



Blackburn Announces Four-year Program To Increase Opportunities For Students With Diverse Abilities

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Newly Expanded "Blackburn and Beyond" will Launch in Fall 2021

CARLINVILLE — As a part of an ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, Blackburn College is announcing an expansion of its “Blackburn and Beyond” program to provide inclusive post-secondary opportunities for young adults with diverse learning abilities. The program was recently approved by the U.S. Department of Education as a comprehensive transition postsecondary program (CTP) and will be one of only two four-year certificate and degree programs of its kind in the state of Illinois. The newly imagined program is specifically designed for students with diverse abilities to support them in areas of continuing academic, career, and/or independent living instruction and will be enhanced with mentors, tutors, and participation in Blackburn’s nationally-recognized work program. The approval from the Department of Education also enables Blackburn and Beyond students to be eligible for federal financial assistance. Funding from the state of Illinois will also be available.

Dr. Mark Biermann, president of Blackburn, said of the announcement, “Blackburn College is deeply committed to supporting and enhancing a diverse and inclusive campus community. Blackburn and Beyond is a wonderful and innovative approach to welcoming young adults with diverse learning abilities to Blackburn College, and is a testament to our goal to support diversity and inclusivity in its many forms.”

Blackburn and Beyond officially began two years ago as a collaboration between the Carlinville Community Unit School District (CUSD #1) and the College to enhance the academic, social, and work experiences for 18-22 year old students with their same-age peers. The College founded the program with the idea that individuals never stop learning and growing and-with the right goals and proper assistance-everyone has the ability to achieve more.

Dr. Cindy Rice, Blackburn’s education department chair and coordinator of the Blackburn and Beyond program said, “Over 300,000 students in the state of Illinois have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and only 16% of these students go on to earn a Bachelor’s degree. With Blackburn and Beyond, we are expanding our commitment to providing access and equity to underserved communities and welcoming those who wish to continue their education. This is who we are.”

Blackburn and Beyond students will participate in a combination of academic, social, and work-based training as part of the program. Based on individualized goals, each student will have access to any course offered by the College consistent with curricular expectations and will have access to the needed support to be set up for success. Career development is also an integral part of any CTP and Blackburn offers a unique

opportunity as the only student-led work program in the nation. Blackburn and Beyond students will be able to participate within any of the College's 12 work departments or with community sponsors.

Rice added that additional features of the program are being developed which will help students navigate independent living and practice social and practical living skills. She explained, "We are planning to build an efficiency apartment lab which will feature a kitchen/laundry area and a dorm-like living space. Students will have hands-on experience to utilize this space. They also will have ongoing interactions with the college's Work Program, Career Center, and Student Life which will help them learn vital skills to obtain paid employment in the private or public sector."

For additional information regarding the Blackburn and Beyond program, please visit <https://blackburn.edu/beyond> or contact Dr. Cindy Rice at Cindy.Rice@Blackburn.edu.

About Blackburn College

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. One of only nine federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn has the only program in the nation fully managed by students. Balancing academic rigor and experiential learning, each student at Blackburn gains tangible experience and develops critical skills by contributing to their community, all while building a resume and earning their degree. In their 2020 Best Colleges Rankings, U.S. News & World Report recognized Blackburn College as one of the top 10 best Liberal Arts Colleges in the Nation for Social Mobility. The Center for Education & the Workforce at Georgetown University ranked Blackburn as a top performer for Earnings-Price Return - 209% (#1 in IL, #10 in the U.S.) and Net Price (#1 in IL; #11 in the U.S.). The Washington Monthly twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.