

UCLA Tarjan Center ACCESS Newsletter

Advancing College Capacity for Equitable Student Success

WELCOME!

This newsletter aims to provide a convenient and current resource for information related to postsecondary education for students with developmental disabilities, such as autism and intellectual disability. While our primary focus will be on content relevant to the California Community College system, much of the newsletter will have broader applicability.



Expanded Access to Student Success Completion Grants

In September, California passed assembly bill 1885 to amend California educational code to increase access to financial support for students with disabilities in the California community college system. Previously, only students taking 12-units or more per semester were eligible for Student Success Completion Grants. However, this did not allow equitable access for students with disabilities who were considered full-time with less than 12-unit course loads as part of their academic accommodations plan. The new law allows students with disabilities who are enrolled in 9-units or more and considered full-time through DSPS to be eligible for up to \$1,298 per semester of support. With this change, there are over 5,400 newly eligible students, representing an expansion of \$14 million in annual financial aid to DSPS students and a significant investment toward the success of college students with disabilities. This bill was introduced by assemblymember Dawn Addis (D-Morro Bay) who says it will help to “level the playing field and support community college students with disabilities to achieve their academic goals.”

➤➤➤ [View the Full Bill](#)

➤➤➤ [Read Assemblymember Addis' Bill Introduction Announcement](#)

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Adrian Arroyo, a former student at Fresno City College, reflects on his college experience and shares insights for students and faculty. Adrian was part of the Fresno City College to Career program, which serves students with intellectual disability and/or autism, and graduated in Spring 2023. Responses have been lightly edited for clarity.

Q: Since graduating, how have you been spending your time?

I'm currently working at Central Unified School District as a classified special education teacher's aide and then I'm working in the after school program working with kids outside doing sports and PE. I love what I'm doing, I love my jobs and I'm glad that Central Unified had opened the doors for me to do what I want to do. A lot of staff and coworkers talked to me, gave me good feedback, told me what to do with kids and how to communicate with them. In the last couple months, they got me a reward for being an excellent co-worker. I had a great first year. I did this for my dad because my dad was telling me, "I don't know where you're going to find work," and I said I just want to help students with disabilities, be a good model, and be there for them.

Q: How do you think college helped you achieve that goal?

When I told my wife that I want to go back to college because I want to find a career, she told me "alright, go for it." So in 2019, one of my teachers told me to try joining this College to Career program. So in 2020, it was my first year in the program, and they asked me, "what do you want to do?" I said that I just want to be a special education teacher assistant and work with kids with disabilities. And they supported me in that. I had to take education courses, English, and get volunteer experience at the school - so that's what I did. So I became a yard duty volunteer at a school for almost 11 months, I worked with kids at recess and lunchtime, walking around, keeping an eye on them, and talking to them. Then the next step was to work with students in the classroom. And that was pretty amazing. I was ready and preparing for myself to get that career. The internship did really help - I talked to a lot of teachers. They told me how to put in an application, how to ask for a letter of reference. In terms of classes, the work experience class I took really helped.

Q: Looking back, what were some of your favorite parts of college?

To me, educational coaches, the counselors, the other C2C students. We had social hours every month, playing trivia, goofing around, just having fun. I loved meeting those people, they changed my life forever. It really helped me to have the support. I keep in touch with some other students and I was really happy for one of them when he got a job.

Student Stories:

An Interview with Adrian Arroyo

Q: What would you say was the hardest part about college for you?

I think it was my English class I took online during COVID. You had to write a lot of essays, take a lot of notes. I was working hard, doing what the teacher told me to do, attending workshops to get extra points. Then my grandma passed away and I had covid too. It hit me hard - I thought I'm not even going to pass because I don't think I'm going to stay focused. My teacher talked to me, he said "it's okay, Adrian. We'll get through this. If you get the assignment done, you will get [the course] done." The teacher was surprised that I was working harder than the other students, because I wrote almost 13 pages of my essay in 2 days on my own. It was pretty amazing, the teacher talked to me on the weekend to go over what I was missing. He had a good heart. So I told my dad that I had to get out of church because I need to finish this work. I passed with a C - I needed that grade to get to my goal.

Q: I'd love to hear more about who and what helped you to succeed in college.

I'd say my educational coaches. They told me to not give up, keep going, do your best, be myself, be independent, don't be afraid, just ask for help... you can do it - they believed in me. They wanted to see me accomplish my goals and grow. Last year, I did it on my own to look for jobs - I said I don't need her help right now, but if I need her help I can ask her for details and advice. The library was also really important. I was doing homework, I was reading all day. I needed to stay focused with assignments and the library helped. I also learned that if I'm struggling, or if I need help, always come to talk to the instructor. I took a child development class two years ago, and I came to the instructor like, "I don't know if I'm doing this right or wrong." And she was really helpful.

