New inclusive initiative program aims to teach entrepreneurial skills to students with disabilities

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For John Robinson, born a quadruple amputee without the extension of his arms and legs, entering the workforce after graduating from Syracuse University wasn't as straightforward as it was for his peers. But following four and a half years without a job, he went on to a successful career in television.

Now, Robinson is focused on giving back to the disability community to help make the job transition easier for others.

Twenty-six students in the Syracuse area are set to participate in an inclusive entrepreneurship program organized by SU and local disability rights nonprofits. The program was funded in part by New York state Sen. John Mannion, and the semester-long online class will teach entrepreneurship skills geared toward helping people with disabilities enter the job market.

Robinson said he's working to spread an inclusive experience at SU because he's seen firsthand the difficulties of attending college as a person with a disability. He has now been the President and CEO of Our Ability, an AI-powered job search platform that connects people with disabilities to employment opportunities, since 2011.

"If you're physically disabled, the university can be daunting with the hills in the snow and the amount of buildings," Robinson said. "If you're neurodiverse, the university can be daunting because of the number of people. If you're intellectual and developmentally disabled, it can be daunting because of the education requirements."

The program is coming to fruition with a $50,000 partnership from Mannion, who is the chairman of the New York state Senate committee on disabilities. Robinson said he sees Mannion as "a champion for people with disabilities" because of his support for the program.

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