

CDI IMPACT REPORT

2024-2025



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GREETINGS FROM PROFESSOR ASHBY

Hello from Syracuse University and the Center on Disability and Inclusion (CDI). As I reflect on the last year, the word that comes most quickly to mind is change. We continue to adapt and respond proactively to the ever evolving policy, funding, and educational landscape. What remains constant is our pursuit of a more inclusive world and our commitment to centering the voices and experiences of disabled people.



CHRISTINE ASHBY G'01 G'07 G'08

Professor, School of Education
Director, Center on Disability and Inclusion

Despite the changes and challenges, this has been a year of growth across the Center. We have welcomed new graduate student researchers and affiliated faculty. We have further diversified our funding streams, allowing us to more nimbly respond to changing needs and opportunities. We have worked with University partners to ensure SU is a campus welcoming to all and a leader in educational access for neurodivergent students. Under the leadership of Dr. Beth Myers, we have expanded our InclusiveU program with new staff and increased enrollment. And we launched the New York State Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center to further increase access and opportunity.

We also developed and led our first intentionally inclusive study abroad course in Italy, and are already planning for next year.

In nearly every episode of the television series “The West Wing,” President Jed Bartlet states, “What’s next?” to signal moving on to the next challenge. That sums up the ethos of the CDI. We keep asking “What’s next?” How do we build on our history of inclusion and keep pushing boundaries? How do we remove barriers and increase access and opportunity for disabled people in all stages of life? Our study abroad course is just one example of how we keep moving forward.

As we reflect on the contributions and impact of the CDI this past year, we are excited by the possibilities before us. We look forward to the year ahead and the launch of our new Advocacy Training and Statewide Network funded by the New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities and the expansion of our Inclusive Higher Education technical assistance efforts with new funding from the State University of New York.

Syracuse University has long been a leader in advocacy, disability rights, and inclusive education. We hope you will join us on this journey and consider a gift to the Dream Big Campaign. Your contribution helps ensure that more students can access higher education and study abroad, more school districts and universities can receive support and technical assistance to advance inclusive education, and more research can be conducted and shared to ensure continued progress and innovation.



RESEARCH **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & OUTREACH** **MODEL PROGRAMMING**

The aim of the Center on Disability and Inclusion is to conduct applied and empirical disability-related research and develop and implement new initiatives promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of school and society, both locally and globally.

While maintaining a strong research focus, the CDI also serves campus and community engagement, technical assistance, and advocacy functions, both independently and through strategic collaborations with other Syracuse University and external centers and partners. The Center is also home to InclusiveU, the University's flagship inclusive post-secondary program for students with intellectual disability.

CDI BY THE NUMBERS



CDI COLLABORATORS

AFFILIATED FACULTY	18
AFFILIATED GRADUATE STUDENTS	11
PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS	14
FULL TIME STAFF	34



INCLUSIVEU IMPACT

INCLUSIVEU STUDENTS ENROLLED	102
MATRICULATED STUDENT INVOLVEMENT	175
CLASSES ACCESSED	355
INTERNSHIP DEPARTMENTS	40
INCLUSIVEU STUDENTS LIVING IN RESIDENCE HALLS	44

RESEARCH

PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS



38 Articles and Chapters
Published/ In press

10 Articles and Chapters
Under Review

21 Peer Reviewed
Presentations

16 Peer Reviewed
Presentations
Under Review

The Center on Disability and Inclusion generates and disseminates research related to disability and inclusion in school and community settings. The numbers above reflect scholarly contributions by CDI affiliated faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate student researchers from the School of Education. Nearly 40% of these submissions and publications are the outcome of collaborative projects with faculty and students.

The photo above was taken at the School of Education's most recent Graduate Research Symposium, where several affiliated graduate students shared their scholarly work. Below is a small sample of recently published and forthcoming work. Contact the Center for a comprehensive research report.

