



CT AHEAD

Connecticut Association on
Higher Education and Disability

Meeting Minutes – November 13th, 2020

A Panel Discussion on The Intersectionality of Ableism and Racism

Kristen called the meeting to order at 9:00am (22 in attendance)

- Members did introductions and had general discussion
 - Meeting recorded for later viewing
- 9:30 Panelists Joined meeting and [Kristen made introductions](#)
 - [Panelist Bios available at ctahead.org/2020/11/intersectionalitypanel/](https://ctahead.org/2020/11/intersectionalitypanel/)

Rayna Dyton-White began facilitation of discussion with Melissa Marshall and Denise T. Best

- [General introduction to the topics](#)
 - [Intersectionality of ableism and racism within the US Education System](#)
 - [Melissa shared on the definition of ableism](#) based on her personal experience with cerebral palsy, while acknowledging her white privilege, and framed what the conversation was today – asking members to [look at the world through the lenses of racism and ableism and where they meet](#)
 - [Denise shared on the experience of her daughter giving birth to a son with down syndrome](#) and his journey through the school system
 - [Denise also shared on her professional experience as an educator](#) working with students with disabilities in higher education and students struggling with disability as part of their identify, as well as helping students to understand there actual current level of functioning after high schools “pushed them through”
 - Denise also shared her opinion of students with disabilities (her grandson) [trying to go to school now](#), during the pandemic
 - [Rayna shared more on the failure to recognize and assist persons with disabilities because of underlying racism](#); also the financial aid impacts
 - [Discussed some of the data around racism and classism in the state](#)
 - [Shared on her experience as a Diversity Director](#) and students coming to her thinking they have been discriminated against, only to find they had been “pushed through” high school and are not at the academic level they need to be for higher education
 - [Recognizing that universities don’t have the resources to evaluate individuals](#)
 - [Personal illustrations of the intersection of ableism and racism in education](#)
 - [Melissa shared on an activity she does called “Who lives where?”](#) – people rise or fall based on the expectations from others
 - [She shared on some of her personal experiences growing up with a disability and the challenge of self-advocacy](#) – students with disabilities are asked to do things that students without disabilities are not required to do
 - [“When you’re a member of one oppressed class, why would you want to identify with two?”](#) – experience with architectural assessment of schools, students reluctance to identify as a student with a disability, and fear of students with disabilities due to lack of knowledge and placement of “special education” students
 - [Recognition of personal assumptions of others with disabilities when hiring](#), and how global expectations can impact persons with disabilities and their ability to find meaningful work
 - [Personal story about self-advocacy](#) in school, especially around physical accessibility

- [Rayna discussed disability services offices engaging with faculty](#) and being empowered through upper administration, and how [“we are the system”](#)
 - She also touched on the [cultural aspect of persons of color not wanting to identify as “disabled”](#) because of how dangerous it can be regarding discrimination
- [Rayna moved on to actions steps for the campus](#)
 - [Melissa talked on the importance of educating yourself](#) about the disability rights movements, and all the layers, and educate others (faculty, colleagues, students, etc.)
 - [Discussed Crip Camp and Lives Worth Living as a starting point](#), and to call out barriers to access when you see them
 - She also suggested, based on her personal experience, [getting involved in an All-Abilities Alliance](#), and using the resources from the Governor’s Prevention Partnership
 - [Melissa also shared information about her book, I Can’t Swim, But I Haven’t Drowned Yet: Notes From a Disability Rights Activist](#) – a memoir about her life and experiences
 - [Melissa shared a resource about captioning](#), especially using Zoom: a free service in Connecticut is Spring Relay
 - [Rayna shared on the importance of disability law training](#) and how to collect information on possible negative outcomes if not provided (punitive damages) in order to gain the support of the cabinet at your school
 - [Melissa added that this should be paired with disability bias awareness training](#) – helps the legal training to be more impactful
 - [Rayna asked Denise about what she would want to see for her grandson](#)
 - [Denise also talked about curriculum being informed by these topics](#), and reflective of the population, as well as the training for students going into these fields
 - [She also gave a personal example](#) of finding material, and making it available, to meet persons where they are at and provides relatable context
 - [Rayna talked about resources on our own websites](#), as well as using United Educators EduRisk Solutions, which includes a short video on 504 for faculty (looking for free resources from companies your institution is already using)
 - [Another suggestion is to get on a standing agenda](#) in order to share changes as they occur, and relevant information at key points in the year, as well as tying disability education into diversity training
 - [Denise recommended getting involved with state legislation](#) as part of a broader strategy (greater than individual institutions)
- [Rayna opened the discussion up to questions](#)
 - [Kristen asked about advice on avoiding burnout for disability service providers](#), especially when many of us live with our own disabilities while supporting students with disabilities
 - [Melissa shared thoughts on how disability is not binary](#) and that you’re in this for life; you might back out a little bit at times, but there are times when we need to lean more in
 - [Rayna shared that we all take breaks](#), but when do what needs to be done when it’s your time to do it, and take what you need in the moment when you need it
 - [Denise shared on her experience with “nurturing for nurturers”](#) because sometimes we can’t “turn it off” in our own heads
 - [She added about holding your boundaries](#) (even with email)
 - [Melissa shared on “enforced time away”](#) – have an activity that include accountability to other people
 - [Rayna added that you want to find the activity that works for you](#) (everything won’t; what works for one person may not work for another)
 - [Denise added what has worked for her](#) (screaming in the car)
 - [Also important is to find mutual support from others in your field of work](#) (CT AHEAD)

- [Rayna wrapping up the conversation](#), encouraging us to be in touch as needed (rdytonwhite@usj.edu)
- After the panelists left the meeting, the Board stayed on and collected feedback for about 10 minutes in order to best serve the group moving forward
 - Reminded that the community chat in January will be a continuation of this conversation

Resources

- [Access town profile data](#)
- [All-Abilities Alliance](#)
- [Melissa's book on Amazon](#)
- [Spring Relay](#)
- [EduRisk Solutions](#)

Meeting ended 11:50am

Respectively Submitted,

Crystal Rose Hill
CT AHEAD Secretary