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Fall 2015

Job Corps Accommodation Support Newsletter

Assistive Technology at Blue Ridge Job Corps Center



BlueTube's Welcome Screen

Staff at Blue Ridge JCC is constantly trying to innovate the Job Corps experience. In the unique Job Corps learning environment, there is not always a set pace or chapter that all students are working on simultaneously. In a classroom of 30 students, all 30 could be working on separate chapters.

Staff wanted to help students learn easier, more quickly, and at a pace that is comfortable for them. They began by looking at how student's progress in their trades. Each chapter requires that the student pass a test and studying for these tests can be limited by the availability of classroom lectures. So, staff concentrated on making this experience more adaptable and accessible to the students.

The outcome was BlueTube (Blue Ridge + YouTube), a custom Web site created by Aaron Litz, the center's IT POC. Using BlueTube, students can go online and view the lectures that they need to continue their course work. BlueTube can be accessed by students on and off center. Creating content for BlueTube is a collaborative effort between the IT, CDSS, and Education departments. Each instructor's lectures are video recorded using Mimio technology, and then compiled into the proper format to be viewed over the intranet.

This process requires a lot of time and effort from all parties involved, but has already proven to have had a substantial impact on student productivity. This accessible content provides an even wider array of benefit in that students with disabilities or students who need some additional review can view the relevant content as many times as they need for mastery. Because of the multi-sensory format, it provides greater learning benefit to all, even students with English language learning needs.

"The idea of BlueTube from the planning stage all the way to implementation stage has truly been a remarkable accomplishment. The technical know-how to pull this off can only be done by hours of hard work, and the genuine desire to help students succeed. It allows instructors to pay greater attention the things in the classroom that may otherwise be overlooked if they are lecturing all day. Plus it permits the student to learn at their own pace. They can rewind and listen to any parts they want to hear again without the feeling of being a distraction if they would have asked in an open forum. It's another step forward in our mission to prepare students for the workplace".

-Mike Steele, Work Based Learning Coordinator, Blue Ridge Job Corps Center

Accommodations to Support Executive Function

Have you ever resisted a piece of chocolate cake in an effort to maintain healthy eating goals? Or perhaps, you decide to splurge on a piece of chocolate cake to celebrate a special occasion. Either way, the cognitive processes leading up to the decision involved executive function. As each of us goes about daily life, executive function helps us plan and respond to the tasks, opportunities, and challenges of life.

What is Executive Function?



Executive function is a new “hot” term used by teachers, counselors, and parents. It is an umbrella term for the management (i.e., regulation, control) of cognitive processes, including working memory, reasoning, task flexibility, planning, execution, and problem solving. It is analogous to the “command and control” center or “CEO” of all cognitive skills. Just as an air traffic control system at a busy airport safely manages the arrivals and departures of many airplanes on multiple runways, the brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses.

Executive Function Functional Limitations:

When a student demonstrates difficulty in executive function, functional limitations emerge such as impulsive behavior, poor time-management, short attention span, and difficulty completing a task. The breakdown in the command center of the brain leaves the student struggling to connect the dots in his or her own mind. Executive function limitations aren’t considered a disability on their own. They are weaknesses in a key set of mental skills and processes. They often appear in individuals with learning, attention, and mental health disabilities. Common disabilities affected by executive function deficits include ADHD, spectrum disorders, dyslexia, depression, PTSD, and intellectual disability.

Manifestations in the Job Corps Environment:

Limitations in executive function may manifest in a variety of ways in the Job Corps environment. Manifestations are diverse since each individual possesses unique strengths and weaknesses in executive function and because executive function covers a wide array of cognitive processes. For example, one student may demonstrate strength in analytical skills, yet struggle with regulating emotions. While another student may excel in social-emotional skills and find it difficult to focus and organize thoughts. Moreover, a student may forget a task as simple as picking up a pencil before beginning a TABE test. It is important for Disability Coordinators to understand the diverse manifestations of limitations in executive function and consider this diversity when developing individualized accommodation plans for students.

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Accommodations to Support Executive Function (cont'd)

Accommodations to Support Executive Function

While limitations in executive function can be both frustrating for the student and staff trying to support the student, recent research finds that the brain is malleable and proper supports can help to build as well as improve executive function skills. That's exciting news for many Disability Coordinators who yearn to implement effective supports for students demonstrating such limitations and frustrations.

The following list highlights functional limitations and related accommodations that may support students with limitations in executive function:

Functional Limitation

- Poor organization skills
- Short attention span
- Poor working memory
- Poor sequencing skills
- Inability to focus while reading
- Difficulty retaining new information
- Poor time-management skills
- Procrastination

Possible Accommodation

- Step-by-step instructions/outline of lesson
- Mindfulness and movement breaks
- Visual schedules and directions
- Provide to-do list of tasks
- Tracking tool to track place while reading
- Highlight key information or Reading Pen
- Provide reminders and timers
- Least preferred task list



Resources

- Information from JAN on supporting students with limitations in executive function <http://askjan.org/media/execfunc.html>
- Apps such as Evernote to support students with limitations in executive function <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/evernote/id281796108?mt=8>
- Reading Pens <http://askjan.org/cgi-win/OrgQuery.exe?Sol676>

Applicant File Review: Center Self-Assessment

Whether your center has undergone a ROCA in the last year or you have one pending, do you know what your current Applicant File Review (AFR) process score would be if you were to be assessed today? AFR is one of the most critically important processes that a center must manage. Let's talk briefly about what we already know.



