

“Part of What We Do”: Perspectives of Faculty Teaching College Courses to Students with Intellectual Disability

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Introduction

With over [340 postsecondary education programs](#) operating across the country, students with intellectual disability are enrolling in college-level courses at higher rates than ever before. This increased enrollment has resulted in several research studies documenting the experiences of college and university faculty members who teach courses in which students with intellectual disability are enrolled. Studies that capture faculty perspectives provide valuable insight into the impact that including students with intellectual disability in college-level courses has on both the students and faculty. In particular, articles that include faculty reflections on their experiences before and after teaching help identify practices and supports postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability have enacted that were either effective or warrant improvement.

To ensure faculty experiences are considered in program development and improvement, we conducted a brief literature review of postsecondary education-related articles, focusing on those that included the perspectives of faculty who taught students with intellectual disability at colleges or universities. In this Insight Brief, we summarize the findings and offer recommendations made by or based on the perspectives of faculty that can be used to support faculty in teaching courses that include students with intellectual disability.

Method

As part of its charge to disseminate research and best practices related to improving higher education for students with intellectual disability, the Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network compiled a list of published research on postsecondary education for students with intellectual disability. Each article in this list was coded by two trained members of the research team for study purposes and design type. Researchers discussed all disagreements until we reached 100% agreement. From the full list of articles, we identified eight articles that included the perspectives of faculty who taught courses that included at least one student with intellectual disability. From these eight articles, we identified 298 quotes or summarizations of faculty responses related to their experiences teaching inclusive courses and grouped them by theme and subthemes:

1. Motivation to teach
2. Preparing to teach
 - a. Faculty concerns
 - b. The need for program support
3. Universal teaching
 - a. Embracing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices
 - b. Missing the point
4. Reflection
 - a. Student participation and investment
 - b. Changing dynamics
 - c. Exposure to disability
5. Growth
 - a. Institutional change
 - b. Professional growth

RESEARCH ARTICLES REVIEWED (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER):

1. Burgin, E. C., DeDiego, A. C., Gibbons, M. M., & Cihak, D. F. (2017). "Smiling and ready to learn:" A qualitative exploration of university audit classroom instructors' experience with students with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 30(4), 359–372. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1172796>
 - Perspectives from nine instructors who taught students with intellectual disability in one or more of their courses.
2. Carey, G. C., Downey, A. R., & Kearney, K. B. (2022). Faculty perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with intellectual disability in university courses. *Inclusion*, 10(3), 201–212. <https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-10.3.201>
 - Perspectives from eight instructors and professors who previously taught a course that included a student with intellectual disability.
3. Hall, C., McCabe, L., Carter, E., Lee, E., & Bethune-Dix, L. (2021). Teaching college students with intellectual disability: Faculty experiences with inclusive higher education. *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.13021/jipe.2021.2730>
 - Focus group study of 23 faculty members who had previous experience teaching college students with intellectual disability.
4. Jones, M. M., Harrison, B., Harp, B., & Sheppard-Jones, K. (2016). Teaching college students with intellectual disability: What faculty members say about the experience. *Inclusion*, 4(2), 89–108. <https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-4.2.89>
 - Perspectives from 19 faculty members who had students with intellectual disability audit one or more of their courses.
5. McCabe, L. E., Hall, C. G., Carter, E. W., Lee, E. B., & Bethune-Dix, L. K. (2022). Faculty perspectives on the appeal and impact of including college students with intellectual disability. *Inclusion*, 10(1), 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-10.1.71>
 - Focus group interviews with 23 faculty members on the appeal and impact of including students with intellectual disability in their courses.
6. Smith, P. S. & Myers, B. (2024). Instructor experiences providing accommodations and modifications for students with intellectual disability in inclusive higher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2024.2305653>
 - Perspectives from 12 university instructors who taught at least one student with intellectual disability in the 2020–2021 school year.
7. Taylor, A., Domin, D., Papay, C., & Grigal, M. (2021). "More dynamic, more engaged": Faculty perspectives on instructing students with intellectual disability in inclusive courses. *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.13021/jipe.2021.2924>
 - Perspectives from 10 faculty across seven colleges and universities in five states.
8. Watts, G. W., López, E. J., & Davis, M. T. (2023). "The change was as big as night and day": Experiences of professors teaching students with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 28(2), 295–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17446295221148791>
 - Perceptions from six professors before and after teaching students with intellectual disability.

