

Little Changes, Big Impact: Enhancing Disability Services Through Small-Scale Innovations and Collaborations

Dr. Ryan McCombs | Ivy Tech Community College
Hanna Lewis | University of Denver

Conference Civility Statement

We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects...

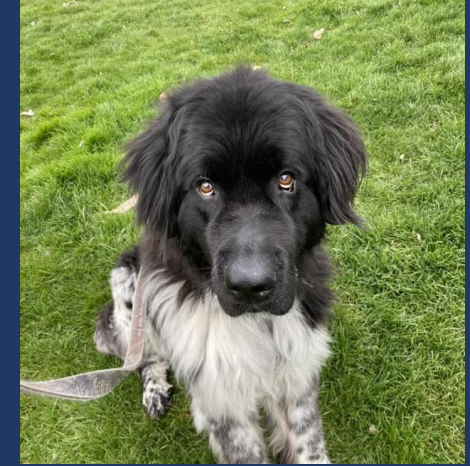
Access and Inclusion

and

Civility and Respect

...this week and in all aspects of our organization.

About Dr. Ryan McCombs



- Assistant Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Services and Student Success @ Ivy Tech Community College in Bloomington, Indiana
- Past Director of the Disability Access Center @ Purdue University Fort Wayne
- I have been working in the realm of education and disability services for 10+ years
- I identify as disabled. I have a rare condition called Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy.

About Hanna Lewis



- Director of Student Disability Services at the University of Denver
- Previously Assistant Director at Butler University and Director at University of Colorado Denver
- 9 years experience in higher education disability services

What Will We Accomplish Today?

- Welcome & Framing the Conversation
 - Why small changes matter
 - Aligning with accessibility and inclusion goals
- Key Concept 1: Small-Scale Innovations
 - Practical, low-cost adjustments
 - Sensory-friendly, digital, and communication-focused changes
- Key Concept 2: Building Collaborations
 - Cross-campus and community partnerships
- Key Concept 3: Measuring Impact
 - Quantitative and qualitative strategies
 - Telling your accessibility story
- Q&A and continued connection



Key Concept I: Small Scale Innovations

The Power of Small Changes

- Minor adjustments can create major access improvements
- Low-cost or no-cost solutions
- Scalable and sustainable across campus
- Benefits all students, not just those with disabilities
- *“Small changes done intentionally can transform the student experience.”*



Universal Design as the Foundation

- Equitable use
- Flexibility in use
- Simple and intuitive design
- Perceptible information
- Tolerance for error
- Low physical effort
- Size and space for approach and use

“Small-scale innovations often stem from these universal design concepts.”

Practical Small-Scale Innovations

Digital Accessibility

- Add alt-text to images
- Caption videos and live events
- Use accessible document formats (Word, PDF)
- Ensure websites and LMS platforms meet WCAG standards

Sensory-Friendly Adjustments

- Quiet zones or designated calm rooms with low visual/auditory stimulation
- White noise machines or ambient sound apps in common areas
- Visual schedules and preview guides for campus events or orientation sessions
- Social stories or virtual tours to help students prepare for busy or unfamiliar spaces

Communication Improvements

- Use plain language in emails, forms, policies
- Provide multiple contact options (phone, email, online form)
- Use inclusive signage (clear fonts, high contrast)

The Ripple Effect of Small Innovations

Institutional Benefits:

- Increases student satisfaction and engagement
- Reduces accommodation requests by proactively removing barriers
- Supports retention and academic success

Student Voice:

- "Because the materials were accessible from day one, I felt like I belonged in the class just like everyone else."

Small Moves, Big Wins: Your Campus Access Game Plan

In a group of 3-6 friends discuss:

What small-scale changes have you already implemented?

