RERC-ACT R5 Project:
Perceptive Animated Agents for Workforce Development

One of the most common and empowering activities in our culture is participation in employment. Work provides validation of the ability of individuals to earn money to support themselves, to add value to society, and to be part of a universal endeavor. As such, finding a job, doing it well, and earning wages is a source of great empowerment that provides individuals with independence, a sense of participating and contributing to society, and confidence and self-esteem. The goal of the project is to provide an engaging and easy to use tool to increase the ability of individuals with cognitive disabilities to identify career paths and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the workforce. This tool has taken the form of a software program featuring an animated agent/virtual tutor that provides instruction and job-related information to these individuals.

The tool, dubbed JESS (Job and Employment Seeking Software) is currently undergoing usability testing by individuals with cognitive disabilities. The design goals associated with the project will be provided along with a discussion of future outcomes.

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