Exploring the Development of an Inclusive Postsecondary Education Program for Diverse Students with Intellectual Disabilities through a Virtual Community Conversation

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Abstract

Inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) programs at institutes of higher education offer a variety of benefits to students with intellectual disability (ID). Although the number of these programs has grown in recent years, many students—particularly those from diverse backgrounds—remain underserved. This study investigated the perceptions of campus and community members from a large, diverse, urban city on the inclusion of students with intellectual disability at their local public university. Using a virtual format, a community conversation was held to explore stakeholders' visions for including students with ID at the university, actionable steps for inclusion, and participants' potential personal contributions to inclusive higher education. Results indicated that there is community interest and support for developing an affordable IPSE program centered on the individual needs and interests of young adults with ID.

Keywords: inclusive education, disability services, postsecondary education, intellectual disability

Plain Language Summary

- College programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) have many benefits.
- Our study took place in a large city.
  - We held an online meeting to explore community members' thoughts on including students with ID at their local university.
  - We also asked how community members could help the program.
- Our findings showed the community wants to start a program for students with ID at the university.
  - Community members felt the program should be affordable and focused on the needs and interests of students with ID.
  - Community members were willing to advocate for a program for students with ID at the university.

Postsecondary options for young adults with intellectual disability (ID) have expanded in recent years. In the not-so-distant past, most students with ID exiting high school had limited choices—with many attending a day program for adults with disabilities, sheltered workshops, or staying at home with family (Parmenter & Knox, 1991). With increased emphasis on community inclusion, young adults with ID now have a variety of options for life after high school, including adult transition programs, vocational training, and/or supported or competitive employment (Wehman, 2020). However, even with the increase in options, the postschool outcomes of young adults with ID still lag behind those of their nondisabled peers. For instance, individuals with disabilities are employed at much lower rates than those without disabilities and, when employed, typically earn less money (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). One promising option to promote improved outcomes for students with ID are inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) programs housed at institutes of higher education (IHEs).

These initiatives are a relatively new postsecondary option for young adults with ID. Though there has been a focus on including students with disabilities in the K–12 setting for some time (e.g., IDEA, 1997), historically there had been no such push for IPSE until the passage of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) in 2008. The HEOA made college more accessible for individuals with ID by not only making financial aid and work study options available to students with ID, but also establishing a National Coordinating Center for IPSE programs receiving federal funding (otherwise known as the Transition and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities [TPSID] grant; Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008). In turn, this act prompted a rapid increase in the development of IPSE programs. Currently, 49 of the 50 states have at least one IPSE program and approximately 308 programs are offered across the nation (Think College, 2021).

There are several benefits from IPSE for individuals with ID. First and foremost, many IPSE programs focus on developing vocational skills. Students with ID enrolled in IPSE programs typically participate in a variety of courses, workshops, volunteer positions, and/or internships focused on career exploration, training, and skill development. Indeed, many graduates of IPSE programs go on to secure post-program employment at rates higher than individuals who do not attend such programs (Grigal et al., 2021). IPSEs also offer additional benefits that cannot be overlooked. Attending a program at an IHE offers students with ID increased social opportunities with both disabled and nondisabled peers, leading to friendships and a sense of belonging (Qian et al., 2018).

With such clear benefits, we would expect that many students with ID would pursue participation in IPSE programs. However, this is not the case. Although roughly half of youth with ID in secondary grades (7–12) expect to pursue college after leaving public school (Lipscomb et al., 2017), in reality, only a very small percentage of students with ID in the U.S. (n = 956) participate in an IPSE program (Grigal et al., 2021). Additionally, the students who have participated in such programs are mostly a homogenous group, with the majority being White, male students between the ages of 18–25 (Grigal et al., 2021). Notably, the racial demographics of IPSE programs are in direct contrast with the demographics of students with ID attending public schools, which primarily consist of students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Clearly, additional IPSE

programs are needed, especially ones in diverse, urban areas that are aimed at meeting the needs of students with ID from varied racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and/or sexual backgrounds.

