And They Were Roommates: Navigating Inclusive Mentorship in Higher Education

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Abstract

This project is about the relationships between peer mentees and mentors in an inclusive higher education setting as they navigate how to support one another in a mutually beneficial and sustainable way. The complexity of these shared experiences with mentorship was captured in two modalities: video blogs and filmed interviews. Our perspectives and understandings are presented in this written document as well as a film to accomodate for multiple learning preferences.

This is not a project about disability. It's not about Syracuse University or InclusiveU. It's not about inclusive education. It's not about Olivia. It's not about me.

Executive Summary

This project, falling in the Creative category for an Honors Thesis, includes this written critical statement as well as a film. The film consists of video blog footage between two students, myself and my roommates, and a series of filmed interviews in order to collect multiple perspectives on experiences in higher education peer mentorship.

All film participants, including myself and my roommate, played a role in inclusive mentorship as a part of Syracuse University's InclusiveU program. Some were InclusiveU students, some were matriculated peer mentors, and some fulfilled a combination of those roles. InclusiveU is an initiative of the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education, creating a supportive, flexible, and individualized program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have real access to higher education and campus life. As a Residential Mentor for the InclusiveU program during my junior year, I supported my roommate, a first year InclusiveU student in engaging in social activities, time management, campus involvement, navigating campus, and independent living. A program such as InclusiveU, providing fully inclusive and on-campus opportunities to all college students is new to higher education. Historically, higher education has not been an accessible option for students with disabilities, particularly students with more complex support needs, who want to advance their education, experience college-life, or gain job skills and certifications from a higher education institution. While the program and InclusiveU students continue to break barriers and embody the idea that disability is diversity, there are numerous challenges that InclusiveU students, peer mentors, staff, and administrators take on. As with anything new and progressive, there is a necessary level of struggle.

The filmed interviews for this project uncovered common challenges, strategies, and emotions tied to certain aspects of inclusive mentorship, regardless of identification as mentor or mentee (or both). In the beginning of mentorships, navigating the specific roles and responsibilities was daunting, even more so as relationships and needs developed into closer genuine friendships. Supporting academics or specific goals within a scheduled working shift proved to be an area of high stress; mentors and mentees both knew that they needed to spend more time together in order to find success, but neither had the time to work additional hours or the courage to self-advocate for more mentorship hours. Maintaining work-life balance and mentorship boundaries were areas of struggle, especially for those involved with residential mentorship in an on-campus dorm. Both mentors and mentees struggled with feeling that their counterpart in the relationship did not always want to be with them or was fully committed to mutual benefits. Many described an uncomfortable stigma towards seeking support outside of the mentorship itself, even if both the mentor and mentee knew additional support was needed, and even though there were systems of support in place. Everyone, but mentors especially, expressed conflict about balancing professional and personal relationships within a mentorship and how to share an honest college-life experience without crossing lines.

These conversations and conflicts are exposed during the filmed interviews and (more indirectly) through the video blog footage. With the theory of Universal Design for Learning implemented into the research, content, and presentation, this project provides a personal and accessible perspective into inclusive peer mentorship on college campuses. The hope for this project is to support students in mentorships in the future in understanding that they are not alone in their struggles, and can learn from the experiences of others in similar contexts. Inclusive peer

mentorship in higher education is challenging, but creates spaces and opportunities for college students to make close connections with a diverse group of students. Inclusive peer mentorship works when both the mentors and mentees feel mutually supported by each other and a system that values them both as individuals and a mentorship pair.

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Acknowledgements

Olivia, this project would simply not have been possible without you. Thank you for embracing this idea, co-adopting “Camera” as our third roommate, and keeping both us accountable for vlogging everything. I enjoyed our spontaneous mall trips, numerous coffee or milkshake runs, dance breaks, and failed attempts at following the rules of racquetball. You taught me that even when days are busy and stressful, there is always time to do something that makes you smile. Thank you for everything. I am so proud of you.

To Rexy, Jon, Meghan, Chloe, Andrew, Dave, Sally, Matt, Madii, Ashley, and Christy, my friends, family, teachers and support-team, thank you. Thank you for sharing your stories, insights and experiences with me, being willing for me to awkwardly film our conversations. Thank you to those of you who were patient with me when I asked you to watch a certain part of the film for the thousandth time. This project, and the success Olivia and I found together, would not have been possible without your support and enthusiasm. I love you all.

