

From Compliance to Inclusion: Working Together to Improve Access and Campus Climate for Students with Disabilities

Allison R. Fleming, PhD, CRC

Ohio AHEAD conference

October 2018



PennState

A little about me and about today...

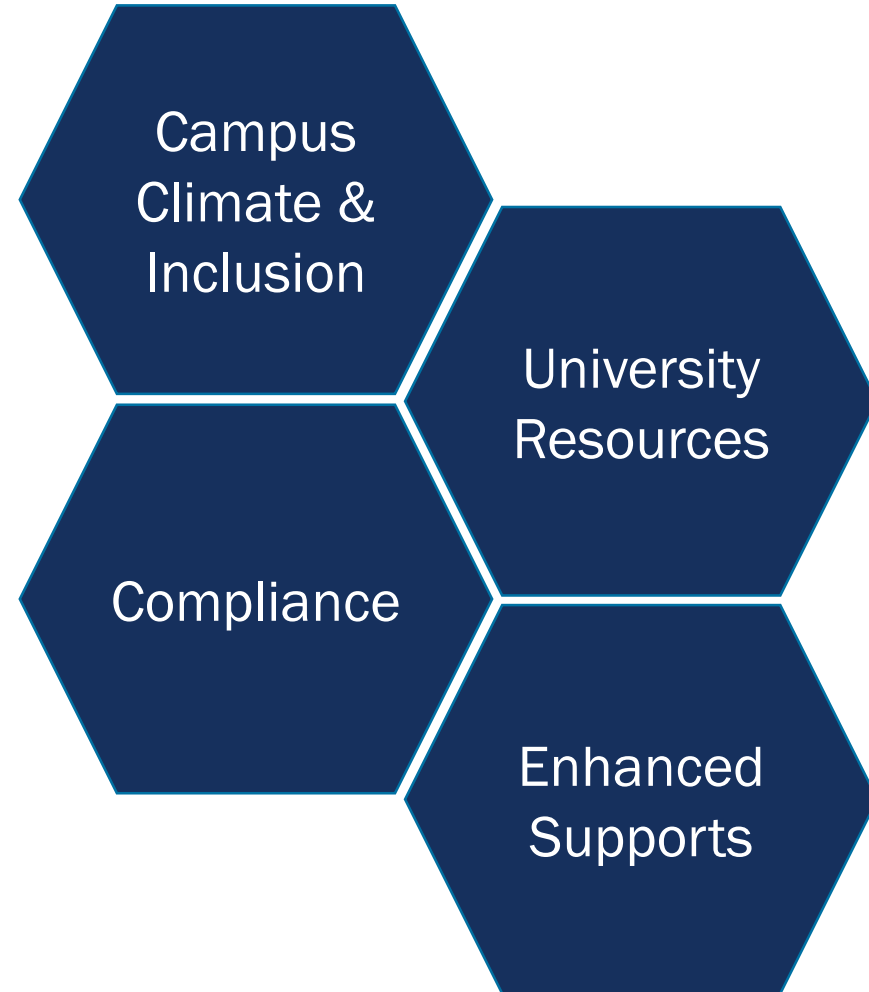
- Former VR counselor
- Instructor/faculty experience
- Research interests

Fleming, A. R., Coduti, W. A., & Herbert, J. T. (accepted). Development of a first-year success seminar for students with disabilities. To appear in: *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*.

Fleming, A.R., Oertle, K.M., & Plotner, A.J. (2017). Student voices: Recommendations for improving postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 30(4), 309-326.

Fleming, A.R., Oertle, K.M., Plotner, A.J., & Hakun, J.G. (2017). Influence of social factors on student satisfaction among college students with disabilities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(2), 215-228.

Coduti, W. A., Fleming, A. R., & Herbert, J. T. (in review). College Students with Disabilities: How University Policies, Resources, and Staff Practices Impact Student Experience. Submitted to: *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*



