Annual Report
FY 2011
October 1, 2010-September 30, 2011

Special points of interest:

- Alabama first in nation to develop state Transition Standards
- Early Learning Progress Profile now has online system
- Alabama’s Youth & Young Adults in Transition (YAiT) project produces “My Plan” for Training IN Transition series
- Prominent national leaders and local youth leaders address Alabama Transition Conference
- 3 new administrative staff members join ATLI in FY2011
Our Vision

The vision of the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute is a society in which all individuals are valued as contributing members, each dignified by his or her strengths and abilities.

Our Mission

Our mission is to help youth with disabilities achieve successful integration into community life by providing continuous improvement resources to the systems, practitioners, and citizens who assist these young people with their transition to adulthood.
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“...And then I went to YAiT and I learned it was okay to come out of your shell and you can share your thoughts and you don’t have to be shy. “

A Parent’s Perspective

I’ve been very impressed with everything we’ve been a part of, and I just wish we had started sooner. With my students—I’m an orientation specialist, and work with ages 3 to 21—I’m going to focus on transition. I think we should start with transition at age three! With Laura’s dialysis and transplant, it was all about being compliant, which is very important for her health. But we needed to find a balance between being compliant and being independent.

Getting to know that other parents go through that “fear of letting go” has helped. YAiT has given us some tools, and it’s been great to have someone take the time to really explain about her IEP, what services there are and what that means, and what she’s entitled to have.

Going to conferences like Auburn Transition Conference is really helpful and enlightening. It’s actually been an eye-opener—getting to know who the players are, and what the issues are. Even for me, a professional, going through this process and seeing what people are working on—it’s changed the way that I’m a teacher, the way that I’m a parent.

—Paula Tapia, shown with Laura in photo above
Laura Tapia

2011 Graduate of Robertsdale High School, Baldwin County Public Schools
Interviewed June 16, 2011, with her mother, Paula Tapia

Laura Tapia: I’m 19, I live in Spanish Fort, and I graduated from Robertsdale High School in 2011. I’m going to try to enter University of North Florida in Jacksonville and live in an apartment or a dorm. They have a class for people with reading disabilities, and I really like that, so they can help me when I get to something difficult for me. I’ve wanted something like this for the longest time.

Mrs. Tapia: It’s a comprehensive transition program to give kids the college experience—a partnership between The Arc of Jacksonville and the University of North Florida. She’s always wanted to live in Florida. There are programs out there that are a good fit for her. [The On Campus Transition (OCT) Program at UNF offers students with disabilities the opportunity to experience college life, participate in campus activities, audit college classes, and be mentored by fellow UNF students.]

We found out about Youth Leadership Forum through YAiT [Youth & Young Adults in Transition] when we went to the Alabama Transition Conference.

Laura: I liked the transition conference very much. I was scared speaking out in front of, like, a thousand people, but now I can speak out and I don’t need to be worried. They’re the same people just like me, and they won’t laugh, they’ll just say, “It’s okay. Just keep going.” I introduced somebody at the conference. I didn’t know if I would have what it takes to talk in front of people, so like I got really, really shy. I’d keep saying, “I do not have a disability, I do not have a disability.” I’m not seeing my disability then, either. And I shut myself into a small, small shell.

And then I went to YAiT and I learned it was okay to come out of your shell a little bit because they have disabilities too—and you can share your thoughts and you don’t have to be shy. Other kids felt the same, and I met new friends. If I give them the chance, I can somehow meet new friends. Now I talk more, and I don’t get shy. You’re out there, and you can just tell people what you need, and what you mean, and you can’t expect them to read your mind. I went to the YLF [Youth Leadership Forum] camp, and they taught transition to college—how to be a leader, how to be independent, how to wake up at 5 in the morning and set the alarm [laughs], how to know where you are if you’re lost, and how to stand up for yourself if there’s something you don’t understand. So I learned a lot in that camp.

I want to study marine biology because I want to be a dolphin helper. I’ve learned that some dolphins are deaf, but you can hand them a paintbrush and they will paint a picture of what they want. You can train another dolphin that can hear to learn how to help the dolphin that can’t hear. You think all dolphins are the same, but when you actually get to know them, they’re not all the same. I wish I had learned to speak to a crowd much sooner, because I’ll need to explain to people about the dolphins. YAiT really helped me with speaking to people. I love animals, and I already know how to talk and act with them.

Mrs. Tapia: At the vet’s office, they call her the Cat Whisperer.

Laura: I’ve been in a hospital so many times, and I know what it feels like to be scared and in a strange place. The hardest thing I ever went through is when I had a kidney transplant. I was 17. It was 2009 and my mom gave me her kidney. They told me I’d have to be careful and I couldn’t play rough with my brother, and I’m going, “Well…what am I supposed to do?”—because I love sports. So, they introduced me to Teen Camp at Children’s Harbor, Camp Bridges. They can watch over you. I’m a little daredevil. I feel much better now than before the transplant, and now I know what to do to take care of myself. Now I know there are people out there who are like me. I am a little nervous about going to Jacksonville and to college classes—but that’s just normal, I’m thinking.
Mabrey Whetstone
Director, Special Education Services
Alabama Department of Education

(The following are excerpts from a September 2011 interview with Dr. Whetstone, in which he was asked to reflect on his career and achievements, his collaborations with ATLI, and the changes he has witnessed. He will soon retire from his position with the state department—and will receive the NASDSE Heritage Award for service to the nation—after devoting 37 years to improving the lives of children who receive special education services. He has been deeply appreciated for the exemplary qualities he brings to his work: optimism and integrity, gentle good humor, and perseverance in advocating for enlightened policies on behalf of the children, youth, and young adults he serves.)