Findings

Here we have included thematic summaries from the articles reviewed, which describe the experiences of faculty who taught courses that included at least one student with intellectual disability.

Theme: Motivation to teach

Subtheme: “I would like to work there and get paid”

Article included: McCabe et al. (2022)

In some postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability, the college courses available for enrollment each semester are subject to the faculty member’s availability and willingness to teach a course that includes students with intellectual disability. Therefore, understanding faculty’s motivation to teach a class that includes one or more students with intellectual disability is essential to expanding college-level course options. Of the articles reviewed, McCabe et al. (2022) were the only ones to explore faculty members’ motivation in depth. Their findings on *motivation to teach can be summarized in three areas: personal connection to disability, putting theory into practice, and general curiosity.*

Regarding *personal connection to disability*, McCabe et al. (2022) found faculty members who were parents of children with disabilities were highly motivated to teach college courses to students with intellectual disability. For example, one faculty member/parent, remarked “I have a son on the autism spectrum and so I think a lot about inclusion, specifically around individuals with disabilities”, and another, Esther, shared “I have a kid with a disability... and so I’m interested in this kind of program to see how they might work” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 76). For these faculty members, it was important to support the inclusion of

students with intellectual disability, as their family members may one day access similar programs. Other faculty members, like Carl, had previous experience with disabilities (outside of family) that served as motivation, “I did teach public school before this, and I was the choir director. So, within that setting it was a very inclusive classroom and so I have a little experience” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 76).

There were also faculty whose area of content expertise or research focused on disability or inclusion, and teaching a course that included students with intellectual disability served as a way of *putting theory into practice*. These faculty members recognized it would be hypocritical to study disability and/or inclusion if they were not also willing to open their classrooms to students with intellectual disability. As Michael noted, “some of my research touches on disability so I don’t feel like I could be a good person and study disability and not have some degree of inclusion in my classroom” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 77). Faculty in the special education field or who taught within the school’s department of education took a similar view, with one faculty member simply stating that inclusion was a core tenant of the department and is “part of what we do” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 75). Two other faculty members were motivated because they sought to promote diversity within their classes. For example, Gabriella stated, “I just saw this as another opportunity to kind of incorporate another layer of diversity into the classroom. I think it’s healthy for the environment, for the conversation, and for the other students” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 76).

Other faculty members were motivated by *general curiosity* and decided to teach a class that included students with intellectual disability to experience it for themselves. One professor, Robert, shared how many within his university’s department “thought it was worth giving it a shot and just seeing how it went” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 75). Five other faculty members also expressed this sentiment. For some, the challenge of including students with intellectual disability in their courses ignited their curiosity. For example, Laura said, “I think I like human challenges . . . and having different students—

... faculty members who were parents of children with disabilities were highly motivated to teach college courses to students with intellectual disability.

“I just saw this as another opportunity to kind of incorporate another layer of diversity into the classroom. I think it’s healthy for the environment, for the conversation, and for the other students” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 76).

diversity in my class—that would be an especially interesting one. So, I guess that’s what motivated me” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 76). Others became motivated to teach after receiving encouragement from colleagues who had previously taught students with intellectual disability. Five faculty, whose curiosity turned into commitment, had the opportunity to ask faculty peers questions about their experiences and concluded, like Sylvia did, that “it seemed like a good idea” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 76). The faculty interviewed in the McCabe et al. study suggested the strategy of connecting potential faculty with those who have previously taught a course that included students with intellectual disability, as it could help motivate faculty who have limited experience with disability. One faculty member noted that they had talked with others before taking up the new challenge and were “super encouraged to do it. And I would encourage anyone that talked to me about it” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 76).