To date, community conversations are the only documented approach for "informing and spurring the launch of new campus [IPSE] programs" (Bumble et al., 2019, p. 29). Based on the World Café model (Brown & Isaacs, 2005), community conversations offer a structured approach to discussing issues relevant to individuals with disabilities and their communities (Carter et al., 2009). During a community conversation event, a group of community members come together for a variety of small and whole-group discussions. Each discussion has a designated "host" who proposes a prompt, facilitates conversation, and records the contributions of discussion participants. Participants problem-solve in a collaborative manner, focusing on solutions that align with a community's priorities, culture, and resources (Bumble et al., 2019). Community conversations have been found to identify solutions, build social capital, and increase employment opportunities for transition-age youth (Trainor, et al., 2012), and are a promising approach to informing the initial development of IPSE programs (Bumble, et al., 2019).

Developing a new IPSE program is certainly a complicated venture—one that requires planning, resources, and community buy-in. Stakeholders from both the university and the community must be present in discussing the development of an IPSE program (Bumble et al., 2019). As noted, community conversations bring together a variety of community stakeholders. Not only does this process increase local awareness of the issue at hand, it introduces new voices to the conversation (Carter & Bumble, 2018). Interested citizens, who otherwise may have not known how to meaningfully engage with the issue, have the opportunity to interact with others in their community and offer their insight, support, and/or resources. Particularly, events held in urban communities have the potential to bring together a diverse group of participants, ranging from academics affiliated with the university to local service providers to individuals with disabilities, all from various racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Indeed, critical partnerships can be made during community conversations between parties who may not otherwise have met if not for the event.

Though community conversations have traditionally been in-person events, a virtual format may also offer a practical approach to this method. With the COVID-19 pandemic restricting in-person gatherings, many events have been forced to alter their format, with everything from kindergarten classes to karate lessons being held online. Beyond adhering to safety guidelines, a virtual community conversation may also bring together participants who may not have been able to attend an in-person event due to circumstances such as transportation issues or childcare, common barriers faced by individuals with disabilities and/or individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds (Baker et al., 2016; Bezyak et al., 2019; Jacob et al., 2015). With the majority of Americans having access to the internet (Ryan, 2018), virtual community conversations may actually offer a more inclusive format for holding these vital discussions.

This study aimed to explore how a community conceptualized the development of an IPSE program for students with ID at a public 4-year university located in an urban area. A

community conversation was held to bring together a diverse group of community stakeholders, representing a variety of community roles, to discuss their visions and support for the program. Due to COVID-19 restrictions related to in-person gatherings, the event was held online. In addition to exploring how community conversations could occur virtually, we aimed to answer the following research questions (RQs): (1) How do campus and community stakeholders conceptualize including students with intellectual disability at a 4-year public university in an urban setting? and (2) What resources can campus and community members contribute to support the inclusion of students with intellectual disability at a university?

Method

Participants

The event was held online, but was facilitated through a 4-year public university located in a large racially and socioeconomically diverse city in the southwestern United States. The university serves a student population of 32,772 students, comprised of 46.1% Hispanic or Latinx students, 20.7% Asian students, 16.2% White students, 5.9% visa non-U.S students, 4.6% students who are two or more races, 3.8% Black or African American students, 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students, and 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native students (2.3% unknown).

Any member of the university community (e.g., faculty, students, staff, administrators) or community-at-large (e.g., individuals with ID, family members of individuals with ID, disability service providers, and/or anyone interested in discussing the development of an IPSE at the university) were able to participate in the community conversation; there were no exclusion criteria. A total of 25 participants and 8 facilitators attended the event. Attendees reported a variety of campus and community roles (see Table 1). Two attendees (9%) were Spanish-speaking and were provided with a translator and participated in breakout groups conducted in Spanish. Five additional attendees were bilingual (English and Spanish) and participated in both English and Spanish discussion groups. Each participant received a $20 gift card.

