

**Abstract:** Staff and faculty have an obligation to create a campus environment where all persons feel welcomed. One area of inclusion that A&S and the campus should address is inclusion for persons with disabilities. Research shows that individuals who are diagnosed with a disability are less likely to graduate college and take longer to graduate than individuals who have not been diagnosed with a disability. The following proposal outlines some of the campus difficulties these populations face, what A&S can do to assist in creating an inclusive environment, and the positive revenue implications for improving inclusion.

### **Policy Problem: Insufficient Support for Students with Physical and Developmental Disabilities**

The Boulder campus has made improving diversity and inclusion a priority for immediate and long-term goals. Efforts to build this reality include the Inclusion, Diversity, and Excellence in Academics (IDEA) plan with a commitment to increase resources to the Office of Disability Services<sup>1</sup>; eight actions to combat racism on campus<sup>2</sup>; and Diversity and Inclusion summits to build connections between students, staff, and faculty on campus<sup>3</sup>.

The College of Arts and Sciences has offered additional resources beyond central campus efforts including the Arts & Sciences Consortium of Committees on Climate, Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity<sup>4</sup>; Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage celebrations<sup>5</sup>; and workshops to address racism, inclusive practices, and power structures<sup>6</sup>. Inclusive environments for populations that have traditionally been marginalized is a public good. When members of marginalized populations feel welcomed and included in our campus environment, they are utilizing a public good that is non-excludable and non-rival<sup>7</sup>.

Efforts by the college to improve disability support appear to be lacking. Only one communication from college leadership that focused on disability inclusive was discovered while searching university email. The message, sent on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2022, advertised a disability awareness event that is currently scheduled for Fall 2022. The Vice Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor (Dr. Dyonne Bergeron) for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in collaboration with the Black Law Students Association and the law school Colorado Disability Justice Alliance, announced that local artist Chloe Duplessis will open an art exhibit highlighting campus experiences of racism and disability discrimination.

Efforts to create a welcoming environment for persons with disabilities requires support from across campus. While central offices have critical roles in establishing an inclusive environment, they are still dependent on staff and faculty at all levels to achieve it<sup>8</sup>. The College of Arts and Sciences comprises over 44% of the total undergraduate and graduate student enrollment on campus, with the next largest

---

<sup>1</sup>“Inclusion, Diversity, and Excellence in Academics Plan,” University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 8<sup>th</sup> 2022, [https://www.colorado.edu/odece/sites/default/files/attached-files/idea\\_plan\\_09212020\\_.pdf](https://www.colorado.edu/odece/sites/default/files/attached-files/idea_plan_09212020_.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> “Immediate Actions to Enable Change,” University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 8<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.colorado.edu/odece/campus-actions>

<sup>3</sup> “Spring 2022 Diversity and Inclusion Summit,” University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 8<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.colorado.edu/odece/diversity-inclusion-summit>

<sup>4</sup> Hillary Potter, listserv communication to author, November 11, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Gonzalez, listserv communication to author, May 2, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Gonzalez, listserv communication to author, January 11, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> David L. Weimer and Aidan R. Vining, *Policy Analysis* (New York and London: Rutledge, 2017), 74.

<sup>8</sup> Dahlia Shaewitz and Jennifer R. Crandall, “Higher Education’s Challenge: Disability Inclusion on Campus,” *Higher Education Today*, accessed May 8 2022, <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2020/10/19/higher-educations-challenge-disability-inclusion-campus/>

college coming in at half the size<sup>9</sup>. With more than 4 out of every 10 students seeking a degree through Arts and Sciences, the college is in a unique position to improve disability awareness and support.

Disability services for undergraduate and graduate students need to be addressed due to the large number of students who have one or more disability diagnoses. During the 2015-2016 Academic Year, the National Center for Education Statistics<sup>10</sup> collected data on the number of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions who had been diagnosed with a disability. Data showed that 19.4% of undergraduates and 11.9% of graduate students reported a disability. At the undergraduate level, 19.2% of males and 19.6% of females report having a disability. Reports of disability by race were distributed across race identities as follows; 20.8% of whites, 17.2% of Blacks, 18.3% of Hispanics, 15.2% of Asians, 23.6% of Pacific Islanders, 27.8% of American Indian/Alaskan natives, and 22.1% of two or more races identify as having a disability. With one in five students diagnosed with at least one disability, the need to establish support systems is critical.

Nationwide data on degree completion varies, but much of the literature agrees that there is a disparity in graduation rates between students who have a disability and those who do not. At the four year mark, 35.2% of students without a disability will complete their degree, compared to only 29.7 percent of students with a disability<sup>11</sup>. Students who failed to disclose a disability during their first year on campus were 3.5 times more likely to not graduate within six years compared to students who disclosed their status in year one<sup>12</sup>. The difference in total graduation rates is starker, with 56% of the general population completing their degree compared to just 28% of students with disabilities<sup>13</sup>.