Advice to Future Honors Students

It would be hypocritical of me if I didn't encourage you to make sure that your project is accessible to all audiences. Make your project inclusive – no matter your field or topic. (A thirty-something-paged research paper in plain English is *not* inclusive). Making a multi-modal, language inclusive, or otherwise creative thesis project will double the amount of work you need to do. But your efforts mark another step towards inclusive academics in higher education. Use the privilege you have as a matriculated university honors student to work toward appropriate, equitable and accessible education for all people. Inclusion is worth it.

If you're going to continue putting forth the hours of extra work, printing dollars, cellular data when the wifi isn't working, emails sent, cups of caffeine, and the tears required to complete your Honors Thesis, then you might as well have it be something worth your while. So, don't do the project that is "the easy way out". Don't do the project that's on a topic you already are well-versed in. Don't do the project that isn't interesting or challenging to you. Do something that will give you two years - plus a lifetime - worth of thinking. Do something worth your audience's attention - no matter who they are or how they access information.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Information

In the world of education, "inclusive" typically refers to the inclusion of students with and without disabilities. Inclusive classrooms, inclusive policies, inclusive practices, and inclusive principles are all designed to support the needs and learning preferences of students with and without disabilities. Providing all students with ownership of classroom structure, student-centered approaches, engaging schedules, an individualized and engaging curriculum, flexible team collaboration, and a supportive climate are all necessary. This idea of inclusive classrooms is not accessible in all regions, all schools, or for all students. Relatively speaking, the practice of inclusive education is new. Schools in the United States of America have only been required to provide special education services to students with disabilities (or disabled students) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) since 1975 (https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/#Rehab-Act). These rights to post-secondary education are protected by Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act are both civil rights laws that protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, ensuring that they will not be discriminated against for having a disability. If we consider that formal education has been a practice in the United States roughly since 1776, laws, policies, and acts to protect the rights of students with disabilities have only existed for 18% of this history. But even with established laws, policies, practices, acts, and rights, higher education for students with disabilities is not a common or accessible option. History, stigma, ignorance, and policies are equitable postsecondary barriers. Post-secondary education is not for every individual, but it should be accessible and available to

those who want to continue their education or need to advance their certifications in order to work in a certain field.

"Inclusion" has to work a little differently in the context of higher education than it does in the general field of education. Syracuse University's Taishoff Center for Inclusive higher Education "defines inclusion as the incorporation of students with disabilities into general academic courses on campus, across disciplines and departments with non-disabled peers" (https://taishoffcenter.syr.edu/about/inclusive/). As an initiative of the Taishoff Center, Inclusive University (InclusiveU) is housed in and works closely with staff members, faculty, and students of Syracuse University's School of Education to provide such incorporation. The purpose of the InclusiveU program is to "[bring] students of all ages with intellectual and developmental disabilities who want to experience college life in a fully inclusive setting" real opportunities (https://taishoffcenter.syr.edu/inclusiveu/). InclusiveU students are involved with and have access to every aspect of campus life at Syracuse University. All students can take classes in their field of interest, whether it be Jewelry and Metalsmithing in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Multimedia Storytelling in the Newhouse School of Communications, or a writing seminar directory through the InclusiveU program. Joining clubs, student organizations, participating in recreational campus events, applying for university-wide scholarships and awards, swiping student IDs for access to dining halls, living in on-campus dorms, and joining matriculated peers on stage during their senior year at commencement are all accessible

opportunities to matriculated and non-matriculated students. In every respect, InclusiveU students are Syracuse University students.

Needless to say, it takes teams of dedicated people who truly embrace the idea that disability is part of diversity in order to effectively and appropriately support all students. There are those who serve as professors and teachers, academic advisors, financial advisors, career services staff members, communications, university outreach, and counselors. Mentorship and advising goes beyond the staff members. Students at Syracuse University, both InclusiveU upperclassmen and matriculated students, may take on roles and positions as Peer Mentors, Peer Partners, Peer Trainers, and Residential Mentors.

The Residential Mentors - of which I was one - are Syracuse University students who live with or are direct neighbors with an InclusiveU student(s) in on-campus residence halls. They are responsible for making sure dorm-life stays inclusive and provide living, social, academic, and emotional supports as needed. This past academic year, there were five Residential Mentors and six InclusiveU students in the residential program. Roommate pairs are completely included and mixed in with matriculated roommate pairs. There is no exclusive wing or set building for Residential Mentor and InclusiveU student pairings to live in, and InclusiveU students live by the same living standards as all matriculated on-campus students. Pairings are expected to attend floor meetings, abide by community standards, participate in fire drills, attend floor or building events, and follow Residence Life Association rules. InclusiveU's option for students to experience the "full college experience" as a residential student, living in a dormitory or apartment with peer support, is part of what makes the program so unique. For many students,

"living away from home is the main reason for pursuing [post-secondary education]" (Katovitch, 2009, p. 41).