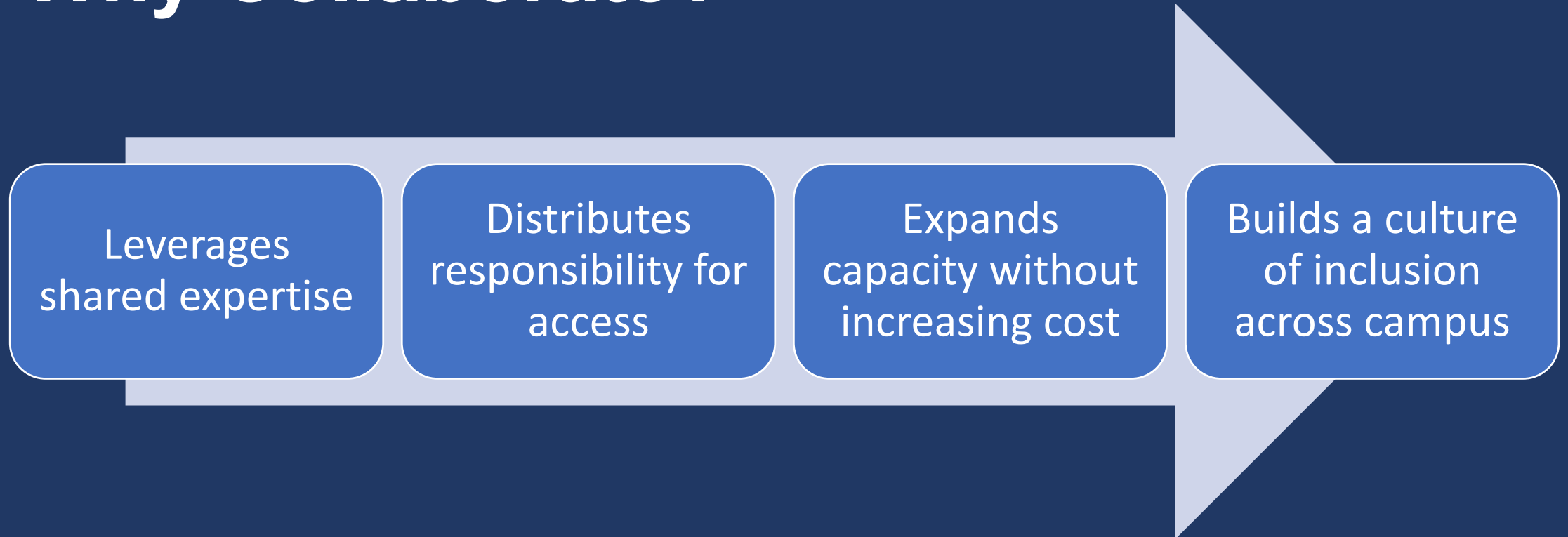
Where do you see opportunities for small innovations on your campus?

What barriers keep small changes from happening?

"Small steps create momentum for larger cultural shifts."

Key Concept II: Collaborations Amplify Impact

Why Collaborate?



"Accessibility isn't the responsibility of one office—it's a shared institutional value."

Who to Collaborate With

Internal Partners:

IT & eLearning (digital access)

Facilities (wayfinding, sensory space support)

Faculty & Academic Affairs (UDL integration)

Student Affairs (inclusive events, programming)

Marketing (accessibility in communications)

External Partners:

Local disability organizations

Vocational rehabilitation

Inclusive recreation or therapy centers

Employers offering internships/co-ops

"Small partnerships, shared success."