The way I first became interested in working with children with disabilities was, well, quite honestly, odd. [Laughs.] It was a change that I feel God moved me toward. I was in my last quarter at Auburn University, working towards a business and economics degree, and I had to take one more course. I signed up for a Physical Education class for people with intellectual disabilities, and played basketball and volleyball with older kids and adults at a center between Auburn and Opelika. I just loved doing it! Coach Martinique asked me to come back that afternoon. I said, “But Coach, I have another class!” He said, “No, Mabrey, you’re meant to do something like this. You need to come back.” So, I did. And it changed my life. I stayed another year at Auburn to earn my degree in special education.

I began teaching in Montgomery with secondary-age kids with disabilities, age 15-21, who couldn’t read. They were rebuilding all of the classrooms—literally tearing down the walls and rebuilding them around our classes—and we worked with the carpenters and learned to read construction signs and directions, and I asked the workers to write notes to the students describing what they were doing. We’d go to the grocery store where the students learned to buy things needed for the week, and I set up appointments with business owners, and we talked with them about their businesses and what jobs the students might do. I truly did like doing instruction in the community, and I guess that’s why I’ve been so committed to that, because I’ve seen it work, first-hand.

Next, I taught at middle school, teaching reading, English and language arts, and social studies to a group of students who had already been through two other teachers that semester. They were a handful, but also a great group of students. Whenever I had a problem with a student I walked them home and I talked with the parents. One mom came back to the class and sat there for the first hour, and I didn’t have any more problems after that, because none of the junior high kids wanted their moms to come to the class! [Laughs.] That mom was one of my best supporters. I won every PTA award for having the greatest percentage of parents attending meetings. You don’t do a good job in education if you don’t involve the parents in it—they made a tremendous difference.

Teaching elementary school was probably my least favorite, because the little kids were just too sweet. [Laughs.] So, I moved on to Brewbaker Jr. High and taught there for several years. I love middle school; that is my group! I love the years when they’re a child one minute, an adult the next.

(Continued)
In my 15th year in education, I came to this agency as an education specialist in intellectual disabilities, and oversaw the development of the “Alabama Guidelines for Transition” manual, did incentive grants to local school systems, established our first local transition projects, and then community-based transition programs. I began to brainstorm with university people like Phil Browning about what else would move transition forward in the state, and the first Alabama Transition Conference came out of that, in 1991. It was true excitement from the very beginning, because it was by and for people who really wanted to improve the secondary services for students with disabilities. They’re a special group of people.

It’s amazing to me that so many who came to that first conference are still coming today. With that first conference, we showcased the models that we were putting into place—how to put together community transition teams, how to do a functional curriculum, how to do school-based employment training. We made a decision to strike a balance, to have experts from around the nation and the very best speakers from Alabama—to try to make the program as useable as possible for our own people here, and to encourage them in what they were doing.

In 1996 I became director of the Alabama Transition Initiative and we continued to establish local programs, improve the interagency work that was required to make transition work, and finalize the job coach services. In 1998 I became director of special education services. I’ve been most proud of pushing inclusion across the curriculum; moving the focus away from the idea of “handicaps” and to the abilities of all kids; correcting the disproportional representation of minorities in special education; and creating the Alabama Occupational Diploma. We’ve made a tremendous change in giving everyone an opportunity and a right to quality education, that they not be kept from general education just because of their background or a lack of enrichment in their lives to this point. Special education is no longer an education that is “special”—it simply provides an intensive support to general education when kids need extra resources and services.

When I was elected to the Board at NASDSE (National Association of State Directors of Special Education), it was a mind-opening experience to be involved with some of the brightest people in the nation who were in my same role, and I learned a tremendous amount from others. We supported each other in efforts to push for inclusion, employment, and improving teacher education. When I became president of NASDSE, it gave me an opportunity, as being director of special education for the state has always done, to help formulate a vision to actualize a change for kids with disabilities. I remembered a quote by Eleanor Roosevelt, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” Our kids with disabilities have beautiful dreams, and it’s our job as state leaders and teachers to help make the dreams of these students come true—dreams of equality, empowerment, fulfillment, and success are certainly beautiful—and, when we can help those students achieve academically and economically, we can bring about the realization of those dreams.
I've considered my role to be a pusher, but it's the students who have pushed the most valuable changes into being over the years. Students are where my heart is. We didn't have high enough expectations for these kids, but they have shown us and helped us understand how we can help them make their lives more successful. In 1997, we started the Youth Leadership Forum, which came out of the transition conference and the transition initiative. YLF's agenda, the YAIT (Youth and Young Adults in Transition) program, the “My Voice” project—all these paths lead toward ownership by the young people that are actually impacted by services. Such opportunities give kids the tools they need to improve their abilities to advocate for themselves. It's a tremendous outcome—sometimes I think an unexpected outcome—to see that the students themselves are pushing to be in charge. I love it when I go to the transition conference—it's great to see them introducing speakers, talking about the impacts that the subjects being discussed have had on their lives. It's great when they go to a session by a national speaker and are engaged in discussing with the audience what has mattered in their lives. That's just what we need!