This document is only an aspect of this qualitative research and reflective project, providing context and findings in a written form. Throughout my time as a Residential Mentor for a first-year student in the InclusiveU program, Olivia, we took video blogs (vlogs) to record our shared experience and the development of our relationship as a mentorship pair. A series of filmed interviews from students in similar roles is woven into the personal vlogs in order to create a larger film. The hope is that this project, whether it is accessed through the film or this document, provides counsel for those in an inclusive peer mentorship, both matriculated and non-matriculated students, in a higher education setting as they navigate a path towards independence.

Chapter 2: Project Influences

Residential Mentorship

I grew up with an older brother and two younger sisters, one of whom goes to a special school for students with multiple disabilities. I love her, and I love her school. I applaud my parents and home school district employees for finding the right educational match for her when the conclusion was made that our public school system just was not going to make the cut. So, I understood and believed in special schools for students with disabilities and complex needs. I believe that education, among other things, is both a practice and a space. Just like some people need different practices to learn, some people need different spaces.

But my major is literally Inclusive Elementary and Special Education. The word "inclusion" is *literally* in the title. In the field of education "inclusion" has a certain connotation. It really means inclusion of all learners, inclusion of individuals with and without (dis)abilities. I've been told (and learned) that inclusion is not just a physical space. Inclusion is a practice, a policy, an idea, and philosophy. Inclusive education is more than just having students of all abilities be in the same classroom space (Danforth, 2014, p. 5).

I believe in and fully support inclusive education. But from life experience, I knew that inclusive living and inclusive education were two very different things. I wanted to fully understand inclusion for individuals with and without disabilities, not just in an elementary classroom. At the time, I had a career goal of being an inclusive educator and later going on to write policies to support inclusive education. I felt that I needed to do a "full-send" on inclusive opportunities. Practice what you preach, right?

> "We have a job opening for a female matriculated student to serve in the role of Residential Mentor for a first year InclusiveU student. Residential mentors share a room with an InclusiveU student and provide

> companionship; compensation is partial room and board in an SU residence hall ....” (D. Katovich, personal communication, July 2018)

When I received this email, I was mowing the lawn, casually contemplating life. I was talking to myself, as one does when doing yard work, about what I was going to do with my future. For some reason, this felt right. I sent an email to the contact person listed, and continued to mow the lawn in mental agony over the typos included in my initial email.

> “I am a rising junior (and full time student) at SU. Today I received an email about the need for another femal Residential Mentor and I may be interested in this opportunity.
> I was wondering if you have any information about the application process or when I would find out if I am accepted into this community?” (K. Walter, personal communication, July 2018)

A few weeks before the start of the fall semester, Olivia and I were introduced to each other through another email, and then a phone call. I knew that Olivia was a first year student, excited to take art classes and dance, loved to sing, have her nails done and use emojis.

I don’t like getting my nails done. I don’t like singing, art classes or emojis. But after a few minutes talking on the phone together for the first time, my fear of this situation being awkward vanished. Olivia was thrilled that I was involved with a dance troupe on campus and that we would take dance classes together all year. We shared a sense of humor, love for broadway musicals, and devotion to the New England Patriots. We clicked.

As roommates, Olivia and I were purposefully paired. Not only did we share interests, we shared some learning preferences, and living styles. We were incredibly lucky to have so much in common - enough in common to become genuine friends and figure out a half-hatched roommate-system only a few weeks in. Our room had quickly become a space for nightly dance breaks. We bonded over treating ourselves to dessert before dinner on a regular basis, talking for

hours, and holding each other accountable for going to the gym. Olivia even accepted my obsessive cleanliness and inability to wake up without snoozing my alarm at least eighteen times.

We worked hard to make sure our room fit both of our needs, especially ensuring that it was a safe space for Olivia to grow as an independent college student. We decorated our dorm room with sensory lights, diffusers, "happy signs", photographs, fuzzy rugs, weighted blankets, bins full of fidgets, and stuffed animals. Practically every tape-friendly surface in the dorm room was covered in visuals we made together, some to support our day to day life, and others to help us navigate conflict (Appendix A).

Olivia and my relationship, and making this whole inclusion *thing* work, became my main focus. I wanted so badly for our relationship, and inclusive-living on a college campus to be a reality in the long run and even outside of Syracuse's campus. In order for this to "work" in my mind, I had to also keep my grades up, relationship with my friends tight, and involvement on campus going. I became sort of (very) obsessive.

