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A Chance at College

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A Chance at College

An innovative program at USF St. Petersburg is giving young adults with intellectual disabilities a rare opportunity to immerse themselves into college life and receive educational and job training opportunities.

The pilot program, called Project STING RAY, offers programming, classes and mentoring for students with intellectual disabilities. The six students in the program have significantly lower IQs than average students and have more limited functional and social skills. They audit university classes, receive job training, help design their individual educational plans and immerse themselves in experiences out of reach to most young adults with intellectual disabilities.

Part of the K-16 Educational Initiatives in the College of Education at USFSP, STING RAY exemplifies what a newly funded consortium led by USFSP is striving to achieve statewide.

With a five-year, \$2.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the K-16 Educational Initiatives is leading the Florida Consortium on Postsecondary Education and Intellectual Disabilities to build resources for programs like Project STING RAY. The consortium's programs address the social, employment and academic needs of students with intellectual disabilities transitioning out of high school with a special diploma.

Academic mentor and USFSP psychology major Rachel Baumsteiger helps her mentee and classmate with studying and setting academic goals.

"It's a win-win for me," Baumsteiger says. "When I go over the class materi-

als with her, it definitely forces me to learn it better."

The consortium provides technical assistance to nine partnering institutions in Florida to align programs with the criteria in the national Department of Education's initiative on Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities into Higher Education.

"This is giving options and access to postsecondary education that they wouldn't otherwise have," says Michael Shaffer, K-16 Initiatives project coordinator.

Rob Baynard '11 | USF St. Petersburg

Blue Skies for Business

USF Polytechnic opened its Blue Sky Wauchula facility in February. The technology business incubation program, established last year, also has locations in Lakeland, Winter Haven and Sebring. Blue Sky focuses on attracting and nurturing entrepreneurial businesses in order to create an environment where USFP faculty, staff and students can engage in experiential learning by working with client firms to grow their companies and bring innovative technologies to market.

The Blue Sky facilities are the first public business technology incubators in Polk County.