When the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute came into being, Alabama became one of the few states with the advantage of tapping into resources that a university institute could provide. The work that goes into the Training in Transition instructional series, the conference and the planning summit, the workshops for the local education agencies, the Parent Survey and the early learning profile and the post-school outcomes—the agency just doesn't have the staff to do all those things. And ATLI initiated the CATTS grant, justifying that we have need for instruction at the master’s level and properly trained teachers working in transition. Other states are envious of the Institute. I worked with Phil Browning—he’s so personable and excited about this field—and then with Karen Rabren—she’s such a hard worker, a great collaborator, and she has such vision. All the ATLI staff, they are a part of my extended family.

I think we have to continue to push for change, for highly qualified, highly effective teachers, and higher standards within the general education curriculum. Standards give you a direction for instruction. Are our students going to be able to reach every one of these standards? Some will not. But they'll be able to do much more than we anticipate, even kids with the severest disabilities.

**We must have teachers that produce robust leadership; they must advocate for students who struggle, and reach out to engage their families. We must deeply respect, nurture, and believe in the abilities of our students. We can expect no excuses, we must own it!**
“When Dr. Rabren said “YES” and provided me with the opportunity to complete my undergraduate internship with the Institute, it opened so many doors for me....My advice to incoming students: Take advantage of what is in front of you! With this opportunity comes responsibility, and that responsibility is to use what you learn to enrich others.”
Courtney Dotson

Doctoral Candidate in Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling
Coordinator of Instruction, ATLI
Auburn University

I grew up with the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute and its staff. There is no other place, I feel, where I would have learned so much, or been able to gain the kinds of professional experiences I’ve been privileged to explore during my undergraduate internship, graduate research assistantship, and doctoral studies.

Being a part of the Institute from my undergraduate tenure through my graduate tenure at Auburn has meant so much to me. The Institute has shaped much of my future, and continues to provide clarity as to why I choose transition as my field of work.

I have never really shared this story with my Auburn Family, and I think that now is the time, as it relates directly to ATLI’s mission of “Building Brighter Futures for Youth and Young Adults.” ATLI has provided more than a future for me. During the spring of 1997, my family underwent a traumatic experience with the murder of my father, and I happened to be the family member—at 15 years old—who took the phone call bringing this horrible news. Later, as my family prepared for the burial, my mother received another call, and the person on the phone proceeded to predict my future by saying, “I give Courtney one year and she will be pregnant and will never be anything in life.”

When Dr. Rabren said “YES” and provided me with the opportunity to complete my undergraduate internship with the Institute, it opened so many doors for me. I will always be grateful to the people at ATLI for giving me a chance during my undergraduate internship, and for continuing to put their trust in me today. When it’s time to reflect on the impact that ATLI has made on families and individuals in transition, you can definitely count my experiences. Because of the Institute, its staff, and the students and projects that I was and still am involved with, I always say: “I credit the majority of my professional skills to my experience with working with the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute.”

There was no better place for me to learn how to work with students or how to improve the services that help them, too, reach for success. For me, there is no greater reward than being a student of Dr. Rabren’s, working with the Institute, and being able to share my stories with the students whom I have the good fortune to mentor. Most importantly, the Institute provided me with the skills I needed to outweigh the obstacles and challenges in my life—skills that let me prove that caller’s dire prediction—made during my own transition years—false.

My advice to incoming ATLI student workers: Take advantage of what is in front of you! With this opportunity comes responsibility, and that responsibility is to use what you learn to enrich others. The most important asset I have gained from my experiences with ATLI is life mentors. The leadership and mentorship at ATLI is more than exceptional. Under the leadership of Dr. Rabren, Diane Glanzer, and George Hall, I was provided with the opportunity to not only thrive, but to flourish as a professional. ATLI does, indeed, build brighter futures. War Eagle!
I learned what a great working relationship between teachers and counselors can do for students....

Many times these teachers aren’t able to attend the transition conference due to local funding, so I feel it’s important that I have the chance to discuss with them what I learned at the conference. My students benefit by their counselor and their teachers having the most up-to-date information.

-Reese Grantham
Reese Grantham

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Tuscaloosa
Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

I have been a counselor with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) for almost 6 years. I knew I wanted to work with high school students with disabilities after working with the Alabama Governor’s Youth Leadership Forum while working on my undergraduate degree at Troy University. I went on to Auburn University to obtain my master’s degree and began working with ADRS in Mobile six months after graduation. I worked in the Mobile area schools for four years, and during that time I learned, in-depth, the process of special education—with the help of some wonderful co-workers and special education teachers. I learned what a great working relationship between teachers and counselors can do for students.

The schools also provided a great amount of support for any of the programs we suggested to benefit the students, such as College Prep, Youth Leadership Forum, and Mentoring Day. When I moved to the Tuscaloosa area two years ago I began working with adults as well as transition, however, I feel I have always had a wonderful rapport with my transition students. I think the rapport I try to establish comes from the examples of guidance and support from my parents. Students have many pressures today in their lives. Many times handling the pressures on top of having a disability are some of the hardest things to learn. Although my title is vocational rehabilitation counselor, many times it feels like my role is more like a life coach when working a transition caseload.

The annual Alabama Transition Conference is the activity that has been most helpful to me in serving the needs of students with disabilities. This conference gives me the latest information on transition as well as explains the changes that either have happened or will happen with special education and vocational rehabilitation. It gives me a chance to go back to my teachers and do a sort of regrouping—to see what, if anything, we need to change in how we are working together. Many times these teachers aren’t able to attend the transition conference due to local funding, so I feel it’s important that I have the chance to discuss with them what I learned at the conference. My students benefit by their counselor and their teachers having the most up-to-date information.

