

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.

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Social Justice Series: Disability, Discipline, and Policing on Campus

For neurodivergent students, interactions with authority figures can be challenging, especially in high-stress situations. The way questions are asked and repeated can shape how students respond and how those responses are interpreted.

Research shows that some adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) may be more likely to agree with or please authority figures, even when unsure. This is known as **acquiescence** and can contribute to misunderstandings during questioning.

Students may:

- Answer yes/no questions without fully understanding
- Change their answer when questions are repeated or re-asked
- Try to give the “expected” answer, even if not true
- Have difficulty saying “I don’t know”

In fast-paced interactions, these behaviors may increase confusion. However, in disciplinary situations on campus, it is important that college professionals are able to accurately assess the situation to know how to respond. It is also critical that students are able to understand boundaries and consequences to be able to change their behavior and succeed.

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Social Justice Series:

Disability, Discipline, and Policing on Campus

Professionals can be mindful of how they approach conversations with individuals with ID. Read below for small changes in conversations that can make a big difference.

Approach with nonjudgmental curiosity

“I heard that you’ve been spending time near this student. Can you tell me about that?”
(Rather than: *“It sounds like you’ve been harassing this student.”*)

Use simple, open-ended questions

“What did you do next?”
(Rather than: *“Why did you keep talking to her and make her uncomfortable?”*)

Explain the impact and set clear boundaries by specifying the behavior

“When you followed her, she felt uncomfortable and scared. We want everyone to feel safe. Moving forward, you cannot talk to or follow this student on campus.”
(Rather than: *“This is unacceptable behavior and you can’t do that.”*)

Clearly state the consequences

“If you continue, you will be suspended and will not be able to take classes here.”
(Rather than: *“This is going to be a problem if you don’t stop.”*)

Avoid yes/no and leading questions

“Let’s check we’re on the same page. What should you do if you see her in the library?”
(Rather than: *“Do you understand?”* or *“Does that sound good?”*)

Additional Tips

- Encourage students to include someone who knows them well, especially when summarizing next steps. This person can help clarify and reinforce the information.
- Spend time building rapport at the beginning of the interview.
- Allow for extra processing time (e.g., wait before repeating, say “take your time”).
- When appropriate, normalize the desire (e.g., to make friends) and provide related supports.

Sensory-Friendly Campus Spaces on Any Budget

Creating sensory-friendly spaces does not have to require a large budget. Small changes can help reduce sensory overload and create quieter and calmer campus environments. These spaces can benefit all students and staff and are a great example of universal design. Sensory-friendly supports work best when students and staff can access them without having to explain or disclose a reason or disability. Watch our [April ACCESS webinar on Neuroinclusive Library Spaces](#) to hear more!

Free to Low-Cost Options

- Paper clips, rubber bands, hair bands or erasers
- Putty or stress balls
- Earplugs
- Fidget keychains or small fidget bags
- Acupressure rings or sensory balls
- Sensory cubes or worry stones
- A handout with information on calm and quiet spaces on campus.



Staff and faculty can provide these options in small baskets or check-out stations.

Medium-Cost Options

- Coloring books or Etch A Sketch
- Lamps instead of using overhead lights
- Yoga balls, bean bags, or foam mats
- Blue light blocking glasses
- Liquid motion times or flow tiles
- Tiny zen garden

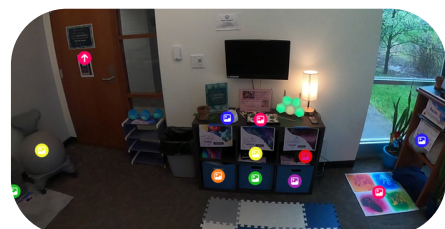


An easy starting point could be adding a lamp, one comfortable seating option, and a few tactile tools in a basket.

Higher-Cost Options

- Noise-canceling headphones
- White noise machine
- ONO roller or similar hand tools
- Weighted lap pads
- Dedicated sensory-friendly room or study pod

Check out [Penn State's sensory friendly room and resources](#) - including a [virtual sensory room](#) for online classes!



