

# Belonging and Nonbelonging: Stakeholder Perceptions of an Inclusive Higher Ed Model at CUNY

CUNY FACULTY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CONFERENCE

CHRISTOPHER ROSA & CARRIE SHOCKLEY, CUNY OFFICE OF STUDENT INCLUSION  
INITIATIVES

# “Belonging” & Its Significance in Higher Education

- ▶ The concept of belonging is regarded as critical to the retention, wellness, academic and social success of college students (Barnett & Di Napoli 2007; Kahu 2013; Quaye, *et al.* 2019; Strayhorn 2018).
- ▶ Belonging is thought to be particularly important to the success of student communities that have historically under-participated in higher education (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas, *et al.*; Strayhorn, 2012).
- ▶ Belonging is also conceptualized as inextricably bound up with inclusion (Nishii, 2020)
- ▶ Historically, inclusion in education has been most commonly associated with the experiences of students with disabilities (Danforth & Rhodes, 1997; Fitch, 2002).

# Definitions & Dimensions of Belonging

- ▶ In the literature in general, and in higher education in particular, both conceptual & operational definitions of belonging vary widely in their dimensions
- ▶ Conceptual definitions of belonging are typically multi-dimensional, comprised of elements that include affective, relational, contextual, political and cultural attributes.
- ▶ Scholars have conceptualized belonging as a subjective feeling of value and respect
- ▶ As a dynamic derived from a “reciprocal relationships to an external referent”
- ▶ As grounded in shared experiences and beliefs
- ▶ Rooted in groups to which individuals choose, desire, and “feel permission” to belong (Mahar, *et al.*)

# Definitions & Dimensions of Belonging continued

- ▶ Temporal-spatial and material dimensions of belonging, also acknowledging the significance of “nonbelonging” as an important foil against which to define, evaluate, and experience belonging (Landesmaki, *et al.* 2017)
- ▶ Intersectionality as an important consideration, which is underscored by who asserts that those from marginalized communities define and experience belonging differently than those with privilege (Landesmaki, *et al.* 2017; Vaccaro & Newman 2015)
- ▶ An operational proxy for studying “identity” (Delanty *et al.* 2008)
- ▶ Connect belonging to sense of competence among women math faculty members (Lewis & Hodges, 2015; Good & Dweck, 2012)

# Symbolic Dimensions of Belonging

- ▶ There has been comparatively little research on the symbolic dimensions of belonging in the higher education context.
- ▶ The symbolic dimensions of belonging to college communities are rich areas for exploration, particularly as they relate to inclusion. Phenomenologically, symbolic dimensions are particularly important to understanding the lived experience of belonging for members of marginalized communities.
- ▶ Disability Studies - understanding the meaning assigned to symbols by and for students with intellectual disabilities in the social construction of “belonging in college” is particularly important to understanding their lived experiences with higher education belonging

# Belonging & Students with ID

- ▶ Students with disabilities are widely recognized as a student population that traditionally has been underrepresented in higher education (Denhart, 2008; Myers & Bastion, 2010).
- ▶ Yet, research on belonging and college students with disabilities is far less prevalent than it is on belonging for other historically marginalized higher education student communities (Leake & Stodden, 2014)
- ▶ Among college students with disabilities, those with intellectual disabilities have historically been among the most underrepresented student disability communities (Grindal, *et al.* 2012; Hart, *et al.* 2006; Wagner, *et al.* 2005).
- ▶ Not surprisingly, within the research on belonging and college students with disabilities, there is a corresponding dearth of scholarship on belonging and students with intellectual disabilities in higher education.

# Burgeoning Populations of College Students with ID

- ▶ While enrollment of students with intellectual disabilities - as a percentage of all college students with disabilities - is low, because of the impact of the Inclusive Higher Education Movement, the population of college students with intellectual disabilities is clearly on the rise, with legislation, resources, model programs and best practices increasingly developed to support their inclusion and success in college
- ▶ Nationally, over the past decade, the number of programs for students with disabilities has increased by 85 percent, according to Think College estimates (Field, 2019)
- ▶ Demand at CUNY is soaring!