I would like to see ATLI extend the areas you are serving with some of your activities and projects. I have observed over the past two years that getting parents involved in special education and vocational rehabilitation services can be a struggle, especially in the more rural areas of the state. I think teachers and counselors would be open to any ideas, suggestions, or programs that you feel might facilitate improvement on this issue. Typically, when the parents are not involved, it negatively impacts the whole process of transition—and many times the teachers and counselors feel that the parents are that one missing component that could turn the process around towards success.
Introduction

**Building Brighter Futures** with the children, youth, and young adults with disabilities and their parents—this is our mission. The Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (“the Institute” or “ATLI”) devotes and engages all its resources towards the improvement of transition practices, programs, and policies that help our young citizens establish and delineate their individual paths leading to fulfillment of their own goals. ATLI works closely with administrators and professionals in education, rehabilitation, and mental health, and other related agencies to provide intensive coordinated services as well as leadership in the areas of instruction, outreach, and research. Our youth advocacy projects offer young people in transition and their parents places to explore leadership, independence, and community. ATLI facilitates the transition from youth to adulthood by providing continuous improvement resources to systems, practitioners, and local programs.

In fiscal year 2011 (October 1, 2010—September 30, 2011), the Institute entered its eleventh year propelled by the momentum of ongoing projects and energized by the talents of several new additions to our staff. Administrative and associate (student) staff members completed the Alabama Transition Standards, the first such standards in the nation, and completed development of the Web-based version of the Early Learning Progress Profile. In a tough economic year all around, we were fortunate to maintain our contracts, add some new work, and fill all the rooms at the Alabama Transition Conference.

Our foundational principles of leadership, accountability, sustainability and capacity-building continued to guide us and help us grow through challenging times. But our inspiration always derives from people—foremost, the students and young adults who conquer their fears to tell their stories and follow their dreams; the parents who find ways to gently support and just as gently let go; the leaders who push strongly for what is effective, just and right, and who ignite others with their vision; and our colleagues who bring their best to each day’s work in service to the future.

We thank you all for making possible this year’s achievements, and we dedicate our work to you.
Full-time Administrative Staff

Deborah Henthorne is the Administrative Assistant for ATLI. She received her undergraduate degree in Business from Central Georgia Technical College. She has an extensive background in special education and rehabilitation in Alabama and Georgia at the local and state levels.

Gregory Jones is ATLI’s Information Technology Specialist. Originally from Ojai, California, he received his Bachelor’s degree in software engineering from Auburn University and his software engineering Master’s degree from Mercer University. Greg assists with website development, computer systems and networks, and technical aspects throughout the Institute.

Myra Thomas, Outreach Coordinator for ATLI, received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of South Carolina and her Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counselor Education from the University of Tennessee before coming to Auburn in 1984 for doctoral studies. Myra coordinates the Alabama Transition Conference, the Local Transition Planning Summit, and other major outreach projects.

Part-time Associate Staff

Pavan Bura, from Hyderabad, India, is a Master’s student in Management Information Systems. He joined the ATLI staff in summer, 2011; his work involves the development and maintenance of the Institute’s website and other Web-based projects. His research interests include Geospatial research and applications, and his current focus is on Geospatial Mapping of Coastal Communities of Alabama.

Christina Adams is from Atlanta, and is a first year doctoral student in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling (SERC). Christina is project co-manager for the Collaborative Approach to Training Transition Specialists (CATTS) program, a federally funded grant awarded to SERC, and is involved with various ATLI projects. She received her undergraduate degree from Auburn and her master’s degree from the University of Georgia.

The ATLI Advisory Board meets during the summer of 2011. From left, Dr. Cary Boswell, Commissioner, ADRS; Dr. Phil Browning, Professor Emeritus, Auburn University; Dr. Karen Rabren, Director of ATLI and Professor, Auburn University; Dr. Mabrey Whetstone, Director of Special Education Services, ALSDE; Dr. Joyce Ringer, Executive Director (retired), Georgia Advocacy Office; Dr. Paul Bates, Professor Emeritus, Southern Illinois University.
ATLI Instruction: Guided Leadership Experiences for Professionals-in-Training

STUDENT STAFF MEMBERS GAIN PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

ATLI student workers carry the responsibilities of associate staff members at the Institute, producing work of value to the university, the state, and their own professional vitae. In fiscal year 2011, associate staff members engaged in six major projects.

- **Academic transition standards development**—A two-year project, the development of Alabama Transition Standards extended through four grade levels, was accomplished with the intensive and exacting work of graduate student workers Megan Cobb and Eric Crumley. Alabama is the first state in the nation to have state-level transition standards.

- **Grant development and implementation**—Associate staff members worked on various research projects that will be integrated into future grant proposals and, under the supervision of Dr. Karen Rabren (co-director of the Collaborative Approach to Training Transition Specialists program, funded by a federal grant awarded to the SERC department in October 2010) helped implement activities prescribed by CATTS directors.

- **Conference planning and coordination**—The success of the 2011 Alabama Transition Conference relied upon the work of all associate staff at all levels of planning, implementation, and follow-up.

- **Direct service provision to local high school students and programs**—Carolyn Finley and Christa Denard learned to apply community-based training principles as they supervised local high school students who engaged in various work projects on the Auburn University campus and in the community.

