

Access+: Fostering Inclusion & Belonging for Students with Disabilities at CU Boulder

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Learning Objectives

1. Participants will gain an understanding of the importance of fostering a sense of belonging for students with disabilities in higher education, using Access+ at CU Boulder as a case study
1. Participants will explore the planning and collaborative process behind the establishment of Access+ and create a toolkit of practical strategies, identifying actionable steps to create similar supportive environments at their own institutions



The Importance of Belonging

- Overview of literature:
 - “Early research on belonging stressed its importance as a basic need and a fundamental motivation, sufficient to drive behavior and beliefs” (Maslow, 1954)
 - “In the postsecondary realm, a sense of belonging has been associated with academic motivation, success, and persistence” (Vaccaro et al., 2015)
 - “Student narratives suggest that developing a sense of belonging also helps advance students’ self-advocacy, mastery of the student role, and social relationships” (Vaccaro et al 2015)



The Importance of Belonging (Cont.)

- “Much of postsecondary belonging literature... builds upon Tinto’s (1987) model of retention which suggested that students leave universities if fail to become integrated into social and academic life” (Vaccaro et al., 2015)
- “Whether measured in terms of the quantity or quality of meaningful relationships that students develop with others on campus, or the frequency with which college students engage in their own learning, college students’ sense of belonging is important and yields a statistically significant (and sizeable) influence on learning and development outcomes” (Strayhorn, 2019)



Why Are We Talking About This?

- Limited research on college students with disabilities
 - Students with disabilities are a growing population of historically marginalized students with 25% of youth with disabilities pursuing education after high school, yet we know very little about how college students with disabilities develop a sense of belonging... (Vaccaro et al, 2015)
 - “There is a lack of cultural inclusion for the disability community in higher education” (Landin, 2022)
 - “Many disabled students don’t learn about disability as a community they are connected to and an identity to celebrate until and unless they encounter disability history or culture in college” (Elmore et al.)



Why Are We Talking About This? (Cont.)

- “Traditionally, higher education institutions have focused on basic legal compliance and accessibility...” (Landin, 2022)
 - “Past few years, we’ve experienced a relative surge in DCCs on college campuses...” (Landin, 2022)
- How is CU Boulder approaching creating a sense of belonging for our students? What resources and/or services are currently available?
 - Disability Services approximately serves a number of 6,000 students on an annual basis
 - Identified a gap in addressing the distinct needs of students with disabilities, which led to the creation of Access+
- Focusing on the process of fostering a sense of community and belonging for all students, rather than an outcome (e.g., graduation, retention rate, etc.)



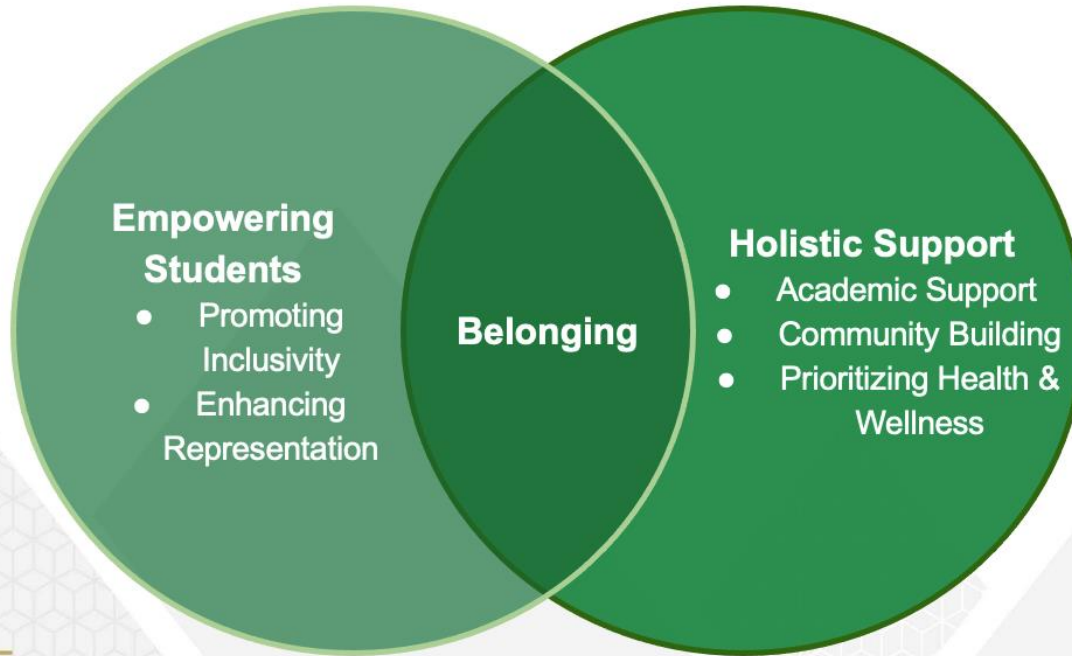
Creating an Inclusive, Welcoming Environment