- Ashby, C. & Rood, C. (in press). **Critical Perspectives on Disability and the Special Education Workforce**. In M.L. Rock, B. Billingsley, L. Dieker, & M. Leko (eds) *Transforming the Special Education Workforce: Research and Complex Systems Perspectives*. American Education Research Association.
- Soldovieri, S.J. & Myers, B. (2025), **"Nothing separate": Understanding why students with intellectual disabilities choose inclusive postsecondary education**. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 53, 223-229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.12650>
- Kilinc, S., & Borowski, N. D. (2025). **Preschool educators' perspectives and experiences implementing dual language bilingual education for emergent multilinguals with disabilities**. *Exceptional Children*, 91(4), 377-395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00144029251335241>
- White, J. (In press). **Inclusive education in Central Europe: Systemic segregation and disablement of Romani children**. In D. Ryndak & M. Chitiyo (Eds.), *Understanding inclusive education*. Edward Elgar.

RESEARCH

AFFILIATED FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS



PROFESSOR GEORGE THEOHARIS

Professor of Educational Leadership
and Inclusive Elementary/Early
Childhood Education

Professor George Theoharis is one of the CDI's most engaged and collaborative partners, providing leadership to multiple School of Education and CDI projects, including the Baldanza Fellows Program in partnership with four local school districts. Theoharis, along with Professor Ashby, launched an interdisciplinary research study on race and high school athletics, supported by an SOE seed grant. Theoharis also co-authored an article with Professor Beth Myers on the integration of inclusive higher education in teacher preparation and on district leadership and disability inclusion with SOE alum Dr. Chelsea Tracy-Bronson.

Theoharis has continued to use his voice to spark conversation and reflection, contributing thoughtful op-eds and essays to Syracuse.com and The Nation. His biggest focus has been on finishing the third edition of *Leadership for Increasingly Diverse Schools*, a project close to his heart. Due out this September, the book includes two chapters he wrote, one of which explores what it really means to lead inclusively in today's schools. He is also working on another book that tackles the very real challenges facing K-12 education right now, and offers a path forward.

Professor Julia White contributed to four major projects in AY 24-25. She served on an expert panel for Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA), helping develop a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) Indicators Tool designed to assist non-educators, including attorneys, in evaluating whether FAPE has been provided. Her forthcoming book chapter, "Inclusive Education in Central Europe: Systemic Segregation and Disablement of Romani Children," will appear in *Understanding Inclusive Education*, edited by Diane Ryndak and Morgan Chitiyo.

White is co-authoring a manuscript with doctoral students Ethan Jackson, Cam Powell, and Rebekah Wallis, critically analyzing rhetoric in debates on special education placement. Julia is also collaborating with Professor Qiu Wang, Professor Christy Ashby, and Doctoral student Rebekah Wallis on a study examining how ESA fund use in Florida and New York relates to segregation and student outcomes. Their findings, based on national data, show higher segregation rates in states using ESA funds for special schools, and they are preparing a manuscript on this work.

Lastly, White is leading Project IMPRESS (Interdisciplinary Master's Preparation of Urban and Rural Educators in Special Education and School Counseling), which prepares highly effective, equity conscious inclusive education teachers and school counselors with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work with diverse student populations.



PROFESSOR JULIA WHITE G'05 G'07

Associate Professor in the
School of Education

RESEARCH

PHD GRANT PROJECT IMMERSE



Supported by a \$3.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Project IMMERSE (Inclusive, Multicultural, Multilingual, Effective, and Responsive Special Education) is designed to prepare future leaders and scholars in the field of inclusive special education. It offers comprehensive support, including full tuition, a competitive living stipend, and funding for books, travel, and conferences.

The program, a partnership among Syracuse University School of Education, University of New Mexico, and Rowan University, provides a rigorous, cohort-based experience that includes seminars, mentorship from experienced faculty, research opportunities focused on culturally sustaining practices, and training in university-level teaching and supervision. Scholars join a cohort of doctoral students and emerging leaders with commitment to, and expertise in, improving outcomes for students with disabilities and their families.

