**SOONER WORKS**

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

**The University of Oklahoma’s Sooner Works program is a four-year, undergraduate, non-degree initiative designed for young adults aged 18-26 with documented intellectual disabilities.** The program aims to enhance students' academics, independent living skills, career development, and social skills while fully integrating them into the University of Oklahoma community.

Students in Sooner Works participate in university coursework, career internships, and activities that build 21st-century skills and social responsibilities. Upon completing the program, they earn the***Integrated Community Studies Certificate****,* which signifies their readiness for integrated employment and their ability to independently navigate adult roles and responsibilities.

Our program supports the development of individualized career pathways, leading to integrated employment based on students’ unique skills, preferences, and experiences. This structured approach ensures that graduates leave with a robust skill set tailored to their personal and professional aspirations, promoting fulfilling, self-determined lives.

## **PERSON-CENTERED ADVISING**

Students’ college success in the Sooner Works program at OU is monitored through a process called Person-Centered Advising. During their first semester as non-degree seeking undergraduates, students in the Sooner Works program engage in a person-centered advisement meeting with the Sooner Works team. The purpose of this meeting is to identify students’ strengths, preferences, and interests in a variety of environments (e.g., academic, social, living, and career), as well as the types of supports needed by each student. With guidance from Sooner Works, students create Action Plans, which help determine coursework, career goals, and employment experiences, as well as living and social experiences for each student. Action Plans are reviewed and updated each semester as the student gains more awareness of his/her own preferences and interests during their college experience. Students meet individually with an assigned advisor every week to monitor progress toward goals in the four program pillars areas: academic enrichment, career development, independent living, and campus and community engagement. Family input is collected in a feedback form prior to the start of the fall semester and discussed with the student at their PCA meeting.

## **PROGRAM PILLARS**

**ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT**Students receive comprehensive academic support through both Sooner Works and the University of Oklahoma. The Sooner Works team provides training and support to existing student services, assists faculty and instructors in making necessary adaptations and modifications to course materials, and trains peer partners to offer ongoing support in academic, social, and independent living areas.

As OU non-degree-seeking undergraduates, students audit six to nine credit hours of inclusive courses each semester alongside degree-seeking OU peers. Additionally, students enroll in one to two credit hours per semester of Sooner Works-specific curriculum. They are expected to learn the essential course material and receive necessary accommodations, adaptations, and modifications, with guidance and support from the Sooner Works team. With guidance from their academic advisors, each student creates an individual plan of study based on their strengths, interests, and career goals that determines course selection. Students are required to attend academic support sessions facilitated by Sooner Works staff, which are offered every weekday. Furthermore, students have access to all existing academic support at the university, including tutoring, professor's office hours, and the university writing center.

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT**The Sooner Works program of study includes both career development classes and employment internships. During the first three years of the program, internships focus on job exploration and soft skill development. By the fourth year, the internship focuses on work-based learning in students’ interest areas in a competitive employment environment. Competitive, integrated employment upon completion of the program is the primary goal.

The internships required each semester assist students in refining their career interests and serve as a mechanism for matching students with meaningful paid employment both on- and off- campus during their program. Specific employment internships are customized for each student based upon his/her person-centered advisement plan. Furthermore, if students are interested, they are supported to apply for paid student hourly positions available to all OU students that are in integrated settings, and especially those which align with their career interests.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING**Students live in OU’s residence halls alongside traditional degree-seeking students. First-year Sooner Works participants live in the OU residential colleges (Dunham and Headington) floors with traditional students in three-bedroom suites with private rooms and a shared bathroom with peers from the Sooner Works program. Sooner Works staff provide weekly dorm checks to ensure skill development in independent living, such as personal hygiene, dorm maintenance, conflict management. After the first year, with program approval, students may choose any available on- or off-campus housing, and decide roommates or enter the “potluck” pool of roommates where the university selects roommates for students. Students’ dorm rooms are integrated among the residence halls and not segregated to halls or floors specifically for Sooner Works participants. This is a completely 100% inclusive setting.