Preparation and Recruitment

In addition to attending numerous event-planning meetings to discuss recruitment goals, strategies, and timelines, the facilitators attended a training that included (a) presentation on the structure of a community conversation; (b) discussion on structuring questions for the community conversation; (c) training on the role of a table leader; and (d) instruction in carrying out the harvest, a large group discussion at the end of the event about the best ideas, resources, and strategies discussed during the entire session (Swedeen et. al, 2011).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment was conducted via electronic methods such as web-based flyers and invitation emails. Participants for the community conversation were recruited from the university campus, local community organizations affiliated with individuals with ID, and community stakeholders. Specifically, invitation emails and web-

based flyers were distributed to 33 university offices (e.g., student support offices, such as disabled student support, education opportunity center, student success center, and student government; and disciplines that may include disabilities studies, such as college of education, humanities, and health and human services), 12 local nonprofit agencies who provide disability-related services (e.g., nonprofit corporations for people with developmental disabilities, such as Autism Speaks, Best Buddies program, etc.), special education administrators from a local school district, and approximately 50 graduate students in school psychology, special education, and school counseling at the target university, many of whom work or intern in local schools. People who received the flyer were encouraged to forward it to others who might be interested in participating. A total of 70 participants registered to attend the event; however, only 25 participated.

Although originally intended to be a live event, the community conversation format was modified to be carried out through Zoom, a virtual videoconferencing encrypted platform, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were given a unique and password-protected link to access the virtual meeting once their consent form was received. The community conversation event included (a) an introduction of the purpose of the event and process; (b) three 15-minute rounds of small group conversations, each centered on a specific discussion question; and (c) the harvest. Questions addressed during the three rounds of breakout-room conversations were: “How can we better include students with intellectual disability at this university?” (Rounds 1 and 2); and “How can I help to include students with intellectual disability at this university?” (Round 3).

Data Collection

This study used event transcription, postings on Padlet, notes from the harvest, and an end-of-event survey as primary data sources. Hosts facilitated the small group discussions (each consisting of 3–4 attendees) and recorded participants’ responses. Each 15-minute round of conversation began with the room host posing the question to attendees and sharing a link to Padlet, an online “virtual bulletin board” platform, that displayed the discussion question and allowed participants to post comments that were visible to other attendees in real time. Event attendees had the option to post their own comments or allow the table host to capture their comments on the online platform. At the end of each 15-minute interval, attendees returned to the main event room and were randomized to a different breakout room for another small group discussion; this structure allowed attendees to interact with an average of eight community members within the three rounds of conversation in a small group format.

Breakout room conversations were recorded and transcribed utilizing an automated transcription service. Due to technical difficulties, two hosts were unable to record their breakout rooms, resulting in a lack of transcription for those sessions (in those cases, Padlet documents were used to analyze the ideas discussed in those breakout rooms). For conversations that were recorded, a trained research member checked the accuracy of the transcription by listening to the audio recordings while reading the transcription, making necessary changes for accuracy. Transcripts were imported into NVivo 10 software for data management and analysis.

At the end of the three rounds of small group conversation, attendees returned to the main event room for the harvest. A member of the research team led this final discussion in which all attendees had an opportunity to share ideas discussed during the event. A blank Microsoft Word document was displayed via the screenshare feature on Zoom, where attendees saw their comments recorded in real time. At the conclusion of the event, participants were given a link to a short survey that included a question about their perception of the virtual event.

Data Analyses

This study utilized thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). All transcripts were coded in English. Discussions that were carried out in Spanish were translated into English by a bilingual staff member and later coded. After reading all transcripts and Padlet records, one member of the team independently open-coded the data creating 22 codes, including an "unusual" and a "surprise" code to ensure that the findings included diverse perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Next, two other members of the team each independently coded 50% of the data with the 22 codes. This process, referred to as investigator triangulation, contributes to the internal validity of the project by cross-checking and verifying interpretation of the data by more than one researcher (Thurmond, 2001). Two additional categories were identified using constant-comparative procedures (Fram, 2013), and the codebook was updated to accommodate the new categories that emerged. We then met to discuss discrepancies and overlap in coding, resulting in an updated set of 13 codes. Consensus around the final codes was confirmed by re-coding all of the data a final time. Finally, we analyzed results from the end-of-event survey question regarding participant perceptions of the community conversation.

Results

In the following section, we first describe key themes related to the type of IPSE program participants would like to see implemented at the local university (RQ1). We then highlight the resources participants could contribute to achieve this type of program (RQ2).