1. Student enrollment hinges on the center's ability to bring in applicants in adequate enough volumes and efficiently enough to keep the center full.
2. Ensuring that the clinical team has the ability to review files and make appropriate decisions based upon PRH policy allowances is critical to the overall health and safety of the program, including the ability to maintain a safe and secure living and training environment for current students and staff. Equally important is the ability to appropriately evaluate for health care needs to determine whether or not the individual's health care needs exceed those of basic care as defined in Exhibit 6-4 of the PRH.

Given this, it is critically important that the AFR process is recognized as a legally driven one. Each individual's application should be processed in the same way and that unfair or discriminatory practices have no place in the decision making process.

Step 1: Prepare for the Assessment. Assemble the following documents, which form the basis for the review:

- The completed set of AFR Pre-ROCA questions. You can request the questions from your Regional Disability Coordinator or obtain them on the Job Corps Disability Web site
- Last ROCA assessment
- AFR SOP (sample on the Job Corps Disability Web site)
- AFR Tracking Log (sample on the Job Corps Disability Web site)

Step 2: Conduct the Assessment (remember, this is just for you so that you can improve your processes).

- Is the Health and Wellness Manager coordinating the AFR process? If not, who is? Contact your Regional Disability Coordinator to review your process.
- Does the AFR SOP reflect PRH policy requirements? If not, pull sample SOP from the Job Corps Disability Web site and edit.
 - Does the center's practice match the SOP?
 - Has staff been trained on the SOP and the AFR process?
- Who determines the composition of the Applicant File Review team? Does it match what the PRH requires in Section 1.4?
- Who is on this team and why is each person on the team? What do we do with an applicant file when we have significant behavioral concerns?



Applicant File Review: Center Self-Assessment (cont'd)

- Has our center submitted any files to the Regional Office with a recommendation of denial in the last 12 months?
- Have we returned files to the Admissions Counselor?
 - Do we know exactly why we returned a file each and every time?
 - List detailed explanations as to why files were returned to the Admissions Counselor and maintain supporting documentation whenever possible
 - If we request more medical documentation but we do not receive it, what do we do next?
- Are we processing files in the 30 day timeframe?
 - If not, why not? Is it a legitimate reason?
 - Are we requesting an extension of time from our DOL Regional Program Manager, when needed? Are we documenting the extension request?
- Are we tracking applicant files from the time they arrive on center until there is a final disposition including when files are submitted to the regional office with recommendations of denial?
 - Does our tracking log contain all the PRH required components?
 - Are we clearly documenting final dispositions for ALL applicant files and maintaining supporting documentation?



Step 3: Review the Results.

Review your Pre-ROCA questions responses and the answers to the questions above.

TIP: If you have the ones you answered for a previous ROCA, gather those with your other documents, but DON'T read them yet. Evaluate your process and then compare the current evaluation to your previous responses and your last ROCA report. Hopefully, you will be able to see the improvements you have made!

Step 4: Determine Next Steps.

Use your findings to correct or modify any parts of your process that are out of compliance with PRH policy. Your Regional Disability Coordinator is available to assist you in evaluating your results informally and offering you guidance for making improvements.



Disability Resources

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Reminder! October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

- The NDEAM theme is **“My Disability is One Part of Who I Am”**.
- The NDEAM Web page has information and resources: <http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/odep/ODEP20150853.htm>.
- Learn how your center can participate in NDEAM: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/employers.htm>
- The Job Corps Disability Web site *Promising Practices* page has ideas for events and examples of past Job Corps specific NDEAM activities: <https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/disability/Pages/PromisingPractices.aspx#disability>



- Let your Regional Disability Coordinator know if your center participates in any NDEAM activities. This information will be featured in the next newsletter.

| Upcoming Job Corps Disability Webinars | |
|---|---|
| Webinar | Dates/Times *All Times are Eastern |
| Reasonable Accommodation Process | 9/2/2015 at 11:00 am, 9/3/2015 at 4:00 pm |
| Universal Design for Learning, Career Technical | 9/23/2015 at 11:00 am, 9/24/2015 at 4:00 pm |
| Efficiency with the Applicant File Review Process | 10/7/2015 at 3:00 pm, 10/8/2015 at 11:00 am |
| Developing Partnerships to Serve Students with Disabilities | 10/14/2015 at 11:00 am, 10/15/2015 at 4:00 pm |

| Regional Disability Coordinators by Region | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Boston & Philadelphia | Atlanta | Dallas | Chicago & San Francisco |
| Kristen Philbrook 301-608-3290 ext. 602 kristen.philbrook@humanitas.com | Kara Brathwaite 301-608-3290 ext. 607 kara.brathwaite@humanitas.com | Laura Kuhn 602-403-9998 laura.kuhn@humanitas.com | Sharon Hong 301-608-3290, ext 603 sharon.hong@humanitas.com |

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