PennState

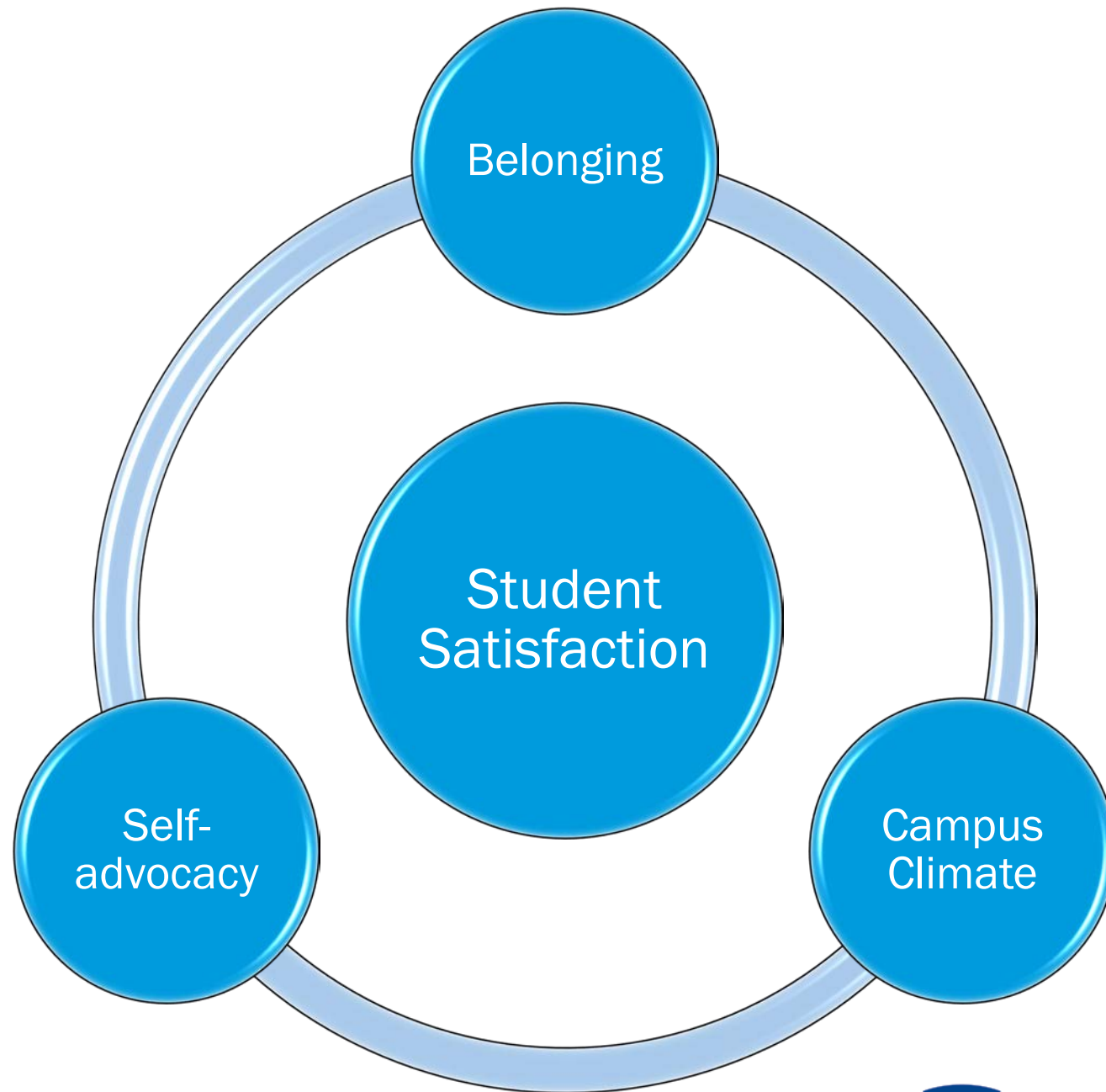
Today's Students

- Grew up with inclusion
- Growing sub populations with different needs
- Disability and identity
- Reasons to not seek supports
- Want to connect with each other and you

In some ways, very much like their peers- in other ways, unique.