Even in my obsessive state, I was proud of what Olivia and I were doing. We were making strides, even if sometimes taking one step back for every two steps forward. It was important enough that I realized our relationship was something I could focus on for my thesis project.

Inclusive Education Practices

I am an interpersonal learner. I learn from interacting with other people, having conversations that push my thinking, and being put into collaborative situations. I am an intrapersonal learner. I learn from writing reflections and being self-critical. I am a visual-spatial

learner. I learn from creating projects around content, interacting with graphics or drawing concept maps to track my understanding. I am a visual-spatial learner. I learn from drawing pictures, completing hands-on projects, or making a film.

I'm *not* a verbal-linguistic learner. When I'm assigned a reading or a paper, I can read it. I can write it. But to be perfectly candid, I won't recall what I read or what I wrote in detail even a week later. It does not provide me, enough interaction with new ideas. It's not for me. It's not for Olivia either.

Olivia is a bodily-kinesthetic learner. Olivia is an interpersonal learner. Olivia is a visual-spatial learner. She loves to dance and go on walks while working something through. She loves to talk through what she learned in class right away, excited to verbally share the information she was given and come to deeper understandings through conversation. She appreciates drawing pictures or having pictures drawn for her, with short, concrete written statements, for both entertainment purposes but also to enhance her understanding of important verbal information.

Reading an article and writing a paper on it requires the ability to remember what was written in the paper and understand the content included. If the written portion of the assignment also requires an analysis of multiple sources or application of outside experiences, a higher level of thinking must be applied. The same basic forms of receiving information (reading) and demonstrating learning (writing) can be pushed further, by having students compare sources, apply information from texts to outside experiences, or write a critical paper to evaluate a text. Creating is considered the highest order of thinking on Bloom's Taxonomy, which can be achieved through creative writing that requires a knowledge and evaluation of texts.

There is a place for written work and text-based assignments. The vast majority of college-level assignments (in the social sciences at least) are based on chapters of textbooks and five-paged papers. During my time as an undergraduate student (and even going back to secondary education experiences) my assignments were “read this paper” and then “write a response.”. It’s a teaching and assignment format that is logical for professors to assign, and for students to complete. It’s straightforward, allows people to come to their own conclusions from a variety of professionals in the field, and allows for professors to use a simple rubric in order to assign a grade. I get it; verbal-linguistic assignments make sense.

But this style of teaching, learning, and evaluation style is limiting. I can personally attest that this assignment pattern does not get me excited about the content I’m being exposed to, the work I’m doing, or even allow me to recall information from a written source a week later.

I have had assignments where I had to create a cartoon-version of a philosophical paper. I’ve had to write a rap about inclusive education practices. I’ve had to create interactive presentations and games in order to merge my understanding of classroom experiences and education philosophies. I’ve had to create an interactive art project based on the central message of a children’s book. I’ve had practical experiences where I have had to teach lessons to primary students based on the theories presented to me in class. I’ve had assignments that appeal to all types of intelligence, multiple learning preferences, and that require a higher order of thinking and engagement. In some cases, the content I have been exposed to, and used in order to learn, has come with multiple modes of representation. Content representation is more than articles, chapters from books, and lectures.

Films are common in Education, and I do not just mean showing *Bill Nye the Science Guy* to a classroom of elementary students when no lesson plans are prepared. Films have been used to show perspectives about inclusive education, as a way to form deeper understandings of other's experiences, and as a model for inclusive teaching practices. Some of the films I've seen, engaged with, written papers about, or just watched for pleasure are shown to demonstrate how educational practices and philosophies began. Some require a critical lens, in order to understand how progressive education practices have evolved. Others share stories that will change the way we think about teaching or educational opportunities. Over the course of my academic career, I have watched films including *Educating Peter* (1992), *Including Samuel* (2007), *Intelligent Lives* (2018), *Who Cares About Kelsey?* (2013) *Autism Is a World* (2005), *My Classic Life as an Artist: A Portrait of Larry Bissonnette* (2005), *Autism in Love* (2015), *Deej* (2018) and *My Beautiful Stutter* (2019). These films have all had an impact on my development as an inclusive educator. I still remember the critical class discussions and assignments I engaged with based on these films. Off the top of my head, I struggle to recall details about the textbooks and articles I've read, never mind the assignments that went along with them (no offense to the professors who assigned them).

