

Dear Readers,

When we originally wrote the introduction to this issue in the fall, we planned to highlight the national award winners from the 2024 State of the Art Conference held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in October. While these award winners are so deserving of this space, you will find the piece on awards later in this issue. Instead, this introduction is needed to address critical issues in our field that are unfolding.

In the last few months, many of us in the field of inclusive postsecondary education have been worried about our programs, our funding, and our students. We are worried about potential changes to Medicaid, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Education, the Office of Special Education Programs, and more. Some have already had work affected by cuts. When the White House Office of Management and Budget listed federal programs under review in late January, Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Higher Education (TPSID) was on the list. “Inclusion” joined a list of words that the federal government seeks to limit or avoid (Yourish et. al., 2025).

Disability is an issue that cuts across the aisle. It is an issue that is owned by neither the Democrats nor the Republicans—and never has been. Bipartisan efforts created the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), and the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. These are still the laws that govern our country. Thanks to the strong advocacy and work of this field, we now have inclusive postsecondary education programs at colleges and universities in all states. We have a national professional conference, international research journal, the national centers at Think College, state and regional networks, and thriving student advocacy groups. This work matters to our students, and they tell us this every day, with over 8,000 students with intellectual disability now attending college in the US (Think College National Coordinating Center, 2024). Fifty years ago, our students who are now in college might have been in state institutions, subject to abuse and neglect at great cost to society. We have made a lot of progress since then, with graduates of TPSID programs achieving 74% employment one year out of college, compared to a national employment rate of only 17% for people with intellectual disability (Grigal et al., 2024; National Core Indicators, 2024). We can’t let this progress slip: Inclusion is precarious, and of utmost importance.

Your research and the work of this journal are more important now than ever. We need this work to demonstrate the importance of inclusive postsecondary education and high expectations for people with intellectual disability. Work like that of Roberts-Dahm and Dukes (2024) or Grigal et al. (2019) that identifies career preparation practices that lead to employment for college students with intellectual disability, a priority shared by all. We need research like that of Cimera et al. (2018) that demonstrates that higher education is a cost-effective and cost-efficient pathway to employment for persons with intellectual disability with reduced need for long-term government benefits and increased quality of life outcomes (Licata and Conroy, 2022). With research like that of Smith-Hill et al. (2024) that uses participatory methods to understand the perspectives of college students with intellectual disability, our field honors what students and families want, paired with strong results. Our students become community members, taxpayers, and voters, both Democratic and Republican, across the entire country. Disability affects everyone, and it

is our charge to research and educate about the importance of inclusion. It is more critical than ever that we hold true to this value; our students, and all of us, depend on it.

Signed,

Beth Myers and Clare Papay
Editors, Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education
March 2025

References

- Cimera, R. E., Thoma, C. A., Whittenburg, H. N., & Ruhl, A. N. (2018). Is getting a postsecondary education a good investment for supported employees with intellectual disability and taxpayers? *Inclusion, 6*(2), 97-109.
<https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-6.2.97>
- Grigal, M., Hart, D., Papay, C., Bukaty, C., Choiseul-Praslin, B., & Pound, S. (2024). *Annual report of the cohort 3 TPSID model demonstration projects (Year 3, 2022-2023)*. University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.
- Grigal, M., Papay, C., Smith, F., Hart, D., & Verbeck, R. (2019). Experiences that predict employment for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in federally funded higher education programs. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 42*, 17-28.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143418813358>
- Licata, A. M., & Conroy, J. (2022). Quality of life outcomes among participants in an inclusive postsecondary education program at a mid-atlantic university. *Social Innovations Journal, 13*(3). Retrieved from
<https://socialinnovationsjournal.com/index.php/sij/article/view/1279>
- National Core Indicators. (2024, May). *Intellectual and developmental disabilities national report 2022-23: Employment*. National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and Human Services Research Institute.
https://idd.nationalcoreindicators.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/IPS-22-23-Ch02-Employment_FINAL.pdf
- Roberts-Dahm, L. D., & Dukes, L. L. (2024). Inclusive postsecondary education: How are program components related to employment? *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education, 5*(2), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.13021/jipe.2024.3083>
- Smith Hill, R. B., Shah, P., Plotner, A. J., Castle, M., & Stinnett, C. V. (2024). Inclusive postsecondary education and self-determination: Using photovoice to centre student voices in the United States of America. *Disability & Society, 1*-28.
- Think College National Coordinating Center. (2024, August). *Higher education access for students with intellectual disability in the United States*. Think College Snapshot: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.
- Yourish, K., Daniel, A., Datar, S., White, I., & Gamio, L. (2025, March 7). *These words are disappearing in the new Trump administration*. New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/03/07/us/trump-federal-agencies-websites-words-dei.html>