

## **BELLEVUE COMMUNITY COLLEGE NEWS**

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### **Nation's 1st degree program for students with developmental disabilities to award college diplomas to pioneering initial graduates**

*Four to receive Associate of Occupational and Life Skills degrees June 13*

BELLEVUE, WASH. - Four students with developmental disabilities will make history June 13 when they step to the Bellevue Community College (BCC) commencement stage to receive Associate of Occupational and Life Skills (AOLS) degrees.

The diplomas will be the first to be awarded in the nation's first and only college degree program for students with learning, cognitive and intellectual challenges.

The four students -- Leah Brand, 22, of Woodinville, Wash.; Bergen Delisi, 27, of Bellevue, Wash.; Anna Harnois, 26, of Edmonds, Wash.; and Trent Marshall, 29, of Seattle -- all have successfully completed the 90-credit curriculum of college-level, AOLS courses.

While many post-high school "transition" programs exist to provide training in independent living skills for students with developmental challenges, BCC's AOLS program is the first to combine higher education with development of comprehensive social, life and workforce competencies.

The goal of the AOLS program is to build critical-thinking abilities, community awareness, job readiness, interpersonal communications techniques and self-sufficiency skills, to prepare its students for fulfilling lives with meaningful participation in society.

The 47-course AOLS curriculum engages students in three areas of study: 1) academic subjects, including reading and writing, environmental awareness, art, media communications and social studies; 2) social and life skills, including strategies for personal finance, interpersonal communication skills, self-advocacy, disability awareness, nutrition, physical education and continued learning; and 3) workforce skills including literacy in information technology, problem-solving, interpersonal interaction in the workplace, career exploration, preparation of job applications, resumes and portfolios, reinforced with practical field experience.

BCC's AOLS degree program was created in 2006 to serve a population with untapped abilities.

"Providing education for these students is one of the final frontiers in higher education. There are scant opportunities today for people with intellectual disabilities to pursue college-level study," said BCC President Jean Floten. "However, we know that students with such challenges can and do learn at an advanced level, and deserve that opportunity. Now, our first AOLS graduates are proving that to the world. As educators committed to providing an open door to education for all., we are exceptionally proud of these four pioneers," Floten added. Students in the AOLS program are typically challenged with conditions such as autism and obsessive-compulsive disorder, among others.

New students to the program are expected to take four years to complete the curriculum. The initial graduates are receiving degrees two years after the program's founding because of credit granted for previous study in the AOLS' precursor, BCC's Venture program.

Potential students and their families wishing more information about the AOLS degree program may visit its website at <http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/venture/default.htm> or contact Mary Allason at [mallason@bcc.ctc.edu](mailto:mallason@bcc.ctc.edu) or 425-564-2844.

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