Theme: Preparing to teach

Subtheme: Faculty concerns and the need for program support

Articles included: Burgin et al. (2017); Carey et al. (2022); Hall et al. (2021); Jones et al. (2016); McCabe et al. (2022); Smith & Myers (2024); Taylor et al. (2021); Watts et al. (2023)

The theme of *preparing to teach* diverged into two distinct subthemes, *faculty concerns* and the *need for program support*. The first subtheme, faculty concerns, describes how multiple faculty members who were new to teaching students with intellectual disability felt they were not adequately prepared to support student learning. This was noted

across all eight articles included in this theme. For example, Participant 9 in the study by Taylor et al. (2021) stated they were “nervous” about teaching because students with intellectual disability were “not my training, and so, I didn’t know what that meant,” (p. 12). Other faculty members viewed teaching students with intellectual disability as a “distinct skillset, one they did not possess at first” (Taylor et al., 2021, p. 11). Similarly, one faculty member said their lack of “training in special [education] and no experience in working with autism or Down syndrome” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 98) contributed to their initial concerns. In Hall et al. (2021), Alice described feeling that she was not able to provide the student with intellectual disability in her class everything they needed, and it made her angry at herself and the program for students with intellectual disability because she did not have time or training to best support the student. Faculty in the study by Watts et al. (2023) also cited time as a primary concern in preparing to teach students with intellectual disability. They indicated needing time to get to know the students and learn how to implement effective accommodations, particularly with technology. Faculty concerns even extended past academic support, with many expressing worries over “making mistakes during instruction, worries about a student with an intellectual disability feeling left out, worries about saying something that a student with intellectual disability may have found offensive” (Carey et al., 2022, p. 208).

One faculty member said their lack of “training in special [education] and no experience in working with autism or Down syndrome” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 98) contributed to their initial concerns.

Relatedly, all articles identified the second subtheme, the *need for program support*, as a crucial need, particularly for faculty who were new to teaching students with intellectual disability or whose courses had not been previously adapted. Commonly seen in the articles was frustration from faculty who did not receive adequate support from the

program. For example, one faculty member in the study by Smith and Myers (2024) shared that they had “no guidance on what I should do, in terms of, should they participate? How do I modify it? I don’t even know how to do that” (p. 6). Participant 4 in Taylor et al. (2021) also shared that more specific information about the students entering the class was needed but not given so they were “never entirely clear what their [students with intellectual disability] goals are, what their needs are” (p. 11). Even when faculty did receive some support, they noted that the type of information given was not sufficient. One participant stated they were dismayed at the “lack of orientation” and stated that “an e-mail and a video was not sufficient” to adequately prepare faculty to support students with intellectual disability in a college course (Jones et al., 2016, p. 98). Additionally, nine faculty members interviewed by Burgin et al. (2017) expressed how their lack of training limited their teaching practices and forced them to constantly rely on the program’s guidance for anything related to promoting student learning.

When teaching, faculty shared feeling unsure if they were doing a “good job” providing accommodations for the students with intellectual disability in the course (Smith & Myers, 2024). Others noted they did not know how to “keep the course moving” and that they did not have the time to “[plan] ahead to accommodate for assessments and assignments” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 98). Though many faculty within the studies included in this theme grew more comfortable in their teaching and learned new strategies throughout their experiences, orientation and training may have helped to ease their initial concerns. This was aptly expressed by Participant 3 in Taylor et al. (2021), who said, “It wasn’t until the end of that first semester that I really started to understand, okay, I get what this program

is trying to do now. But there’s a pretty big learning curve there that first semester or two” (p. 12).

To address faculty concerns and adjust the way programs provide support, the faculty in Burgin et al. (2017) recommended the program communicate with faculty well in advance of the course beginning to provide time for planning and information sharing. Faculty in the study by Taylor et al. (2021) also reiterated that having additional time to prepare for students with intellectual disability in their college courses would help them gather useful information on things like time commitment, academic accommodations, course modifications, and grading practices. In Jones et al. (2016), faculty advocated for more learning opportunities. They suggested programs coordinate a “pre-class meeting for professor and student” and “communicating with someone who knew the student’s capabilities and responsibilities” before the course began (p. 99).