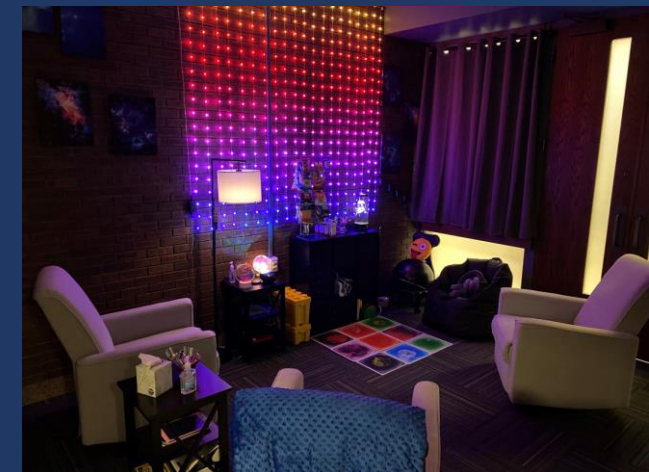
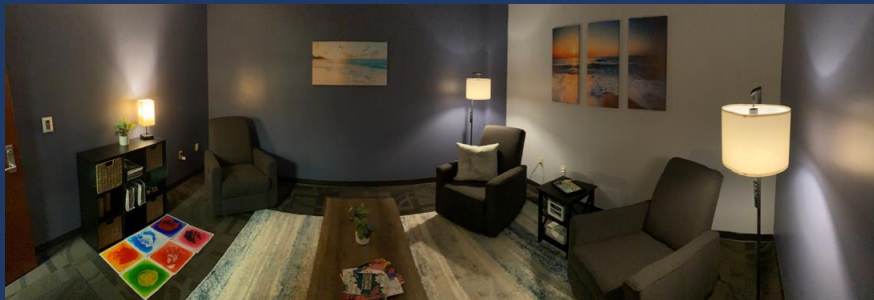
Collaboration in Action: Low-Cost Sensory Room

Partners:

- Facilities (space & furnishings)
- IT (accessible technology)
- Student Affairs (promotion & support)
 - Counseling Center
 - Career Center
- Community Partners (funding)

Outcome:

- High usage by students with and without disabilities, positive feedback from neurodivergent students



Collaboration in Action: Accessibility Trainings

Mandated Accessibility Training at DU

Interactive training course created in Canvas.

Training covers subjects such as:

- Disability rights, history, and language
- Applicable laws
- About SDS
- SDS best practices
- Testing, assistive technology, and classroom accommodations

Request to require training made to Associate Vice Chancellor of Risk & Compliance and Provost.

Disability Zone Training at PFW

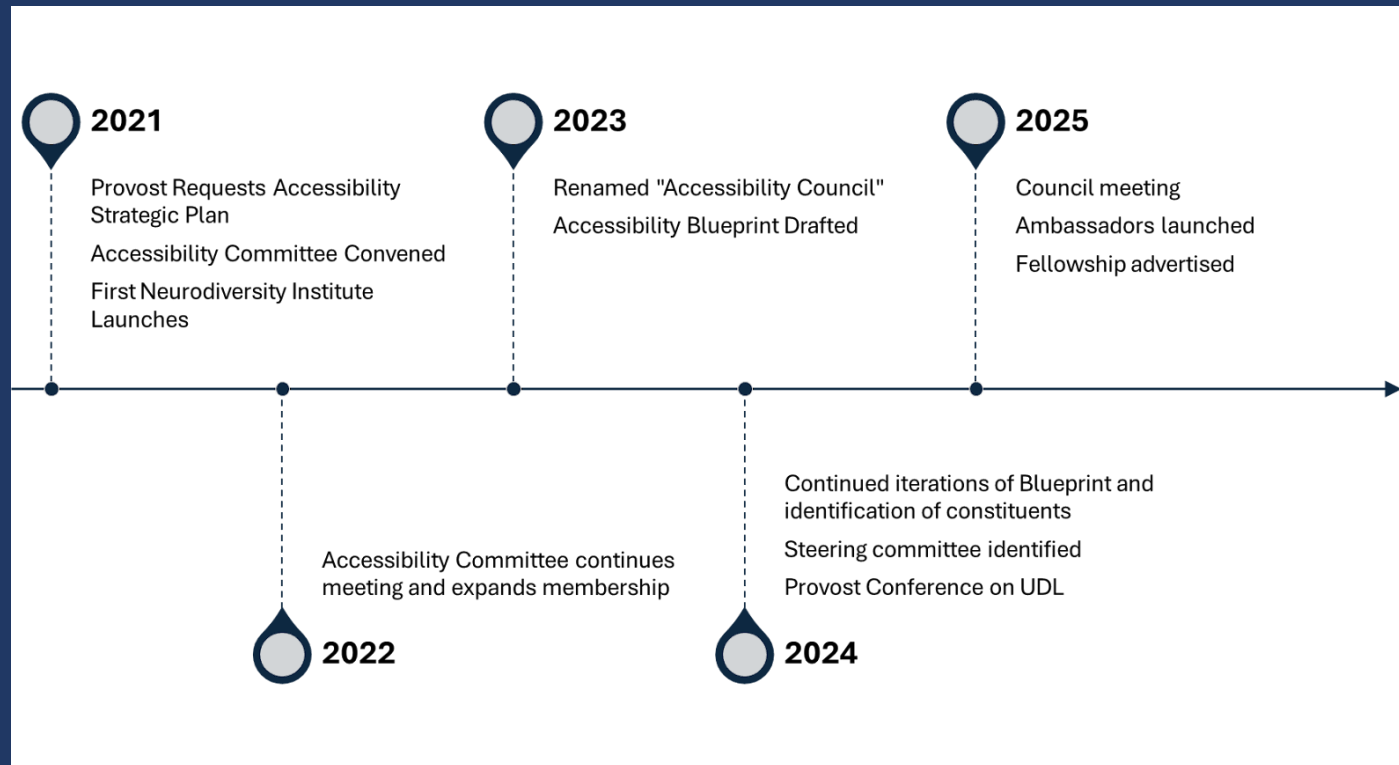
An interactive professional development workshop designed to build awareness, empathy, and competence in supporting disabled students, faculty, and staff.