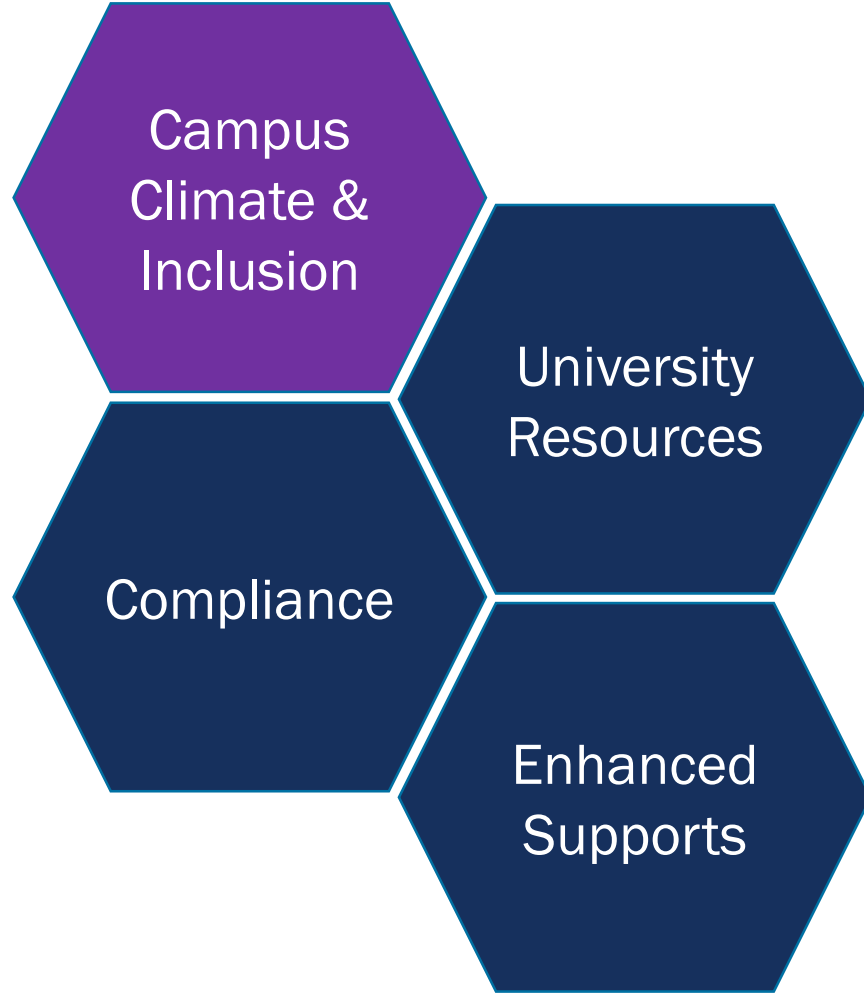
College Integration Models

- Belonging and integration- Responsibility with the student
 - e.g., Tinto, Astin, Bean; Bean & Metzger, 1985; Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Mamiseishvili & Koch 2011; Milem & Berger, 1997
- Critical for persistence, performance, graduation, health outcomes
 - Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Qualter et al., 2015; Rotenberg, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2011
- Diverse student literature revamp – Environment is critical
 - Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalamo, & Nora, 2000



Belonging and satisfaction?

- Students with a higher sense of belonging are more likely to be satisfied because they have a **higher sense of self-advocacy** and because they have an **improved perception of the campus climate**.
- Compliments previous findings of Vacarro and colleagues (2015) who noted that students interviewed described a **complex relationship between belonging and self-advocacy**, in so far as increased belonging helped students to self-advocate and pursue social relationships.



Belonging and Inclusion

- Disability Experience
 - Complex and ongoing identity development
- Experiences with faculty and peers
 - Positive and negative
- Calls for increased responsiveness to disability inclusion & accessibility

Belonging and Inclusion

- **Disability Experience**
 - **Complex and ongoing identity development**
- Experiences with faculty and peers
 - Positive and negative
- Calls for increased responsiveness to disability inclusion & accessibility

Disability Experience

“ignored” “misjudged” “insignificant”

“I don’t want to disclose because I feel people will look at me differently”

“demeaning” “not [being] understood” “frightening”
“self-conscious.”

“pride” “brain just works differently”
“other people want to support”



“It’s nothing that I’m ashamed that I’m... I have some type of disability. It’s just that I’m more ashamed that I can’t be like everyone else, because everyone else seems to be doing just fine.”

“We don't need to feel we are being put on the pedestal above other students because we have disability. On the opposite, **we just want to feel like everybody else.**”

“Once I met other friends who have a bunch of different things from hearing to autism to ADHD, and other people with dyslexia, it was like suddenly realizing that this isn’t a disability, I learn differently and the disability comes in the fact that **society doesn’t accept people who are different.**”

Belonging and Inclusion

- Disability Experience
 - Complex and ongoing identity development
- **Experiences with faculty and peers**
 - **Positive and negative**
- Calls for increased responsiveness to disability inclusion & accessibility

Experience with Faculty & Peers- positive

“I think having that support is incredibly **important and powerful**. I met somebody in a extracurricular activity, I have been really close to him. He really accepts me. Our friendship has grown really strong and in retrospect, I realized that how incredibly helpful to have somebody accept who I am, who supports me, who makes effort to understand my issues. I think that is really really important for your mental and emotional strength to have people support you. Surround yourself with people like that.”

