



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY HOLDS “REDEFINING INCLUSION” DIVERSITY PANEL



***Pictured Top: Dr. Brent Elder; Middle L-R: Micah Fialka-Feldman, Amy Brenneman, Beth Myers, Sean McElwee, Carrie Rosen; Bottom L-R: Dan Habib, Andy Arias, Megan Bomgaars
Photo by Rich Prugh***

LOS ANGELES, CA – Syracuse University Los Angeles, in conjunction with Syracuse University’s Lawrence B. Taishoff Center for Inclusion Higher Education, brought their message of lifelong inclusion to a premiere event called “Redefining Inclusion” held on Thursday, January 26th at the Intercontinental Hotel in Los Angeles featuring a panel of disability experts and celebrities connected to the field of disability studies.

Syracuse Assistant Vice President of Regional Programs in LA, Joan L. Adler welcomed the crowd and introduced the evening’s moderator, Dr. Beth Myers, Executive Director at Lawrence B. Taishoff Center

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for Inclusion Higher Education. Dr. Myers explained that the specific panel members were chosen to create a variety of representation and a nice mix of academics, media and self-advocates, focusing on disability in the media and to bring awareness and garner national attention for the work that they're doing for Inclusive Education. "Syracuse University has a long history of being at the forefront of the disability rights movement. We feel strongly that our students deserve to have a place at a university. Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have been the most excluded from higher education deserve to have the chance to make the same kinds of decisions for themselves that every other college student gets to make."

The panelists were:

- Amy Brenneman, actress, producer and activist
- Carrie Rosen, writer for ABC's *Speechless*
- Dan Habib, Filmmaker, *Intelligent Lives* and *Including Samuel*
- Micah Fialka-Feldman '15, self-advocate and Outreach Coordinator for the Taishoff Center
- Brent Elder G'16, Professor of Inclusive Education at Rowan University
- Andy Arias, disability advocate and actor

Special guests included Megan Bomgaars and Sean McElwee from the Emmy Award winning A&E series "Born This Way". The show follows adults born with Down syndrome as they pursue their passions while defying society's expectations. The show's film crew followed them and interviewed faculty and audience members as they shot footage for a future episode.





Actress Amy Brenneman became involved in disability advocacy to support her daughter who has cognitive disabilities. "You stop looking at 'normal' and 'abnormal' and you start looking at 'strengths' and 'challenges'. The question to ask is, 'What can you do and what do you need help with?'"

The audience was treated to a fourteen-minute trailer of "Intelligent Lives", a new documentary film project by Dan Habib that explores how the segregation of people with disabilities became the norm, why this segregation is slowly being dismantled, and how some people with intellectual disabilities are blazing a bold new path. The film centers on three individuals including Micah Fialka-Feldman, whose parents insisted he be included in general education despite scoring a 40 on an IQ test. Micah graduated from high school, attended college, and is now a co-teacher at Syracuse University.

Established in 2009, the Lawrence B. Taishoff Center for Inclusion Higher Education provides full and equitable participation of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in higher education. The Taishoff Center has secured more than \$6.2M in grants and federal funding from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Taishoff Family Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education. In 2015, the Taishoff Center was selected as a Model Transition and Postsecondary Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID).

InclusiveU at Syracuse University opens the doors to higher education and offers a comprehensive college experience for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. InclusiveU is an initiative of the Taishoff Center, housed in Syracuse University's School of Education. Students work toward a non-credit college certificate in a specialized area of study according to their interests, participate in social activities on campus, acquire marketable job skills, receive advisory services, attend seminars, and have the opportunity to live in an inclusive campus facility. "We are excited to bring the Taishoff disability program to the attention of our West Coast alumni and community members," says Joan Adler. "Showcasing innovative, relevant campus programs such as this is a primary goal of the University's Los Angeles office."

Syracuse University Los Angeles is a satellite office for the upstate New York school. Their mandate is to engage with the local alumni and bring students and alumni together enhancing the experience for both student and alumni. The office also includes an admissions office, a development office, and an LA Semester office -in conjunction with the S.I. Newhouse School of Communications and the College of Visual and Performing Arts- a semester program for juniors and seniors to come to LA and intern in the entertainment industry and take classes with industry professionals.

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