Pictured above are two of the Center's newest IMMERSE cohort, Rebekah Wallis and Ethan Jackson.

“I would have to say that the biggest draw for me to SU specifically is the long and rich history here of radical inclusion and the framing of ‘special’ education through the lens of disability studies.”

Rebekah Wallis
Ph.D. Student | Inclusive Special Education
Graduate Research Assistant | Center on Disability and Inclusion



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

LEARN HOW CDI IS HELPING STRENGTHEN
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NEW YORK STATE AND BEYOND



10 Colleges in New York received
Technical Assistance in FY24-25

With generous support from the Golisano Foundation, the Taishoff Center has developed the **Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center of New York (IHETAC)**, in order to increase college options and access for students with intellectual disability, by addressing systemic gaps and supporting statewide program development and improvement.

IHETAC serves as a statewide catalyst for change, supporting public and private institutions in developing inclusive environments that create social connection, confidence, and long-term success.

Hosted by the Taishoff Center, the international **State of the Art Conference on Inclusive Postsecondary Education and Individuals with Intellectual Disability** provides opportunities for colleges, universities, researchers, program staff, parents, and self-advocates to learn about the current state of research and practice in the field of inclusive postsecondary education, and to network with each other.

The conference is also home to the parallel Student Leadership Conference, as well as the largest inclusive college fair in the world. This travelling conference was held in Chapel Hill, NC in 2024 (pictured, right) and will return to Syracuse in the Fall of 2025.



523 Participants attended
SOTA in 2024



51 School Districts &
Pre-school Programs
receive support

CDI's **Mid-State Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Center** is a regional hub under the New York State Education Department's Mid-State Regional Team that works with 51 school districts and preschool programs across Central New York. Through evidence-based professional learning, targeted skill-building groups, and intensive partnership services, the FACE Center equips educators, administrators, students, and families to systemically increase equity, access, and inclusive outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. This is the second cycle of funding from the New York State Education Department to support the region's education community.

