

First Students with Intellectual Disabilities to Graduate from Inclusive Higher Ed in Colorado
Upcoming graduates pave the way for future students with disabilities at UCCS and ACC

May 15 at UCCS and May 18th at ACC: Six students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) will become the first students to graduate from inclusive higher education pathways in Colorado. Nick, Mia, and Ashley will graduate from University of Colorado - Colorado Springs (UCCS). Jazmine, Kacie, and Vince will graduate from Arapahoe Community College (ACC) with certificates in their chosen area of study.

The upcoming graduates are truly trailblazers – the first in Colorado! They are proving that inclusion works and showing us all that what was once impossible is very possible. They are demonstrating that college and career dreams can be reached, regardless of disability. “My advice for high school students is to pursue their dreams and know that they can accomplish anything that they want to,” Jazmine, upcoming graduate.

Historically, students with intellectual disabilities have been excluded from higher education due to restrictive entry criteria and lack of on-campus supports. This changed in Colorado with the passage of Senate Bill 16-196 in 2016, which provided pilot funding to three schools (University of Northern Colorado, UCCS, ACC) to open their doors to students with IDD. Today, around 60 students with IDD are enrolled across the three schools. Students take regular college classes; participate in clubs and activities on campus, live on campus, complete internships, and hold employment, right alongside their typical peers.

This year, in light of the pandemic, the students, along with their peers cannot walk at graduation but are participating virtually with an opportunity to walk at a later date. UCCS will hold its virtual ceremony on May 15 at 1:00 pm; ACC will be on May 18th (time TBD)

The Colorado Initiative for Inclusive Higher Education (IN!) is a non-profit that creates fully inclusive college opportunities in Colorado for students with intellectual disabilities to foster academic growth, social development, and career advancement.

University of Colorado - Colorado Springs (UCCS) graduates

The Office of Inclusive Services at UCCS provides supports to students with IDD on campus.

- Ashley studies Advocacy and Human Services
- Mia studies American Sign Language and Education
- Nick studies Photojournalism

Arapahoe Community College (ACC) graduates

Elevate at ACC provides supports to students with IDD on campus.

- Jazmine studies Nursing Assistance
- Kacie studies Communication
- Vince studies Music

More information on each graduate is available at: <https://inclusivehighered.org/first-graduates/>

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