- **The conduction of original research leading to publication and presentations**—Cody Watts, Megan Cobb, Eric Crumley, and Carolyn Finley presented their research findings at the 2011 Alabama Transition Conference in March; Cobb and Crumley also presented at the 2011 Alabama Department of Education MEGA Conference in July.

- **Meeting coordination and participation with state and national leaders in transition**—Associate staff members engaged in planning and dialogue with transition leaders at the Alabama State Interagency Transition Team meetings, the Alabama Transition Conference, and the Local Transition Planning Summit.

ATLI continues to give me many opportunities to make meaningful contributions to students with disabilities and the field of education. Most recently, we created a set of Alabama Transition Standards, which we believe will help teachers improve student outcomes throughout the state of Alabama. The most rewarding part is knowing that our hard work is evoking change.

—Megan Cobb
SERC Department doctoral candidate
Outreach

ATLI Outreach: Projects and Activities in Service to the Transition Community

THE “TRAINING IN TRANSITION” SERIES (TNT)

Training iN Transition is a series of workshops and online modules providing professional development for service providers and personal development for young people with disabilities. Modules I & II, first developed by ATLI in 2007, were revised this fiscal year, and Module III—My Plan for Transition (student-focused), was released during spring 2011. Preliminary work was done for the development of three new training modules slated to be released during FY 2012: IV—Transition Standards and the IEP; V—Interagency Transition Services; and VI—My Plan for Transition (teacher-focused). ATLI launched an updated website, with a new look, an updated logo, and a more user-friendly registration process. A flyer marketing the TNT training series was created and disseminated throughout the state this summer.

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN TRANSITION (YAIT)

The Alabama Youth and Young Adults in Transition (YAIT) project has been established to encourage and facilitate the development of self-determination in young people with disabilities so that they may then mentor other students within the state as well as collaborate with groups in other states who share the vision of promoting self-determination and youth leadership. The Auburn Transition Leadership Institute co-sponsors the statewide YAIT project in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Education’s Special Education Services.

During FY 2011, YAIT members developed training modules for the TNT series. As of September 30, 2011, the “My Plan for Transition” module has been completed by 104 transition stakeholders (91 of whom were transition-aged students). This summer, YAIT members completed preliminary work for the development of “Module IV, My Plan for Transition—teacher-focused,” to be released in 2012. These student-led trainings are filled with information that includes activities for developing self-determination skills. Youth and young adults involved in this project are provided the opportunity to display and enhance their leadership abilities.

Statewide members of Youth and Young Adults in Transition (YAIT) take a field trip to Auburn University’s Jordan-Hare Stadium in June, 2011. The YAIT members met in Auburn to produce “My Plan,” a student-based module in the Training iN Transition Series.
The 21st Annual Alabama Transition Conference focused on enhancing hope and promise for over 700 transition stakeholders through the sharing of improved resources and practices. Rousing welcomes by the president of Auburn University, Dr. Jay Gogue, and the dean of the College of Education, Dr. Betty Lou Whitford, marked the beginning of the two-day proceedings. Transition-aged youth and young adults provided introductions and comments for nationally prominent leaders: Dr. Ginger Blalock of New Mexico delivered the keynote address as well as led the Local Transition Planning Summit; the National Transition Update was presented by the U.S. Department of Education’s director of the Office of Special Education Programs, Dr. Melody Musgrove, and by the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services, Lynnae Ruttledge; expert workshops were offered by Dr. Paul Wehman and Dr. James Patton. Workshop and concurrent session presenters from around the state shared pertinent information on a diverse range of transition-related topics. The entertainers were of Alabama origin as well: Spicer Garage Band Camp’s Chris McPherson and Gideon Weigel performed during the opening ceremonies; String Theory provided lively lunch-time listening; and Garrett Miles performed the original conference song, “I Can” on the final day. The inclusion of an exhibitors display area was new this year, a valuable venue offering personal interaction with knowledgeable individuals. Income realized from the 14 for-profit and nonprofit exhibitors helped offset the expense of fee waivers for students and parents. The second annual Local Transition Planning Summit, held concurrently with the conference, drew 30 participants comprising four first-time local education agency teams (LEAs) and three repeating teams. Summit evaluations showed that the aims and accomplishments of the process—learning goal development as a team, and then teaching the process to others in the LEA who will help carry out the necessary objectives to improve transition services—are considered important.

NATIONAL AND STATE LEADERSHIP ROLES

ATLI director Dr. Karen Rabren serves on the advisory committee for the National Post School Outcomes Center (NPSOC), on the assessment committee for the Council for Exceptional Children’s (CEC) Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT), and serves as a peer reviewer for federal grant competitions. Locally, Diane Glanzer received the 2010 “Professional of the Year” award from the East Alabama Area Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

GRANT DEVELOPMENT

ATLI staff members worked with other members of the SERC department to connect students in the masters-level Collaborative Approach to Training Transition Specialists (CATTs) program with field-based experiences. ATLI associate staff member Christina Adams has been named program co-manager of CATTs, which is funded by a federal grant awarded to the SERC department in 2010.

“ATLI outreach is the functional link between transition stakeholders and access to the latest in transition instruction, as well as ongoing ATLI transition-related research and its implications for the field, ultimately resulting in more successful outcomes for students with disabilities.” -Myra Thomas
Research

ATLI Research: Explorations and Findings in Service to Decision-makers and Policymakers

HIGHLIGHTS OF ATLI RESEARCH PROJECTS FOR ALABAMA

ELPP DATA COLLECTION WEBSITE OPENED SEPTEMBER 15.

