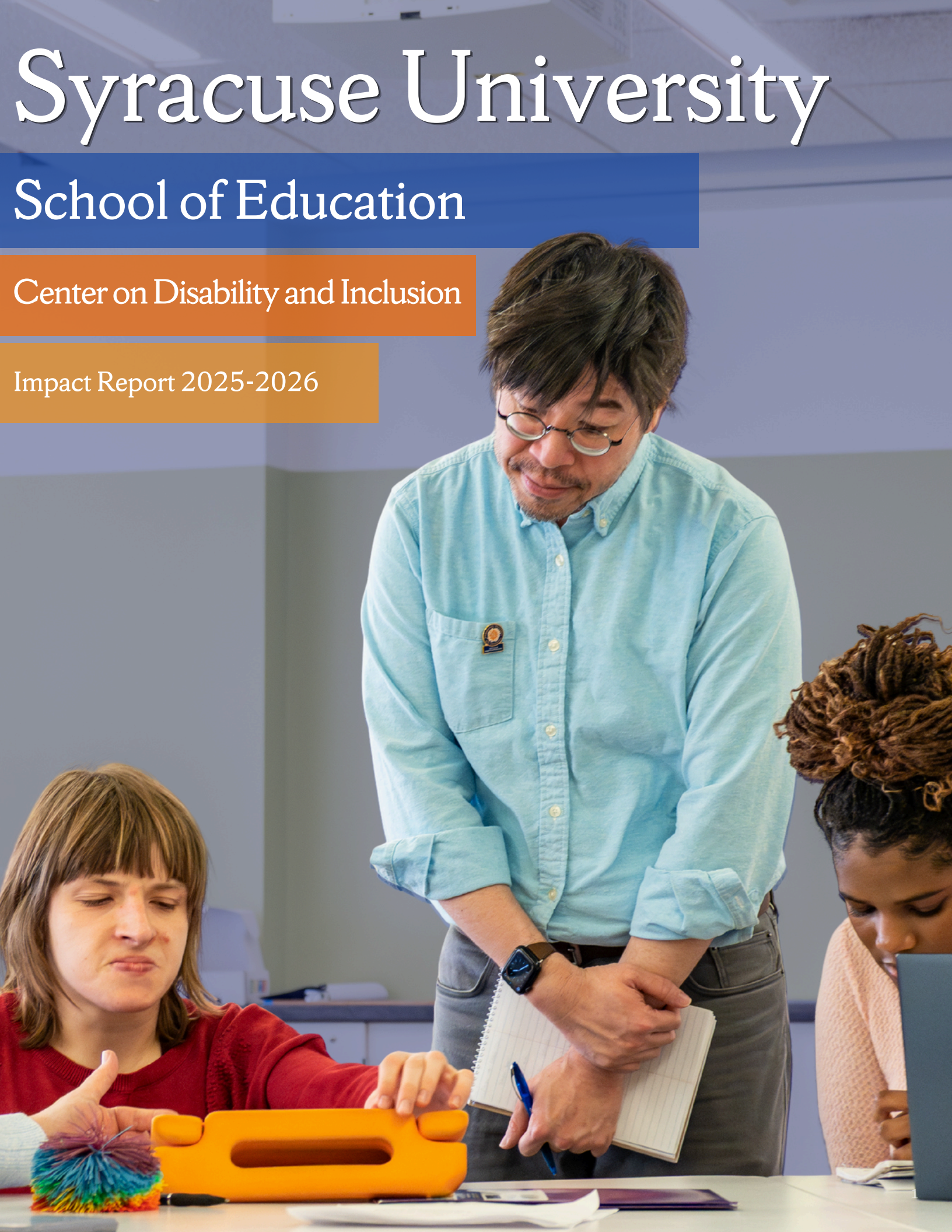
Syracuse University

School of Education

Center on Disability and Inclusion

Impact Report 2025-2026



GREETINGS FROM PROFESSOR ASHBY

Greetings from sunny Syracuse! Those aren't words we get to say for much of the year! As the lush green lawns and riotous flowers bring color to a quieter campus, we take a moment to reflect. There is no denying that this has been a turbulent year. The federal funding landscape has shifted dramatically, the Department of Education has been broken up and responsibilities moved to new agencies, there is renewed tension over local control of schools, and disabled people face greater challenges living in the community.

While the changes can understandably make us feel like we are navigating a constantly shifting terrain, the core of our work and the goals we are working toward remain steadfast. We may need to use new tools, forge new partnerships, shift our path slightly, but the destination remains unchanged. CDI remains focused on increasing access, inclusion, and opportunity for all disabled people. As you will find, our team has done amazing work this year.

We have expanded our technical assistance efforts in both the PK-12 and Higher Education space. After a highly successful pilot year, our Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center (IHETAC) secured additional funding from the Golisano Foundation and new funding from the State University of New York (SUNY) system to enhance and expand our reach.

Through this work, we hope to drastically increase the number and quality of inclusive postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disability in New York State. All students that want to attend college or university should have the opportunity, and IHETAC is helping make that a reality for many more students.

We also have broadened our technical assistance and professional development efforts with schools, universities, businesses, and organizations drawing on the expertise of our faculty, staff, and extraordinary graduate students. If you, or an organization you know, is looking for support advancing disability inclusion, please reach out and let us know what you are looking for.

We began working on two other state-funded grants this year, both with funding from the Council on Developmental Disabilities. These projects focus on two vital areas of need for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities - advocacy and mental health. You can read more about both of these projects on the pages to come.

But our work isn't only focused on New York State. You could find CDI faculty, staff, and students all around the globe—leading our second inclusive study abroad trip to Italy, meeting with European leaders in inclusive postsecondary education in Austria, supporting college students with intellectual disability at a summit in Hawaii, as well as in a documentary on inclusive education produced and shown in South Korea. The impact of our work is far-reaching and these partnerships are mutually energizing.

