

# UCLA Tarjan Center ACCESS Newsletter

Advancing College Capacity for Equitable Student Success

## WELCOME!

We are thrilled to present the inaugural issue of the UCLA Tarjan Center ACCESS Newsletter. My name is Dr. Christine Moody, and at the UCLA Tarjan Center, I lead several postsecondary and employment initiatives. This includes our close collaboration with the California Community College system, where I serve as a consultant to provide training and technical assistance related to serving students with developmental disabilities on campus.

As a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), part of a national network of 67 such programs, the mission of the UCLA Tarjan Center is to advance the self-determination, inclusion, and quality of life among the diversity of people with disabilities and their families. We achieve this through providing training, education, and informational resources to communities, systems, agencies, and policymakers. The Tarjan Center also offers assessment, therapy, and consultation services through multiple specialty clinics and programs.

Through this newsletter, we aim to provide a convenient and current resource for information related to postsecondary education for students with developmental disabilities, such as autism and intellectual disability. While our primary focus will be on content relevant to California, much of the newsletter will have broader applicability. In this and future issues, we plan to highlight:

- Student and expert perspectives
- Federal and state policy updates
- Research summaries
- Tips for faculty and staff
- Examples of successful programs and best practices
- News from related systems, such as K-12, Department of Rehabilitation, and Regional Center
- Related resources and training opportunities

I look forward to connecting with you through this newsletter. We always welcome questions, conversations, and feedback. Our contact information will be at the end of every newsletter – please reach out!



Christine Moody, PhD  
ACCESS Project Director

## IN THIS ISSUE

WELCOME FROM THE  
UCLA TARJAN CENTER

NIH UPDATE

CLASSROOM TIPS

CAPED CONFERENCE  
TAKEAWAYS

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT:  
ARISE AT NORTH  
ORANGE COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE DISTRICT

RESEARCH INSIGHTS



# NIH Update: Recognizing People with Disabilities as a Health Disparities Population

The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) recently took a significant step by **officially designating people with disabilities as a population with health disparities**. This decision acknowledges the complex landscape of health outcomes and experiences for individuals with disabilities. It also creates new funding opportunities to learn more about and find ways to reduce the health disparities faced by people with disabilities.

This news is a major win for advocates who have been diligently pressing the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to recognize people with disabilities as a population experiencing inequities. As college campuses champion diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, it is essential that people with disabilities continue to be considered. This example illustrates that even if not included initially, persistent voices can create change and open doors to new resources. We encourage staff and students to participate in larger campus conversations on these topics, bringing attention to the needs of students with disabilities, their intersectional identities, and the impact on educational access and success.

## READ MORE

>>> [NIH News Release](#)

>>> [Disability Scoop](#)

>>> [National Council on Disability](#)



## Classroom Tips for Neurodivergent College Students

From past webinars, we have compiled strategies for faculty drawn from positive behavior supports, whose goal is to create a structured and supportive environment, reducing the likelihood of behavioral issues and fostering a positive learning atmosphere. Here are some strategies tailored for college classrooms.

1

### In-Class Mental Health Activities:

*Description:* Instructors lead in-class mindfulness sessions and breathing exercises  
*Benefits:* Help students manage stress, anxiety, and promotes emotional well-being  
*Webinar:* [Returning to Campus for College Students with I/DD](#) (Timestamp: 10:35-16:17)

2

### Student-Created Class Rules and Expectations:

*Description:* Collaboratively set class rules and expectations with students  
*Benefits:* Increases student autonomy and clarity about expectations  
*Webinar:* [Holistic Supports for Students with Autism, Intellectual Disability](#) (Timestamp: 1:13:33-1:17:20)

3

### Detailed Syllabus Videos:

*Description:* Instructors record detailed videos explaining the class syllabus  
*Benefits:* Provides a visual and auditory reference, increases independent inquiry  
*Webinar:* [Holistic Supports for Students with Autism, Intellectual Disability \(ID\), and Mental Health](#) (Timestamp: 34:05, 1:18:15)

# Takeaways from CAPED 2023: Braving the Waves of Change

The UCLA Tarjan Center, represented by Dr. Christine Moody, attended and presented at the annual conference hosted by the California Association for Postsecondary Education and Disability (CAPED) in October 2023.

**Below are some of her takeaways from the presentations and conversations at the conference.**

## Collaboration can advance our ability to make an impact

I heard about so many collaborations between colleges and other systems, including community organizations, K-12 districts, policymakers, Department of Rehabilitation, and Regional Centers to support student success. Such partnerships have so many benefits - they can create a more integrated student experience, reduce pressure on colleges to “do it all,” and sometimes even open the doors to funding opportunities. Examples of cross-departmental collaborations were also shared, like DSPS working with Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOP&S). These collaborations take work, especially upfront – in first understanding what other programs, organizations, and agencies do, then in thinking creatively about how to work together, and finally, in making it happen. But they pay off exponentially in the end.