Since neither Olivia nor I benefit from reading and writing as the sole mode of a work, it did not make sense to me to have a project focusing on us be created or presented in that format. My experience as an education student has been a model for inclusive education practices. Why shouldn't my thesis project?

Chapter 3: ArTiStiC, Authentic, and Accessible

Film, By Non-Filmmaker

Before this project, I had no legitimate film experience. I've made a few short video projects for various creative assignments or for technology in education courses. With the exception of the professor grading the projects, they were never intended to be seen by anyone else. I'm thankful for the small viewership since anything I created previously was done using iMovie, my iPhone, and completed from start to finish in the span of a couple hours. Before this project, I had never filmed something with a larger audience in mind, with professional software, or with such an extensive timeline. I was not prepared for, nor had I anticipated, how vulnerable this project would make me feel.

There were some aspects of the filmmaking process that I was not prepared for or even considered. The classrooms that the interviews were conducted in all had old-school radiators, leading to some muddled or unusable audio. The top-hits songs and music that was playing in our dorm room ended up being mostly unusable, due to copyright laws. Hard Drive storage quickly became an issue with all of the hours of high-definition vlog and interview footage. Backing up school work, personal documents, systems, project footage, and project drafts required numerous external harddrives. The professional-grade editing software I used, Final Cut Pro, in addition to my completed filled harddrives, ended up being too much for my laptop to handle, killing my laptop about halfway through the editing process. I was aware that the editing process would be time consuming and mentally draining, but I did not believe there so many

"final" versions would turn into just another draft. Somehow, it's now a complete film (Appendix B).

Thirteen Perspectives

The film comprises two modalities: vlogs (or video blogs) and interviews. From October 2018 to May 2019 Olivia and I took videos on our iPhones or my camera, depending on the context. We would vlog our daily routines in our dorm room, walking to class, going to the gym or dance classes, hanging out with friends, and at university events. However, I could not possibly create a project that would share everyone's perspective who has a connection to inclusive mentorship in higher education. Capturing all of inclusive mentorship on a college campus and all of InclusiveU in one project would be impractical and unfeasible. I wanted to provide more perspectives than my own in order to bring heterogeneous viewpoints from peers in slightly varied roles.

During the spring semester, I sent out an email and Google Form to InclusiveU students and mentors, asking for my peers to participate in short interviews (either alone with me or with a group) about their experiences with mentorship. Eleven of my peers ended up participating, sharing their stories and even naming subtopics on mentorship that would be of interest before the interviews were conducted. In order to avoid limitations or stigma tied to established titles, I asked all participants, both matriculated and non-matriculated students, the same five baseline questions:

1. How is support provided or received?
2. When is support provided or received?

3. What happens when the amount of support is not beneficial?
4. What does the word “mentor” mean?
5. How is support returned?

From there, I let our conversations follow the direction of the interviewee. We would derail and talk about anything from laundry to acting classes to the best coffee on campus. Somehow, it all came back around to inclusive mentorship.

When the time came to edit all of the vlog footage and interview clips, I had to watch them all over again. I watched the roughly six-hundred hours of vlogs and the thirty hours of interviews, trying to pare down each clip into a meaningful sound (or visual) bite and the whole film down to less than an hour. This was a challenge not only because of the sheer number of hours this took, but also because of the internal debate I had with practically every clip. Because the clips all captured a memory moment from my life as a junior, every single clip felt meaningful and important to me. I had to decide what would be understood with limited context and what would be interesting or meaningful to my audience, not just me. There was also a challenge in knowing I had to show moments that I was not proud of to people I care about.

How will an audience who doesn’t know Olivia and I perceive this? How will this be viewed with this clip before it and that clip shown after? What will Olivia think of other people seeing this clip with this audio? What will Olivia’s mom, my family, my professors, or my supervisors think if they see this moment? What will a stranger think if they see this moment? How can I show moments of tension in our relationship and experience without making Olivia and I look bad? How can I make the final project both accurate, honest and respectful to the people in it? How can I be honest about the mix between good and bad days? How can I make

this film feel raw, and not just cute? How can I ensure Olivia and I have privacy but also share enough for our relationship and experiences to be understood? How can I make this aspect of our relationship known with these clips? How would others feel about hearing this clip from someone's interview? Will this person really be okay with this part of their interview being shared? How do I honestly show multiple perspectives with the interviews if there were things said that made me uncomfortable or that I did not quite agree with? How do I balance showing other's perspectives but keep my project my project? Is this my project? Whew.