These are challenging times, but we continue to face them with optimism, innovation, and purpose. We hope you find that passion in these pages and encourage you to reach out if you want to get involved or simpy learn more!



Professor & Faculty Director, School of Education
Executive Director, Center on Disability and Inclusion

CHRISTINE ASHBY G'01 G'07 G'08



TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Research

5 Affiliated Faculty

6 Project IMMERSE

7 Taishoff Center

8 State of the Art

9 Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center

10 InclusiveU Impact

11 Inclusion in Action

13 International Collaboration

14 Support from NYS

15 Community Impact

19 Disability Pride Month

20 Life After College

21 Dream Big!

22 CDI Volunteers

23 Remembering Liam

24 Contact Us



CDI COMMUNITY BY THE NUMBERS

21 AFFILIATED FACULTY

14 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

11 AFFILIATED GRADUATE STUDENTS

33 FULL TIME STAFF

RESEARCH



Emma Wareing G'26 and doctoral student Cam Powell presenting their research on play-based learning at the School of Education Graduate Student Symposium to Dean Kelly Chandler-Olcott.

The Center on Disability and Inclusion generates and disseminates research related to disability and inclusion in school and community settings. The numbers below reflect scholarly contributions by CDI affiliated faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate student researchers from the School of Education.

2026 PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS

36
PEER REVIEWED MANUSCRIPTS PUBLISHED

16
PEER REVIEWED MANUSCRIPTS FORTHCOMING

22
PEER REVIEWED MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW

42
PEER REVIEWED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

AFFILIATED FACULTY

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS



YEHYANG LEE
Inclusive Education

Professor Lee's research focuses on how disability, race, language, culture, and poverty intersect to shape educational inequities for students with disabilities experiencing housing instability and other forms of marginalization within educational systems. Building upon decades of transformative work led by Syracuse University faculty and community partners, Professor Lee has continued growing university-school-family-community partnerships through collaborative research projects centered on restorative justice and equity-centered educational policy and systems redesign. Publications include "Marginalization at the Intersection of Language, Culture, and Disability: Systemic Contradictions Perceived by Special Education Teachers in Serving Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students with Disabilities in South Korea" in the *Peabody Journal of Education* and "Culturally Sustaining Inclusive Systemic Design to Address Overrepresentation of Students of Color with and without Dis/abilities in School Discipline" in *Equity and Excellence in Education*.

Lee recently received the 2026 Korean American Educational Researchers Association Best Conference Paper Award.



ALAN FOLEY
Cultural Foundations of Education & Disability Studies

Professor Foley's work spans several interconnected projects at the intersection of disability studies, educational technology, and inclusive design. In April 2026, Foley published DISCO-Tech: A Framework for Resisting Ableism in Emerging Technologies in *Teachers College Record* with School of Education Professer and Associate Dean for Research **Beth Ferri**, offering administrators, faculty, and researchers an analytical framework for moving educational technology decisions past accessibility compliance and toward disability justice. In addition, as part of an NIH-funded project on co-creating consent materials with adults with intellectual disability for precision medicine research, and in partnership with PhD student **Rebekah Wallis**, Foley demonstrated that standard readability scores can be misleading in isolation.

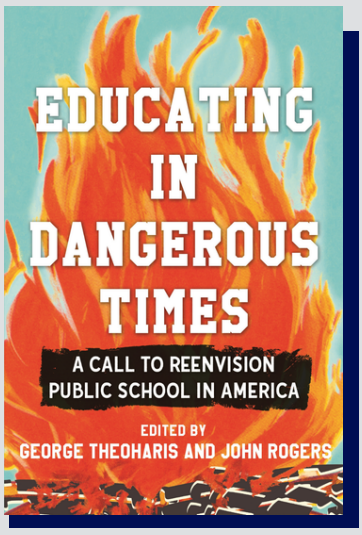
Looking ahead, Foley is developing Designing-Within Practice, a longitudinal qualitative study to examine co-design experience and identity in Intelligence++, Syracuse's interdisciplinary inclusive design course. With co-investigators Professor **Beth Myers**, course Teaching Assistant **Micah Fialka-Feldman**, and Visual and Performing Arts Professor **Don Carr**, the study will follow InclusiveU students across multiple interview points to explore what genuine co-design authority looks like and how participation shapes students' identities as designers and innovators.



GEORGE THEOHARIS
Educational Leadership & Inclusive Education

Congratulations to **Professor Theoharis** on the release of *Educating in Dangerous Times: A Call to Reenvision Public Schools in America*, a new book to seed a public conversation about K-12 schooling, with contributions by a community of impressive scholars in the field, including former School of Education professor Marcelle Haddix, and CDI leaders **Christy Ashby** and **Beth Myers**.

This book invites friends, neighbors, and people who do not yet know one another to talk together about our collective future and and responsibility in our shared public schools.



PROJECT IMMERSE

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCHOLARS AND LEADERS

CDI hosted the first annual in-person convening of Project IMMERSE at Syracuse University last spring. The conference brought together IMMERSE Scholars, external advisors, and faculty mentors from all three partner universities to advance scholarship and inclusive pedagogical practices through collaborative programming, including paper presentations and feedback sessions, poster sessions, and facilitated roundtable discussions. Student and faculty hosts were proud to show off points of pride in the Syracuse community, including the Salt City Market, Dinosaur BBQ, and the SU Art Museum.

A highlight of the convening was the compelling plenary on Syracuse University's historic legacy of inclusion, featuring former School of Education Dean and scholar **Doug Biklen (*image below*)**. By convening faculty and emerging researchers in this intensive setting, the IMMERSE Program continued its mission to cultivate the next generation of engaged scholars and advance institutional capacity for inclusive excellence and transformative teaching practices across higher education.