“He’s [professor] willing to do anything for anyone in any situation, at any time. And **that means more, I think to me personally**, than it might to students in general, but that's big.”



Experience with Faculty & Peers- negative

“With interactions I have had with certain professors, I have felt a feeling of **great judgement, and expressions or questioning of my character** as to my intentions in seeking some extra help. I feel they thought I was just looking to **work the system** to improve my grades, or for easier curriculum adjustments to get better grades.”

“I’m **always insecure** about these things, so I’ll wait almost two weeks into class, to go to office hours and say ‘hey, we’re gonna be in test time soon, so this is what you should know.’ ‘Cause yeah, it’s really, really annoying if you really like your professor and really like the topic and you’re really doing well in it and the professor’s like you know, this is a great student or whatnot and then it’s just like crap, now I have to go to office hours and tell them that I need extended time.”

Belonging and Inclusion

- Disability Experience
 - Complex and ongoing identity development
- Experiences with faculty and peers
 - Positive and negative
- **Calls for increased responsiveness to disability inclusion & accessibility**

Calls to Improve Campus Climate & Access

- Respondents compared resources for other student groups (e.g., athletes, LGBTQA+) to what is available to them- not favorable.
- Perceived a lack of knowledge or awareness of disability by faculty, staff, peers
 - Low expectations
 - High achieving students
- Inaccessible spaces frustrating and alienating
 - Physical and online spaces



“[University] has an LGBT student and faculty coalition, where it’s student and faculty who meet and discuss things that [University] needs to do for that community, and I really wanted to start that here because I the thing is that [University], like you said, has all these students who have all these different needs, but I feel like **ODS is so small.**”

“Develop professors’ awareness of **all disabilities**, not just the common ones like ADHD.”

“Many of my classes are on the 3rd floor and the building only has 2 freight elevators. I am unable to open the heavy exterior doors and have injured myself in trying. This semester I have 2 classes in that building and the **only option is to have the secretary assist me up to my class.** Sometimes she is not available, so it is unworkable on those days. I have the class teacher or a student assist me back down the elevator. That works well.”

“I really wish that the disability services staff would realize that **I am a strong student with significant academic goals.** I am a math major with a 4.0 GPA currently taking a graduate math course in my junior year and keeping pace with the graduate students! I intend to go to graduate school and earn a PhD.”

“I applied for it before I started the RHS major. I went in there and started to talk about my resume, how I started wings and the person who interviewed me asked if I had disability, which I did not know at that time it was illegal. the thing was I felt so pressured to admit what it was because I didn't want to be looked as I was secretive or some kind of way when I applied for a job. once I said it I felt such a need to defend myself, just like I have this, wait a second, I can still do this job like it just affects me. I just completely blew off the interview. **I left in tears because I just ruined the whole thing and it was so uncomfortable.** I did not realize that it was not ok until I went to class in fall. So yeah. I mean, even targeting younger students, 'cause you apply for jobs all through your college and internship everything. I don't want to wait until I get a real job.”

Belonging & Inclusion - What can we do?

- Support students in building self-advocacy to address disability-related challenges
 - Approaching instructors
 - Peer interactions
 - Employment

“Having a discussion group and some guidance of how to talk with professors or being confident in your disability, how to respond to peer situations that might arise which is something that everybody feels no matter what their disability is. I think probably that would be helpful for a group moving forward here. I think near graduation, ways that people discussed applying for jobs.”



Belonging & Inclusion - What can we do?

- Offer ways for students to connect with other students.
 - Peer mentors
 - Casual & formal opportunities

“I feel sometimes like I am on a boat in the dark. I know other people are on the boat, but I can’t see them. I want to know who else is on my boat.”

Students can lead on this!