LEADING THE WAY IN INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION



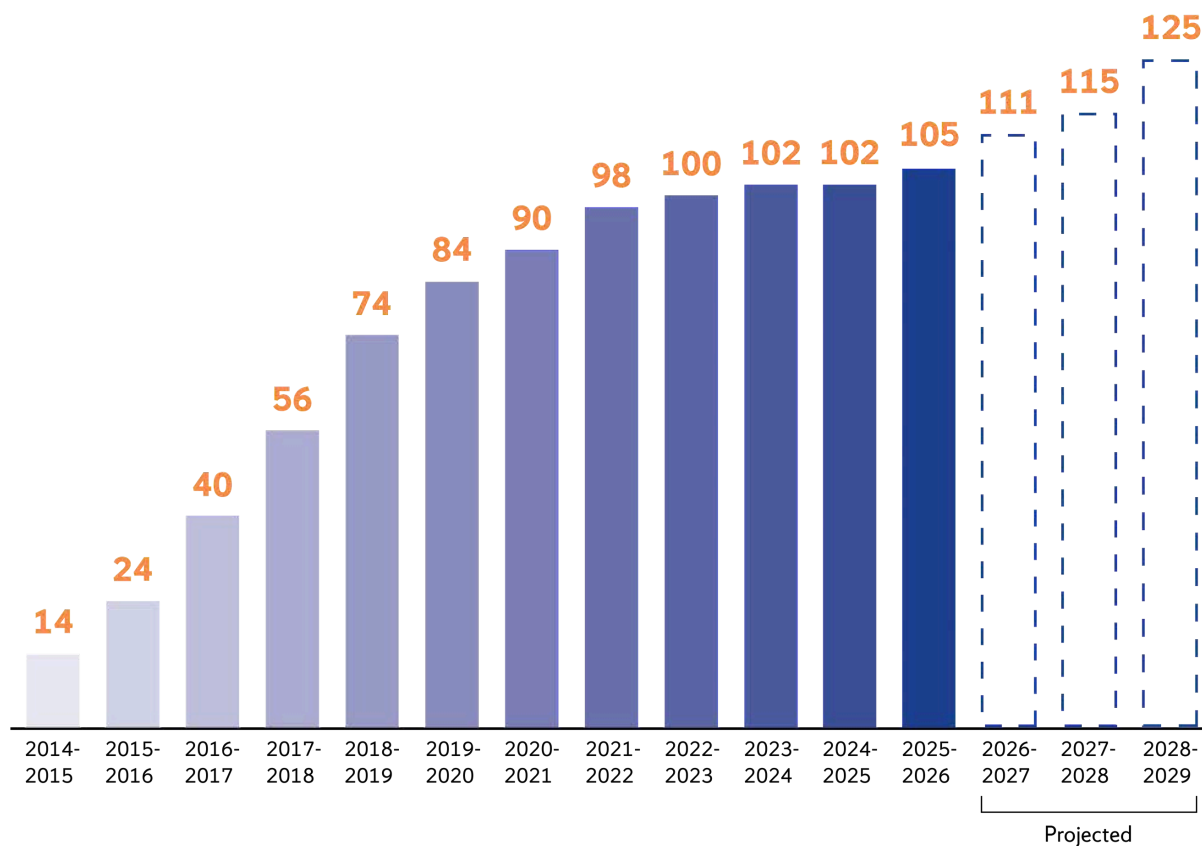
INCLU^{SIVE}U

CDI is home to InclusiveU, the largest inclusive program for students with intellectual disability in the country. InclusiveU offers opportunities for students to participate in every aspect of campus life, from SU coursework, inclusive living in the residence halls, and campus social activities.

Matriculated students at Syracuse have opportunities to engage with and support InclusiveU students through Peer2Peer, residential living, classroom mentor support, and more!

INCLUSIVEU STUDENT ENROLLMENT

AND GROWTH PLAN



“It’s going to be the proudest moment I’ve ever accomplished because people told me I would never get this far. But guess what? I proved them wrong. Everyone who told me that, I think they’re going to be in shock when they hear I graduated from Syracuse University. I get to show them now when I walk across the stage and shake the hand of our dean. I can say ‘look at me now, I am a college graduate!’”

Thomas Wilson, InclusiveU '23,
when asked about graduating with his peers



INCLUSIVEU ON THE ROAD

STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY



WASHINGTON, D.C.

NDSS ON CAPITOL HILL

As part of the National Down Syndrome Society Advocacy Conference, InclusiveU staff, faculty, and students joined advocates from around the country to visit Capitol Hill and meet with lawmakers to push for key legislation like the INCLUDE Project Act, funding for inclusive higher education programs, and anti-discrimination protections.



NEW YORK CITY

INCLUSIVEU INFO SESSION

InclusiveU staff joined NYC-area alumni to host an admissions information session at the University's Joseph I. Lubin House last Spring. Prospective students and families from the region were able to hear first-hand how transformative college can be. Pictured to the right are current InclusiveU staff and former InclusiveU and School of Education alumni.



ALBANY

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT DAY

Each year, Taishoff Center brings a bus-full of students to Albany for Student Empowerment Day, a statewide advocacy event promoting increased funding and financial aid access for students with disabilities. Last year, students met with legislators, visited the Senate Chambers for special recognition from New York State Senator Rachel May, and supported key policy initiatives, including expanded TAP eligibility. This event exemplifies the Center's commitment to student-led advocacy and inclusive higher education.

INCLUSIVE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM IN ITALY

INCLUSION IN ACTION



This summer, CDI partnered with the Florence Center to launch a fully inclusive study abroad program in Italy, bringing together students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities to learn and travel side-by-side in Florence, Rome, and Padua. Through language lessons, school visits, and cultural immersion, 14 students explored Italy's inclusive education practices while building cross-cultural understanding, independence, and lasting friendships. Reflections from students and faculty emphasized the program's profound personal and academic impact and highlighted its potential as a scalable model for inclusive study abroad. Pictured above are InclusiveU and School of Education students, along with faculty and staff, enjoying a tour of the Tuscan countryside.