Theme: Universal teaching

Subtheme: Embracing UDL practices and missing the point

Articles included: Carey et al. (2022); Hall et al. (2021); Jones et al. (2016); McCabe et al. (2022); Smith and Myers (2024); Taylor et al. (2021); Watts et al. (2023)

The first subtheme, *embracing UDL practices*, reflects how faculty gained awareness of the need to adjust their teaching practices to support students with intellectual disability and the benefits they witnessed when they made changes. More specifically, this subtheme captures faculty members’ realizations that their materials or content presentation were not inclusive or engaging for many learners. Participant 3 in Taylor et al. (2021) embodied this in their reflection:

It really has caused me to stop and think, man, a lot of times I’ve just made this material a lot more difficult than it needs to be. So, I think it’s helped me make sure that the material that I’m covering in these classes is accessible to a wider audience than just a half a dozen people in my field. (p. 7)

Nine faculty members interviewed by Burgin et al. (2017) expressed how their lack of training limited their teaching practices and forced them to constantly rely on the program’s guidance for anything related to promoting student learning.

Additionally, another faculty member said, “[r]ecognizing and addressing the individual needs and learning styles of students is always a challenge, whether the student is diagnosed with a disability or not” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 98). Although this may ring true for many, it is the process of becoming aware and re-evaluating aspects of the course that will make the experience truly inclusive and valuable for students with intellectual disability.

Faculty also expressed how the changes to their teaching impacted everyone in the class.

When faculty made changes to support students with intellectual disability, they often found positive results. For example, professors in the study by Watts et al. (2023) who embraced UDL teaching strategies found they could “not only reach all students, but also self-evaluate personal teaching outcomes and make informed decisions for future instructional planning” (p.11). One professor, Phillip, said that adjusting projects in his class allowed students with intellectual disability to participate and demonstrate learning in multiple ways, and though the experience was ultimately rewarding, it “also caused me to kind of re-evaluate not only what they need to know, but how I’m going to know they know it” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 77). Across the articles on this theme, faculty also expressed how the changes to their teaching impacted everyone in the class. For example, in the study by Jones et al. (2016), a faculty member said that “most adaptations are helpful to the entire group, not just the students with intellectual disability” (p. 95). This sentiment was also expressed by five faculty members in Hall et al. (2021). Sydney noted that strategies initially implemented for students with intellectual disability improved the academic environment for traditionally enrolled students who might not have understood the material as it was originally presented but were not willing to ask for clarification (Carey et al., 2022). Participant 9 in Taylor et al. (2021) described the impact they experienced by embracing universal teaching strategies, “it’s allowed me to really impact a wider diverse population ... it really gave [me]

confidence that I can work with any type of student” (p. 8).

The other subtheme, *missing the point*, reflects faculty members who taught courses that included students with intellectual disability and did not make teaching adaptations or use strategies to accommodate the learning environment for them (effectively “missing the point” of the inclusive teaching experience). While these faculty members did benefit in some ways, like Carl, who became more mindful in his communication with students but did not change his approach to teaching (McCabe et al., 2022), others did not. Some faculty made little or no changes to their instruction or courses and others understood the lack of traditional grades for students with intellectual disability in their course (i.e., a course taken without credit and resulting in no grade) to mean students should not be held to any expectation or standard. For example, Participant 10 in Taylor et al. (2021) said, “I pretty much allow them to do whatever they want to do in my ... classes, because they don’t get graded” (p. 10). Additionally, more than half of the 12 instructors in the study by Smith and Myers (2024) significantly lowered or completely removed engagement and assessment expectations for students with intellectual disability in their courses. One faculty instructor shared, “If someone says, ‘I can’t read a book’, then I say, ‘[you] don’t have to do that assignment.’ And I don’t usually give them another assignment unless they ask for one” (Smith & Myers, 2024, p. 9). Multiple faculty reflections included in Hall et al. (2021) also expressed providing little, if any, accommodations to their courses to support students with intellectual disability. These reflections seem to stem from a misunderstanding on the part of faculty as to the purpose of inclusive courses and the expectations of those who teach them. The misunderstandings even affected faculty members like Delaney and Naomi, who were on board to include students with intellectual disability in their courses and received some support from their postsecondary education programs, yet still cited significant concerns over expectations for grading, how much feedback to provide, or what type of feedback would be most appropriate for students with intellectual disability (Carey et al., 2022).

Faculty in four of these studies (Carey et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2021) suggested similar recommendations to help others understand the purpose of including students with intellectual disability in college courses. For example, faculty in Taylor et al. (2021) shared that program staff could provide clearer information about the postsecondary education program's purpose, goals, and objectives as well as information on best teaching practices for students with intellectual disability. Likewise, in Jones et al. (2016), faculty added that program staff should provide communication tips for interacting with students. Others commented that having guidance or tools to gauge their effectiveness in teaching and supporting learning would be particularly helpful for those with limited experience or knowledge of disability.

