

An Introduction to the Inclusive Postsecondary Education Association

John M. Andresen, Ph.D.
IPSEA President-Elect

Misty Vetter Parsley, Ed.D.
IPSEA President

The field of inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) has expanded greatly over the previous 20 years, with a reach that continues to set records for the number of college options across the United States and internationally. Programs for students with intellectual disability have established themselves as research-backed options for students to participate meaningfully in college life alongside their peers, engaging in academic coursework, campus employment opportunities, and social activities. The field has grown through legislation, state and federal funding, a national coordinating center, an annual conference, and research journals, as well as a focus on advancing student advocacy and leadership (Myers & Grigal, 2023). The foundation of IPSE programming has been set in place by many dedicated and passionate advocates who worked tirelessly to advance the field to this point.

With an ever-increasing expansion of programs comes increasing numbers of students, faculty, program directors, policymakers, and advocates who are working with the IPSE field. The field has done an excellent job of creating and maintaining informal support networks; however, there is now a need for a sustainable infrastructure for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and leadership development. In tandem, a need for a collective voice in this space necessitates a shared platform where students, families, educators and other advocates can continue to strive for a better future.

Through discussions across a range of stakeholders, it became clear that purposeful planning needed to be done to develop an organization that can support the IPSE community and develop meaningful connections for the field. In late 2025, representatives from Think College, the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education, IPSE programs, and University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs) began planning for a membership organization that can support and grow the IPSE field into its future. Through purposeful dialogue and deliberation over a year's time, the planning committee developed what is now known as the Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Association.

The field has relied upon organizations such as Think College and the Taishoff Center to hold the critical role of leadership in the areas of research, technical assistance, and dissemination. The IPSE Association allows us to take additional steps by creating a community of students, alumni, practitioners, families, researchers, and other advocates who will support each other in continuing to break new ground in the IPSE space. Leveraging the unique aspects that a membership organization provides, we hope to continue to professionalize this field through the development of future leaders.

To make progress on the vision of people with intellectual disability being included and supported at all colleges and universities to pursue their desired life goals, the IPSE Association was purposefully developed on four core pillars: (1) Building Community, (2) Fostering Partnerships, (3) Providing Professional Development, and (4) Advancing Leadership and Advocacy. Our intention is that through leveraging our collective strengths and these four guideposts, the IPSE Association will support expanding access to quality IPSE opportunities for students around the world.

Our vision for each of these pillars is as follows:

1. **Building Community:** Creating a strong community of professionals and advocates on international, national, regional, and state levels; creating a space for professionals within the field of IPSE to share and learn with each other.
2. **Fostering Partnerships:** Cultivating partnerships between organizations and initiatives to foster collaboration that advances equitable higher education for people with intellectual disability.
3. **Providing Professional Development:** Providing professional development, including training and mentorship, to those whose work impacts higher education for people with intellectual disability.
4. **Advancing Leadership and Advocacy:** Advancing the capacity of community members to advocate for needed change and provide leadership in their local, state, regional, and national networks related to higher education for people with intellectual disability.

We encourage you to join us on this journey. This IPSE Association is being built by and for the field, and our success will be built off of the collective strength of all of the tremendous work that has been done and will be done into the future. The launch of the IPSE Association marks an important milestone in the evolution of inclusive postsecondary education. Together, we have the opportunity to strengthen the field, expand access to high quality IPSE programs, and ensure that students with intellectual disability are welcomed as full members of college communities everywhere.

Reference

Myers, B., & Grigal, M. (2023). Ten years of the state-of-the-art conference: Reflecting on the progress of inclusive postsecondary education. *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.13021/jipe.2023.3539>