Stakeholders' Visions for an Inclusive Postsecondary Education Program

Participants expressed strong opinions regarding the type of IPSE program they thought would best serve young people with ID at their local university, including ideas on how to plan and implement a program, key characteristics, program outcomes, and potential barriers that program implementers should consider.

Planning and Getting Started

Participants discussed various ways to launch an IPSE program. One participant noted the need for structure:

> I think we also need to develop some sort of structure because I don't believe we have a means with the TPSID grant not being funded. I don't think we have a

> structure right now. So if a family were to come and say, if you want to, you know, enroll, we'd have to sort of reinvent the wheel each time for each individual.

Quite a few participants liked the idea of a pilot program to "see and feel what this all means to us as a community that wants to embrace students with ID." They suggested reaching out to a handful of professors who might be open to the idea of having students with ID in their courses and offering them professional development on accommodating students with ID. Participants also expressed reaching out to established programs noting "we don't need to reinvent the wheel." Others suggested conducting a needs assessment:

> What we're finding is that it would be helpful to do a needs assessment of individuals that fall into the category of having an intellectual or developmental disability, to find out what type of supports are missing, that makes it difficult for them to successfully complete, be competitive with their college courses, as well as being able to matriculate with the rigors of all of the social dynamics that come with college added on to feeling isolated, because they may not have community groups that encourage participation.

Outreach and Community Input. Unlike special education at the K–12 level, IHEs do not have a child find mandate, wherein public schools are required to identify and provide special education and related services to students with disabilities in their service area; thus, participants felt it was important to incorporate widespread outreach, particularly to underserved communities. One suggestion for promoting the program was to have "videos, short clips on the university website … you know, so students, again, can kind of hear other people's experiences." Participants also emphasized outreach to students and families who are underrepresented in IPSE. One participant suggested conducting outreach in communities of color through nontraditional means.

> I prefer using nontraditional means to recruit families, when I've had cases where we actually worked through churches, or big families, like in a barber shop, and things like that, that we are talking to folks in spaces that we don't often go to make sure that we are diversifying this program.

Participants thought it would be helpful to have "an outline of steps on how to help students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to gain access to campuses such as [University]."

A number of participants emphasized the importance of building a program based on the desires and needs of families.

> [we] has [sic] been discussing individualizing vs. homogenizing. [We] need to know what family and individual needs [are]—learn from families what they need, what they actually want to do rather than just providing a program. What is really close to their heart? [We should be] building something that meets their needs.

Existing Programs. When planning a program, participants felt it was important to look to existing programs for young adults with ID for collaboration and guidance. Some

participants drew on successful inclusive programs that exist in the local area, as inspiration for an IPSE program at a university: "… for Special Olympics, our large games are at [local campus] during the summer, and … they live in the dorms and they're clean, and they're messy, and they're just like the rest of us." Another participant discussed a local high school that offers inclusive sports and classes. It may be important to build partnerships with existing programs in order to learn strategies and techniques on how to best support the inclusion of students with ID.

Key Characteristics

In conceptualizing including students with ID at the local university, participants described key characteristics that they would like to see incorporated in the program, noting that they did not want the program to be just an extension of K–12 special education.

Individualization. A number of participants emphasized the need to have the program based on individual students' needs and interests rather than having the student "fit" the program. One participant described this aspiration as:

> If a student has a dream of want[ing] to do something, how do we help them and not put them in a box? Cuz [sic] I think a lot of times adults put students in a box, because if they don't, it's a lot of work to do something different. It's easy to do the same thing over and over and over again, and say, I'm gonna [sic] have you work in here, you're gonna [sic] fold clothes at Marshall's. How do we get to break that cycle? You know, and that's the challenge that I'm facing right now is how do I break that cycle and to get other adults around me to realize that we got to do better than what we're doing?

Participants discussed giving students options similar to those of typical college students.

> …you don't want to create a program where they're all taking the same classes. Right? Because that's not the that's not the college experience. Right for us to have a preset program that they're choosing from. That's not college. That's more like high school.