About 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 through a partnership among Syracuse University School of Education, University of New Mexico, and Rowan University. The rigorous, cohort-based experience is designed to cultivate scholars committed to improving outcomes for students with disabilities and their families. Christy Ashby is the Principal Investigator on the grant, along with Co-PIs Beth Myers and Julia White.

"Project IMMERSE has helped me to expand my understanding of educational systems through the support of a tightly knit community. After the convening, I came away with an extended appreciation for the educational legacy here at Syracuse and inspiration to reimagine educational futures."



CAM POWELL

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

TAISHOFF CENTER

OPENING THE DOORS TO INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

Staff and faculty from the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education travelled across the globe this year to continue driving progress in the field of inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE).

Read on to learn about our award-winning work that was celebrated on a national stage, a new cross-country collaboration and partnership with colleagues leading the way in Hawaii and Missouri, a historic recognition from New York State, and the building of a new professional organization for the field. This has been a year that reflects not just where the field of inclusive higher education is headed, but the role our Center is playing.

Beth Myers, along with Assistant Director of the Taishoff Center **Brianna Shults G'20**, and Associate Director of Operations and Strategic Initiatives **Karly Grifasi,** collaborated with IPSE leaders from across the country to develop and found a professional member organization for the field, the IPSE Association. Together, they serve as board members for this essential organization charged with increasing collaboration, building community and ensuring sustainability for professionals, non-profit organizations, self-advocates and families involved in inclusive higher education.



Karly Grifasi, Brianna Shults, and Beth Myers with the founding board members of the IPSE Association at the Strategic Planning Retreat.

The IPSE Association formally launched at the State of the Art Conference last fall, and has grown to more than 300 members in almost a year. Moving forward, the IPSE Association will play a pivotal role in organizing the State of the Art Conference and additional professional development opportunities for the field.



A rising tide lifts all ships

In addition to the groundbreaking work of InclusiveU at Syracuse University, CDI Assistant Director and Executive Director of the Taishoff Center **Beth Myers** has worked tirelessly for over a decade to raise awareness and increase opportunities for inclusive postsecondary education across the globe.

She is the founding Executive Editor of the *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education (JIPE)*, the national research journal for the field, the Chair of the annual State of the Art Conference on Inclusive Higher Education, and a founding board member of the IPSE Association. From providing technical assistance to the SUNY system, to collaborations from Europe to Mexico, Myers' steadfast commitment to building truly inclusive college programs is incomparable.

Her work at the University spans from teaching future K-12 educators about disability, supporting future inclusive education professors in their own research and professional development, overseeing the Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center of NY, managing several externally funded grants and projects through CDI, leading University-wide committees including the Disability Access Committee, and continuing her own academic research and pedagogy. At the center of Myers' work are the students she serves. From launching the Student Leadership Conference track at State of the Art, to bringing students to advocate for disability access and inclusion in Washington D.C. and Albany throughout the years, to centering student voice in her recent book, *Creating Our Own Lives: College Students with Intellectual Disability* with co-author **Michael Gill,** Myers holds a truly holistic approach to increasing access and inclusion for future generations.

LEADERSHIP IN IPSE

The State of the Art Conference (SOTA) continues to be an essential gathering space for the IPSE community, by providing opportunities for colleges, universities, researchers, program staff, parents and self-advocates to learn about the current state of research and practice in the field.

This annual, travelling conference was hosted in Syracuse in 2025, giving the Taishoff Center the opportunity to show off our inclusive campus facilities including the JMA Wireless Stadium, Barnes Center, and Schine Student Center, as well as the Salt City Market in downtown Syracuse, where the conference reception and annual karaoke party was held.

In collaboration with IPSE Association, the conference added pre-conference sessions to facilitate deep dives into key topics. InclusiveU director **Brianna Shults** hosted a session for families interested in learning about inclusive college programs, where she invited current InclusiveU parents to a panel to share their experiences supporting their students in college preparation.



SOTA's annual Inclusive College Fair at Schine Student Center. Students and families had the opportunity to meet with representatives from 40+ inclusive programs from around the country.



In addition to hosting SOTA, the Taishoff Center leadership team (**Beth Myers, Brianna Shults, and Samuel Roux**) travelled to Hawaii for the University of Hawaii at Manoa's historic Pac Rim Conference to facilitate and present a new conference strand centered on IPSE.

While in Hawaii, the team met with partners from University of Hawaii and University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL) to continue planning a new cross-university study away collaborative and partnership.

L-R, Beth Myers, Brianna Shults, UMSL Assistant Director Jonathan Lidgus, and Sam Roux.

The State of the Art Conference and InclusiveU teams took home TWO awards for their groundbreaking programs at the 2025 National Down Syndrome Congress Big Game Ball last fall, held annually at the College Football Hall of Fame.

Let's celebrate!





***Photo on Left**: InclusiveU students Will Grabau '26, Lily Traub '27, and John Rorro '26*
***Photo Above:** Christy Ashby, volunteer Tim Crosby, Beth Myers, Brianna Shults, and Karly Grifasi*

INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

MOMENTUM FOR INCLUSIVE COLLEGE PROGRAMS CONTINUES TO GROW IN NEW YORK STATE

In its second year, the **Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center of New York (IHETAC)** had a targeted focus on the Western New York and Southern Tier regions, supporting Roberts Wesleyan University, Daemen University, and Hartwick College in creating and expanding programming to increase college access. Spearheaded by **Director Mak El Hassan,** IHETAC provided dedicated consultation, professional development and technical assistance throughout the year.

A major milestone was securing a continued $1,000,000 investment from the Golisano Foundation, ensuring momentum over the next five years. This commitment supports the IHETAC's strategic plan of supporting new program development, creating an accessible statewide resource library, and formalizing a community of practice to support collaboration across institutions.