For the Early Learning Progress Profile (ELPP) project, fiscal year 2011 witnessed the culmination of a two-year process of planning and implementing a new ELPP data collection website, launched on September 15, 2011. This website was created to support the annual collection, analysis, and reporting of federal Indicator 7 data to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), which measures the improvement of preschool children in their (a) positive social-emotional skills, (b) acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and (c) use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs. The ELPP website is unique to ATLI’s other web-based data collaborations in two ways. First, the ELPP website receives pre-school program entry and exit evaluation data throughout the year, rather than several months. A second feature, unique to the ELPP website, is its daily data updates from the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) database, necessary to reflect changes in the ELPP teachers and students across Alabama. These two features represent a significant increase in ATLI’s ongoing responsibility for the collection, analysis, and reporting of Alabama’s federal indicator data. The full implementation of this new ELPP website will span three years, as the prior online-spreadsheet method of ELPP data collection is phased out, and other ELPP website features (including online reporting) are developed. The initial ELPP website data analysis and reporting is scheduled to take place in FY 2012.

PARENT DATA PROJECT CONTINUES FOR 8TH YEAR

FY 2011 marked the eighth consecutive year that ATLI has provided data collection, analysis, and reporting services on the Alabama Parent Survey to the Special Education Services Division of ALSDE, which then reports to OSEP. The results for Indicator 8, regarding parental involvement in schools, reflected responses from 5,332 completed Parent Surveys, representing a 27% return rate of the 19,449 surveys mailed this spring. Data analysis revealed that 75% of parents responded with “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to 11 survey items describing school efforts to involve parents of students with disabilities. Each participating LEA received a report of their Parent Survey response analysis; this information is also available online from an ATLI-hosted Alabama Parent Survey website.

PSO DATA PROJECT IN 11TH YEAR

For eleven consecutive years ATLI has provided Post-school Outcomes (PSO) survey data analysis and reporting services to the Alabama Department of Education. FY 2011 data revealed that 14% of the responding young adults with disabilities (144 of the 1,046 participants) were enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school. An additional 32% (n=331) of these young people were competitively employed, and 18% (n=189) were either enrolled in some other postsecondary education or training program or engaged in non-competitive employment within one year of exiting high school. These results were reported to ALSDE to submit to OSEP in compliance with federal Indicator 14.
WORK EXPERIENCES IN RESEARCH, INSTRUCTION, AND SERVICE DELIVERY

In FY 2011, several Auburn University students were able to gain experience in research, instruction, product development, and service delivery while working at ATLI as staff members, interns or practicum students.

One student gained research experience by administering the Transition Outcomes Scale and participating in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative on research ethics.

Two students, a staff member and an intern, gained instruction experience this year.

Nine students assisted with product development and service delivery. One of these worked in community based training and 8 CATTs students worked with Youth and Young Adults in Transition (YAiT) members.

INTEGRATION OF RESEARCH INTO PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Three Auburn University students, in their capacity as ATLI associate staff, conducted original research submitted for publication during this fiscal year.

Four Auburn University students presented their research findings at the 2011 Alabama Transition Conference. Two of those four also presented at the Alabama Department of Education’s MEGA conference this summer.

One student worker presented at the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center conference.

INSTRUCTION GOAL 1

ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 1a: 1 AU student will gain research experience
Actual: 1 student gained research experience

Goal 1b: 2 AU students will gain instruction experience
Actual: 2 students gained instruction experience

Goal 1c: 3 AU students will assist with product development/service delivery
Actual: 9 students assisted with product development/service delivery

INSTRUCTION GOAL 2

ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 2a: 3 AU students will conduct research leading to publication
Actual: 2 students conducted research submitted for publication

Goal 2b: 3 AU students deliver presentations at state conferences or meetings
Actual: 4 students delivered presentations

Goal 2c: 1 AU student will present at a national meeting or conference
Actual: 1 student presented at a national conference

“My advice to student workers:
Take advantage of what is in front of you!”

-Courtney Dotson

Carolyn Finley received her undergraduate degree while working at ATLI and is now a master’s level student and associate staff member.

ATLI associate Mridula Allani, left, prepares name tags before the conference, and SERC doctoral students present a poster session at the 2011 Alabama Transition Conference.
Instruction Goal 3

APPLICATION OF RESEARCH-BASED TRANSITION METHODS IN SERVICE PROVISION TO INDIVIDUALS AND PROGRAMS

ATLI provides opportunities for Auburn University students to apply research-based methods in service provision directly to youth and young adults with disabilities or by working with their transition programs.

In FY 2011 two such experiences were provided at the Alabama Transition Conference (ATC), as students worked directly with the YAiT members and with the young people who participated in the concurrent session “What’s My Line.”

Four experiences in consumer empowerment were provided through participation in community-based training, ATC, YAiT, and the East Alabama Area Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

Work on the Alabama Transition Standards provided experience in program development.

INSTRUCTION GOAL 3 ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 3a: 4 ATLI direct service experiences will be provided for AU students
Actual: 2 direct service experiences were provided

Goal 3b: 4 consumer empowerment experiences will be provided
Actual: 4 experiences in consumer empowerment were provided

Goal 3c: 4 service experiences in transition program development will be provided
Actual: 1 experience in program development were provided

Local secondary students receive community-based training at ATLI to hone their office and button-making skills in preparation for competitive employment. Supervision was provided by AU students who are associate staff members.