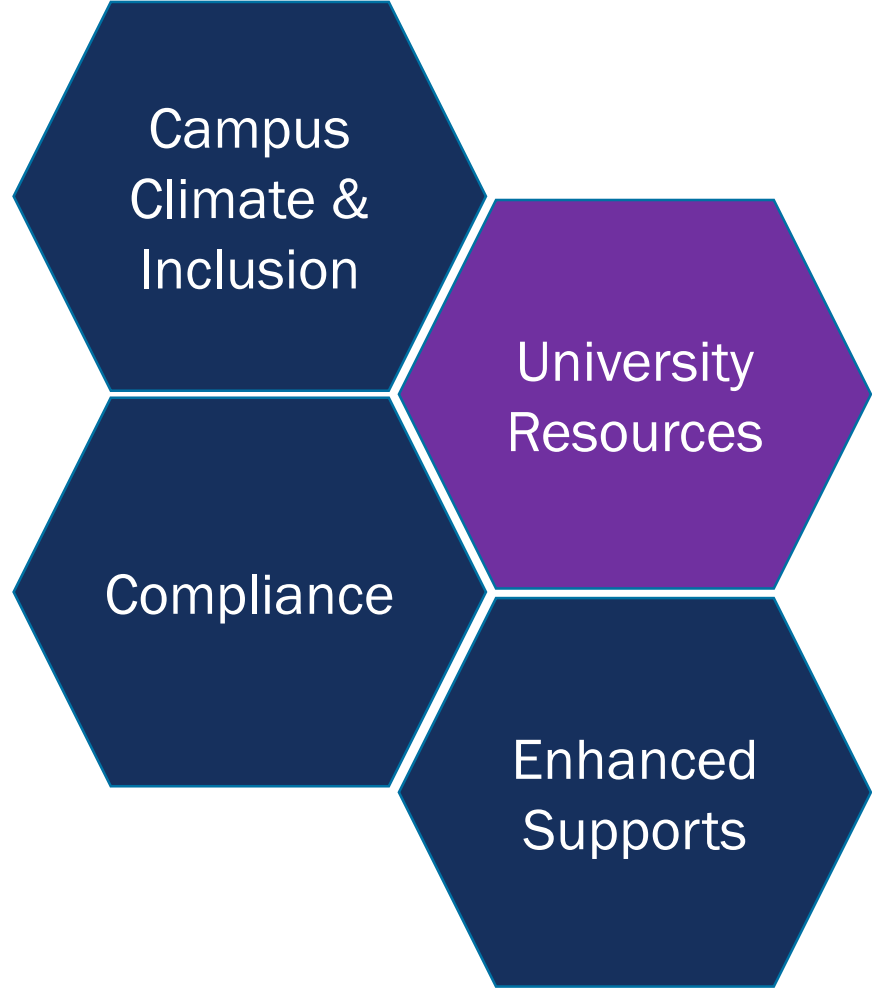
- [WINGS](#)
- [Disabled & Proud](#) online conference

Belonging & Inclusion - What can we do?

- Be a resource for faculty and staff on educating about disability. Insert ourselves in faculty and staff trainings (e.g., new faculty orientation), Disability awareness learning opportunities.
 - PSU example- LGBTQA+ Center



- Insert ourselves in Strategic planning (architectural and otherwise) to ensure inclusion of disability-related considerations.



University Resources

- Disability Resources
 - Positive and negative experiences
 - Want transparency and individualized approach
- Increase visibility and connectedness
 - Underutilized and misunderstood
 - Are general student supports (e.g., counseling center, career center, tutoring, advising) prepared to help students with disabilities?

University Resources

- **Disability Resources**
 - Positive and negative experiences
 - Want transparency and individualized approach
- Increase visibility and connectedness
 - Underutilized and misunderstood
 - Are general student supports (e.g., counseling center, career center, tutoring, advising) prepared to help students with disabilities?

“My DRC advisor was very **helpful and knowledgeable** once I finally found out there was a DRC. She helped me find funding and get the accommodations in place. Her help and the help of a great academic advisor (who has also been great about my disability) is why this time I am leaving college with a degree and not just having to take a break. **The support I have received here has been the key for me being successful this time.**”

“I really feel like they have system in place **to support students** who have really, you know, have issues come up during their time.”

“Prompt”

“Accommodating”

“Super supportive”

“Amazing”

“Helpful”

“Caring”



“It feels like this kind of back alley, “oh here’s your paperwork,” it kind of **feels weird**”

“you just have a great half hour....twenty minutes with them doing whatever it is that you need to do with paperwork or whatever....and then you don’t hear from them again...or **you only talk to them once a semester to get your paperwork.**”

“it’s just like kind of that secretive thing. And then like going there, ok like we can’t help you. And that’s kind of like, ok I was already **embarrassed** to come here and now you’re just kind of lessening me.”

Transparency & Individualized Approach

“I went to my person and I was like “what are all the accommodations I want?” And it was honestly, I felt like I didn’t want to be rude or anything, but **it felt like pulling teeth**. And they were like ‘well....’ And being naive and I was like ‘no not the ones that I have, what are all the ones that can be offered to me?’ And then she would go talk to someone else and then came back and was like ‘okay here.’ And there were all these other ones I had never knew about because they had never mentioned it because it wasn’t on my transcript.”

“Tailor the accommodations to the individual needs and severity of disability rather than giving us cookie-cutter plans.”