“Everyone in this course brought their own perspective and experience, and that really added to what we were learning through the readings, classes, and school visits.”

Professor Beth Myers

Lawrence B. Taishoff Associate Professor of Inclusive Education
Executive Director | The Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education
Associate Director | Center on Disability and Inclusion



GLOBAL IMPACT

■ UZBEKISTAN

CDI, in partnership with the nonprofit Creative Associates, contributed to Uzbekistan's shift toward inclusive higher education through the USAID-funded All Children Succeeding initiative. As part of the \$25 million effort launched in 2023, CDI worked with local and global partners to assess the inclusive education landscape, develop inclusive curricula, and enhance inclusive teacher preparation and in-service professional development to support students with disabilities.

■ ITALY

CDI partnered with the School of Education and Syracuse Abroad to launch the University's first fully inclusive study abroad program in Italy. Fourteen students from InclusiveU and the School of Education explored inclusive education practices in four cities while sharing accommodations, meals, and academic activities—promoting community and accessibility under the guidance of Dr. Christine Ashby and Dr. Beth Myers.

■ IRELAND

CDI faculty and Taishoff Center staff travelled to Ireland last fall to present at the European State of the Art Conference in Cork. On the way, the team stopped at Trinity College in Dublin and discussed inclusive internship and career development partnerships.



COMMUNITY IMPACT

FROM PRE-K TO ADULTHOOD



INVESTIGATING INCLUSIVE PRE-K PRACTICES

Jowonio Preschool, with more than 50 years of intentional, full inclusion of students with a wide range of disabilities, holds a critical place in the history of inclusive education and exemplifies “the living tradition of inclusive practice.”

CDI’s latest collaboration with this Syracuse preschool is a research study examining the sustainable framework behind Jowonio’s longstanding practices, by exploring the perspectives of experienced educators and parents.

As part of a broader, long-term research endeavor, this first phase investigates the key components and benefits of Jowonio’s inclusive educational model, with particular attention to the interplay between values, leadership, pedagogy, and practices.

Building on this foundational work in inclusive early education, it is essential to consider how inclusive values and practices extend beyond preschool and into later stages of a young person’s development. This continuum of inclusive support is exemplified in initiatives, such as Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), which focus on preparing young adults with disabilities for successful transitions into adulthood, higher education, and meaningful employment.



PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Pre-ETS provides free career planning support for students with disabilities ages 14-21. Services include career exploration, workplace readiness, post-secondary planning, self-advocacy, and work-based learning.

Students gain insight into their skills and interests, develop job-seeking and soft skills, explore education or training options, learn to advocate for themselves, and experience real workplace environments.

Last fall, students toured the JMA Wireless Stadium to learn about the different types of jobs that the facility hosts (pictured, right).

CAMPUS IMPACT

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION THROUGH INTELLIGENCE ++



Intelligence++ is a partnership between Syracuse University Libraries' Blackstone LaunchPad, the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education, and the College of Visual and Performing Arts. The program includes a two-semester inclusive entrepreneurship and design course that encourages students from across campus to imagine and create products, devices, and services for persons with disabilities.

Open to both undergraduate and graduate students, along with InclusiveU students, the program fosters collaboration across diverse academic backgrounds. At its core is a two-semester course where students co-create innovative products, services, and devices designed to support individuals with disabilities. The course culminates in a spring design competition, offering participants the opportunity to apply inclusive design principles in real-world contexts. Intelligence++ is generously funded by donor Gianfranco Zaccai '70, H'09.

“The most transformative aspect of participating in the Intelligence++ course was the profound shift it collaborative and inclusive process.”