With all of these questions in mind, I paused my individual editing process and shared a draft of the film with those who had participated in interviews, appeared often in vlog footage, and advised the project development. Editing further without initial feedback would have been an unethical move as a filmmaker and, perhaps, as a friend. I wanted to make sure the story I was telling was not just my biased perspective and that everyone was comfortable with the video and audio they were included in. After it was shared multiple times during private viewing parties and discussed extensively, I made changes. Then, I showed it again to a slightly wider audience and made more changes. Over and over.

With this feedback from the people who were closely involved in the project from the beginning, I was able to go back through the editing process with a fine tooth comb, taking out even split seconds of footage that someone didn't like of themselves and adding in more clips per recommendations. I wanted to put multiple perspectives on the creation and editing phases of this project.

Forced Triple

Olivia and I filmed our morning routines, dining hall trips, dorm hangouts, serious conversations, dance classes, late-night campus events with friends, sporting events, bedtime routines, arguments, homework (or our code-phrase, "taking the llama for a walk") sessions, and spontaneous dance breaks. We embraced this project to the point that "Camera" became our adopted third roommate, an embodiment of our dedication to sharing our experience.

Recording as much as we did helped Olivia and I feel comfortable around the camera - rather, Camera. We grew to not pretend or act when Camera was in the room with us; we grew to accept and embrace the idea that this project would be an honest portrayal of our experiences and who we were. If Camera was only allowed into our lives when we were dancing happily, this project would be a cute interpretation of college life. My intention was not to be cute.

Camera was an incredibly helpful roommate. Camera provided me with a way to deeply reflect. I was able to grow as a person, roommate, friend, mentor, an educator because of Camera.

But sometimes, I wished Camera would go away. I wanted to kick Camera out of the room and call them a terrible roommate. Filming my life for almost seven months was hard. There were certainly days where I did not want to film.

The truth is, Olivia and I did not film every second of our lives. Doing so would have been impossible for my hard-drive budget and too painful for our project mentality. This was a marathon of a project, not a sprint.

There were funny clips we shot together, or mini-movies we made just for fun that are not included in the final version of the film. We would honor each other when we asked for the

camera to go off, and asked no questions when one of us wanted footage to be deleted. There were moments between Olivia and I that we agreed to keep between us. We worked hard to find a balance between dedicating ourselves to this project and making sure this project did not become something we dreaded or saw as an invasion of privacy. Sometimes that meant kicking Camera out of our lives for a couple days. That was okay.

Accessibility

Film allows for the communication of ideas through audio, audio descriptions, closed captions, body language, music and sound design, facial expressions, movement, and dialogue. Films, with appropriate accessibility features, can be a more inclusive form of sharing information than an extended written paper; films more closely align with Universal Design standards. Universal Design "maintains that ease of use and accessibility for all can be included into the design…..without creating special accessible spaces [features, or practices] specifically for people with disabilities" (Katovitch, 2009, p. 17). My intent was to abide by all aspects of Universal Design for Learning, while sharing experiences that I personally did not think would translate well on paper. This project was designed to support Olivia and my engagement, representation, action and expression of learning. The final version includes closed captions and audio descriptions in order to ensure that the film is accessible to needs and preferences outside of our own.

Chapter 4: The (UN)Guide

When I started this project in October of my junior year, I aimed to shed light on inclusive living and maybe even provide mind-blowing guidance to future students in similar roles. This project was supposed to be a descriptive guide for students in inclusive mentorships on college campuses down the road. At the very least, I thought completing this project would bring a feeling of satisfaction for all that I learned during the experience and process. Boy, was I naive.

This project cannot serve as a guide that will be applicable to every student involved with inclusive mentorship on a college campus. There were no big "ah-ha" moments or one-hit-wonders in strategies to find success for every person. I take pride and am grateful that it includes thirteen different perspectives on mentorship. But it does not include enough perspectives, experiences, or situations for this to serve as a complete, practical, and honest guide. Instead, this project can provide counsel in that the questions, challenges, and successes that I found as an inclusive mentor were largely universal.

Personally, I found an odd sense of comfort in the fact that, when I finally realized *I* could ask for support *for me*, that no one has the right answers. No one ever knows what the right thing to do is, especially when experiencing a relationship and role that is oh-so complicated. I was never alone. From having conversations with my friends and peers specifically about mentorship, something we never causally did before, I learned that everyone was having similar internal debates. There were numerous grey areas and fine lines that none of us knew for sure how to navigate. Through these conversations, we became more comfortable about reaching out

to each other and asking for help. Our struggles and conflicts with mentorship became a non-taboo topic. None of us were alone. It's comforting to not be the only one who is lost. Even hearing "I don't know" over and over is sometimes helpful.