Reflections with Hartnell College: An Exclusive Interview



The UCLA Tarjan Center was joined by Kevin O'Haire, the Director of Student Affairs in the Department of Supportive Programs & Services (DSPS) at Hartnell College, to talk about their recent "Beyond Access" workshop. Beyond Access sought to bring together TK-12 and college partners in the region to better support autistic and other neurodivergent students in the transition to college. As an all day event, there was time to learn, but also brainstorm and collaborate to develop actionable next steps. Responses have been lightly edited for clarity.

Q: Tell me about the idea of Beyond Access. Where did it come from? What was your intention?

Kevin: *Well it started with being selected for a training from the UCLA Tarjan Center! I had been thinking prior of what the biggest impact of that training could be. I was pretty new at the time; I think I'd been a DSPS director for two months. And a lot of what I learned in the first few months was about accommodations from K-12 that didn't translate to college and about all the steps to sign up for DSPS services - and the challenges that presented for students as they transitioned from high school to college. So the idea was to share best practices and some nationwide, large-scale data with everyone in the county - to reach all of the secondary districts and postsecondary institutions. I think the thought was, if we could work on countywide coherence and what those supports look like, especially for our autistic students. How we can prepare neurodivergent students to navigate that change from high school to college? Can we look at what the outcomes have been, can we recognize the things we do have some control over to improve outcomes? It was an opportunity to provide that data and give districts a chance to reflect and review - to think about what their current practices are, where are their strengths, and what are some blind spots. We really worked toward them developing a change idea, an actionable item that they developed with their teams. By having posters and gallery walks where they discussed those change ideas, we created that cool positive pressure and mutual accountability, but also sharing of resources and practices, to hopefully make it an inciting event that would continue and carryover for longer-term impact.*

Q: Logistically, how did you make it happen and bring together all these different institutions?

Kevin: *We had a little carryover and this event was a great quickly approved use of those funds - food, venue, supplies. We were able to host the event at One Main Street, a venue co-owned by Hartnell College and the National Steinbeck Center, so it really was a county event in the community, not just a Hartnell College event. And then working with the County Office of Education was really helpful in engaging the K-12 districts. I gave a presentation with my counterpart at Monterey Peninsula College, Jacque Evans, on the enrollment process at our colleges and it was really well received but you could tell there were a lot of things that just weren't known. During that, I was able*

Reflections with Hartnell College: An Exclusive Interview

to give the high level overview of the training with the UCLA Tarjan Center and people were excited. The county was also helpful in identifying a date that they already had an All Director meeting scheduled, so they cancelled that so a lot of directors could go. Another goal was to give 2-3 months notice to be able to get good representation because everyone's busy, and we allowed each institution to bring 4 staff so we had a mix of directors, school psychologists, case managers, instructors. On the Hartnell side, it was meeting with the Student Success Council, Academic and Student Affairs, Academic Senate, the Professional Learning Center, our VP's of Instruction to get the message out to staff and faculty. And we paid for adjuncts to go - which was really nice to get them involved. I wanted to fill the place to have as powerful of an impact as possible.

Q: What would you say the reaction was to the event, during and after?

Kevin: I felt like it was really positive. During, we didn't have a lot of awkward pauses when we were seeking feedback or reflection. People were ready and willing to share. So much so, that bringing people back from groups was challenging - the conversations were landing really well and we wanted to just let it keep going. People were ready to keep working longer, so next year we'll extend the time longer and have more time to unpack and Q&A. It was great looking at the posters everyone created where they had their change idea, their initial spread team, and their benchmarks, and a chance to give each other feedback. It was cool to see the range of ideas and how everyone applied to to their own context - involving students more in the IEP process, redesigning their tutorial pathway with more explicit instruction and greater focus on the transition, formalizing a dual enrollment class, CSU Monterey Bay offering a longer orientation, faculty wanting to create more collaborative and connected learning environments for students. After, I sent the follow-up with the summary of all the posters, which was inspiring. And some districts have already expressed interest in sharing their experience next year, they're saying "we're doing this, this is happening."