In addition to experiential learning through on-campus living, students receive direct instruction in independent living via Sooner Works coursework and a weekly skills lab. Students receive support in skill development in areas determined by their person-centered advisement plan as well as generalized competencies, such as using public transportation, grocery shopping and cooking, scheduling and attending medical appointments.

 **CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**Through the person-centered advisement process, students identify their hobbies and interests, which are starting points for connecting students with OU student clubs and organizations to engage in social activities with peers without intellectual disabilities in natural, integrated settings. In addition to tailored support and engagement plans provided by Sooner Works staff, students also receive support from Peer Partners: a registered OU student organization led by traditional OU students who participate in student life experiences with students in the Sooner Works program.

Peer Partners support Sooner Works participants to access OU campus, engage in any of the 600+ OU student clubs and organizations, access student activities (e.g., attending plays and musical performances, attending athletic events, attending student union events, etc.) and integrate with other OU students on campus. Peer Partners are recruited and are provided training on high quality inclusive practices.

## **INTEGRATED COMMUNITY STUDIES CERTIFICATE**

Students in the Sooner Works program who meet the obtain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) in the Program of Study will graduate from the University of Oklahoma with a certificate in Integrated Community Studies, recognized by both the University of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher education. The goal of the Integrated Community Studies Certificate is to prepare young adults with intellectual disabilities for successful adult outcomes, including obtaining integrated employment, developing essential skills for independent living, enhancing academic abilities, and becoming contributing members of their community. Read more about the value of this credential in this handout from Think College: [Articulating the Value of a Credential from a Postsecondary Education Program for Students with Intellectual Disability.](https://thinkcollege.net/sites/default/files/files/resources/Value_of_Credential_IB61_2024F.pdf)

 **4-YEAR PROGRAM OF STUDY**

Sooner Works is recognized by the United States Department of Education as a [Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP),](https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/eligibility/requirements/intellectual-disabilities) which designates enrolled participants as full-time OU students and allows access to certain parts of federal financial aid. Full-time student status requires a certain number of contact hours—typically awarded via credit hours and/or clock hours in institutions of higher education. Certified Transition Programs for students with intellectual disabilities may count a broad range of activities for contact hours for credit toward program completion. In Sooner Works, audited inclusive courses, specialized Sooner Works courses, advisement meetings, campus and community participation, and work-based learning all count toward the required number of contact hours.

A first-year student in the Sooner Works program is expected to participate in approximately 40 hours of program activities throughout the week. Traditional degree programs requires 120 college credits (15 credit hours a semester), which translates to an average of 1,800 contact hours. Sooner Works participants graduate from OU having with approximately 3,414 contact hours across four years, as demonstrated in the table below:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Academic Enrichment  | Career Development  | Independent Living  | Campus and Community Engagement  |
| Inclusive OU coursework  | 720  | Employment Internships  | 1,520  | Direct Instruction and Skills Lab  | 256  | Social Activities   | 640  |
| Specialized Sooner Works coursework  | 150  |   |   | Meetings with Advisor  | 128  |   |   |
| Total  | 870  | Total  | 1,520  | Total  | 384  | Total  | 640  |
|  Total Contact Hours across 4-Year Program of Study = 3,414  |

**SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP)**

Federal regulations require that students make Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree at the University of Oklahoma to be eligible for financial aid, which is evaluated at the end of each semester. As full-time non-degree undergraduates, Sooner Works participants must also make Satisfactory Academic Progress. SAP for Sooner Works participants is determined using both OU policy and the person-centered advisement planning approach. Goals will be determined and agreed upon for each student through collaboration with the student and the Sooner Works team. A rubric is used to identify and quantify the student’s goals and progress across the four program focus areas: academic enrichment, career development, independent living, and campus and community engagement. Students who struggle to meet documented goals and maintain satisfactory academic progress will be placed on performance improvement plans; students may be placed on academic probation if progress is not made within the agreed-upon timeframe. Should a student’s academic progress remain below expected progress goals, students will not be allowed to return to the program the following semester. Students receive a report of their SAP standing at the end of every semester.