Inclusiveness and Self-Determination. A related theme that emerged involved including students with ID in all aspects of college life, based on their own preferences and interests. This included recommendations such as including students with ID in student governance, leadership positions, dormitory living, part-time campus jobs, and clubs and sports. As one participant put it: "I think that students with disabilities should be included in all activities like sports so they can have a chance to experiment and they can choose if that works for them or if it doesn't work." Inclusiveness was discussed in tandem with self-determination; with greater opportunities to experience and make decisions about college life, students' self-determination will grow. Participants felt the program should be able to adjust accordingly:

> So she might [only] need an aide for the first few days to get her situated. And that's what the program could say, like, Do you need help? And then maybe as they grow,

> and they make friends, they don't need that aide anymore. They're able to speak for themselves, you know, make their voices heard and all that.

Participants seemed in favor of natural supports whenever possible, such as having a classmate rather than a paid notetaker in class: “I think that's a big difference. If you have somebody who actually is taking the class, not just someone older sitting next to you taking notes.” Participants expressed the importance of inclusion to avoid stigmatizing the students. As one person stated, “I've also been on campuses where you see the individuals and they're not integrated, and they stick out like a sore thumb moving within their circle.”

Student mentors. Several participants discussed the value of having matriculated college students participate in the program as mentors. One participant suggested recruiting work-study students who would be paid through a federal program, while another suggested recruiting college-student mentors who have disabilities. Another participant thought the relationship should be more equal than a mentor/mentee relationship: “it wouldn't be fair to them to make me their mentor. You know, it would be we’re teammates and we're learning together as teammates and as friends.” Overall, participants were enthusiastic about opportunities for individuals with ID to socialize with same-aged peers without ID on a college campus.

Educational programming. Several participants discussed academic programming, including accessing university supports and flexible course delivery options. One participant described the need to assist students in navigating the various support services on campus:

> Questions that I've always gotten from the students that we have in our program is, you know, who do I go to, to talk to about accommodations? Who can I talk to, if I'm, you know, falling behind in class? Is there anyone that can be in the in the room with me if I need to take my exams or if I need someone to help me with notes?

As one participant put it “you could have an excellent plan but if there is no mechanism to navigate that plan, you're in a very difficult place.” Participants also discussed the benefits of online classes, including flexibility in learning the content, and greater control over how students integrate into campus life.

> I think even long term like having more options for online courses, so that students can have that accessibility to still take those courses without having to stress or to have to add more to like the feeling of having to adjust to the campus culture and things like that, like having more of like a choice, like if they choose to want to push themselves into that space that is available.

Program Outcomes

Participants discussed the academic and social benefits of a successful IPSE program. However, there was not complete consensus about the purpose or desired outcome—is it

a degree, competitive employment, greater independence, or the simply the satisfaction of becoming a college student?

> … you can go to college and take classes in the theater and take different classes [such as] art, but if there's no cohesion there, and if that experience doesn't lead to competitive employment, competitive, integrated employment afterwards, right, side by side, with typically developing peers, then what was the point of the college experience?

While some participants thought a certificate from the local university would be valuable, others emphasized the chance for students with ID to develop a college identity.

> I think just the opportunity to say that they're taking a college course and they are a college student would mean more than a certificate or anything, you know that but they could walk up and say, Hey, I'm, I'm in 13th grade at [local university]. Yeah, you know, like, just that is gonna mean so much or they can, you know, add it on their Facebook profile that they go to [local university], you know, just those little things.

Many participants emphasized the value in the college-experience, including making friendships, over earning a degree or starting a career. One participant put it this way:

> Even among our typically developing population, students go to college and they don't know what they want to do. Right, or they finish college and they still don't have a clear idea of what their career path is. Right. And so I think if those are the concerns in the typically developing population, while we might not be thinking about it for our students with IEPs right now, there that will eventually come to the table, right?

Another stated “they're learning stuff. They're kind of broadening their horizons.” Finally, a few participants discussed the benefits of an inclusive program to other students, staff and faculty on campus, as one student stated: “I'm a student at [local university]. And I'm very, I don't have a lot of knowledge in regards to like the services that are provided for students with disabilities.”

Potential Barriers

Participants identified barriers that students with ID and/or their families might face in accessing and attending an IPSE program, including concerns over financial challenges, meeting academic standards, and maintaining the well-being of students with ID.

