Life Scholars

Background & Overview

As a land grant university, MSU is committed to widening access to higher education and ensuring equality of opportunity for all; committed to inclusion, social justice, equity, and diversity by creating and sustaining an environment that welcomes, respects and nurtures all students, staff, faculty and community; and believes that a more diverse and inclusive institution will contribute to the highest level of excellence that ultimately benefits all members of the university community in becoming outstanding citizens and leaders in local and global communities. As part of that commitment, the university is launching the LIFE (Learning Is For Everyone) Scholars program in the fall of 2018.

Nationally, there is a growing interest in postsecondary education as a way to improve employment and other key life areas for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In Montana, many barriers keep individuals with disabilities from pursuing their employment and independent living goals, such as the lack of IDEA funding beyond age 18, long waiting lists for adult services, low expectations, and a lack of postsecondary options in which students can learn and gain skills. Positive student outcomes have been reported from over 268 inclusive higher education programs at universities and colleges across the US. Best practices have been developed and standards and quality benchmarks have been identified. The MSU LIFE Scholars program will offer an inclusive college experience to eligible students in a geographic region with few opportunities.

Campus Engagement

LIFE Scholars are encouraged to get involved in all aspects of the campus community. Students can choose to attend sporting events, join clubs, participate in service outings, eat in the dining halls, hang out in the SUB with their peers and more! Campus Engagement is required for earning a LIFE Scholars Certificate of Completion. Requirements pending.

Peer Partners for Social Support

LIFE Scholars are matched with MSU Peer Partners who facilitate engagement in social activities and events. Partners spend a minimum of two hours/week with LIFE Scholars where they may have a weekly coffee date, make plans to attend campus events or workout together at the gym. Peer Partners encourage LIFE Scholars by communicating specific ways they can access activities. For example, students may be instructed to text Joe if they want to go to the basketball game or meet at the SUB at 6:00 pm to go to the movies. Peer Partners also plan monthly events hosted by the LIFE Scholars program. Events may include a pizza party, trip to a ropes course, bowling night, etc. Training is provided to all Peer Partners to ensure a successful and fun experience for all.

Circle of Support

LIFE Scholars are invited to create a Circle of Support, which involves bringing together people they value and trust who can support them in achieving their goals or brainstorming solutions as problems arise. LIFE Scholars may invite family members, Peer Partners, friends or teachers to be part of their circle. Scholars are responsible for inviting participants to the meetings, setting the agenda and providing snacks. How often a circle meets is determined by the needs of the student. Participation in a Circle of Support provides repeated opportunities for students to advocate for themselves, re-examine their goals and establish a network of support which can be accessed after graduation.

Career Development

LIFE Scholars participate in campus internships to prepare them for competitive employment upon graduation. The majority of students engage in meaningful work experiences through the nationally recognized Project SEARCH (https://www.projectsearch.us) internship model.

Project SEARCH is a unique, ten-month, internship program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Interns are immersed in a workplace on campus or in the community to explore careers through hands-on learning. They participate in daily classroom instruction and rotate through three, 10-week internships to learn relevant, marketable skills. Interns complete complex and systematic tasks, gain confidence and independence and develop professional relationships. Student interns work in MSU offices, labs, auxiliary and facility services with on-site support from a college or business mentor and a LIFE Scholars job coach. Interns graduate with a career portfolio, which contains a resume, letters of recommendation and a competency profile. The goal of the Project SEARCH model is for graduates to obtain meaningful, competitive employment for a minimum of 16 hrs./week for minimum wage or more.

LIFE Scholars are required to complete a capstone project presentation during their final semester detailing their experience as a LIFE Scholar. The presentation must include specific skills gained in the areas of academics, campus engagement and career exploration. Completion of 3 internship rotations and the capstone project presentation is the Career Development requirement for earning a LIFE Scholars Certificate of Completion. Alternative internship experiences will be provided to accommodate students who are already employed in the community or who have participated in Project SEARCH prior to their acceptance into MSU as a LIFE Scholar.
Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

Times was used instead of Adobe Garamond Pro.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.