# CUNY's Access & Inclusion Legacy

- ▶ 1847 – CCNY Founded as “The Free Academy”
- ▶ 1921 – Hunter College extends graduate studies to both men & women (Centennial!)
- ▶ 1968 – Hostos Community College
- ▶ 1968 – S.O.F.E.D.U.P. established at Brooklyn College
- ▶ 1970 – Medgar Evers College
- ▶ 2001 – Inclusion Program at Queens College
- ▶ 2020 – *CUNY Unlimited!*

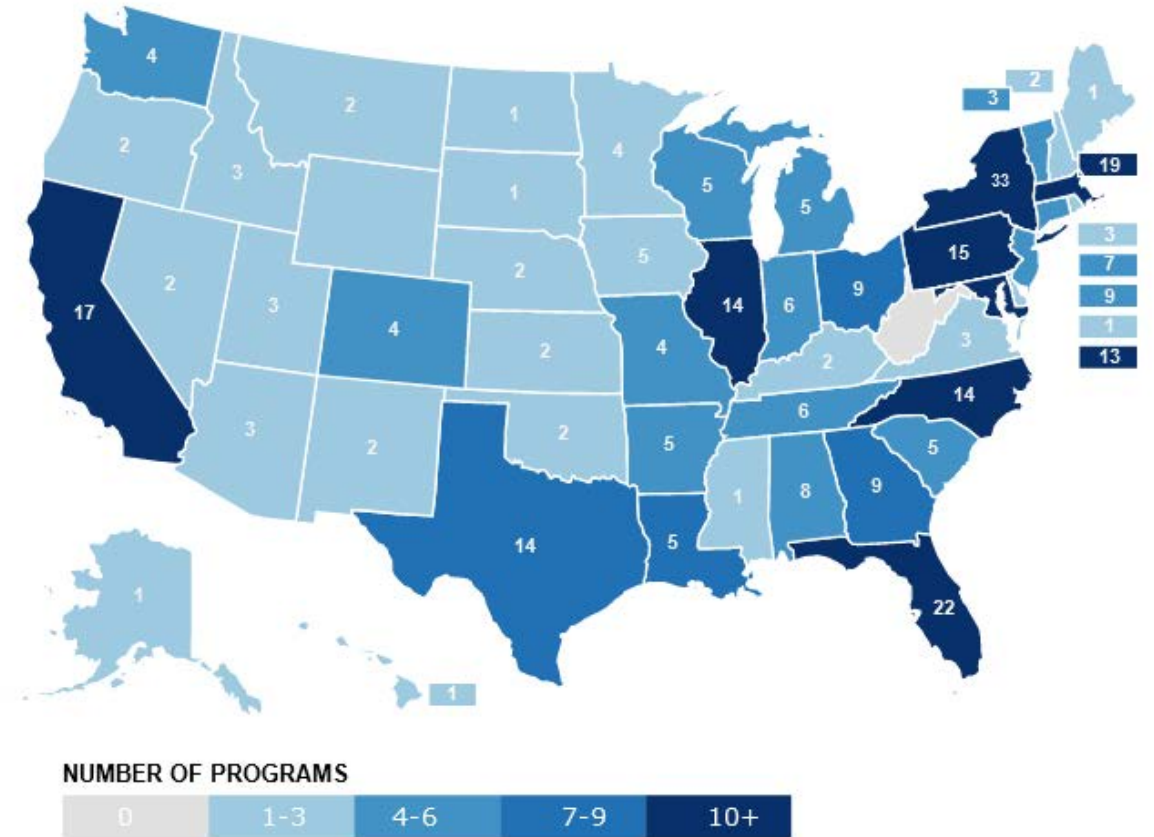


# New Yorkers with Intellectual Disabilities

- According to NYS OPWDD, there are more than 140,000 New Yorkers with intellectual disabilities, a third of which live in NYC
- NYC DOE enrolls almost 24,000 student in District 75
- 11,000 District 75 students are enrolled in grades 8 and above; 8,865 are enrolled in “ungraded secondary,” i.e. they are aging out of “a free & appropriate education... in the most inclusive setting”
- These are 3rd-Gen IDEA students – they and their families have “inclusion” as an expectation!
- No longer satisfied with receiving education and training in separate, segregated settings

# Inclusive Higher Education – A Movement!

- Think College reports that there are more than 400 inclusive higher education programs nationally
- Varied models across country
- 33 programs in NYS
- 7 downstate programs (5 CUNY, Westchester County CC, Mt. Saint Vincent)



# Inclusive Higher Education at CUNY – Our History

- 📍 Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program  
*AHRC NYC (2008, 2009, 2014, 2015)*
- 📍 Inclusion Program at  
Queens College  
*NYC DOE (2001)*