Financial Challenges. Some of the participants expressed concern regarding the cost of the program to families and whether they could access financial aid: “I don't think you can get financial aid at a four-year institution without having a high school diploma. So what would be the cost for the families if they want to participate?” Participants from different affiliations expressed concerns about the affordability of tuition, program fees and university housing, noting that the cost may prohibit some families from participating.

Thus, participants insisted that an IPSE program needs to be accessible to families from all income levels.

Meeting Academic Standards. Participants expressed concerns regarding whether individuals with ID would be able to meet the academic demands of college coursework. One participant questioned whether students with ID had the prerequisite skills to be successful in college: "they may not have … the skill development in order to successfully matriculate through college because they did not learn those fundamental skills at high school." Others questioned whether the students would be taking courses for college credit and if the students would be able to pass their classes. Several participants noted that an IPSE program must have supports in place for students with ID to be successful.

Preserving Students' Safety and Well-being. The final major concern about including individuals with ID in college regarded their safety and well-being. One individual summed up the various safety concerns as:

> For instance, one of the challenges… is the social aspect of college can be daunting. And there are some threats there. How does an individual that may have been in a sheltered environment, coming from the family home and engaging and participating on college [manage]? How do we ensure that they have the community awareness, the safety awareness, the knowledge of themselves and people, in order to know how to say, I know not to partake in the party and drinking, or of how to manage the relationships that come with being a young adult, that's a that's a part of the college experience, as much as I'm here to achieve my goals to be x.

Participants expressed concerns about whether individuals with ID attending college would experience stress and anxiety, or even bullying and threats to their personal safety. Thus, participants recommended that an IPSE program include preparing students and their "parents to know that our children will be in a safe place and nothing will happen to them."

Resources to Achieve a Successful IPSE Program

The second research question explored the resources that participants could contribute to establish an IPSE program. There was near unanimous agreement that partnerships with the local community were integral and that certain key partners and advocates must be on board.

Key Partnerships

Participants listed University administrators such as the dean, provost, vice president of student affairs, and faculty as critical to establishing an IPSE program at the local university.

One participant shared the following:

> The permission has to come from top down, because we had an experience at another community college … and went through disabled student service, did the whole thing... And at the end, when it was time to register for class, the Dean said "No." So half a year of work was lost. So checking in with the top is important.

Participants also stressed establishing partnerships with developmental disabilities service providers or agencies (e.g., Regional Centers), local school districts, and the city.

Advocating for the Program

Participants seemed enthusiastic about the prospect of establishing an IPSE program at their local University, with some offering to advocate on behalf of such a program. Others discussed the benefits of parent advocates, though some suggested that parents might need training.

> …what came to my mind was like, what about those families who don't have [a connection to the local university]? Or who don't know how to advocate for their children? I wonder how we can bridge that gap between the university and families?

Participant Perceptions of the Virtual Community Conversation

Most (76%, n = 19) participants completed an end-of-event survey. All (100%) respondents indicated that the event was a good investment of their time. Further, 89% (n = 17) reported a high level of interest in being part of the next steps for developing an IPSE program.

Discussion

As IPSE programs become increasingly prevalent across the nation, more research has emerged regarding program characteristics and outcomes (e.g., Becht et al., 2020; Brewer & Movahedazarhouligh, 2021); however, few studies have explored the development of new programs. This study examined how community members from a diverse, urban city conceptualize including students with ID at a local University, including resources that community members could contribute to implement a program. In addition to exploring the feasibility of holding a community conversation in a virtual format, this study had several interesting findings.

Our first finding relates to the visions that community stakeholders held on an IPSE program at the University. Similar to Bumble and colleagues' (2019) study, participants discussed the key program characteristics, or components, required for a successful program. These characteristics included individualized academic and social programming and access to peer supports. Rather than having students take preselected courses, participants felt that students should have the opportunity to explore their interests, as traditional university students generally do. Peer supports may also be beneficial for students in the program. This connection may provide students with ID helpful academic and social supports, as they navigate college life. Additionally, acting as a student mentor could provide matriculated college students with a chance to befriend a person with ID, to

get to know their personalities and strengths and, in turn, to reduce disability-related stigmas on campus (Griffin et al., 2016; Harrison et al, 2019).