Carolyn Fernandes '25
Visual and Performing Arts Student



CAMPUS IMPACT

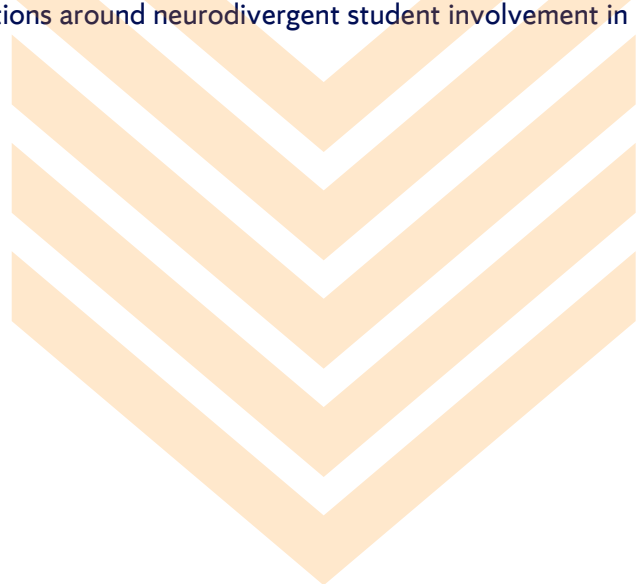
NEURODIVERSITY COMMUNITY AT SU



The Neurodiversity Community at SU is a student-centered program designed to support degree-seeking students who are autistic or otherwise neurodivergent during their campus journey, formed with a generous contribution from Karen Colapietro Seybold G'92. Inspired by her daughter Lauren, who has autism, Seybold's funding allows for academic and social support, sensory-friendly spaces, and research opportunities, as well as promoting neurodiversity inclusion on campus.

This was a pivotal year in expanding the Neurodiversity Community's impact on campus and beyond. CDI collaborated with partners such as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), the Disability Cultural Center, SU Libraries, Hendricks Chapel, and SU Press to bring thoughtful, relevant, and engaging programming around neurodiversity on a college campus. Advocacy from recent years around sensory friendly options on campus helped drive the work forward - including new sensory spaces in Bird Library. Events such as "Brainy Breakfast: Supporting a Neuro-affirming Campus Climate" engaged staff and faculty from across campus with new tools and a sense of community on supporting neurodivergent students at Syracuse.

These touchpoints have helped increase awareness of Syracuse University's neurodivergent community and successfully created a network of partners who understand the importance of supporting them. In addition to campus presence, the CDI team has developed and delivered technical assistance to other universities around neuro-affirming practices and research presentations around neurodivergent student involvement in Greek Life.



DREAM BIG! CAMPAIGN



The Dream Big! campaign is a transformative \$5 million matching challenge sponsored by Kathy and Capt. Robert P. Taishoff, JAGC, USN (Ret.) '86, a Syracuse University Life Trustee, that directly supports our goal of creating inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities across the lifespan. This funding supports InclusiveU scholarships and enhanced student experiences on campus, fosters collaboration and research, assists faculty development in inclusive teaching, increases technical assistance, and deepens community engagement, and more. Launched in Spring 2024 at InclusiveU's 10 Year Anniversary Gala, The Taishoff Center Advisory Council has been instrumental in driving pledges and support for this initiative.

With an expansive wishlist across CDI's areas of focus, the campaign has resulted in overwhelming generosity. Gift highlights include:

■ BUILDING INCLUSIVE FUTURES

Thanks to a generous donation from the Payne family, InclusiveU is expanding opportunities for InclusiveU students. Inspired by their daughter Chloe's positive experience at InclusiveU, the Paynes aim to help more graduates transition successfully into independent lives and careers.

■ LIVE LIKE LIAM

In memory of InclusiveU student Liam Zoghby, we are proud to acknowledge the Live Like Liam Scholarship, established by the Live Like Liam Foundation Inc. By honoring Liam's spirit and commitment as a student manager for the Syracuse Orange Men's Basketball Team and member of InclusiveU, the scholarship ensures that future students benefit from Liam's values, fostering joy, connection, and academic growth within a fully inclusive campus community.

