**Transcript: Disability on Campus Webcast | October 15, 2024**

[Accompanying PowerPoint Presentation](https://nationaldisabilitycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Webcast-Disability-on-Campus-The-Latest-Findings-Higher-Ed-Needs-to-Know.pptx)

## 0:00 - Introduction Music

## 0:12 - Introduction and welcome

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Welcome to the webcast for the National Disability Center for Student Success. We are thrilled to have you here. Our foundational course video today is *Disabled Students on Campus: The Latest Findings Higher Ed Needs to Know.* And we'd like to see your experience and see how we can support each other and support students.

## 0:38 - Agenda and Outline

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** So the agenda for today, we have four key topics. And the first is really thinking about and understanding disability itself. It's very complex, and I want to unpack that concept—what disability is and what it looks like in higher ed, on higher ed campuses and in programs. And then we'll go through some data. There may be some misperceptions about disability enrollment in higher ed and students' experiences and student success in programs and curriculum. And then the third thing we'll talk about today is accessibility—things that you can do to create accessibility for everyone within higher ed, post-secondary institutions and programs. We'll think about how some of those programs are two years, some are private, some are public. There's technical training, all sorts of things. So we want to provide options for each of those. And then the last thing we really want to emphasize is your role. Everyone has influence. Everyone has opportunities to support students.

## 2:20 - About the Instructor

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** A little bit about me. I'm here at the University of Texas at Austin. I’m a professor in Educational Psychology and the founding Executive Director of the National Disability Center for Student Success. This is the work that I do. It’s grounded in research, it’s grounded in experience, and it’s grounded in being someone who has worked with institutions and students for a long time. I’m excited to bring that expertise and connection to the work we're doing today.

## 3:33 - Who are disabled students on your campus or in your program?

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** That we’re starting with today is who are disabled students. So one of the questions I like to ask is: when you think about disabled students, who comes to mind? What images come to mind? What stories do you think of? What does your own experience tell you? Because that framework—your perception—shapes your policies, your practices, and how you engage in the classroom or in your campus environment.

**3:53 - Enrollment Data**

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** So we’re going to take a look at some data now. And I want to thank the U.S. Department of Education and the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study for making this available. It’s self-reported enrollment data for students with disabilities—across institutions.

## 4:30 - An Increase Over Time

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** What we’ve seen is an increase in disabled student enrollment over time. And you can see, depending on the type of institution, whether it's four-year public, four-year private, two-year, for-profit—those numbers are going up. But we also have to look at the fine print—how those numbers are collected and how disability is defined.

## 6:14 - Our Survey Says

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** We also conducted a national survey. This is the foundation for the data we’re talking about today. We had over 2,800 students respond to this survey from across the country—students from all types of institutions. And what we found is that over half of the students who responded identified as disabled. And these were folks who may or may not have disclosed their disability to their campus. So this isn’t just about accommodations. This is about identity.

## 7:59 - More Than 60% of Disabled Students Report Mental Health Conditions

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** One of the most common disability categories in our data set was mental health conditions. Over 60% of disabled students in our survey reported at least one mental health condition. And that’s important for faculty and staff to know—because this may not be visible. It may not come up in class. But it is a major component of how students are experiencing higher ed.

## 9:34 - Over Half of Disabled Students Report More Than One Disability

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Another finding we want to highlight is that over half of the students who identified as disabled reported more than one type of disability. So this idea that disability is one thing, one label, one box—that’s not how it shows up in students’ lives. They may have multiple conditions, overlapping experiences, and different support needs.

## 11:12 - What we know about disability is directly related to how and when students disclose.

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Disclosure is a huge piece of this puzzle. Because if a student doesn’t disclose their disability, then the campus may never count them as disabled. That’s a problem when we base our services, funding, and policies on those counts. It’s also a problem when disclosure is complicated—emotionally, socially, or administratively.

## 12:28 - What They Say About Disclosure

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Students told us a lot about what goes into the decision to disclose—or not. Some said they didn’t think their condition “counted” as a disability. Others worried about stigma or judgment. Still others said the process was just too hard—too much paperwork, too many steps. Disclosure isn’t just a form; it’s a moment of vulnerability. And that shapes everything that comes after.

## 15:22 - Undergraduate Student Quote

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** One student said, “I didn’t tell anyone because I didn’t want to be seen as broken. I just tried to keep up like everyone else.” That kind of silence is heavy. And it tells us something about what students are carrying.

## 17:22 - Disabled student experiences are not one-size-fits-all.

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** There’s no such thing as a typical disabled student. They have different identities, different supports, different barriers. So we have to stop assuming. One-size-fits-all approaches just don’t work here. That includes how we talk about disability, how we offer accommodations, and how we structure our courses and programs.

## 19:05 - How accessible is your campus or program?

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Accessibility isn’t just ramps and captions. It’s about the whole experience—how people navigate the campus, how they access information, how included they feel in the classroom. So ask yourself: how accessible is your campus, really?

## 19:30 - Campus Accessibility is in Silos

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** One thing we’ve seen is that accessibility often lives in silos. It’s the responsibility of one office, one department, or one person. But accessibility has to be a shared commitment. Everyone plays a role—faculty, staff, leadership, even peers. When it’s isolated, it’s not sustainable.

## 21:06 - Undergraduate Student Quote

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** One student told us, “It felt like no one talked to each other. My professor didn’t know what my advisor said. The disability office didn’t know what my department required. I had to connect all the dots myself.” That’s not how support should work.

## 22:42 - Undergraduate Student Quote

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Another student shared, “I had accommodations, but I still failed the class because the professor wouldn’t adjust deadlines. I felt like the system gave me permission to be there but didn’t actually support me.” That gap between permission and real access—that’s where students fall through the cracks.

## 24:29 - Professor Quote

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** A faculty member said, “I want to support my students, but I don’t always know what’s appropriate. I’m afraid of doing the wrong thing.” That’s honest. And it shows us that we need more training, more conversations, and more support for faculty too.

## 26:01 - Key Student Entry and Exit Points

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Let’s talk about when students enter and exit our systems—because those are key moments that shape their whole experience. From orientation to graduation, are we making things clear? Are we welcoming? Do students know where to go if they need help? Those transitions are where access either opens up or shuts down.

## 30:30 - Undergraduate Student Quote

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** One student said, “I almost dropped out after my first semester. Not because of grades, but because I couldn’t figure out how to get what I needed. It felt like I was doing college on hard mode.” We shouldn’t make students work harder just to stay.

## 32:13 - 6 Simple Ways to Take Action at Your Campus

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** So here are six simple ways to take action:

1. **Include accessibility in every syllabus.**
2. **Ask students early and often what they need.**
3. **Partner with your disability services office.**
4. **Use accessible formats and tools from the start.**
5. **Build flexibility into your teaching.**
6. **Talk about disability as part of diversity.** These aren’t extra—they’re part of good teaching and good leadership. And they benefit *all* students, not just disabled ones.

## 37:21 - Stay Connected

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** If you want to keep learning, keep growing, or bring this to your team, we’d love to hear from you. Visit our website at nationaldisabilitycenter.org. You’ll find reports, resources, upcoming events—and ways to stay connected. We’re here to support your journey, and we hope you’ll be part of ours.

## 38:41 - Q&A

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** We’ll take some time now to answer your questions. Feel free to drop them in the Q&A box. If we don’t get to yours today, we’ll follow up or add it to our FAQ on the site. Thank you for engaging with this content so deeply.

## 42:53 - Thank You

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD:** Thank you for joining us. Thank you for the work you do, for showing up for students, and for committing to access and equity. We hope this webcast is a step forward—for you, for your campus, and for higher education.