Q: What advice would you give to college students with disabilities and to the faculty instructors who teach them?

For students, talk to your counselor, figure out what you want to do for you career and what you need to do to get there. Study every day. Give yourself plenty of time. You will get there. When I was in high school, I got my certificate. I went to an adult school and got my high school diploma. Then college, then I took a semester off, and went back for College to Career. I also think students should speak up for themselves. For me, I was needing more time on tests, especially when I had my anxiety attacks. I told my instructor and she said 'sure, you can have more time, just go to the DSPS office.' Students with disabilities deserve a chance, don't make them rush themselves. Sometimes teachers are mean and have no respect for students with disabilities, and they shouldn't be doing that. They need to be more helpful. They should not be annoyed. Students don't want to be behind, they just need extra support.





Research Insights:

Neurodivergent Student Perspectives on College Inclusion

More scholarly attention is being paid to neurodivergent college students' experiences and perspectives. There is much to learn from students' lived experience that can inform college policies and practices.

The two articles below centered the voices of neurodivergent students and researchers toward presenting recommendations to enhance neuroinclusion in postsecondary education.

Both articles identified overlapping areas for improvement, which are categorized into the following categories:

Sensory Needs

- Recognize and accommodate sensory discomfort, distraction, distress, and overload
- Provide spaces with low lighting, low noise, no strong smells, and multiple seating options

Mental Health

- Establish disability cultural spaces
- Create disability support groups
- Improve mental health support for neurodivergent students, respecting their preferences for advocates

Training

- Provide campus-wide neurodiversity and universal design trainings to faculty/staff
- Establish neuroaffirming peer mentoring to help students navigate school and social interactions

Accommodations

- Offer flexible modes of communication and instruction
- Provide accommodations for both in and outside of the classroom.

[Sarrett, J. \(2018\). Autism and accommodations in higher education: Insights from the autism community. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48\(3\), 679-693.](#)

[Dwyer, P., Mineo, E., Mifsud, K., Lindholm, C., Gurba, A., & Waisman, T. C. \(2023\). Building neurodiversity-inclusive postsecondary campuses: Recommendations for leaders in higher education. *Autism in Adulthood*, 5\(1\), 1-14.](#)



2024 Paris Paralympic Games

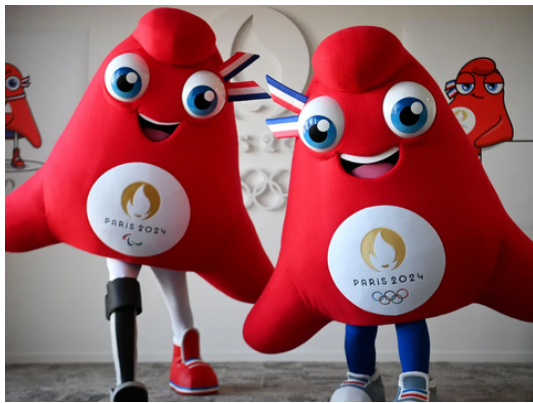
PARIS 2024

PARALYMPIC GAMES



The Summer 2024 Paralympics happened August 28 to September 8, 2024 in Paris, France. The games happen after the Olympics in the same sports facilities. The International Paralympics Committee (IPC) was founded in 1989 with the vision of “an inclusive world through para sports.”

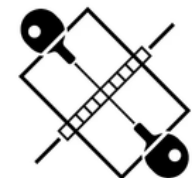
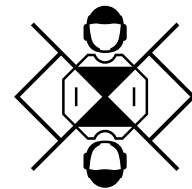
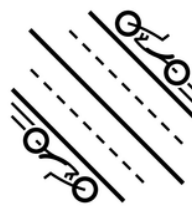
The 2024 Paralympics brought up to 4,400 elite athletes to compete in 549 events over 22 sports. The competing athletes are a part of 3 distinct groups: Physical Impairments, Vision Impairments, and Intellectual Disability. Some sports provide competition opportunities to all athletes while other sports are specific to certain distinct groups. Each sport then groups athletes with similar activity limitations together for competition, so that they can compete equitably. The 22 Paralympic sports range from cycling and swimming to taekwondo and table tennis. [Learn more about each sport.](#)



[Learn about the Paralympic Mascot](#)

Not only do the athletes that compete benefit from the Paralympics, each game leaves a lasting impact on the host city and country by showcasing the values of determination, equality, inspiration, and courage from the elite athletes. This year, the [IPC reported](#) that France committed “1.5 billion euros of accessibility improvements in public spaces, a full reimbursement of wheelchair purchases, reduced tax on adapted sports equipment, inclusive schooling for 430,000 students, and

an expansion nationwide of the inclusive sports club initiative.” In 2012, the [London Paralympics reportedly](#) saw 1 in 3 people have a positive change in attitude towards disabled individuals and at the 2022 winter Paralympics, over 12 million people in the US viewed the games. Through awareness propelled by the immense audience size and investments in programs from host cities, the Paralympic athletes are able to not only showcase their talent but also be a part of change. Learn more on the next page about inspiring Paralympians with neurodevelopmental disabilities.