## Think big and small to make accessibility and universal design the standard

Changing how systems and people work is hard. During CAPED, I heard two different approaches to this work that I want to carry with me. The first emphasizes making change approachable with ideas that are quickly understood and easily implemented. For instance, spending 5 minutes in department meetings to demonstrate how to check for color contrast or break down assignments into smaller deadlines on a syllabus. The second, more transformational approach takes advantage of colleges’ role in training future professionals. How can college curriculum for web designers, architects, teachers, journalists, healthcare professionals, office workers, and others include content on disability, accessibility, and universal design that is relevant to their fields?

## Holistic, intersectional, lived experience needs to be centered

Several sessions focused on the lived experience of disability from the student and professional perspective. I always appreciate the reminder to see the world through a different lens. I was particularly struck by an example shared by Katy Washington (keynote speaker, Virginia Commonwealth University) – questioning why a student without a disability can hear about a campus event and decide to go last minute, while someone who needs captioning must let the event organizers know in advance that the accommodation is needed. Even if the accommodation is available, the lost spontaneity, the mental load of planning ahead and advocating, the message of inconvenience and exclusion all come through. How can we make our campuses more inclusive by design?

## Student supports rooted in relationship can be powerful

Several presentations this year discussed supports that involved a student with a disability building a relationship with a coach, mentor, or DSPS counselor. There is research on the power of “positive childhood experiences” (PCEs; Bethell et al., 2019), which serve to build resilience, buffer against stressful and traumatic events, and predict positive outcomes. One PCE is having non-parent adults who genuinely care and show interest in your success. Many of our college students are in a unique phase of life, the transition to adulthood, when life is shifting, changing, and growing. I can see how these types of relationships continue to be meaningful and protective for students who may face more adversity than their peers. We can all strive to be that person for others.

# Campus Spotlight:

## ARISE at North Orange Community College District

Welcome to an exclusive interview unveiling the transformative journey of the ARISE program, a beacon of support for neurodivergent students in higher education in the North Orange Community College District. In this interview with **Casey Sousa, ARISE Faculty Coordinator**, we delve into the program's purpose, evolution, and the impactful services Responses have been edited for clarity and conciseness.

A neurodiversity and wellness resource focused on:  
**Academics, Relationships, Independence, Self-Advocacy, and Emotional Health**

### **Question: Can you provide a brief overview of the ARISE program, its mission, and objectives?**

*Answer: ARISE really came from realizing that we had this huge bubble of students with autism coming up through K-12 systems, and we weren't seeing those groups of students be successful in postsecondary education. We looked at the holistic picture for this population to identify the barriers, and a lot of it was social interactions, executive functioning skills, and sensory sensitivities. Just being able to walk onto campus and survive the day with all the things going on - that's a lot for any student. But then if you have some sensitivities to stimulus, noise, smells, it can be super overwhelming. So, we started by setting up one ARISE room at our Anaheim location, and we had comfortable seating with lamps instead of overhead lighting. A place where students can sit if they need a minute to decompress. And we thought, let's see where we go from here. And really quickly, our students with and without disabilities were like, "What is this? This is really cool. I need a place to sit that's quiet on campus." Our focus is still on neurodivergent students, with intellectual disabilities, autism, ADHD, mental health issues, but it's open for anybody. This is a school service, not just a Disability Support Service (DSS).*



### **Question: What specific services or resources does ARISE offer to students?**

*Answer: We really try to make it a very student friendly place. So, if a student wants to just walk in and sit down, we're not peppering them with questions. I'll just say, "Do you just want to sit and relax, or do you want to talk?" because I want to give them that option for support. We can just sit and coexist in the space and allow them that time to de-escalate and decompress. Whatever it is that they need. We do social groups, for example we have a virtual connections group where students can just come and hang out online. We do lunch games and activities, different workshops, like making a do-it-yourself stress relief kit. Students can also meet with us one-on-one. So, if they're struggling with executive functioning, we'll sit down with them and say, "Okay, let's try a planner. Let's get out your phone, map out the next three weeks, and see if that works." And if it doesn't, we still have time to try something else. It's really cool because I think a lot of times you do have instructors and DSS counselors and staff that are willing to help, but they don't have the time.*

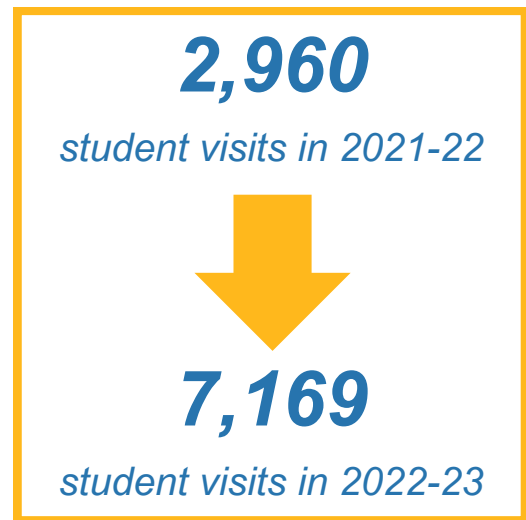
*We also try to help equip students with strategies they can use outside of ARISE - in the classroom, at work, and in relationships. For example, we saw some of our students were struggling with setting boundaries. We would role play different scenarios, and it was still hard in the moment. So, our student services specialist, Erika Larsen, came up with boundary cards. For a lot of our students that struggle with communication, it's such a cool tool for them to be able to use to say, "I might not be able to say this to you verbally, but I can hand you this card." A lot of it is seeing what our students are struggling with and what are some creative ways that we can help them work around those barriers.*

