

Inclusion and Diversity at Kingsborough Highlighted at International Conference

By Susan Carpenter

“The State of the Art” conference in Syracuse in November afforded the opportunity for an inclusive collaboration between Prof. Susan Carpenter from the Department of Behavioral Sciences’ Education Program with Dr. Stella Woodroffe, Director of Access Ability, Autumn Hester alumni of the AHRC, Melissa Riggio Program (for students with intellectual disabilities) and Toni Abreu Honors student in the education program. This diverse and dynamic team presented on the benefits of including students with intellectual disabilities in the arts in education courses at Kingsborough Community College and beyond.

The conference brought together faculty, staff and students from across the world to learn, collaborate and advocate for extending opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) to attend college and hence gain employment. Unemployment is more than twice as high for people with intellectual disabilities. Internationally speaking, there are currently far higher education opportunities in the USA than in Europe. For example, there are no higher education opportunities for students with ID in the UK where Prof.

Carpenter originates from.

CUNY is participating in a prestigious 5-year federal grant to develop a comprehensive transition program for students with intellectual disabilities in partnership with U Rochester, the JFK Jr. Institute for Worker Education, AHRC NYC and NYC DOE (District 75). Kingsborough is a key player in the development of this program across five of the 24 CUNY campuses: The College of Staten Island, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Queens College and Hostos College in the Bronx are our partners together with AHRC, District 75 of the NY City Board of Education and the University of Rochester.

CUNY is preparing to launch a program for students with intellectual disabilities: CUNY Unlimited. Students will obtain a CUNY credential and be fully included in college life, auditing classes supported by a mentor, becoming members and officers of clubs, and gaining job experience through internships.

For many years, Prof. Carpenter has seen the benefits for the students with ID but more so for the undergraduates and college campus as a whole.

“These students often end up helping and become role models for undergraduates. Their enthusiasm and



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From left to right: Dr Sue Carpenter, Toni Abreu, Autumn Hester and Dr. Stella Woodroffe

commitment to their study are palpable in the courses I teach,” she said. “I also see it as an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to experience an inclusive environment which they can then replicate in their own classrooms in the future”.

Autumn Hester who is also planning a career in education came into her own at the conference with conference attendees asking her many questions about her college experience. “I will ever remember this golden opportunity” she commented- not least of all her first experience flying!

“Students like Autumn, make me feel really comfortable when I collaborate and learn alongside them in my courses,” Toni Abreu stated. “They ask me about myself not just whether I had completed the assignment!”

Stella Woodroffe concluded that there is a need to further understand and support inclusion, to develop equity within our colleges and beyond.

Prof. Carpenter lead presenter invited the three co-presenters to contribute to the presentation which is funded by the grant.

“I hoped that it was an example, a microcosm of a friendly, diverse and inclusive collaboration we hope to see more of at Kingsborough, in our communities and society,” she said. “It was truly a pleasure!

For further information on college opportunities for students with ID across the USA go to the Think College website: <https://thinkcollege.net/>. And for further information or involvement in CUNY UNLIMITED at KCC feel free to contact Prof. Sue Carpenter at scarpenter@kbcc.cuny.edu



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Autumn right, participating in the EDC2200 Art in Education workshop.