Theme: Reflections

Subtheme: Student participation and investment, changing dynamics, and exposure to disability

Articles included: Articles included: Burgin et al. (2017); Carey et al. (2022); Hall et al. (2021); Jones et al. (2016); McCabe et al. (2022); Taylor et al. (2021); Watts et al. (2023)

This theme refers to faculty members' *reflections* on their experiences teaching courses with students with intellectual disability and identifying the impact of their experiences on the course itself, all students, and themselves. The three subthemes that emerged from our analysis were (1) *student participation and investment*, (2) *changing dynamics*, and (3) *exposure to disability*.

The first subtheme, student participation and investment, encompasses the overall, positive experiences many faculty members had teaching courses that included students with intellectual disability. This is, in part, due to the value students with intellectual disability added to the courses. When reflecting on working with a student with intellectual disability who was enrolled in his course, Wesley shared:

He was fantastic and the class, I mean he was there regularly, he is a good student,

you know, and he asked questions in class too, and they were good questions, so I appreciated having him there. It was a good experience all around. (Carey et al., 2022, p. 206)

Participant 3 in Taylor et al. (2021), shared a similar experience, “we’ve had some times where [students with intellectual disability] will bring up something or ask a question that really sparks a good discussion, which leads to the benefit of the traditional students” (p. 8). This was also reiterated in Sydney’s reflection that the openness to learning that students with intellectual disability bring to class acted as a support for other students in the classroom, mentioning that “... the student with intellectual disability was comfortable asking questions that provided necessary reinforcement for his classmates” (Carey et al., 2022, p. 207). Reflections from multiple faculty in the study by Hall et al. (2021) also indicated that students with intellectual disability were often more involved in the class than their classmates. All professors in Watts et al. (2023) noted increases in their expectations of students with intellectual disability as the semester progressed and “they observed student’s ability to produce high-quality work, with the appropriate support” (p. 12). In Burgin et al. (2017), most faculty shared that students with intellectual disability were committed to participating in all aspects of the class. One faculty said, “they came in smiling and ready to learn” (p. 367) and some even noted that it was refreshing to have students excited about being in their course.

The openness to learning that students with intellectual disability bring to class acted as a support for other students in the classroom.

The second subtheme, *changing dynamics*, refers to how the inclusion of students with intellectual disability affected the classroom environment. Faculty members noted that students with intellectual disability positively changed the overall dynamics of the course. Some, like Participant 8 in Taylor et al. (2021),

described the impact that inclusion can have on the entire classroom, by stating, “I get to see how the [typical] students in the class ... just embrace [students with intellectual disability] ... That, again, goes back to the dynamics of the classroom ... it’s a really beautiful thing” (p. 8).

One faculty said, “they came in smiling and ready to learn” (Burgin et al., 2017, p. 367)

A few faculty members in Taylor et al. (2021) felt the inclusion of the student with intellectual disability brought energy and life to their classroom, described as a “...greater level of ‘enthusiasm’ and a more ‘positive attitude’ on the part of students with intellectual disability, and that this ‘energy’ was ‘contagious among the other students’” (p. 7). Changing dynamics include the authentic support of peers who took it upon themselves to engage with their classmate(s) with intellectual disability. Multiple faculty members described the nature of these relationships: “Laura used words like ‘natural’ and Gabriella described them as ‘genuine.’ Faculty did not see the formation of artificial relationships, but instead described them as mutually beneficial for all students involved” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 80). In fact, one faculty member in Jones et al. (2016) felt that students in their course felt “a sense of accomplishment” (p. 97) when assisting their peer with an intellectual disability and another noted that providing support might have “[led] to increased sense of self-worth as well among students without disability” (p. 97).