Associate staff members learn and apply professional and practical skills in the workplace. Everyone enjoys a job well done!
Outreach Goal 1

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENT FOR ALL TRANSITION STAKEHOLDERS

THE 21ST ANNUAL ALABAMA TRANSITION CONFERENCE

ATC 2011 drew 755 total participants (683 registered attendees and 72 university volunteers) including participants from Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, Texas, Virginia, Washington State and Washington D.C.

Every stakeholder group was well represented, with 365 from education, 92 from rehabilitation, 37 job coaches, 28 students in transition, 18 family members. Thirty-seven agencies and six universities sent representatives, as did 92 of 132 local education agencies (LEAs), a number slightly down from last year, possibly due to proration.

Of the attendees representing secondary school transition practice, 27% were from middle schools, 73% from high schools.

OUTREACH GOAL 1 ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 1a: 500 participants
Actual: 755 participants

Goal 1b: 80% of AL counties represented at conference
Actual: 89% represented (60 of 67)

Goal 1c: 75% of AL LEAs represented at conference
Actual: 70% of LEAs represented (92 of 132)

Outreach Goal 2

INSERVICE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ONLINE AND ONSITE

THE TRAINING IN TRANSITION SERIES (TNT)

As of September 30, 2011, a total of 390 online and onsite training experiences have been recorded through the TNT series.

Onsite training workshops were held at the 2011 Alabama Transition Conference, and at the 2011 ALSDE MEGA conference.

The newest product, “Module III: My Plan,” produced with the Youth and Young Adults in Transition group, had drawn 104 participants by the end of the fiscal year, 91 of whom were transition-age students.

OUTREACH GOAL 2 ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 2a: 200 online trainees
Actual: 258 online trainees

Goal 2b: 100 onsite trainees
Actual: 132 onsite trainees

Goal 2c: 85% report moderate-much increase in knowledge
Actual: 85% reported moderate-much increase in knowledge
Outreach Goal 3

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN TRANSITION

YAIT WORKSHOPS, LEADERSHIP, AND COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING (CBT) WORK EXPERIENCES

ATLI hosted 28 young people of transition age at the 2011 Alabama Transition Conference (ATC), where they participated in advocacy and leadership activities. Four young people participated in the YAIT workshop held in Auburn in June of 2011, and four local high school students received work experience in the ATLI offices.

OUTREACH GOAL 3

ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 3a: 2 events will be coordinated for youth in transition

Actual: 2 events were coordinated (ATC, CBT)

Goal 3b: 15 youth will participate in direct services/opportunities

Actual: 32 youth/young adults in transition participated in conference and workshops

Goal 3c: 1 high school student will be provided community-based work

Actual: 4 high school students were provided community-based work experiences

Outreach Goal 4

INTERAGENCY DIALOGUE AND LEADERSHIP ON LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL LEVELS

The 2011 Local Transition Planning Summit drew 4 new planning teams and 3 returning teams. Feedback indicated attendance was low due to reluctance to miss other conference events. On other leadership fronts, ATLI coordinated all four meetings for Alabama’s SITT, and its director continues to contribute to peer review panels and committees for NPSOC and CEC’s DCDT.

OUTREACH GOAL 4

ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 4a: 25 local education agencies receive interagency transition goal-planning support

Actual: 7 LEAs received goal-planning support

Goal 4b: 4 quarterly meetings will be coordinated annually for the State Interagency Transition Team (SITT)

Actual: 4 meetings were coordinated

Goal 4c: 1 invitation to national leadership position

Actual: 3 national leadership positions extended 2010-2011

Outreach Goal 5

Promise Transition Awareness in Local, State, and National Communities

ATLI published four more issues of Directions—its transition awareness newsletter, in FY 2011, and Governor Robert Bentley proclaimed “March is Transition Awareness Month in Alabama,” as youth in transition and state leaders looked on. One staff member presented at the National Secondary Transition Assistance Center conference.

OUTREACH GOAL 5

ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 5a: 4 issues of an ATLI newsletter will be published and distributed

Actual: 4 issues were published and distributed locally and statewide

Goal 5b: 1 statewide proclamation on transition will be issued

Actual: 1 statewide proclamation was issued

Goal 5c: 1 presentation at a national conference or meeting

Actual: 1 presentation at a national conference or meeting (NSTTAC)

Members of Youth and Young Adults in Transition attend Governor Bentley’s signing of the Transition Awareness proclamation. Also attending were Speaker of the House of Representative Mike Hubbard and transition leaders from Auburn University, the Alabama Department of Education, and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.
Research Goal 1

INVOLVE LOCAL AND STATE AGENCIES WITH THE DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR CONDUCTING OF RESEARCH

POST-SCHOOL OUTCOMES SURVEY

In fiscal year 2011, ATLI continued its service to the Special Education Services (SES) Division of the Alabama Department of Education (ALSDE) by providing analysis and reporting of federal Indicator 14 Post-school Outcomes (PSO) survey data. The 1,046 former students with disabilities whose surveys were submitted, analyzed, and reported represent a 92% survey completion rate among the 1,141 former students identified earlier as potential survey-takers.

The results of the Indicator 14 data analysis were submitted to the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Among the results was the finding that 14% (n=144) of the 1,046 responding Alabama students with disabilities were enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school. An additional 32% (n=331) of these students were competitively employed, and 18% (n=189) of them were enrolled in some other postsecondary education or training program or engaged in non-competitive employment.