Training covers subjects such as:

- Increased awareness of disability as a dimension of diversity
- Disability history & applicable laws
- DAC and Campus Stats
- Practical strategies for fostering access and belonging

Faculty, staff, student leaders, and community partners committed to creating a more inclusive and accessible campus culture.

Collaboration in Action: Accessibility Council at DU



Collaboration in Action: Faculty Ambassador Program at DU

- 12 instructors representing 7 of the 10 schools and colleges on campus
 - Voluntary, unpaid position
- 1 Accessibility Fellow to oversee operations
 - Application required, paid position
- Serve as advocates and local experts

Tips for Building Effective Partnerships

"Collaboration is not about perfection; it's about shared progress."

Start small with pilot projects

Build relationships before requests

Communicate shared goals & student impact

Celebrate and share successes widely

Use data to sustain and grow partnerships

Small Moves, Big Wins: Your Campus Access Game Plan

In a group of 3-6 friends discuss:

Who on your campus
can be an access ally?

Where might small
collaborations already
be happening
informally?

What barriers can
collaboration help you
overcome?

“Collaboration is a force multiplier.”

Key Concept III: Measuring the Impact

Why Measure Impact?

- Justifies investment
- Demonstrates student success outcomes
- Informs future planning
- Builds institutional buy-in
- Ensures student needs are being met



"You can't improve what you don't measure."

Indicators of Success

Quantitative Measures:

Increase in registered students with disabilities

Utilization rates of new innovations

Improved retention or graduation rates

Fewer reactive accommodation requests

Qualitative Measures:

