

Opportunities to shine

For five years now, [UD's Career and Life Studies Certificate \(CLSC\) program](#) has been crunching the numbers that show the [labor force participation rate](#) for people with disabilities—at 20 percent—is more than three times lower than the national average.

CLSC has been crunching them, stomping them, shredding them. In the first four years of CLSC, a two-year postsecondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities, 75 percent of its students acquired jobs within three months of graduating. This year, every student graduated with a job.

What's more, six months after landing them, they were still holding them.

CLSC administrators and instructors say exploring and identifying the students' interests, understanding their strengths and vulnerabilities and providing real-world learning experiences such as internships and job shadowing are keying the workplace successes. CLSC job coaches also continue dialogues with employers after the CLSC graduates find their jobs, discussing the former students' progress and, should they arise, concerns.

"Having so many CLSC students find jobs shows the effectiveness of a college experience, an option previously unavailable to Delaware students with intellectual disabilities," says [CLSC instructor Debbie Bain](#).

That experience paid off for 2016 CLSC graduates Brandon Brown and Alex Slusser. CLSC helped turn Brown's preference for hands-on experiences into a job caring for plants and stocking the market at [Willey Farms](#). The job's "a great opportunity to use all of my abilities," he says. Slusser says he overcame his shyness during his enrollment in the CLSC program, which, in turn, helped him get a customer service position at Wilmington's [Penn Cinema](#). "The job is fun, but it also helped me mature," he says.

Penn Cinema assistant manager Ed Trout says employing CLSC grads benefits the community. "Having Alex on board has shown our staff, customers and other employers how to treat people with disabilities—like anyone else," says Trout. "Give them opportunities and they'll shine."



In his element: Brandon Brown's preference for hands-on experiences gets satisfied in a big way in the weeks before Christmas at Willey's Farms.