University Resources

- Disability Resources
 - Positive and negative experiences
 - Want transparency and individualized approach
- **Increase visibility and connectedness**
 - Underutilized and misunderstood
 - **Are general student supports (e.g., counseling center, career center, tutoring, advising) prepared to help students with disabilities?**

Visibility & Connectedness

“ODS has been great. I didn’t reach out to them until my sophomore year. **I wish I had been advised to do that earlier because it has been really valuable to me.** I mean overall I had a really fantastic experience.”

“I used the Writing Department once and it was great but **the guy definitely wasn’t prepared to see someone with dyslexia** because I sat down and he was like okay, so how about you read this aloud to me and I was like, no. I can’t. I would have all my energy on reading out loud, it wouldn’t help me to do it and, I mean he was great about it and ended up reading it to me and we worked on it but it would be nice if they had different tutors that could actually work with you more specifically on things you struggle with.”

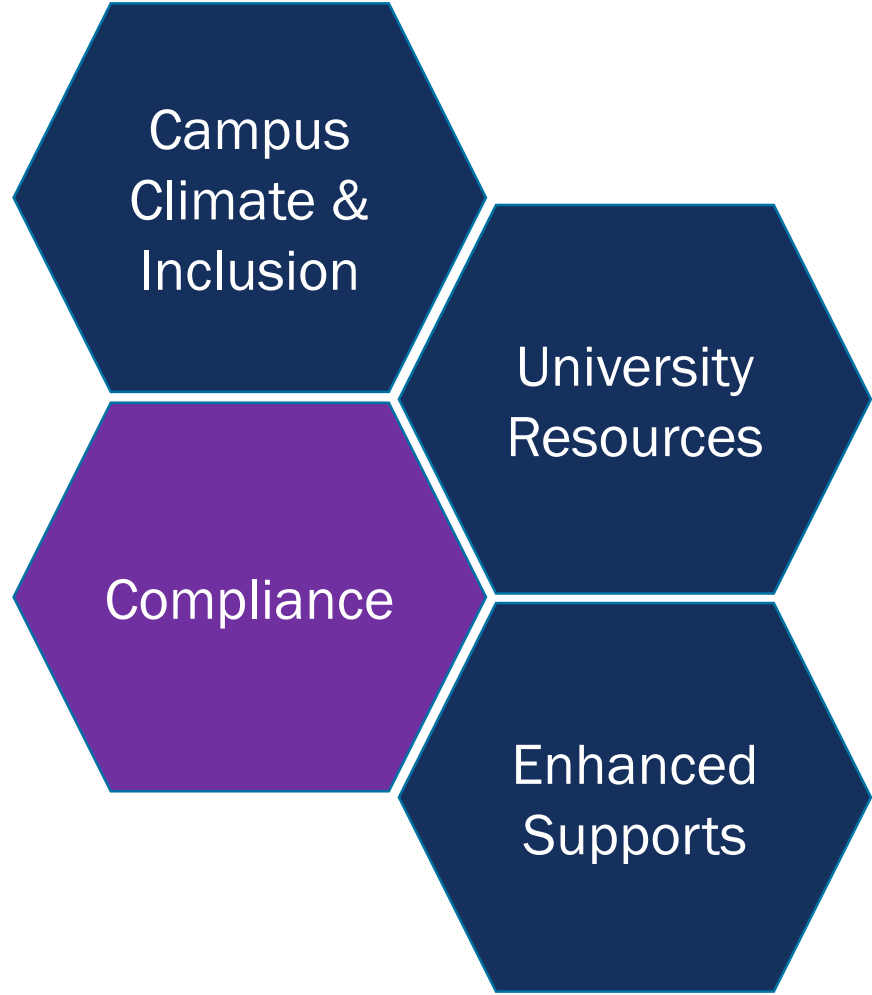
University Resources- What can we do?

- Do not stop asking for more.
 - Students note when office is underfunded
- Reach out and partner with other student supports to increase presence on campus.
 - Advocate for increased knowledge of disability issues.

University Resources- What can we do?

- Get to students early, and in plain language.