Program outcomes were another theme that emerged from our data. Notably, there was a lack of consensus over what the intended program outcomes should entail. Some participants felt that the goal should be to earn a certificate or secure meaningful employment. Indeed, this is the main purpose of TPSID-funded IPSE programs (Grigal et al., 2021). Other participants, however, felt that the goal of the program should be more socially oriented, providing students with opportunities to meet new people and develop a college identity. Corby and colleagues (2018) describe a tension in IPSE programs, between a focus on traditional employment outcomes versus the benefits of having an opportunity to learn; they suggest educators revisit traditional views of educational outcomes, while seeking the input of people with ID when designing new programs. Overall, most participants felt that it is essential to provide students with ID access to a "true college experience," including them in all aspects of college life. Students with ID participating in IPSE programs should have a sense of agency, with opportunities to make decisions while pursuing their interests and goals (Rillotta et al., 2020).

Event attendees also discussed the need for collaboration in developing an IPSE program. Participants felt that the university should work with local families of young adults with ID from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds as they develop the program. Indeed, examining the community culture should be one of the first steps of IPSE program development (Baker et al., 2018). Developing a planning team comprised of a broad range of community stakeholders can ensure that the program meets the desires and needs of the local community, including students and families (Papay & Griffin, 2013). In addition to working with the community, participants felt that it is important to learn from existing programs. With over 300 IPSE programs across the U.S. (Think College, 2021, more and more information on the design and delivery of these programs is becoming available (Bumble et al., 2019; Grigal et al., 2021).

Participants also recognized that there are several barriers that could get in the way of developing a successful IPSE program. Specifically, participants expressed concern over the safety and well-being of students with ID on a college campus and issues relating to program costs. Concerns over the safety and well-being of individuals with ID has been the focus of much research. Indeed, numerous studies have pointed out increased vulnerability of individuals with ID (Fisher et al., 2016) and the higher likelihood of individuals with ID being a victim of bullying (Griffin et al., 2019), sexual abuse (Byrne, 2018), and physical abuse (Gil-Llario et al., 2019). While societies are called upon to provide adequate protections to vulnerable populations, we must also allow adults, including those with disabilities, the right to make their own decisions and take risks (Bumble et al., in press). Certainly, the college years are a time when many young adults are provided with such opportunities. By including students with ID on university campuses and providing them with appropriate supports, we can increase their independence and self-determination by allowing them to make day-to-day decisions to pursue their goals (with support, as needed; Mello & Sanderson, 2021).

Many stakeholders also expressed concern over the affordability of such a program, including whether families could access federal financial aid. Thus, it may be important for an IPSE program to receive Title IV approval as a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Program (CTP). This approval allows individuals with ID, who do not have a high school diploma and are not enrolled in a degree-granting program, to access financial aid (Weir & Boyle, 2020). Funding remains a large barrier to implementing and sustaining an IPSE program. A Think College State Alliance Affinity Group (2021) found large variations in the sources of funding, which included Vocational Rehabilitation, federal (i.e., TPSID) and state grants, local educational areas (in the case of dual enrollment), private donations, developmental disabilities services, and program fees paid for by families. Some families, unaware that IPSE programs exist for individuals with ID, may have failed to save for college through conventional means, such as 529 plans. Further, students from families who face financial difficulties, including those of low socioeconomic status, should also have an opportunity to access IPSE. More research is needed on funding programs that are accessible for families from all income levels.

Another finding relates to the resources that community members can contribute to include students with ID at the university. Clearly, many resources are needed to design and implement a successful IPSE program, and this becomes more of a challenge without funding from a TPSID grant. Community stakeholders at our event felt they could personally work to build partnerships and advocate for the development of an IPSE program. Strong partnerships between universities, local school districts, disability service providers, and individuals with ID and their families seem essential to planning a meaningful program (Plotner & Marshall, 2015).