# Campus Spotlight:

## ARISE at North Orange Community College District

### Question: In what ways do you see ARISE impacting students and the college community?

Answer: *Well, I think that a lot of our students haven't felt like they've had a place where they fit, a place where they belong. Most institutions have veteran resource centers; a lot of them now have pride centers and all these different places where groups that are minoritized or not represented can come together. And with our DSS students, you can go to DSS and get accommodations, but that's not where you're going to find your people. I have so many students that will come in to ARISE and say, "I've never been around this many students like me before." I think ARISE just really helps with that. ARISE is not structured like a classroom, so students can come in, eat lunch, and talk about their interests. That's what keeps them coming to school. Finding somebody that shares a common interest. I think so much about how our success in education is based on retention and completion, and those are great things! But there are so many other ways to measure success that are more difficult to look at. For example, at Cypress, one student was coming into ARISE all the time. At first, he had a really difficult time talking to anybody, and he would just come in and sit quietly. Over the year, he started opening up a little bit more until he was kind of like the 'mayor of ARISE.' Everybody loved him. And then staff suddenly stopped seeing him at ARISE. Our Cypress team was kind of worried. But our student services specialist, Hailie Hurtado, ran into him a couple of weeks ago on campus and said, "Hey, I haven't seen you in so long; where have you been?" And he said, "When I first started at ARISE, I didn't want to talk to anybody. I was so nervous... I'm really sorry I haven't been coming to ARISE, but I started going to the Pride Center, and I started becoming part of all these other communities on campus." And that's what we want to hear! That's what I want our administration to hear. Because whether or not the student completes a bachelor's - what a wild success. This student is now going to be more comfortable walking into a job, fighting for a promotion, and advocating for himself.*



ARISE has expanded to **3 locations** across the North Orange CC District

### Question; What advice would you give other campuses that might be interested in starting a similar program?

Answer: *If you have one person who's dedicated and committed, there are some really simple things people can do, even without the space or funding for a full program. When we first started at our other campuses, we were 'ARISE out of a backpack.' We put fidgets and coloring books and other things into a backpack and we moved back and forth between different classrooms based on spaces that happen to be open and available. It really was like, "Oh, nobody's using this space on Mondays during lunch. We'll use it then." It doesn't have to be an all-day thing. It could be the lunch hour every day, or it could be one day a week. It's always just about getting creative with what's not being used 'and developing good relationships with people. We also had a student worker create a map of all the places or walks on campus that are quiet and calm - places that anyone would want to go to if they were really stressed out or overstimulated. You can have a weekly lunch on the lawn or have students come together in a neurodiversity club. Another thing that I've heard a lot about in research and from students is that campus events are often overstimulating - with balloons, noise, music, lights, so we also started advocating for sensory friendly resource fairs. I'll also tell our students all the time, if you want something, go to the board meeting and tell them because they love hearing from students. So, dedication, creativity, good relationships, and student advocacy can really kickstart a program.*

# Research Insights: Fostering Inclusive Postsecondary Education

We plan to highlight relevant research in our newsletter to share more about what the field is learning and how it translates to enhance student success on campus. The two articles we selected this issue both underscore the need for a holistic approach to inclusivity with meaningful opportunities for involvement to achieve the overarching goal of creating an educational environment where every individual can thrive and reach their full potential.

## Building Neurodiversity-Inclusive Postsecondary Campuses: Recommendations for Leaders in Higher Education (Dwyer et al., 2023)

Data suggest that 0.3%–1.9% of postsecondary students in the United States are autistic, while 5% have ADHD. Despite their strengths, neurodivergent individuals often encounter barriers and challenges, leading to lower completion rates than the general population. The authors advocate for a system-wide approach to enhance the inclusion of neurodivergent students in postsecondary education. Key recommendations include:

- Recognize neurodiversity as a DEI issue
- Implement campus-wide training
- Establish disability cultural centers
- Involve neurodivergent students
- Integrate disability supports
- Facilitate transitions and career supports
- Respect communication preferences

## A Conceptual Framework for Enabling Risk in Inclusive Postsecondary Education Programs (Rooney-Kron et al., 2022)

Students with developmental disabilities who engage in inclusive education have better outcomes than those in segregated settings. However, data from Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities reveal that only 62% of courses taken by students were inclusive, 22% of students resided in campus housing, and 17% participated in paid work experience. In practice, programs can be insular, prioritizing safety and ensured success, which limits students' choice, ability to take risks, and growth. From the University of Missouri–St. Louis Succeed program, recommendations to promote authentic risk-taking in inclusive college settings include:

- Identify areas of growth
- Understand risks and rewards
- Evaluate natural supports
- Enable access to natural consequences
- Reflect and plan for authentic risks

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