2024 Paralympic Sport Pictograms

2024 Paris Paralympic Athletes

Breanna Clark

Country: United States

Sport: Para Track and Field



Breanna Clark is an autistic, 2-time Paralympian champion winning gold in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020. Paris 2024 was her 3rd game placing 4th in the 400m track and field race. She is from an Olympic family, her mother won silver at the 1976 Rio Olympic games.

Florian van Acker

Country: Belgium

Sport: Table Tennis



Florian Van Acker won gold for Belgium in Rio 2016 and bronze in Tokyo 2020, placing 5th this year in the table tennis semi-finals. Van Acker is autistic and has an intellectual impairment; he has said that table tennis has made him more confident in his abilities.

Lawrence Sapp

Country: United States

Sport: Para Swimming



Lawrence Sapp is a 2-time Paralympian from Maryland, placing 13th in the Paris 2024 100m butterfly and 5th in Tokyo 2020 100m butterfly. Sapp is autistic and has an intellectual impairment. He has been swimming since the age of 5.

Ryan Medrano

Country: United States

Sport: Para Track and Field



Ryan Medrano is a first time Paralympian winning silver in the 400m race in Paris. Medrano was born with mild cerebral palsy and discovered Para track and field after competing on CBS's Survivor.

»»» [Watch the Paralympic Replays](#)

»»» [See Ryan Medrano win silver](#)

Like the Paralympics, the Special Olympics, an internationally recognized organization for disabled athletes, are hosting their world games in 2025. The Special Olympics global grassroots organizations host games for athletes of all skill levels with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

»»» [Read more about differences between the Paralympic Games and Special Olympics](#)

Service and Facility Dogs for Neurodivergent People

September was National Service Dog Month! While service dogs are well-known for assisting people with physical disabilities or PTSD, they can also play a vital role in supporting neurodivergent people. For example, service dogs can help autistic people by applying deep pressure for sensory support, alerting their handlers to repetitive, self-injurious behaviors, and providing emotion regulation assistance during stressful moments. Expertly trained facility dogs can also be helpful in educational and healthcare settings. Facility dogs are bred and trained to be affectionate, calm, and reliable in professional settings, with knowledge of over 40 commands. Data suggest that facility dogs have a number of benefits for younger students, patients, and professionals.

Colleges may also be able to harness the power of facility dogs in higher education. In the North Orange Community College District, Lindon II, a facility dog, fosters a welcoming environment while supporting students' psychosocial well-being. Lindon works primarily in the ARISE lab, a neurodiversity and wellness resource. Casey Sousa, ARISE Faculty Coordinator, says, "Lindon provides unconditional acceptance, love, and encouragement to our students. He is so sweet and calm, bringing a mellow and relaxing vibe to our ARISE spaces. Lindon helps students manage stress and with emotional regulation. He also helps students feel a sense of belonging and inclusion on campus."



The college students at NOCCD love Lindon too and see the benefits of his presence, sharing:

- *"Lindon is always so happy to see me, it makes me feel good when I walk in."*
- *"How can you be upset when you see his precious face?"*
- *"Lindon is so great because he loves you without judgment!"*

Canine Companions and Tender Loving Canines are non-profits that provide highly-trained service or facility dogs to people with disabilities and healthcare/educational settings, free of charge.



PEERS® for Dating Research Study

We are excited to announce a research study being conducted through the UCLA PEERS® Clinic, a specialty clinic affiliated with the UCLA Tarjan Center. PEERS® for Dating is a 20-week peer mentor assisted social and dating skills program for autistic adults. The PEERS® for Dating curriculum targets skills to develop and maintain healthy

romantic relationships - from conversation skills and asking someone out to sexual intimacy and conflict resolution. The research program is **FREE** and will be offered virtually and in person at UCLA, starting in January 2025. Participants will be randomly assigned to receive the telehealth program, in person program, or no treatment control. All participants will receive a PEERS® Virtual Bootcamp at the end of the study - a \$500 value, with unlimited access and ability to learn at your own pace.

Please feel free to share with students who may be interested! To learn more, email us at peersclinic@ucla.edu.

Who's a good fit?

- ☐ Autistic
- ☐ 18-45 years old
- ☐ Able to come to UCLA
- ☐ Currently interested in dating
- ☐ Available Thursday 4-8pm

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