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 materia-