Building on this momentum, IHETAC was contracted by the State University of New York (SUNY) system to complete a comprehensive readiness review of SUNY's foundational work toward creating additional inclusive postsecondary education programs in the state. Next year, IHETAC will continue to scale up technical assistance and resources to colleges and universities in response to growing interest and support from additional organizations committed to this essential work.

"I am incredibly proud of this growth as we enter this next phase of development."

MAK EL HASSAN
Director, IHETAC



IHETAC TEAM MEETING WITH STAFF AND STUDENTS FROM EMPOWERU AT HARTWICK COLLEGE

INCLUSIVEU IMPACT

QUICK STATS 25-26

105
INCLUSIVEU STUDENTS ENROLLED

175
MATRICULATED STUDENTS INVOLVED

366
CLASSES ACCESSED

48
INTERNSHIP DEPARTMENTS

325
UNIQUE INSTRUCTORS

53
INCLUSIVEU STUDENTS
LIVING IN RESIDENCE HALLS

RANKINGS

The MIGHTY

On The Mighty's 20 Greatest Inclusion Programs for students with Disabilities in 2025

IVYWISE

2026 IvyWise Best Colleges for Autistic College Students



InclusiveU students and faculty posing with the citation from Governor Kathy Hochul.

The Center received a special citation from New York Governor Hochul, commemorating **May 1, 2026,** as **New York State IPSE Day!**





Nicole Massab '28 (above, bottom center) posing with her sorority Delta Phi Epsilon and David Bulan '28 (right, center) posing after his Pi Kappa Phi initiation ceremony.

Nicole Massab and **David Bulan** are opening the doors for further inclusion in Greek life on campus by being the first InclusiveU students to officially pledge!

INCLUSION IN ACTION

INCLUSIVE STUDY ABROAD HIGHLIGHTS

The School of Education brought a second cohort of students to Italy in 2026 for the study abroad course, Inclusive Schools and Societies: Lessons from the Italian Context. Sixteen students, with and without disabilities, participated in this second iteration of the groundbreaking trip, led by CDI faculty **Christy Ashby** and **Julia White**, centered around learning and living inclusion.







An additional outcome of this innovative course has been the research and extension opportunities this trip has made possible. Elyas and Maia—alumni from the first inclusive study abroad trip in 2025—demonstrate that impact below. The CDI is proud to create opportunities for undergraduate research and will continue to expand on this in the coming years.



Maia Simmons '28 (left, with classmate **Elyas Layachi '27** and Italian high school students) returned from their trip to Italy with more questions than answers. Energized by the experience and intrigued by the ways students navigated and made sense of accessibility differences and challenges during the trip, she leveraged her upcoming Renee Crown Honor's program thesis to explore this topic further. She joined the CDI inclusive abroad research team and integrated her research interests into the broader study, focusing on perceptions of access and what can be learned through these types of inclusive abroad experiences. Simmons has conducted interviews with students involved in the second cohort and will be analyzing the data over the coming year.

INCLUSION IN ACTION

INCLUSIVE STUDY ABROAD HIGHLIGHTS

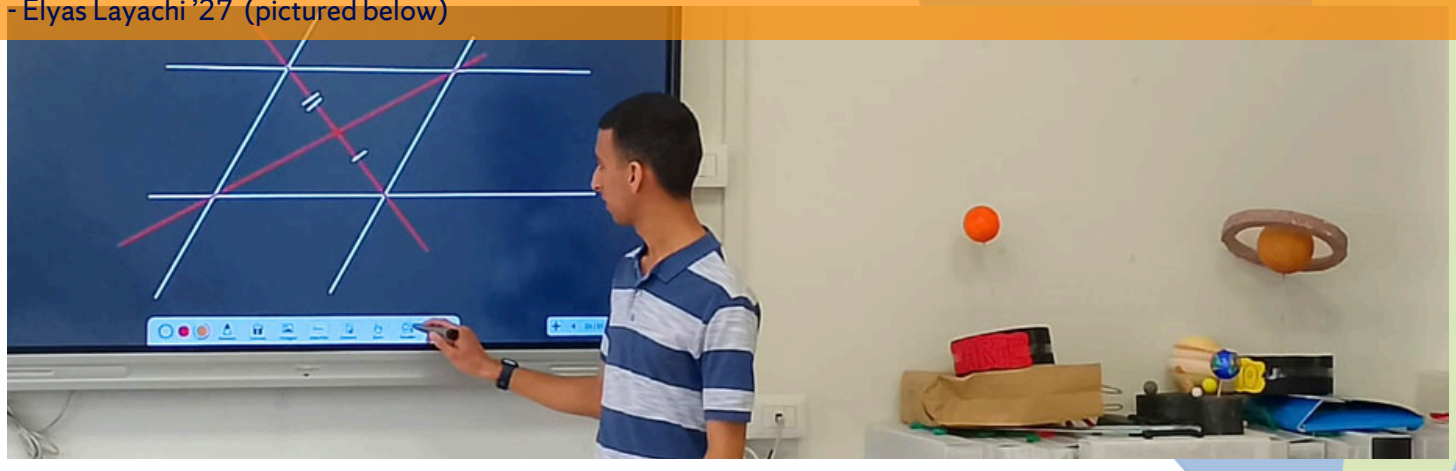
This summer, **Elyas Layachi '27, returned to Italy to** conduct fieldwork in Italian schools as part of his honors thesis.

Layachi's research focuses on comparing the teaching practices and philosophies of teachers in the US and in Italy, as well as the mathematical dispositions and experiences of students in both countries. His work builds on his inclusive abroad experience, focusing on comparing teaching philosophies of inclusion and the presence (or lack thereof) and roles of support teachers within the classroom.

This research project reflects an extension of Layachi's experience on the 2025 trip. After touring an inclusive middle school in Rome, Layachi connected with the school principal, and long-time collaborator of the School of Education, Dr. Simona D'Alessio. Intrigued by the Italian education system's policies on inclusion, Layachi wanted to further immerse himself in the system and learn from teachers and students about their experiences. The mathematics focus came from his major and a second interest in exploring how mathematics teachings may be similar or different between the two countries, despite similar performance levels on math assessments.