Participants also felt that community stakeholders will need to be vocal advocates for the development of such a program. However, existing research has shown that parents of children with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have significantly less special education knowledge and empowerment, compared to White parents (Burke et al., 2018). This indicates the need to train parents to effectively advocate for a new IPSE program. Disability advocacy programs for parents of transition-age youth with disabilities do currently exist (e.g., the Volunteer Advocacy Project-Transition offered by Vanderbilt University), but are not widely available for parents across the country (Taylor et al., 2021). Although more research is needed, increasing the availability of transition-focused advocacy trainings for parents of youth with disabilities could potentially lead to the development of additional IPSE programs and improved postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities.

In addition to our findings related to developing an IPSE program, we also were among the first research groups to host a virtual community conversation event focused on inclusive higher education for students with disabilities. While we had initially planned to hold a traditional, in-person community conversation event, we were forced to adapt our event due to pandemic-related restrictions. Given the circumstances, we had an adequate turnout, with a group comprised of a variety of community members. Indeed, this event may have been easier to access than an in-person event, seeing as participants were not required to navigate issues related to transportation, childcare, or other barriers. Additionally, participants reported that they were satisfied with the event. We believe this

study demonstrates that virtual community conversations are feasible and may actually have some advantages over the traditional model.

Implications for Practice

The discussions that occurred during the virtual community conversation brought to light many different possibilities and issues regarding inclusive higher education for students with ID. Both existing IPSE programs and programs that are currently "in-the-works" may be able to apply our findings to improve their programs. Specifically, students with ID should be provided with a variety of opportunities to engage with the campus community, from inclusive courses to campus clubs to student government representatives. Individualized programming might be one way to accomplish this. By providing students with ID choices regarding courses, internships, and social activities, students can be involved with the IHE in a way that is meaningful to them. IPSE programs at IHEs should also strive to work with their local community, including school districts, service providers, and individuals with ID and their families. By working with these stakeholders, programs can ensure that they adequately meet the needs of their students and represent community values. Further, programs should aim to remove potential barriers, such as high tuition and program fees, that may prohibit individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds from accessing inclusive higher education.

Limitations and Future Research

Although our study sheds new light on community members' perceptions regarding the development of an IPSE program for students with ID, there are limitations that should be noted. The first limitation relates to our sample. Although 70 people had RSVPed to attend the event, only 25 participants participated. This small turnout may have been due, in part, to additional obligations and stressors people faced related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Necho et al., 2020). Though attendees represented a diverse range of community roles (from parents of individuals with ID to professors), no individuals with ID were present. Additionally, participants' racial and ethnic demographic data were not collected. Future community conversations held on this topic should include individuals with disabilities, as well as people from racial and ethnic minorities, to ensure that the voices of all people are represented.

A second limitation regards technical issues related to holding the event virtually. Two table hosts were unable to video record their small group sessions on Zoom, resulting in a lack of transcriptions for these sessions. While we still had a Padlet record of ideas captured during these sessions, these records provide less detail than the recorded sessions. While we do recommend that some future community conversations be held online, future researchers may consider having a trial run, wherein table hosts practice technical skills, prior to the actual event.

Though this was not the first study to use a community conversation to address the development of an IPSE program for students with ID (see Bumble et al., 2019), this study does offer new insight into both the topic and the approach. Community stakeholders shared their views on including students with ID at a university located in a diverse, urban

city. These stakeholders discussed several ideas for designing and implementing an IPSE program, including the need for individualized programming and access to appropriate supports. However, potential barriers, such as affordability and student safety, do exist and must be considered when designing an equitable program. Further, a great many resources are needed to actually design and implement a successful IPSE program, especially without federal funding from a TPSID grant. Advocacy and strong partnerships between universities, local school districts, disability service providers, and individuals with ID and their families seem essential to planning a meaningful program. Finally, this study demonstrates that virtual community conversations are feasible and may be a good option for researchers hoping to attract diverse participants. Moving forward, we must continue to make higher education accessible to individuals with ID. The more that community members can be involved in such endeavors and take part in conversations and planning (as done in community conversations), the closer we come to building a more inclusive society.

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Table 1

Participant Affiliation

Affiliation	% (*n*)
University faculty member	24% (6)
Community service provider	20% (5)
Family member	16% (4)
University student	16% (4)
University administrator	12% (3)
Local district representative	8% (2)
Community organization	4% (1)
Total	**100% (25)**