In the third subtheme, *exposure to disability*, many faculty members expressed that including a student with intellectual disability in their course exposed other students to the needs and experiences of people with disabilities. This left students with a broader appreciation of disability as a facet of diversity. Some faculty, like Ruben, were worried about explaining the different expectations to other students in the class and though uncomfortable at first, Ruben shared, “It worked out in the end and people understood what was happening and it was not a big deal” (Hall et al., 2021, p. 12). Another faculty member, Henry, noted that “most of his students knew someone with a disability, but emphasized that it was impactful for them to be classmates together”

(McCabe et al., 2022, p. 81). Similarly, one faculty member shared, “Students without disability not only gained an understanding of his [student with intellectual disability] perspective, but acquired knowledge, learning from the student’s perspective fostering new perspectives and ideas about the class subject” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 93). Though reflections were mostly positive, Julia in Hall et al. (2021) shared that in her course, the education major students adopted more instructional roles, providing a greater challenge in creating an equitable learning environment.

Theme: Growth

Subtheme: Institutional change and professional growth

Articles included: Carey et al. (2022); Jones et al. (2016); McCabe et al. (2022); Taylor et al. (2021)

The theme of *growth* is represented within four studies and reflects the subthemes of *institutional change and professional growth* of both faculty members and peers. *Institutional change* refers to a change in policy or culture at the institutional level. *Professional growth* refers to the development of both faculty members and peers without intellectual disability in the course, in expressing that their perspective or practice was in some way positively affected by the participation of a student with an intellectual disability in their course.

Related to *institutional change*, some faculty members in the articles expressed both surprise and pride in the fact that their institution embraced the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in academia. One said they “found it ‘rewarding’ to teach at a university in which such a progressive program was supported” (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 79). Another stated that:

...something about the existence of the [postsecondary education program] softened certain attitudes I had toward [the university] as an institution. I was shocked to hear that it existed: [The university] is doing this? Which is an odd thing to think . . . I thought . . . why isn’t there more of this going on? (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 79)

Faculty members in the articles expressed both surprise and pride in the fact that their institution embraced the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in academia.

Faculty across all four studies in this theme felt as though the inclusion of students with intellectual disability in their classrooms and the existence of the postsecondary education program contributed to a better place for everyone to learn and contributed significantly to both their own and their students' professional development. Several participants in the study by Carey et al. (2022) also expressed that they were impressed with the university for embracing the postsecondary education program and “taking such huge strides toward providing a truly inclusive educational experience for all” (p. 207). A faculty member in the study by Jones et al. (2016) also felt the institution benefitted from the program, calling the opportunity “wonderful,” and adding that the “inclusion of students with intellectual disability adds to the texture of the university and provides a model of inclusive communities to all of us” (p. 93). Faculty also shared that embracing inclusion does not stop at the classroom door or on the boundaries of campus. One faculty member shared how the experience of teaching or participating in a course that included students with intellectual disability had a far-reaching impact:

I think it's good that it—both for me and I hope for everyone around, everyone who sees them out on campus and in classes—it helps remind all of us that the reason we're here is to grow communities and grow whole people... Not only to teach geology or astronomy, while that's my goal in those 50 minutes. My real goal is this other thing that's bigger. (McCabe et al., 2022, p. 79)

The second subtheme, *professional growth*, refers to both the growth faculty witnessed in their students as emerging professionals and their growth as instructors. As for their students without intellectual disability, faculty

noted growth in broad professional skills like using concise language, which were acquired because of completing the class with their peers with intellectual disability (McCabe et al., 2022). One faculty member in McCabe et al. (2022) recalled a specific scenario in which the experience had a lasting professional impact on their students:

I'm just remembering one class where a student took the [postsecondary program for students with intellectual disability] student under her wing and really loved ... it turned out that this student recognized through having that student [with intellectual disability] in the class, that she's always loved working with special needs kids. Now she's with Comcast and she's working with the vice president because Comcast is especially keyed in to accommodating customers and staff with intellectual disability. So it has now transferred into her professional life.”

Faculty across all four studies in this theme felt as though the inclusion of students with intellectual disability in their classrooms and the existence of the postsecondary education program contributed to a better place for everyone to learn and contributed significantly to both their own and their students' professional development.

Faculty members also experienced professional growth in several ways because of their efforts to create an inclusive classroom setting. For example, in Carey et al. (2022), faculty members “identified benefits included inclusivity, increased awareness of disability, increased engagement, and a focus on improving teaching skills” (p. 205). For some, teaching students with intellectual disability led to an increase in confidence to “work with any type of student” (Taylor et al., 2021, p. 8) particularly in “increasing [their] range and experience and skills in meeting students with diverse needs” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 95).