■ STRENGTHENING THE TEACHER WORKFORCE

The Baldanza Fellows Program—supported by the Baldanza Fund for Excellence in Education Policy in Practice—is dedicated to recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers from diverse backgrounds into Syracuse area K-12 schools. This program is a partnership between the School of Education, the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, and several Central New York school districts. Marcia Baldanza '86 has extended her support through her leadership of the new CDI Advisory Committee.

■ SUPPORTING A CAMPUS WELCOMING TO ALL

Generous funding from Karen Colapietro Seybold G'92 supports student experience through InclusiveU as well as through the Neurodiversity Community at SU. The Joanne Larson Memorial Scholarship, honoring Larson's resilient spirit and love of learning, offers scholarships for InclusiveU. Neurodiversity at SU supports matriculated neurodivergent or autistic students through campus programming, community building, and more.

DREAM BIG! CAMPAIGN

PROGRAMMING SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVEU

More than 100 students are currently enrolled in the InclusiveU program, with a goal of increasing student capacity by 25% by 2029. Gifts to the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education enabled the Center to scale up support staff by hiring more coordinators dedicated to enhancing the student-centered experience.

In addition to existing InclusiveU leadership including **Brianna Shults** (InclusiveU Director), **Sam Roux** (Academic Coordinator), **Bridget Fowler** (Residential Coordinator) and **Jennifer Quinn**, (Internship & Employment Coordinator), the Center welcomed several new roles committed to supporting student experience:



Liz Brown

**Transition
Coordinator**

Supporting students as
the enter and exit
InclusiveU



Nick Pallotta

**Program Partnership
Coordinator**

Aligning program
partners with the
InclusiveU experience



Jon Rohald

**Student Experience
Coordinator**

Leading student
involvement on
campus and
community activities



Erin Wilsch

**Assistant Career
Development
Coordinator**

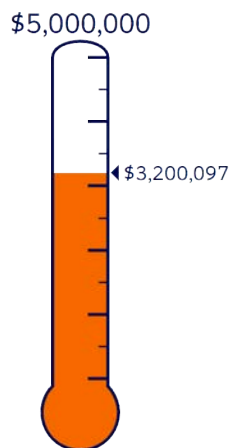
Increasing internship and
employment support



Ashley Shuster

**Assistant Academic
Coordinator**

Facilitating access to
over 350 courses across
campus



Help us reach our goal!

To support the CDI through the Dream Big! campaign, go to our website at disabilityinclusioncenter.syr.edu/dream-big