In addition to providing statewide Indicator 14 data analysis results for submission to OSEP, ATLI also generated survey results to each of the 37 participating Local Education Agencies (LEA). In these reports, each LEA’s former student aggregate responses to each survey item are compared to the responses from all of the 1,046 Alabama former students with disabilities, in adjacent histograms. These reports are available for printing and download from an ATLI-hosted PSO website.

ALABAMA PARENT SURVEY

In fiscal year 2011, ATLI also provided data collection, analysis, and reporting services to ALSDE’s Special Education Services for federal Indicator 8 regarding parental involvement in schools. The 5,332 completed Parent Surveys represent a 27% return rate of the 19,449 Parent Surveys mailed earlier this year.

The analysis of the Indicator 8 data analysis, submitted to OSEP, found that 75% of parents responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to 11 survey items describing school efforts to involve parents of students with disabilities.

As was done with the Post-school Outcomes (PSO) Survey data, a report of the Indicator 8 Parent Survey analysis was provided to each of the participating LEAs. These Parent Survey reports compare the aggregated survey responses of parents from each LEA to all of the Parent Survey responses, using side-by-side histograms. The LEA-specific reports are also available online for printing and download, from an ATLI-hosted Parent Survey website.

RESEARCH GOAL 1

ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 1a: 100% PSO Survey return rate
Actual: 92% return rate

Goal 1b: 25% Parent Survey return rate
Actual: 27% return rate

“When the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute came into being, it moved Alabama into the envy of the nation, being one of the few states with the advantage of tapping into resources that the institute at the university could provide.”

-Mabrey Whetstone
Research Goal 2

SHARE TRANSITION RESEARCH RESULTS WITH LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

Currently, the Post-school Outcomes (PSO) Survey, and the Parent Survey are compiled into school district-specific reports available online. The results of the Early Learning Progress Profile (ELPP) are planned to be similarly available next year. Besides these district-level reports, the data collected are also compiled into statewide reports, used by Special Education Services to comply with annual federal reporting requirements.

The PSO Survey results are used to submit the Indicator 14 federal data requirements, and the Parent Survey results form the basis for the Indicator 8 results. The ELPP instrument results will be used to satisfy the Indicator 7 federal reporting requirement.

RESEARCH GOAL 2
ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 2a: PSO with one-fourth of AL districts
Actual: One-fourth of AL school districts

Goal 2b: Parent with one-fourth of districts
Actual: One-fourth of AL school districts

Research Goal 3

DISSEMINATE FINDINGS AT STATE, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL FORUMS

STATE FORUMS

In fiscal year 2011, results of the Indicator 14 Post-school Outcomes Survey were presented at the Alabama Transition Conference. Also, during the 54th annual Alabama Rehabilitation Association Training Conference findings were disseminated about the “TNT” Series.

RESEARCH GOAL 3
ACHIEVEMENT FY 2011

Goal 3a: 2 state level forums
Actual: 2 state forums

Goal 3b: 1 national level forum
Actual: 0 national forums

Goal 3c: 1 international forum
Actual: 0 international forums
FY 2011 ATLI Funding & Expenditures

The Institute’s contractual responsibilities for ALSDE were continued for FY 2011, as was funding from the Alabama Legislature. As shown in Figure 1, these two sources comprised the majority of ATLI funding, with limited funding from the CATTS four-year federal grant and the Alabama Transition Conference revenues after expenses.

*Figure 1. FY 2011 ATLI Funding.*

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An analysis of FY 2011 expenditure categories reveals that the majority of funding dollars from all sources are used for personnel costs.

*Figure 2. ATLI Expenditures for FY 2011 by Funding Source ($1,000s)*

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Figure 4. A more detailed analysis of personnel categorical expenditures illustrates a distribution across Legislative, contracts, and grant funding sources. The assignment of administrative support staff personnel costs highlight the importance of Legislative funding to the operations of the Institute.

* Part-time director percentages represent only time allocated to ATLI activities, apart from other faculty responsibilities.

Figure 3. FY 2011 Expenditures. The major Institute expenditure for FY 2011 is for personnel, with operating expenses, and indirect costs comprising the remainder.
Through the vision and pioneering efforts of leaders from Alabama’s state agencies, Legislature, and Auburn University, the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute continues to provide valuable services and supports to Alabama’s transition stakeholders. In FY 2011, the numbers of persons participating in each of ATLI’s instruction, outreach, and research, activities total 7,626. This reflects the span of our collaborative reach, the aim of our aspirations to contribute to the integrity of our nation, our state, and our university, and our dedication to positively influencing the lives of persons with disabilities.

*ATC 2011 drew 755 total participants, 683 registered attendees and 72 university volunteers*
FY 2011 PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS


Cobb, M., Rabren, K., & Eaves, R. (in progress). *Post-school satisfaction levels of individuals with disabilities: The effects of geographic location, race, and gender*.


Auburn Transition Leadership Institute
Annual Goals
2011-2012

INSTRUCTION
I-Goal 1: Provide pre-service practicum and internship opportunities to Auburn University students
I-Goal 2: Integrate ATLI research into publications and presentations
I-Goal 3: Provide university students with pre-service and service learning experiences

OUTREACH
O-Goal 1: Engage transition stakeholders in professional or personal development
O-Goal 2: Provide resources to public school systems to improve their transition programs
O-Goal 3: Participate in the development of local, state, and national transition policies and practices

RESEARCH
R-Goal 1: Involve local, state, and national transition stakeholders with the design, development, and/or conduction of research
R-Goal 2: Share transition research results with local, state, and federal agencies
R-Goal 3: Disseminate transition research findings at state, national, and international forums