Making disability visible in higher education research: A DRAFT research agenda for quantitative, qualitative, and theoretical higher education disability scholarship.

A report submitted to the Spencer Foundation by:

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<h1 style="text-align:center">Introduction</h1>

Between May 30 and June 1, 2018, nineteen disability scholars and two graduate students from across the country convened at the University of Rhode Island's Whispering Pines Conference Center for an intensive conference titled Making Disability Visible in Higher Education Research: Addressing Quantitative, Qualitative, and Theoretical Limitations. One of the goals of the workshop was to articulate a collaborative research agenda for the future of disability and higher education research. We worked collaboratively to compose an agenda that took into consideration some of the pressing theoretical and methodological challenges related to this work. Part of the conference process included using small working groups to brainstorm a list of potential research agenda items. The lengthy lists generated by each group were reviewed, debated, and synthesized into the five items listed here.

In hopes of prompting an array of cutting edge and *inclusive* quantitative, qualitative, and theoretical scholarship, we intentionally designed this agenda to be broad. To that end, we feel obligated to share some overarching guidelines that scholars should consider when developing any scholarly project related to disability in higher education. First, we contend that *all* good disability research requires scholars to resist deficit and limiting perspectives of disabled people. Second, disability research should involve the disability community with scholars gleaning wisdom from the disability community at various stages of the research process. Third, scholars must work diligently to recruit samples that reflect the racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality, age and class diversity of people with disabilities. Fourth, scholars should compose clear, and empirically-driven recommendations for effective educational practice. Finally, scholars should consider if, and how, their scholarship can inform inclusive education policy and compose findings that are easily accessible and implementable by various stakeholders.

Research Agenda Item 1
How prevalent are people with disabilities (in general and with various disability types) in postsecondary institutions?

Since funders and policymakers respond to numerically driven arguments and ask for consistent data, knowing with precision the prevalence of disability in higher education would allow us to respond more effectively to information requests from these audiences. Moreover, "counting" and attendant issues of definitional clarity are integral to addressing other research questions.

Research Agenda Item 2
What funding and/or service delivery models enable the full participation of people with disabilities in higher education?

A more complete understanding of the ways that full participation can be effectively supported

would help to encourage educational practices supported by strong logical, theoretical, and empirical foundations.

Research Agenda Item 3
How do we understand and measure students' experiences within liminal spaces (e.g, transition in, transition out, transition from military to college, higher education programs in prison settings)?

Answering this would allow us to understand the ways in which people with disabilities move between larger social structures (e.g., military to higher education). From a quantitative perspective, we know the vast majority of disabled students start at 2-year colleges, but we have very limited information on how many students transfer to 4-year institutions and what percentage of those transfers graduate. We also have a gap in our knowledge about the transition between undergraduate and graduate or professional programs. From a qualitative perspective, exploring this could help us understand students' choices and the ableism they face, particularly as they enter career pathways.

Research Agenda Item 4
What are the pre-college, college-going, within-college, college completion, and post-college experiences and outcomes for diverse students with disabilities? What differential experiences predict these outcomes?

Identifying the points in the educational trajectories of students with disabilities where they diverge from their peers with the same disability type, with different disability types, and without disabilities would help to make the case that changes to structures or environments and/or the provision of additional support are needed at these points. Moreover, by exploring how earlier experiences predict divergence in outcomes, researchers can help demonstrate the impact of structural inequality and cumulative disadvantage on the educational trajectories of students with disabilities. Qualitative research can add nuance and richness by documenting experiences and meaning making processes related to these important educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Research Agenda Item 5
What is the profile (e.g., training, dispositions, position within the university) of disability service educators, and the offices they work in?

Disability services educators play a central role in helping postsecondary institutions to develop supportive environments and supporting individual people with disabilities. A comprehensive understanding of how they think about their work, why they think about their work in this way, and how universities view their work would help to produce more effective recommendations for

practice. A better understanding of the philosophical orientation of disability services offices, their primary functions (i.e., documentation of disability, accommodations, service delivery advocacy), and administrative placement will help to understand how disability is formally addressed on campus.