During his fieldwork, Layachi connected with Italian teachers and students, while truly immersing himself in their education system. While conducting video observations of various middle and high school classrooms, Layachi interviewed teachers about their philosophies and experiences and interviewed students about their experiences learning mathematics. To compensate the sites, Layachi assisted students with learning English, and even taught some mathematics lessons in English. **"I am so fortunate to have had this experience and the full support of the School of Education and Honors Program. I am excited to continue my work in the United States and begin developing my findings!"**

- Elyas Layachi '27 (pictured below)



INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

TAISHOFF CENTER FORMALIZES PARTNERSHIP WITH EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WORKING TO EXPAND IPSE

This year, Taishoff Center entered into an Erasmus+ (Key Action 131) Agreement with the University of Salzburg, Austria, to support collaboration as well as faculty, staff, and student exchange for increasing knowledge and initiatives on Inclusive Postsecondary Education. So far, this has funded a visit to Salzburg for five days for a Blended Intensive Programme with nine European countries, where the team delivered sessions on IPSE models in the US and student advocacy, and participated in strategic planning to increase opportunities for students in universities around the world. Recently, four members of the European group JoinIn! traveled to Syracuse to learn more about the Taishoff Center's initiatives and observe the work of InclusiveU. The group is working on future international research, conferences, and symposia to support inclusive postsecondary education across global contexts.

SOUTH KOREA HIGHLIGHTS SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S COMMITMENT TO CAMPUS ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

News network Daegu MBC highlighted the CDI in a recent national documentary on inclusive education, spending a week on campus to highlight some of the University's best practices in action. Reporter Choi Woosik interviewed InclusiveU students **Nicolas Sorentino '29** and **Rohan Pai '29**, CDI leaders **Beth Myers** and **Christy Ashby**, and other members of the campus community to showcase our systems of embedded support and accessibility in classrooms, residence halls and social spaces on campus. South Korea's desire to create more inclusive environments opens up possibilities for us to learn from each other and collaborate on solutions.

ITALY VISITS EXPAND CDI'S NETWORK

In addition to visiting elementary and secondary schools in the country during the 2026 inclusive abroad course, students, faculty, and staff had the opportunity to connect with the accessibility and inclusion office at the University of Padua, where students from the Padua's inclusive program hosted the class for a campus tour and reception. CDI faculty and staff also returned to University of Roma Tre to participate in a panel discussion, "What's in the Pipeline," which centered around the state of academia and research in uncertain times.

NEW SUPPORT FROM NEW YORK STATE

This year, the Center was awarded two grants from the New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities, both centered around improving resources and strenghtening networks for New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

CONNECTING ADVOCATES TO DRIVE SYSTEMS CHANGE

CHRISTY ASHBY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CDI
SHANA LEWIS, PROJECT DIRECTOR

The NYS Disability Advocacy Training Network (DATN) is bringing people together to center the voices that matter most, working to equip self-advocates, along with their families and allies, with the knowledge and skills to speak up for change for their communities. By building capacity, providing trainings, and fostering collaboration across the state, the network is growing a connected community of advocates who learn from and support one another, and who can engage directly with policymakers, because informed voices drive better policy.

The team, led by Project Director **Shana Lewis**, has led over 30 focus groups and training sessions this year. Lewis said participants are leaving with both a realistic understanding of how systems actually change, and the motivation to keep advocating. As one participant noted in recent feedback: "New York's disability support system cannot simply be torn down and rebuilt, but can be changed incrementally by committed people working together for the good of others."

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

JULIA WHITE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
MELISSA LUKE, DEAN'S PROFESSOR, COUNSELING AND HUMAN SERVICES

CDI, in partnership with the School of Education's Counseling and Human Services Program, is leading a two-year, statewide initiative to strengthen mental health literacy for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and the professionals who serve them across New York State.

This initiative addresses two critical gaps: People with intellectual and developmental disabilities often have limited access to mental health information, and mental health professionals often have limited understanding of the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The team is working with faculty from S.I. Newhouse School of Communications to develop an interconnected set of accessible resources, including a multifaceted website, video and podcasts, print materials, a training guide, and micro credentialing opportunities.

Both projects have advisory groups of individuals including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, family members, caregivers, and practitioners to help shape these resources to ensure they reflect the needs of interest-holders and achieve lasting, statewide impact.



COMMUNITY IMPACT

SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY



Doctoral student Rebekah Wallis delivering CDI staff donations to the Food Bank of CNY.

CDI participated in two significant initiatives this past year that have positively impacted the Syracuse community. The Center donated more than 40 pounds of food to the CNY Food Bank, as well as three large boxes of warm winter clothing, mainly jackets and hats, for children and adults as part of the United Way CNY Share the Warmth clothing drive. These supportive efforts helped spread some love and kindness for people in need in the Syracuse community.

The **Mid-State FACE Center** hosted their annual **Agency 101: Connecting Individuals with Disabilities to Adult Services**, a free training designed to support families, educators, and community agencies working with students with disabilities ages 14 to 22.

The training helped participants understand adult services and how to plan for life after high school, offering presentations and Q&A sessions with representatives from across New York State from Independent Living Centers, Workforce Development, and College Disability Services. By bringing together this range of state agencies and community partners in one room, Agency 101 reflected the FACE Center's broader mission: building the capacity of families and educational organizations to navigate transition planning and connect students with disabilities to the resources and opportunities that support meaningful outcomes after high school.