Several faculty members reflected on how teaching a course that included students with intellectual disability improved their approach to teaching. Participant 2 in Taylor et al. (2021) stated that after teaching students with intellectual disability, they began to “focus more on individual instruction” (p. 9) and “meet people where they are, rather than having people meet you where you are as a teacher” (p. 9). Others felt it “helped them address their teaching goals at a systemic level...[by] being more cognizant of needing to modify my teaching” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 95).

Lastly, faculty members experienced professional growth in terms of mentorship and their ability to connect with students. This includes relationships that evolved into meaningful friendships resulting in students meeting and working with faculty mentors after the course was over (Jones et al., 2016). A faculty member described the relationship as a “mutually beneficial one, providing opportunities for the faculty member to develop his ‘personal mentoring skills with the student’” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 96).

For some, teaching students with intellectual disability led to an increase in confidence to “work with any type of student” (Taylor et al., 2021, p. 8)

Discussion

In the studies reviewed, most faculty perceived teaching courses that included students with intellectual disability in postsecondary education programs to be a positive and worthwhile experience. Nearly all faculty in the eight articles reviewed also expressed that training and guidance were needed before students with intellectual disability joined their courses. Whether faculty perceived their experiences positively or negatively, nearly all articles included some mention of faculty needing more preparation to support students with intellectual disability in their courses. The topic of preparation centered on understanding best practices to teach and communicate

with students as well as how to accommodate or modify materials within the course. Even when postsecondary education program staff did provide guidance or training, the need for more knowledge and training was still evident. Without proper training, faculty may be more likely to lower or remove expectations for students with intellectual disability, which goes against the purpose of an inclusive learning experience.

This issue of under-preparedness is not unique to teaching students with intellectual disability. Research indicates that faculty in higher education often feel inadequately prepared to teach students with disabilities more generally, including those with learning disabilities, sensory impairments, and other disabilities (e.g., Moriña, 2017). Such lack of preparation can lead to less effective teaching practices and reduced educational outcomes for students with disabilities. By providing faculty with proper training on universal design for learning (UDL) principles and clarity of information, like program purpose, individual student characteristics and needs, and guidance on modifying materials, faculty will be better prepared and feel more confident teaching students with intellectual disability. These practices will also help motivate more faculty to teach or continue teaching courses that include students with intellectual disability.

In Table 1, we summarize faculty recommendations related to improving motivation, preparedness, and implementing UDL strategies. Also in Table 1, we have included additional resources to support these three areas. Above all, recommendations related to helping faculty adequately prepare to teach students with intellectual disability stood out.

Most faculty perceived teaching courses that included students with intellectual disability in postsecondary education programs to be a positive and worthwhile experience.

Table 1. Recommendations for Programs and Faculty in Teaching Students with Intellectual Disability in College/ University Classes

Recommendations for:		Check out these additional resources:
Motivating Faculty to Teach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect faculty with others who have taught courses that included students with intellectual disability before. • Connect students with faculty before the semester/class begins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tips from Faculty: Engaging Students with Intellectual Disability Enrolled in a College Course • Think Higher. Think College Public Awareness Campaign
Preparing Faculty to Teach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the purpose of the program, inclusive classes, and goals, and communicate the academic and participation expectations for students with intellectual disability. • Make expectations for time commitment, academic accommodations, course modifications, and grading practices clear. • Increase communication with faculty and explain the types of services students can receive from the school's disability service office and the program. • Designate program staff to mentor faculty who are new to teaching courses that include students with intellectual disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Faculty Through Planning and Communication Strategies for Success • Faculty Guidebook: Supporting Faculty Teaching Inclusive Classes • Creating (Inclusive) Campus Communities Begins in the Classroom • Examples and Resources for How to Do Inclusive Coursework
Implementing UDL Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students get ready for independence in college by fading support in high school. • Provide support for applying to and funding college. • Provide emotional support while in college but learn to let go (even though it's hard!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Planning Worksheet for Universal Design for Learning • New & Dynamic Ways Forward: UDL in Career & Technical Education • Enhancing Instruction with UDL Strategies (Classroom Activity)

Limitations

One limitation of this review to consider when interpreting the findings is the decision to only use peer-reviewed research. This did not allow for a review of the perspectives of faculty who shared their experiences through other means, such as conference presentations, publicly available newsletters, or other non-peer-reviewed sources. As such, there is a possibility that the perspectives of those with first-hand experience and worthwhile information to share were not included in this review. This could unintentionally have narrowed our understanding of faculty perspectives on teaching students with intellectual disability in college settings. However, we believe our review has effectively summarized the common experiences discussed by faculty in the peer-reviewed literature and has also helped identify areas where postsecondary education programs can dedicate resources to support faculty who teach courses that include students with intellectual disability.

