prepare young adults for their futures as well as by creating programs such as the new one we have at KU.”

“First of all, my belief is that, no matter what the disability, we should be encouraging and preparing students to be successful adults, so students should have the experiences while in high school in order to understand careers and to be successful when they are transitioning into careers, not just having a job but actually being able to think about having careers that they enjoy and are interested in pursuing beyond an entry level position.”

“The other thing I believe is that just like for any other high school kid, going on to postsecondary education is a critical period of time, and it's not just because education is so important, but it's also because that's a period of time for all young people where you're learning to be more independent, and you're socially engaging in ways you didn't in high school. So, building those opportunities for ongoing postsecondary education is essential. Part of what that involves for me right now is building a program at KU.”

“It's going remarkable well; it's very interesting. Our program is a two year program. Students enroll as nondegree KU students, so they're not working towards a bachelor's degree like most of the students on campus, but they are working towards a certificate, but they are KU students, they're enrolled in KU classes, and they're getting the supports that they need to be successful in those classes. That's been a huge change at KU, and interestingly, KU infrastructure has been great to work with; they really understand the purpose of the program which is to design experiences that support the individualized learning goals of the young adults with intellectual disabilities on campus, so that's been really fascinating.”

“The young people who have been on campus, I will tell you that they come from different districts, so they're from the surrounding area, including Lawrence, and they come from a range of different experience in high school, and that's part of what I think I'd like to see: more high schools better preparing young adults to be successful and independent in postsecondary settings.”

“Students are enrolled in KU courses; they take two courses a semester. Right now, they're all taking university 101 which is like an orientation to KU course that a lot of