- Empowering students
 - Promoting Inclusivity
 - Focus on creating an environment where all individuals feel valued and included (e.g., accessible features, sensory-friendly lighting and equipment)
 - Enhancing Representation
 - Ensure diverse voices are present, reflecting the variety of perspectives of the community (e.g., highlight voices/stories through artwork and opportunities)

Creating an Inclusive, Welcoming Environment (Cont.)

- Holistic Support
 - Academic Support
 - Ensure access to a wide range of academic support services to help students navigate coursework (e.g., Academic Coaching, workshops/presentations, study space)
 - Community Building
 - Create opportunities for students to connect and form meaningful relationships through social events and collaborative projects (e.g., movie nights)
 - Prioritizing Health & Wellness
 - Promote initiatives focused on reducing stress, encouraging healthy habits and providing access to services (e.g., physical and mental health resources)

Venn Diagram Analysis



The Power of Collaboration

- Dedicated liaisons for offices
 - Establish a primary point of contact for coordination, ensuring seamless communication and alignment of objectives
- Identifying overlap in interests and populations
 - Focus on finding the natural overlap of missions, interests and populations served by different departments (e.g., CAPS, Health Promotions, Collegiate Recovery Community, Academic Coaching)
- Collaborating is what makes events successful
 - Engaging campus partners brings diverse perspectives, shared resources and additional outreach opportunities, leading to higher student engagement and robust programming



Current Programming/Initiatives

- **DS Academic Coaching Drop-In Hours:** Every Tuesday from 1-4PM
- **Stress Less Event:** October 16th at 2PM
- **WorkWell Flu Clinic:** October 23rd from 7:30-10:30AM
- **Afternoon Movie Series:** October 25th at 1PM
- **ASD Community Workshop:** November 5th at 3PM
- **Health & Wellness Summit – Accessibili-TEA:** November 13th, TBD
- **Stress Less Event:** November 20th at 2PM
- **Preparing for Finals Workshop:** December 5th at 1PM



A Look Inside Access+



*Photo taken by Student Affairs
Communication & Marketing*

*Alt Text: An open, accessible space
at Access+ with modern furniture,
low seating, tables for collaboration,
and wide walkways for mobility.
Inclusive artwork and equipment on
the walls create a welcoming
atmosphere for students with
disabilities at CU Boulder.*

A Look Inside Access+ (Cont.)



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Planning/Establishment of Access+

- Important item(s) we considered before launching initiative:
 - Who should we talk/propose idea to?
 - What is our role/mission?
 - What will it look like?
 - Who is included? Who are we supporting? Who is being represented?
 - Where will it be located?
 - What will we offer?
 - What is our student population asking for? Who can we collaborate with?
 - How will we fund this?



Creating Individualized Toolkits

- [Planning Materials](#)
 - Access+ Business Proposal Example
 - Access+ Mind Map Example
 - Considerations/Discussion Questions
 - Planning Organizer Example
 - Road Map Example
 - Other



Questions?

Disability Services

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