“If I were to happen to get something the mail and it says, ‘get help with your disability’ or something like, even as a senior in high school, I feel like, if I don't start to experience problems, I would be like I don't need that. But, I feel like those advertisements, you can get extra time on exam, you can get this technology, you can, whatever, I feel like that is the thing, when you take a test and you run out of time and you remember hearing that you could get extra time on the exam. That is what's gonna, run through my my mind. ”



Compliance

- Process to establish and maintain eligibility
 - Demeaning and frustrating
 - Expensive and cost-prohibitive for some
- Faculty and staff as the face of compliance
 - Above and beyond
 - Non-compliance
 - Tension of lack of oversight
- Accommodation outcomes

Compliance

- **Process to establish and maintain eligibility**
 - **Demeaning and frustrating**
 - **Expensive and cost-prohibitive for some**
- Faculty and staff as the face of compliance
 - Above and beyond
 - Non-compliance
 - Tension of lack of oversight
- Accommodation outcomes

“I remember being so frustrated and it was like the whole process was really **demeaning, honestly, going and getting myself tested for ADHD when I know that like my entire I’ve been struggling with it.** So it was, actually, looking back on it, that was a just like a big kind of – I guess that was like the most frustrating because, like I said, it was really demeaning because the whole issue like with insurance; the fact that it was just so incredibly, like just **outrageously expensive.**”

“but it’s really frustrating for me ‘cause I have a lot of friends who have disabilities all across the spectrum and **just can’t get access to ODS.** I have a friend who completely had to drop out and has been working in retail for the past couple years because they couldn’t do [University]; like they were originally in [University] and **they ended up dropping out ‘cause of their learning disabilities.** They’re hard of hearing and autistic and have an auditory processing disorder.”

Compliance

- Process to establish and maintain eligibility
 - Demeaning and frustrating
 - Expensive and cost-prohibitive for some
- **Faculty and staff as the face of compliance**
 - **Above and beyond**
 - **Non-compliance**
 - **Tension of lack of oversight**
- Accommodation outcomes

“I got a pretty negative response the first time I talked to one of my teachers, although now she’s really helpful because I kept pestering her; but the first time I told her about my extra time and the whole notes and all that, she’s like oh, I understand that you get it but **just make sure that this isn’t an excuse** for whatever – she sounded so bitter towards it. She’s like oh, but you shouldn’t use it as an excuse for – she said something really rude. That it shouldn’t be an excuse for taking so long or something like that; and I get extra time but I need that. I told her that I don’t try to take the extra time, it’s because I tend to, which I try my best not to, but just it was such a very un-professional.”

“My professors, the ones that I did mention it to, some were ok, some were not. It was honestly fifty/fifty. **It just depends.**”

“I mean probably twenty five professors in my time here cause I’m almost ready to graduate and I can say two or three of them, and I can name them by name. **They understood more than I needed to.** “

Compliance

- Process to establish and maintain eligibility
 - Demeaning and frustrating
 - Expensive and cost-prohibitive for some
- Faculty and staff as the face of compliance
 - Above and beyond
 - Non-compliance
 - Tension of lack of oversight
- **Accommodation outcomes**

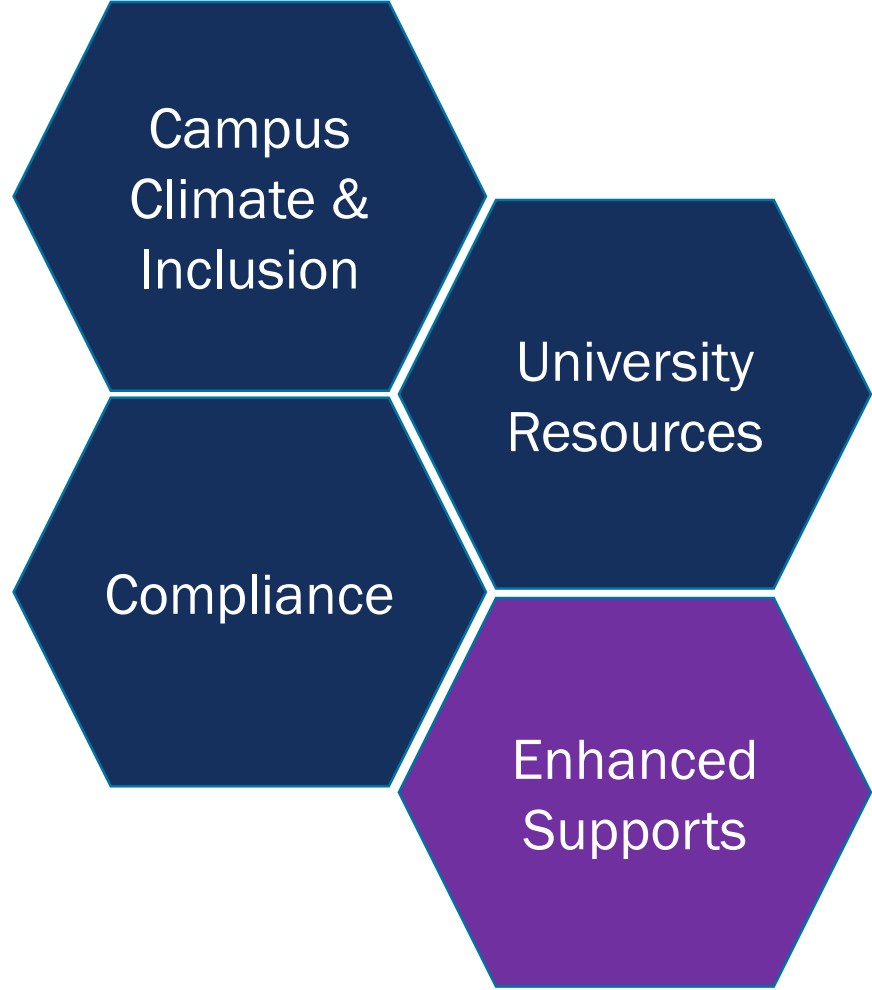
“I am wondering if I got help and I had extra time as a freshman, I would still be in engineering, 'cause I eventually got so frustrated, I **just gave up on it.**”