Even with our different roles, backgrounds, and identities we all, mentors and mentees, struggled with work-life balances, needing and seeking support, (un)assigned roles, self-advocacy, being transparent about college-life and evolving relationships to some degree.

Roles in Mentorship

"Mentor" is an incredibly vague and broad term; it "invokes myriad meanings" (Trowbridge et al., 2013, p. 1) – a fact that comes with benefits and limitations. Mentors can do anything and be anyone. But this also means that the role and responsibilities of a mentor can be confusing and overwhelming. Many mentors report that the first challenge they face in the role is contemplating their own concerns and questions "about their ability to do the job" (Sowell & Maddow, 2015, p. 5). It's hard to do a job that has a plethora of directions that you do not feel confident in, even if that plethora of directions allows some "free range" in your role.

Confidence or not, and no matter the field area of mentorship, or role, being intentional about mentorship is far more valuable than being an expert in the area (Johnson, 2016, p. 3). However, what typically "qualifies a person to become a mentor may be professional standing, personal knowledge, [or] life experience" (Trowbridge et al., 2013, p. 1). Mentors do not have to know everything about the path they are leading their mentee through, have the same identities as their mentee, or go into mentorship with strict role-responsibilities.

Some roles are designed and titled to provide support while others signify receipt of support. Mentees are scheduled to have support in classes, support in the university dining halls,

support with independent living in the dorms, and support in building social lives or attending campus events. Mentors are scheduled to be there for their mentee.

Yes, everyone has fun, everyone enjoys the good company, and everyone is there with good intentions. Yes, it's true that the definition of a mentorship requires one person to mentor another. That's kind of the whole point. But the problem is that a one-sided mentorship is taxing, not sustainable, does not support genuine friendship developments, and prevents people from seeing that they are worthy and capable of giving and receiving support from others. This, obviously, is problematic.

Everyone needs support, no matter your role (R. Vachereau, personal communication, April 7, 2019). As trite as it sounds, it's true. Many of the roles that come with mentorship are fluid, ever changing, and unassigned. Both the mentor and mentee have to support one another in order for the mentorship to remain functioning over time. Both the mentor and mentee have to trust that they are working to support their shared relationship. Sometimes this means taking on responsibilities that no one initially identified. Mentors support mentees. Mentees support mentors. Any healthy mentorship will reach this point. Otherwise, it's a one-sided mentorship that will not last.

Mentorships are relationships like any other: they take effort from more than one individual to build, they depend on a common purpose or goal, and they thrive in honest, collaborative environments. It's important for both members of the mentorship "understand their own role as well as the other person's role" (Trowbridge et al., 2013, p. 3). More than that though, it helps if both members understand their own evolving role and needs as well as the

other person's evolving role and needs. Relationships mature. Needs and goals change. Responsibilities adapt. Both individuals have to be prepared to support independence.

All people, whether they identify as a mentor or not, are capable of helping someone in one way or another (D. Voron, personal communication, February 19, 2019). The problem is that the fluidness of roles in a healthy relationship is sometimes an unspoken rule. In the context of mentorship, individuals who identify as mentees often see themselves only as support-receivers. It's not that people in certain roles do not want to help those that support them, it's that the titles and roles are constraining. Many of my interview participants who identified as mentees were thrown off by "how do you support others?", asking variations of "would that be a mentor question?" (L. Pecori, personal communication, April 3, 2019). Many of those that self-identified as mentors struggled with the reverse question, "How are you supported?". It's not that support for mentors did not exist - I can attest that it did. Mentors were not used to thinking about their own needs or desired supports in the relationship because their "job" was not to receive support.

Others seem to have found that the fluidity in mentorship roles became more acceptable (and expected) with experience just being in the mentorship relationship. Anyone can grow into exhibiting a mentoring role, supporting newer mentees with this same process towards independence: "it's a given that you have to be a mentor to help everyone move on" (A. Benbenek, personal communication, February 18, 2019). Mentees learn not only how to be more independent, but they learn from the ways they were supported (or not). Overtime, mentees become mentors; "mentoring begets mentoring" (Johnson, 2016, p. 13).

In every area, purpose, dynamic, or length of mentorship, mentorships are a "developing relationship" (Johnson, 2016, p. 24). The typical goal is independence, or at least providing

guidance on a similar path to the one a mentor previously followed. A "healthy mentor/protégé relationships involve a progression from relative protégé dependence at the beginning of the relationship to autonomy and self-reliance as the protégé grows into a colleague and peer" (Bey & Holmes, 1992, p. 12). The dependence on a healthy mentorship will gradually dissolve, meaning that the relationship between the two individuals will change.