Q: How do you envision Beyond Access continuing and growing?

Kevin: I think we could use the website landing page to post updates or show progress. I think that would be a good way to keep the goals moving forward. And the design for next year would be to have districts and institutions to present on what changes they've made, what went well, what they learned. Another idea is involving students directly. This year, we had some recorded student interviews, and that was a highlight of the event. All of the work that every district is developing is focused on improving student outcomes so it would be really powerful to have students come and share what's changed, what positive impact it's had on them. It would also be great to work with all the districts and groups to collect some data in this process too. And I think continuing to build, we looked at transition, employment, social outcomes and all the barriers - as we review the projects and progress, I think it will also help inform the next area we want to push our thinking in. Beyond Access is about both sides: what's happening in each institution and what we're doing to support students, and then how that connects to the broader scope of the students' experience.



Research Insights:

Supporting College Students with ADHD

A recent study examined how university students with and without ADHD differ in their academic experiences, focusing on academic self-efficacy (confidence in academic ability) and study engagement (motivation and connection to learning).

Students with ADHD reported:

- Lower academic self-efficacy
- Lower study engagement
- Higher levels of procrastination
- Lower self-esteem
- Weaker relationships with peers & faculty

The researchers also found that these very factors were linked to outcomes for all students - regardless of ADHD diagnosis. Students who reported lower procrastination also had higher academic confidence and engagement. And stronger relationships with faculty was one of the strongest predictors of success for all college students.

These results point to potential mechanisms that may partially why college students with ADHD sometimes struggle. However, these areas can also be responsive to intervention and the study points to areas colleges can focus on targeting to promote better outcomes for students with ADHD.

What Colleges Can Do:

Faculty can manage procrastination by breaking assignments into smaller steps, using reminders, and setting aside class time to get started. For example, instead of having one final project due at the end of the semester, break the assignment up into smaller projects with multiple deadlines.

Build supportive student-faculty relationships by creating intentional and systematic opportunities for connection. This may look like a beginning of the semester activity, a one-on-one check-in for all students, or incentives for coming to office hours.

Strengthen confidence through feedback. Provide strengths-based, timely feedback and early opportunities for success. Feedback should be targeted and concise, focused, action-oriented, and timely. Read more about [giving effective feedback here](#).



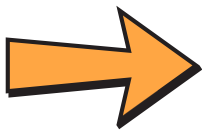
[Andreassen, M., Berg, L. J., Larsen, M. M., Vee, T. S., Andersen, P. N., & Orm, S. \(2026\). Academic self-efficacy and study engagement in university students with and without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 169, 105209.](#)

Resource Spotlight: Job Accommodation Network



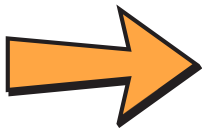
The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free resource sponsored by the Department of Labor that provides expert guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. JAN's A-Z disability guides may help DSPS professionals identify additional accommodations to

consider. Some accommodations are relevant to multiple neurodivergent populations and could be implemented in the classroom by instructors as an approach aligned with universal design for learning. See below for two themes of accommodations present on each of the A-Z guides for autism, ADHD, and intellectual disability.



Sensory accommodations, like noise-cancelling headphones, alternative lighting, unscented cleaning supplies / air filters, and options for movement (e.g., fidgets, bouncy bands, wobble chairs).

- Beyond allowing use, DSPS can purchase sensory tools for students. Some options can be systematically available in all classrooms.



Accommodations that increase structure and clarity through visual and verbal means. For example, color-coding, written and recorded instructions, checklists, and task flow charts.

- Instructional faculty can use color-coding on syllabi, slides, when analyzing text, or when giving feedback.

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Read past
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ACCESS
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