Student satisfaction surveys

Focus group feedback

Anecdotal evidence of improved access

Success stories/testimonials

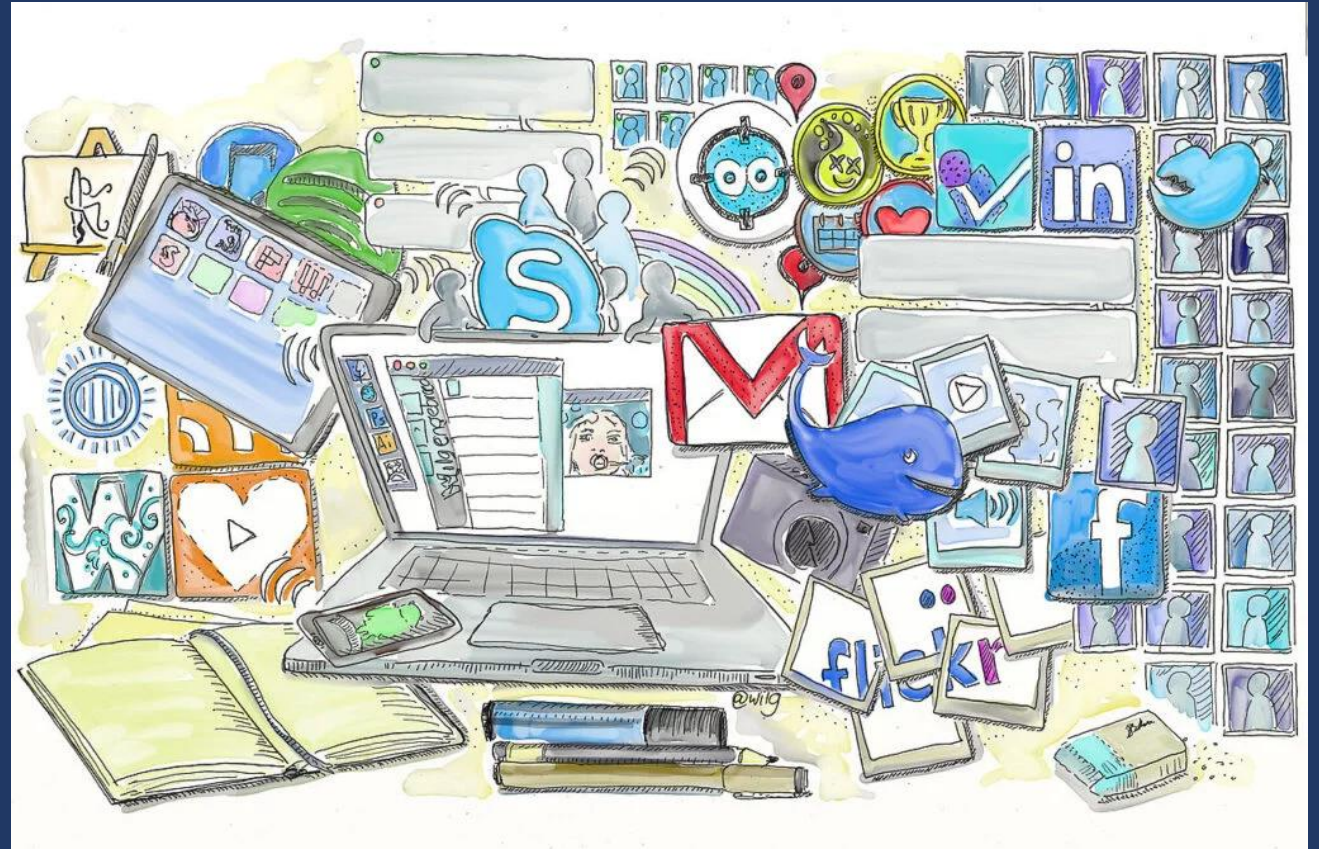
Tools for Tracking Impact

Service usage data (e.g., check-ins, requests)

Pre/post student feedback (on spaces, tools, communication)

Collaboration outcome logs (joint projects, grant funding, shared tools)

Inclusion audits or accessibility inventories



Turning Data Into Action

Share wins in reports and meetings

Use feedback to guide next innovations

Communicate impact to stakeholders, donors, and leadership

Celebrate small wins with students and staff



“Data tells the story of access done right.”

Small Moves, Big Wins: Your Campus Access Game Plan

In a group of 3-6 friends discuss:

What one small
change can you make
on your campus this
semester?

Who will you
collaborate with?

How will you measure
its success?

Call to Action

Small Changes You Can Start Tomorrow:

Review your
website
accessibility

Create a low-cost
sensory-friendly
space

Simplify
accommodation
request forms

Begin a
conversation with
one new campus
partner

"Every small change sends a message: all students belong here."

Thank You — Let's Keep Building Access Together!

- Small changes are powerful when done with intention.
- Collaboration turns individual efforts into institutional culture.
- Measuring impact helps us sustain momentum.

Final Takeaway:

"Accessibility is a journey — and small seeds grow into big trees."

Questions? Ideas? Let's Connect!

- Dr. Ryan McCombs | rmccombs4@ivytech.edu
- Hanna Lewis | hanna.lewis@du.edu

Session Evaluation



tinyurl.com/AHEADFeedback

Your feedback helps shape future programming.

Thank you for attending!