CU Boulder is doing better than the national average but has room for improvement. The number of students with registered disabilities at CU Boulder has doubled from 1,322 students in 2015 to 2,645<sup>14</sup>. Graduation rates in the College of Arts and Sciences for students without registered disability status for Academic Years 2012-2015 were 68%, 65%, 68%, and 71%, respectively. For students with registered disability status, the rates were 53%, 61%, 64%, and 65%<sup>15</sup>.

A research brief from the National Center for College Students with Disabilities noted that students with disabilities have reported four categories of barriers to academic success. First, students noted a lack of knowledge regarding disability resource offices and services, inadequate accommodations in these offices, and difficulty navigating procedures. Second, students listed classroom and instructional environment issues including uninformed or non-responsive instructors. Third, students described access issues such as physical barriers and gaps in services. Lastly, students described a hostile campus environment with negative peer interaction, stigma, and the added work of

---

<sup>9</sup> "Overall Enrollment Profile 2021," University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 11, 2022, [OverallProfileFall21.indd \(colorado.edu\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> "Disability Fast Facts," National Center for Education Statistics, accessed May 1, 2022, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=60>

<sup>11</sup> William Knight, Roger D. Wessel, and Larry Markle, "Persistence to Graduation for Students With Disabilities: Implications for Performance-Based Outcomes," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 19, no. 4 (February 2018): 362–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025116632534>.

<sup>12</sup> Robyn L Hudson, "The effect of disability disclosure on the graduation rates of college students with disabilities" (PhD Diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2013) 60.

<sup>13</sup> Joan M. Azarva, "Why College is Daunting for LD Students," Smart Kids with LD, accessed May 8 2022, <https://www.smartkidswithld.org/getting-help/college-bound/why-college-is-daunting-for-ld-students/>

<sup>14</sup> "2019-2020 Diversity Report," University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 8 2022, <https://www.cu.edu/doc/oaareportdiversity-2019-2020pdf>

<sup>15</sup> "Cu Boulder Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates," University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 8 2022, [https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/university.of.colorado.boulder.ir/viz/GradRetention\\_Rates/RetentionGraduationRates](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/university.of.colorado.boulder.ir/viz/GradRetention_Rates/RetentionGraduationRates)

disability management being primary issues<sup>16</sup>. The 2021 CU Boulder Campus Climate Survey Report, which was released in April of 2022, found that 44% of undergraduate students and 47% of graduate students reported experiencing incivility in the prior 12 months. For students with disabilities, these numbers climbed to 54% and 62% respectively<sup>17</sup>.

### Recommendation

We suggest that the college begin a concentrated effort to build a disability outreach program by celebrating months or days that center disability awareness and inclusion; by advertising the existence of student organizations that are focused on disability inclusion; by assisting national and state-wide organizations with creating chapters on the CU Boulder campus; and by making Disability Services a primary focus for faculty orientation at all levels. The springboard in this process is a single or multi-day symposium that is focused on disability needs and resources for student populations. The CU Denver symposium, held November 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2022, could be a template for a similar symposium held by the College of Arts and Sciences. The JEDI office or the Student Success office are obvious choices for spearheading this effort, though myself and Gavin Laing would volunteer to provide the bulk of the labor involved with planning and carrying out the symposium.

The symposium would include

- Keynote speaker
- Sessions for students on disability support programs
- Sessions for students on software tips in Canvas, Microsoft Suite, etc.
- Sessions for faculty regarding disability support programs
- Sessions led by student organizations that focus on disability awareness and support
- Sessions led by state/national student disability support organizations

### Budget

*Requested budget is \$5,000. (Sample breakdown)*

Speaker Compensation: \$2000

Speaker housing: 3 rooms for 2 nights = \$1,100

Room Reservation: Chancellor Hall for two evenings = \$300

Food catering: 100 people @ \$16 = \$1,600

### Favorable fiscal impact

The college could see a positive fiscal impact from improving the campus climate and promoting disability supports within the college. The anticipated cost of AY 22-23 for in state residents is \$30,000 while the cost for out of state residents is anticipated to be \$57,500<sup>18</sup>. If the college could retain just five in state and out of state residents, the campus would increase campus revenue by \$400,000 each year with some of that revenue coming back to the college.

---

<sup>16</sup> Scott, Sally. "Access and Participation in Higher Education: Perspectives of College Students with Disabilities. NCCSD Research Brief. Volume 2, Issue 2." *Grantee Submission* (2019).

<sup>17</sup> "2021 CU Boulder Campus Culture Survey Report", University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 8 2022, <https://www.colorado.edu/dei/sites/default/files/attached-files/4.6.2022%202021%20CCS%20Survey%20Report%20Final.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> "Cost and Finances," University of Colorado Boulder, accessed May 8 2022, <https://www.colorado.edu/admissions/cost-finances>