2026 Agency 101 at Drumlins Country Club.

CAMPUS IMPACT

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIPS



Intelligence++ initiative brings InclusiveU and matriculated students together to design devices, products, and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Founded in 2020 with support from designer **Gianfranco Zaccai '70, H'09,** and expanded in 2023 through the Intelligence++ Ventures fund, the program has produced ventures such as SOLACE Collective, a sensory-friendly clothing line, and **Aidan Samsel's '27 (image, left)** "Pod Finder" friendship app for young adults seeking connection.

Last semester also saw students in the Innovations for Humanity course—including Alex Keysor, Samara Tomlinson, and Gavin Johnson—collaborate directly with consultants who primarily type to communicate, including InclusiveU student **Chase Coleman '27,** alumni **Maia Chamberlain '23,** and Jamesville-Dewitt high school student Leo True-Frost to prototype AI-enhanced augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools that convey emotion, support scheduling and safety, and improve conversation between users and communication partners. Co-taught by professors **Beth Myers, Alan Foley, Don Carr,** and strategic advisor **Linda Dickerson Hartsock**, with TA's **Micah Fialka-Feldman '15** and **Tucker Kopp '22,** the initiative continues to grow as a hub where students learn inclusive design directly from the people it's meant to serve, moving away from "one-size-fits-all" solutions toward technology shaped by real user needs.

NeurodiversiTEA continues to serve as a weekly gathering space for neurodivergent and "neurocurious" students within the Intercultural Collective lounge. The series, part of **Neurodiversity Community at SU** programming, was given a refreshed brand identity and more student ownership through new student-led takeovers, where attendees chose the theme and shaped the program in their own voices each week. Sessions remained tight-knit, blending honest conversation about daily challenges with lighter moments such as music, crafts, stress coloring, and info-dumping about special interests supported by snacks, tea, and sensory tools like fidget spinners and slinkies. The Center is proud that students continue to describe NeurodiversiTEA as a rare, affirming refuge on a campus not always built with them in mind, and we remain committed to growing this space so every student knows they belong.



Doctoral student, Teukie Martin (right), and Graduate student, Emma Norman (left) hosting a special edition student-run NeurodiversiTEA during Disability Pride Month on campus.

STUDENT VOICES

INCLUSIVEU STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE LEADERSHIP BEYOND CAMPUS



InclusiveU students **Chase Coleman ’27 (*image, left*)** and **Rohan Pai ’29 (*image, below*)** were selected to serve on Microsoft’s Advisory Committee on People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

This committee brings the perspectives and lived experiences of people with IDD into Microsoft’s work to help the company better understand community needs related to technology and training. Coleman and Pai have participated on this working group for the past year, contributing feedback and ideas to support the development of products that are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to real-world needs of individuals with IDD.



InclusiveU student **Sasha Soraci ’27 (*image, right*)** has served for two years on the Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board for the My Road to Empowerment Project, run by the American Institutes for Research. This project consults with inclusive college programs and students to find the best ways to support dignity of risk for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



INCLUSIVEU PARENT PERSPECTIVES

MANU'S STORY

For InclusiveU student **Manushri "Manu" Krishnan '27**, no part of her experience at Syracuse University has been left up to chance.

Choosing the right college program for Krishnan was a top priority for her parents as they decided where to enroll her. Latha Ramamurthy, Krishnan's mother, said that the program has given her daughter the support needed to take part in every corner of campus life. Ramamurthy highlighted that InclusiveU is incredibly flexible in adapting to students' needs, particularly in student living arrangements, compared to other programs.

Krishnan's parents' advocacy for her well-being is a key reason for her having the opportunity to attend Syracuse University.

Krishnan and her family relocated from New Jersey to the Syracuse area so that she could attend InclusiveU. Initially, Krishnan had been commuting from home but, as a junior, she moved onto campus. Ramamurthy said that distance should not be an end-all, be-all factor for parents deciding to enroll their child in college. Rather, finding the program that best empowers them should be the goal, regardless of location. Krishnan's family wants her to embrace her disability and independence, and to find her purpose by doing so.

> **"When we started looking at programs for Manu near us, there were only a handful of programs available"**
>
> - Latha Ramamurthy

Ramamurthy said that enrolling Krishnan in the program has not only positively benefited her socially but also in learning real-world strategies in a safe and welcoming environment.

Ramamurthy said the time Krishnan has spent in the program has been the best decision that aligns with the family's wishes for her life: "When we started looking at IPSE programs for Manu near us, there were only a handful of programs available, and the choices narrowed down even further when we thought about whether these programs might meet Manu's needs or not."



Manu (pictured above) enjoying the New York State Fair.



Manu (right) posing with her parents and sister.

DISABILITY PRIDE MONTH

CELEBRATING WITH OUR CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Every year, Syracuse University celebrates Disability Pride Month (DPM) throughout the month of April so that the campus community can celebrate together.



CDI welcomed the owner of Wheeling Prodigy Productions, Kevin Hamm to campus to host a seminar: ***Universe of Inclusive Characters With Disabilities.*** Hamm, a disability advocate and imaginative AI content creator, shared his journey building a universe of original disabled characters, highlighting standout figures from his character library and reflecting on the lessons he has learned through the creative process. He then guided attendees through creating their own original disabled characters, and students left with a unique character to call their own. Students enjoyed the creative approach to disability representation.

Kevin Hamm (pictured, left) talking with audience members during the activity part of his seminar.



The Center hosted ***Eco-Crip: Exploring the Intersections of Disability Identity and the Environment Through Artistic Practice,*** jointly presented by CDI and the Syracuse University Art Museum as part of School of Education Ganders Lecture and the Humanities Center's Syracuse Symposium Series on "Creativity." Artist Francisco echo Eraso delivered a presentation using an "Eco-Crip" framework to challenge the framing of disability as a pathological deficit, drawing on Disability Justice principles to position disability as a vital part of human diversity and as a source of wisdom and leadership. The event proved both fun and engaging, drawing a large turnout from members of the University community for the main lecture, followed by two art-making sessions where attendees learned to weave using natural and recycled fibers, connecting the discussion of disability and ecology to a tactile, collaborative art practice.