Implications for Program Evaluation and Improvement

This review emphasized the need for programs to provide quality training and continuous support to faculty teaching students with intellectual disability. Programs should start each semester by offering or connecting faculty with training on program operations, disability and inclusive education, and UDL strategies. These training sessions would be especially useful to new faculty or those who have a student with intellectual disability in their course for the first time. To understand the specific types of support faculty at each institution may need, we recommend that programs survey faculty to identify relevant topics for training and additional resources faculty may need or want to access.

As a result of this review, we have additional recommendations for program personnel in their role of supporting faculty:

- Programs should maintain **ongoing communication** with faculty (e.g., emails with reminders on best practices and relevant teaching resources) and schedule regular check-ins with them throughout the semester to provide direct support if needed. In all

communication methods, programs should remind faculty who to contact if they have questions about the student or the program. This would help reiterate the support available and ensure that faculty receive accurate and timely information directly from program staff.

- As suggested in Taylor et al. (2021), faculty would benefit from **clarifying information on peer mentor roles and responsibilities**. This would help reduce any reliance faculty may have on using the student or a peer mentor as a conduit for information and enhance the overall effectiveness of peer mentoring in academic settings, contributing to a more supportive learning environment for students with intellectual disability.
- Program staff must conduct **regular evaluations** on the academic aspects of their programs. We suggest that programs evaluate the inclusive practices of the courses students with intellectual disability participate in, especially with faculty who are new to teaching students with intellectual disability. In doing so, program staff may learn that some faculty provide an inclusive educational experience for all students, while others may not engage students with intellectual disability in the class and instead relegate them to the role of passive observers. Information from this type of evaluation would support faculty development in improving inclusive teaching practices and inform subsequent student advising for course selection.

Implications for Research

Findings from this review highlight the need for research to identify effective practices for programs to help faculty adapt courses and materials to support learners with intellectual disability. Research should also be conducted to assess the effectiveness of faculty preparation efforts, which may include building knowledge of the program itself, disability education, and UDL strategies that support students with intellectual disability in college courses. Establishing a metric for faculty to assess themselves throughout the course would also be of great value to faculty who are new to teaching courses that include students with

intellectual disability. This would allow them to establish goals, track professional growth, and create space for personal reflection on their experiences.

In addition, future research should explore existing practices for orienting faculty to the structures and expectations of postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disability. This includes examining the effectiveness of different orientation approaches and instructional strategies to ensure faculty are well-prepared (Taylor et al., 2021). Another critical area of research involves understanding the perspectives of faculty who have either denied or have yet to participate in inclusive courses. Such research could provide valuable insights into how to better prepare and engage faculty, including those who may be resistant to teaching a course that includes a student with intellectual disability (Carey et al., 2022). Finally, there is a need for more studies to capture the experiences and viewpoints of faculty across diverse college and university settings such as community colleges, career/technical education schools, and minority-serving institutions. Findings from this line of research could reveal how varying institutional factors influence faculty perspectives and practices in teaching students with intellectual disability (Hall et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016; McCabe et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The inclusion of students with intellectual disability in postsecondary education has led to both rewarding experiences and significant challenges for faculty members. The studies reviewed consistently highlight the importance of faculty preparation, not just in understanding the specific needs of students with intellectual disability in college courses, but in adopting UDL principles that benefit all students. Furthermore, the faculty's reflections underscore the broader impact of inclusive practices, both in terms of professional growth for faculty and the positive changes in classroom dynamics that benefit all students. By addressing the needs and recommendations provided by faculty in the articles, postsecondary education programs can foster an inclusive learning environment within their respective institutions where all students can thrive.

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