“While it’s a great school and I love what I’ve learned here, if I would have had a little more accommodation, I feel I would have done so much better. Last semester I planned my schedule to a ‘T.’ Last fall semester I had a 2.67, last semester I had 3.67. So... **that’s a huge jump.**”

“I don’t have the testing center in [building], but part of my accommodations is to be in a quiet room by myself and take a paper exam, that’s why I don’t go to [building name]. And uh, half the time, I’m not, I’m usually in a room with 150 to 250 other students taking the exam, that’s bad. I **take measures on my own, I wear earplugs, I sit in the very front in the corner so I’m not completely distracted by everything that’s going on, but it’s not anything like that. They just won’t do it.**”

Compliance- What can we do?

- **Reduce the burden however possible.**
 - [AHEAD guidance](#) on requirements necessary to be eligible.
 - Professional judgement & autonomy
- **Educate and empower students** to make decisions regarding reasonable accommodations.
 - Skills and confidence to approach faculty- interactive process.
- **Emphasize with faculty** the importance of providing accommodations- **be a resource for them.**



Suggestions for Enhancements

- Supports for adaptation and coping with disability
- Mentoring and connections with other students, faculty and staff, and community professionals with disabilities
- Additional training/workshops in navigating campus resources (disability and otherwise), internships and pre-professional experiences, and job application information relative to disability status
 - e.g., disability disclosure, legal/illegal questions, finding internships, networking
- Enhanced program evaluation efforts – assessing effectiveness, areas of strength, areas of growth.

Access vs. Engagement

- ODS to provide access
 - Determine eligibility
 - Evaluate “reasonable accommodation” requests
 - Uphold ADA
 - Address accessibility barriers
 - Inform instructors of approved accommodations
- ODS to enhance engagement
 - Help students develop: self-advocacy skills, understanding of own needs, solutions to barriers
 - ID barriers to full participation on campus
 - Academic, social, rec settings
 - Educate staff and faculty
 - Transition programs
 - Mentoring opportunities

Summary

- Belonging is a complex interaction of our own perceptions and the climate – improving climate may also mean boosting self-advocacy and confidence of students.
- Disability as part of diversity initiatives, SWD as an underrepresented group on campus.
- Time we spend with students and personal relationships matter to them.
- Students can take a lead on making change!

Thank you!!

Questions and Comments?

Contact me: apf5208@psu.edu



Study Details

- 325 students recruited from SDR from three large, public universities
- Survey including:
 - Demographics
 - UCLA Loneliness scale (USL-8; Hays & DiMatteo, 1987)
 - Self-reported GPA
 - College Students with Disabilities Campus Climate Survey (CSDCC; Lombardi, Gerdes, & Murray, 2011)
 - If I could do it over again, I would...
- 132 students provided additional qualitative data: “We are interested in your perception of how your school could better support students with disabilities. Please provide any suggestions you have related to campus, classes, general student supports, or disability-specific supports that you feel would be an improvement”

Study details



- Students (N=26) recruited from college of education and ODS list serve volunteered for focus groups lasting two hours each. Facilitated by pair of authors and transcribed verbatim for analysis.
- Asked about their experiences at university, people or resources who were helpful to them, advice for new students, and possible content for a First Year Success (FYS) course with disability emphasis.