Alumni-owned brand SOLACE teamed up with CDI to host the ***Inclusive Fashion Expo*** in order to build brand awareness among the SU community and celebrate sensory-friendly fashion. SOLACE clothing brand features award-winning loungewear made with soft, upcycled materials, free of tags and harsh seams, with subtle fidget-friendly details that invite self-expression and belonging. The brand grew out of SU's **Intelligence++** class, and this event served as a way to raise campus-wide awareness and support for the clothing line built around comfort and inclusion. The event, which included a pop-up fashion show, brought together several campus organizations for an afternoon of celebration and community.

L-R, Models Juliet Olson '29, Michaela Mazur '28, Sasha Soraci '27, and Nicole Massab '28 posing at the SOLACE Fashion Expo.

LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

When Kate Allyn '26 graduated from **InclusiveU**, her family realized that graduation was not an ending, but a critical transition point. Allyn spent four years on campus developing professional skills, building networks, and gaining independence. But like other InclusiveU graduates returning to their communities, she would face new challenges, maintaining the connections she had built, accessing ongoing employment support, and navigating independent living in her home community.

Recognizing this need, Allyn's parents Amy and David Allyn, along with family members including Kate's grandfather Bill Allyn G'59, and aunts and uncles Scott, Mark, Eric, and Meg, provided a combined $1 million gift to the CDI as part of the Dream Big campaign.

The funding towards the new **Career and Transition Center** will support career and employment services, an alumni network, and access to community resources to ensure successful transitions for InclusiveU graduates wherever they live.

"Our students are well-prepared for employment after graduation," says **Beth Myers**, executive director of the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education. "But we recognize that our students need more support outside of employment. They need help to maintain the social networks they've built here and build new ones."

Allyn's mother credits the University with her increased sense of confidence, and the Allyn family investment ensures that other graduates will have the support they need as they begin their lives beyond campus.



What is the Career and Transition Center?

The Career and Transition Center prepares students for meaningful employment and successful transitions beyond college through individualized career development, internships, and community partnerships. Students will receive additional support to explore career interests, build workplace and self-advocacy skills, secure internship placements, expand their professional networks, and to build the skills they need to make a successful transition after graduation.

Through the **InclusiveU Business Engagement Group**, graduates and alumni are connected to employers dedicated to inclusive workplaces and receive mentorship, job connections, and more.

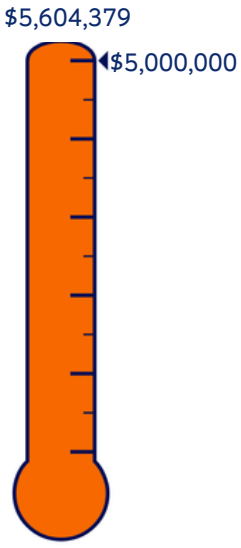
In addition to helping InclusiveU students in their post academic plans, the Center also supports high school students through a partnership with ACCES-VR. The Center's **Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)** gives students the opportunity to explore their interests, gain experience, and develop an understanding about decisions they will need to make for their future.

Together, the Center's job coaching services and employment readiness curriculum will support students in their transition to integrated employment.

DREAM BIG!
RENOVATION CAMPAIGN

We have exceeded our Dream Big! goal, but the work continues.

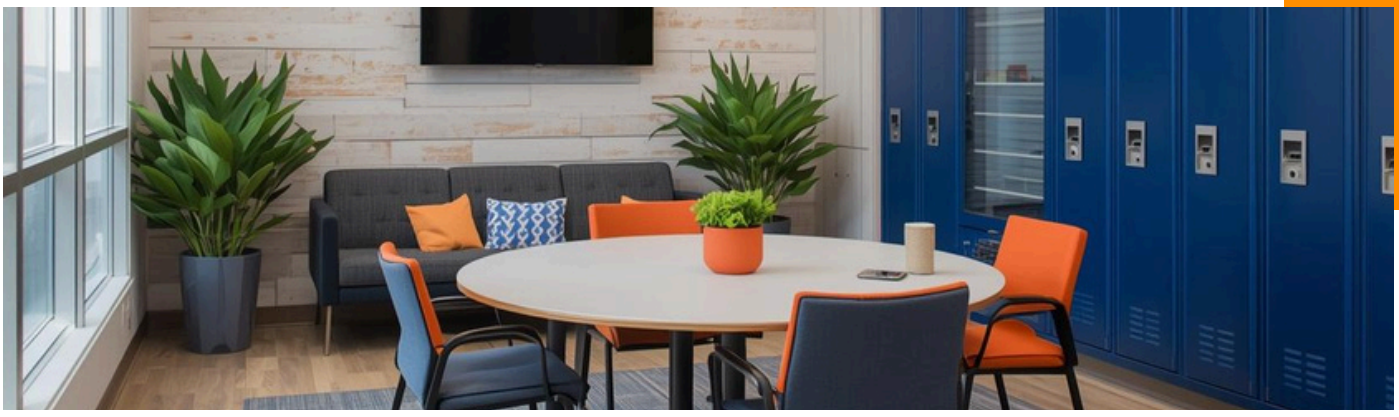
The Dream Big Campaign isn't a ceiling—it's a foundation. Beyond the $5 million for programs, services, and scholarships, CDI is seeking an additional $1.5 million to transform the Center into a state-of-the-art hub where innovation, research, and student success converge.