or contact Torin Washington at tjwashin@syr.edu

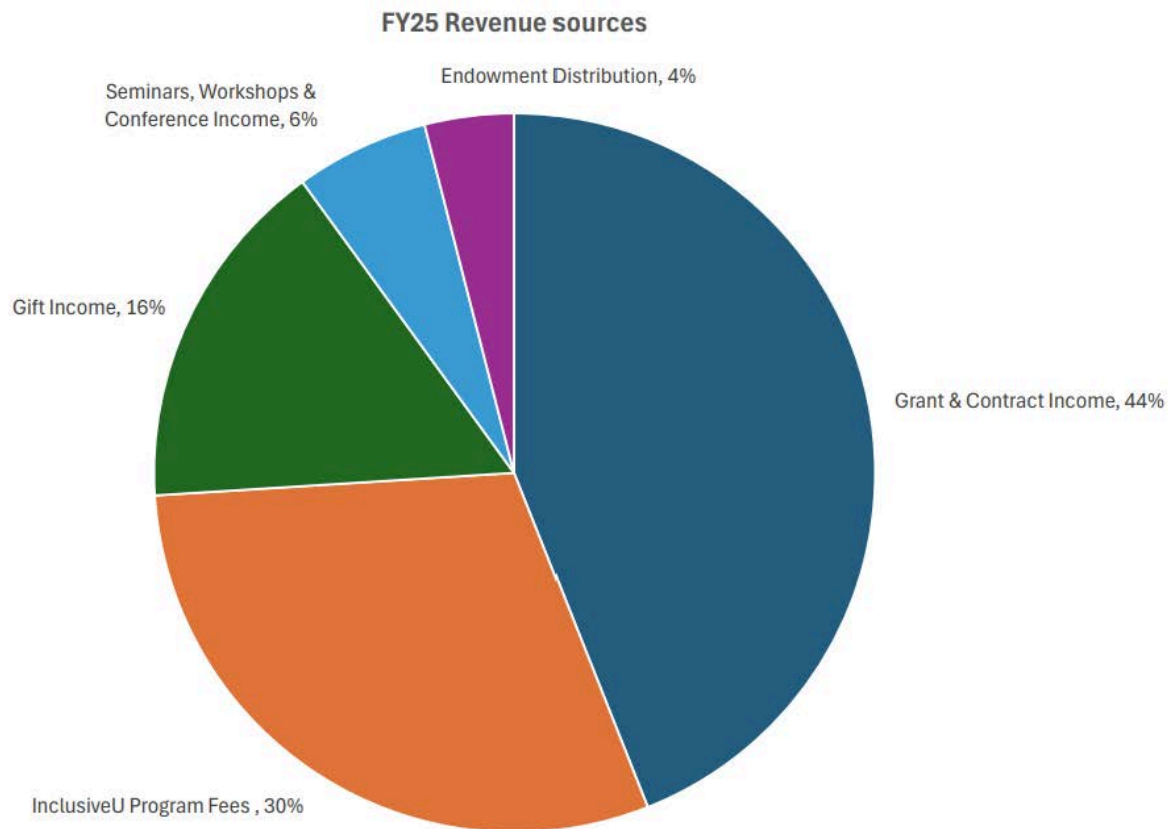
“If we give them the chance to pursue their interests and prepare them for careers, just like we do with every student at Syracuse University, they will thrive, excel, succeed, and surprise us.”

Robert '86 and Kathryn Taishoff



BUDGET SNAPSHOT

CDI's AY 2024-2025 total expenditures exceeded \$4 million, with a variety of revenue streams supporting research, model programming, and technical assistance efforts.



START SPREADING THE NEWS...



CDI was recently awarded three grants and contracts that will improve outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in New York across their lifespan.

- **NYS Council on Developmental Disabilities** \$250,000 to develop and grow a network of self-advocates and advocates in New York State.
- **Golisano Foundation** \$200,000 to launch the Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center of New York.
- **State University of New York (SUNY)** nearly \$75,000 to support SUNY campuses in enhancing and growing IPSE opportunities.

CDI LEADERSHIP AT SU AND BEYOND

DR. CHRISTINE ASHBY

Professor of Inclusive Education and Disability Studies
Director, Center on Disability and Inclusion

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

- Faculty Representative to the Syracuse University Board of Trustees
- Co-Chair of the Syracuse University Disability Access and Inclusion Council
- Co-Coordinator of the Baldanza Fellows Program
- Co-Chair of the Search Committee for School of Education Inclusive and Literacy Education Positions
- Member of the School of Education Tenure and Promotion Committee

NATIONAL/ INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

- Member of the ID+ Project External Advisory Group, University College Cork
- New York Steering Committee and State Leadership Team Member, Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR)

DR. BETH MYERS

Lawrence B. Taishoff Associate Professor of Inclusive Education
Executive Director, The Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education
Associate Director, Center on Disability and Inclusion

UNIVERSITY SERVICE


- Committee on Degrees and Curriculum, School of Education
- Blackstone Launchpad Advisory Council
- Women in Leadership Steering Committee

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

- Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Association Founding Board
- Think College National Coordinating Center Partnership Advisory Council
- Founding Executive Co-Editor, Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education (JIPE)
- State of the Art Conference on Inclusive Postsecondary Education Conference Chair
- Student Leadership Conference, Host
- Co-founder of the NYS Inclusive Higher Education Coalition

CONTACT US

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