

STUDENT PROFILES

An Animal Lover Prepares for a Career in Animal Health

by Ross Hooley

Pete is an outgoing, curious, and compassionate young man with a sense of humor and a love of animals that goes way beyond taking care of the family pets. For his final project during his senior year of high school, Pete brought in a bearded dragon lizard to show his classmates. Pete has clear preferences, so when his school offered him the option to attend its 18–22 year old transition program based at the high school, he chose instead to go to college.

GOALS

1. To attend college.
2. To pursue a career working with animals.
3. To develop vocational skills.

PLAN

Although there was an inclusive dual enrollment college program close to Pete's home, he decided to attend Bristol Community College, where the course options were more closely aligned with his vocational goals. Despite Pete not passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System standardized test, he enrolled through the college admissions office as an auditing student, and received supports on campus from a mentor provided by his school district.

When it came time for Pete to choose his first class, it was an easy decision. In consultation with his family and team, he chose Introduction to Animal Care and Management. The hybrid course involved a combination of classroom lecture, field trips, and work online. These instructional methods matched nicely with Pete's learning style.

In the following semesters, Pete and his mentor would consult with the department's assistant professor on class selection. He had perfect attendance, and was always ready in the morning when his mentor picked him up to drive him to college.

SUPPORT

For most students, the period of adjustment from leaving the familiarity of high school and going off to college can be overwhelming and lonely. At first, Pete was nervous,

The Think College Transition (TCT) project is an inclusive dual-enrollment transition model designed to improve post-school outcomes for students aged 18 to 21 years who have intellectual disability and autism. The key feature of this model is assisting students to be involved with college classes, work experiences, and social networking opportunities on a college campus with their same-age peers, rather than having typical transition services in a high school.

and a little reluctant about being on campus. Through the encouragement and support of his family and mentor, he quickly settled into a routine, and on his first day had no trouble sitting through a 3-hour lecture. This was a contrast to Pete's final year in high school, when he was not as motivated and was allowed to wander the school corridors because he had a difficult time staying focused in class.

Pete embraced all aspects of the animal care course, including going on a variety of field trips. He was an active participant in class, and would ask questions if he needed clarification. He participated in group work with other students, including collaborating on designing PowerPoint presentations. Whenever he was on campus attending a lecture, he wore his scrubs (as was required for all vet students and staff). This made it easy for him to identify other members of the department and to know who to ask for information, initiate a conversation with, or sit next to in the cafeteria.

His mentor supported Pete to become familiar with the campus, attended classes to help with note-taking and class assignments, and provided job support. In consultation with the class instructor, accommodations and curriculum modifications were put in place as needed.



LEARN

In 3 semesters, Pete successfully audited 4 classes: Introduction to Animal Care and Management, Applied Animal Behavior, Medical Terminology, and Animal Science Humane Euthanasia. These courses were recommended to give Pete a range of hands-on experiences and to develop a solid foundation in the veterinarian field. Pete's learning however has gone way beyond the classroom. Being on campus has presented the ideal opportunity for him to learn how to coordinate his schedule, navigate independently, and develop money management and budgeting skills.

Pete has been an active member of the campus community. He's enjoyed the camaraderie of being with other students, not just from his class but with the general student body. Pete accessed the college library to review course videos and do homework assignments. He exercised at the campus gym and enjoyed going to the student cafeteria, where he would often eat lunch with a friend from high school or with other college students he had met. This fall, Pete may look into joining the Animal Science Club.

WORK

As part of his studies, Pete was required to complete several job shadowing experiences and keep a log documenting his care of an animal. He went on a tour of an animal medical center in Boston and visited wildlife sanctuaries and a veterinary clinic on Cape Cod. Pete also found a part-time job walking dogs.

Outside of college, Pete has several volunteer jobs, including working at the New Bedford Whaling Museum transcribing historical manuscripts into a Word document. During one summer, he was able to combine his data entry skills with his love of animals by volunteering for the Frog Watch USA Project where he entered research information into a database.

These job experiences, combined with what Pete has learned in class, have helped him to develop a good foundation of skills for future paid employment. For example, on a tour of a horse farm, Pete learned how to muck out stalls, use a hoof pick to clean a horse's hoof, and lead a horse correctly. Through his volunteer work, Pete has developed strong data entry skills and learned how to break a task down into segments.

OUTCOMES

Pete has thrived on campus, and is planning on returning to college in the fall to continue his studies. He has developed a sense of belonging, and had opportunities for growth and learning among his same-age peers because of the strategic decisions made by Pete, his family, and his team. This would not have occurred if he had accepted his high school's initial offer to follow the traditional route of staying at the school.

Attending college has laid the foundation for great things to come. Through being with his peers and engaging in the college community, Pete has developed the confidence to dream of a future, as his friends are doing.

PETE'S COURSE OF STUDY

| | PLAN | LEARN | WORK | SUPPORT |
|----------|---|--|---|---|
| Spring 1 | Person-centered planning with team. | Introduction to Animal Care and Management | Set up dog-walking business Job tours of animal facilities | Received 1:1 support for class, homework, and job activities. |
| Fall 2 | Discussed course selection with college faculty and team. | Applied Animal Behavior | Acquired volunteer job at museum to develop data entry skills Dog-walking business Job tours of animal facilities | Continued to receive 1:1 support in class and homework, and required less support to navigate campus. |
| Spring 2 | Discussed course selection with college faculty and team. Periodic review of goals with transition team. | Medical Terms for Animal Science 1 Humane Euthanasia | Volunteer job at museum Dog walking Internship with Frog Watch USA project at zoo | Continued to receive 1:1 support in class. Decreasing support at job activities. |
| Fall 3 | Recommendations on course selection made by faculty. | Medical Terms for Animal Science 2 Veterinary Office Procedures | Volunteer job at museum Dog walking Internship at zoo | Continued to receive 1:1 support in class. Decreasing support at job activities and on campus |