This renovation will create spaces that embody our mission of true inclusion, limitless possibility, and collaborative excellence:

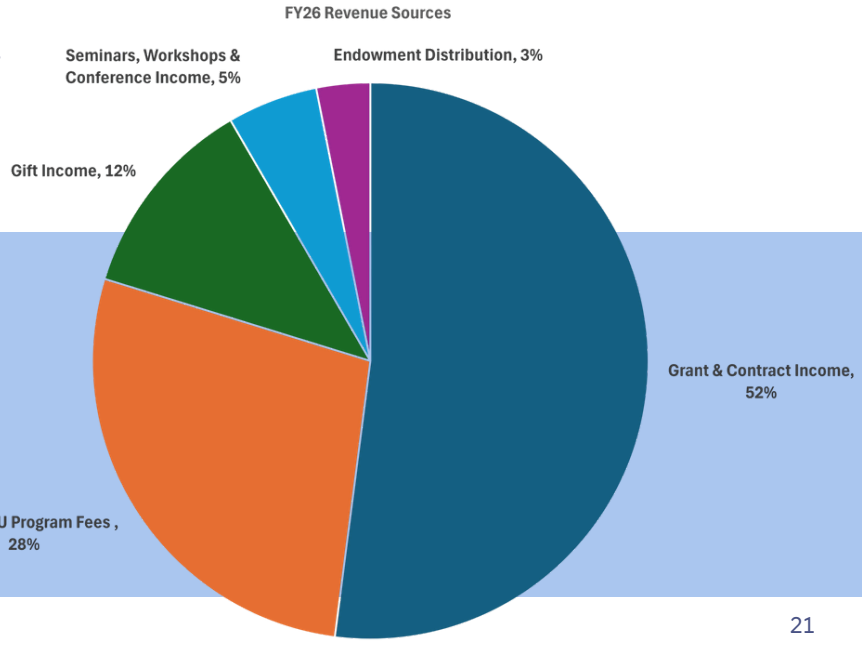
- InclusiveU Student Services Wing
- InclusiveU Commonspace
- Career Services and Transition Center
- Technical Assistance and Outreach Wing
- Research and Innovation Wing

To support CDI through the Dream Big! renovation campaign, visit disabilityinclusioncenter.syr.edu/dream-big



BUDGET SNAPSHOT

CDI AY 2025-2026 total expenditures exceeded $4.7 million, with a variety of revenue streams supporting research, model programming, and technical assistance efforts.



THE CDI VOLUNTEERS WHO MAKE US STRONGER

The Center would like to thank our community of volunteers who help serve our mission.

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD CDI SUB-COMMITTEE

Members of the school-wide board dedicated to supporting key pillars of our mission (Research, Technical Assistance, Disability Employment, and Outreach)

Marcia Baldanza '86 (Chair)
Greg Allen '73
Nkenge Bergan '95
Leota Blacknor '93
Nino Elbakidze G'22
Mary J Goodwin-Oquendo G'09
Terry MacDonald G'82, G'07
Susan Newman '76
Carey Ng G'02
Fran Odette G'21
Julie Padilla G'12
Kate Powers G'02
Saravan Rajendran
Frank Ridzi G'01
Donise Robinson '97
Karen Seybold G'92
Debra Solomon '81
Kenneth J. Vinikoff '84

INCLUSIVEU BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT GROUP

Business leaders committed to inclusion in the workforce, whose main role is supporting InclusiveU seniors and alumni in the job search after graduation.

Richard Alsever
Ryan Benz G'11
Timothy Crosby
Andrew Gordon
Maggie Hartnett
Josh Hazard
Kate Houck
Amanda MacLachlan
John Gaylord Mannion
Michael Messersmith
Jamie Miller
Garry Payne
Jessica Pitcher G'14, G'22
Colette Powers '83
Laurel Rossi
Alicia Reese
Jeff Trisciani
Dean Wallace
Cainaan Webb
Jason Zanfordino

THE TAISHOFF CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL

Assists with and guides key Center programs and initiatives, including regional events, fundraising, strategic planning, research, and InclusiveU admissions/recruitment. The Council also represents the Taishoff Center and advocates for involvement and giving at Syracuse University.

Capt. Robert P. Taishoff, JAGC, USN (Ret) '86 (Chair)
Amy Allyn
Juli Boeheim G'97
Doug Cramer '87
Garry Payne

Want to get involved? Contact Executive Director Christy Ashby at ceashby@syr.edu for opportunities to support our work.

REMEMBERING LIAM

FIND THE GOOD

*Our 2026 graduating class had one seat empty, that of **Liam Zoghby '26**, who passed away during his sophomore year of InclusiveU. Liam built community across campus, including a close connection with the Syracuse Men's Basketball team, where he worked as a student manager.*

For the past two years, Liam's family and friends have continued to visit campus and connect with Liam's classmates and InclusiveU staff.

The family's organization, Live Like Liam Foundation, continues his legacy of "finding the good" in every moment through their ongoing support of InclusiveU.



Learn more about Liam and his legacy at livelikeliam.org

CONTACT US

CENTER ON DISABILITY AND INCLUSION

CDI
Christy Ashby, Executive Director CDI
Faculty Director of Teacher Education and Undergraduate Studies, SOE
ceashby@syr.edu

Beth Myers, Associate Director CDI
Executive Director, Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education
bemyers@syr.edu

Karly Grifasi, Associate Director of Operations and Strategic Initiatives
kgrifasi@syr.edu

InclusiveU
Brianna Shults, InclusiveU Director
Associate Director, Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education
bmshults@syr.edu

FACE Center
Amy Zogby, Co-Director
aezogby@syr.edu

Maria Gill, Co-Director
mkgill@syr.edu

Higher Education Technical Assistance Center (IHETAC)
Mak El-Hassan, Director
melhassa@syr.edu

Advocacy Training and Statewide Network
Shana Lewis, Director
selewis@syr.edu

Mental Health Literacy Project
Julia White, Principal Investigator
jmwhit02@syr.edu

Pre-Employment Transition Services
Jayson McDowell, Program Manager
jvmcdowe@syr.edu

330 Huntington Hall
Syracuse, NY 13244

cdi@syr.edu

315.443.9379

Syracuse University
School of Education
Center on Disability & Inclusion