# Inclusive Higher Ed at CUNY: CUNY Unlimited



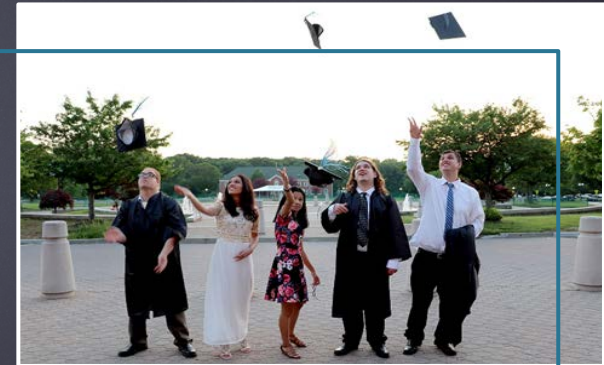
Academic Access



Campus Membership



Career Preparation



Self-Determination

# Credential Pillars

## Academic Access

- Inclusive class settings at least 50% of coursework
- Wide array of classes available across subjects
- Official audit of courses

## Campus membership

- Participation in clubs and campus organizations
- Engagement with classmates
- Peer mentors helping navigate campus life

## Career preparation

- Paid and unpaid internships on and off campus
- Soft skills curriculum
- Work-based learning

## Self-Determination

- Person-centered academic and career goals
- Curriculum in self-advocacy & decision making
- Independent living skills

# Learning Outcomes

1. Develop knowledge of self
2. Understand principles of citizenship and advocacy
3. Develop learning outcomes of subject-specific content in collaboration with faculty or other academic partner
4. Demonstrate communication skills in academic, professional, and social settings
5. Demonstrate the ability to organize, process, and apply information
6. Demonstrate basic research skills
7. Know and apply job-related skills in a workplace setting
8. Demonstrate social skills such as teamwork and collaboration
9. Demonstrate the use of reflective practice on academic, experiential, and social experiences

# Methodology & Data

- ▶ Case Study - CUNY Unlimited (5 campuses); Mixed Methods
- ▶ Theoretical framework for analysis: Literature on Belonging, including themes on identify, self-esteem, locus of control, sense of belonging, level of involvement, forms of membership, sense of opportunity, relationships, language, and symbolism/artifacts.
- ▶ Document Analysis
  - ▶ Stakeholder Annual Surveys
    - ▶ Direct Questions
    - ▶ In-vivo and open-coding of open-ended questions
  - ▶ Meeting Notes (5 years worth)
  - ▶ Limitation - data not collected for the purpose of this analysis on belonging

Stakeholder Group	Responses (based on YR2-5)	Response Rate (based on YR2-4)
Students	341	92%
Mentors	413	100%
Family	177	53%
Faculty	293	43%

# Naming & Doing – The Grammar of Belonging

- ▶ In a 2017 student survey, when asked to respond to the following question, *“I call myself a college student”* 95% of respondents answered “yes” and 85% said they felt “like a member of campus.”
- ▶ In an open-ended question that asked one of the three things liked best about the college experience:
  - Students: “Letting us pick our own classes”
  - Parents: Having access to campus facilities allowed their students to “have the full college experience”
  - Administrators: Importance of independent travel and how it relates to belonging. “Arriving on campus like all the other students, you see them coming up the subway stairs....” seeing students walk across campus to their classes independently as a signal that they felt like they fit in (belonged) like everyone else



# Belonging – Artifacts & Symbols

- ▶ From “Students with ID” to “*Students with IDs!!!*”
- ▶ “Are You In?": Digital Inclusion and Belonging
- ▶ Got SWAG?
- ▶ Transportation: Independence, Inclusion, Commuting... Belonging!
- ▶ Pizza... Cookies... Soda... Belonging!
- ▶ We Did It!: Symbols of Graduation and Belonging
- ▶ What’s in a Name?

# Non-Belonging – Language and Practice

- ▶ **KEY BARRIER: Limited Access to Systems, Processes and Practices; Not Belonging to the “In Crowd”**
- ▶ Administrators: CUNYFirst, Blackboard, Convocation vs. Graduation
- ▶ Faculty: Blackboard, naming
- ▶ Mentors: CUNYFirst, Blackboard, email address
- ▶ Students: Access to courses

# Intersectionality & Constructing Belonging

- ▶ Constructing CUNY Administration “Neurotypicals” as Outsiders - D75 and the Horan School
- ▶ The Impact of Race & the Definition of Situation in the Inclusive Higher Ed Setting - Hostos Community College

# Lessons About Inclusion & Belonging

- Students with ID as “Disruptors”
- Lay Bear Some of the Symbolic Underpinnings of Belonging - Making the Tacitly Known Elements of Belonging Discursive
- How Can We Use Our Awareness of the Elements to Cultivate Belonging for Everyone?
- Broadens the notion of diversity in higher education
- Equal Access, “Intellectual Ableism” & Equity in Higher Ed - a) Implications for Belonging for Students with ID b) Implications for the Mission of Public Higher Ed c) Implications of the Concept of “Ableism?”