Work-Life Balance

Keeping a work-life balance, when living collaboratively is technically the main aspect of your work, can be incredibly tricky. I couldn't just go home after a hard day "at work" because my dorm room was where my role was located. My "life" was shared with Olivia's because of "work"; my role was to support residential living and social life. For Olivia, her goals were geared towards independent living and social life (O. Baist, personal communication, February 9, 2019). College was first and foremost a social endeavor. Initially, it made sense to support these goals by going to all of the same on-campus events, clubs, and group-hang outs.

My life became shared with Olivia's. We had the same friend groups and almost the same extra-curricular club involvement. I love all of our friends, I do. But I also think we would have benefitted from having our own social lives that merged a bit, rather than being almost a complete overlap. Even the handful of times when I hung out with friends without Olivia, I felt *guilty*. I felt guilty for having a social life of my own. We should have set up social boundaries earlier on. No one should feel guilty for having a social life. I admittedly prioritized mentorship first and foremost, not letting my friendships, privacy and mental health be as much of a priority as necessary.

A little later in the year, Olivia and I set up boundaries for our time in the dorm room. We established “no talking hours” during the night and for “brain hours”, when I would try to get some homework done. These hours of quiet and independence were supposed to be for us to sleep and wind down. Naturally, I used this time to catch up on homework, go through a twenty-seven-step skin care routine, get another workout in at the gym, clean the room and waste hours on Netflix. This was not healthy. Do not do what I did. Set up enough boundaries to have a social life, have down time, do homework, *and* sleep. Please sleep.

Not Wanting, but Needing Support

From Day One in my role as a Residential Mentor, I knew I could ask for help. I was given phone numbers I could call or text at all hours of the day and night. I knew how to get help and had it offered frequently. I would respond to texts, calls, and emails, and had meetings to check-in. There were numerous supervisors, advisors, and professors that I knew I could count on.

But the problem was that when help was offered, I said I didn’t need it, or only accepted the bare minimum. I saw taking anything more as an admission that I was not qualified for this role, that I did not know what I was doing or that I was failing. Needing support made me feel inadequate. I saw receiving help, or even taking a step back, as compromising Olivia’s opportunities to succeed. We were so dependent on each other that I felt like I could not ask for help without hurting her feelings, sabotaging her confidence or damaging the friendship side of our relationship. Anyone, mentor or mentee can have these feelings. Mentees can feel that they “don’t do enough for people” (D. Voron, personal communication, February 19, 2019). Mentors can feel “conscious, or at least scared of ‘am I doing enough?’.... ‘am I being helpful enough?’”

(J. Ruiz, personal communication, April 5, 2019). It's not even that it *feels* like it's not enough. Sometimes the best one can do really is just "not enough for a lot of students" (J. Ruiz, personal communication, April 5, 2019). Mentees spoke on how they knew their mentors were doing everything they could to carry out their role perfectly, but it still was not always the right support, the right timing, or the right amount of support (M. Brozaitis, personal communication, April 5, 2019). Knowing this as a mentor can really tear you down.

I was stubborn. In the long run, my refusal to accept the support we really needed limited both Olivia's and my success. If you don't accept offers to receive support, it will stop being offered. My supporters and supervisors either thought things were better or had accepted that I was going to keep saying "I'm fine". That was hard. There were some really dark days. I neglected to take care of myself, and I paid for it. I couldn't help myself, and thus couldn't help Olivia. We both paid for my stubbornness.

There was a period of time when Olivia and I had to seperate. Our dependence on each other was out of control. We were forced to take time apart, to take a few days not in the same dorm, not in the same dance classes, not sharing meals, and not following the routines we had created together. Neither of us wanted separation, but it was needed for us both to grow as independent college students. Regardless of the need, it was traumatizing to be pulled away from my friend, my roommate and my mentee that I so badly wanted to support and be with. When we came back together, the support was forced on me. I was forced to take breaks. I was forced to focus on my academics. I was forced to check in with my mental health. Ignoring anyone's needs is not sustainable in the long run.

Now, I'm thankful that I have people in my circle that saw what I needed, knew me well enough to know how to help, and supported me no matter what. I'm not alone in this feeling that there are "times I felt like I wanted to be independent myself. But I know I would not have been successful without the support" (A. Benbenek, personal communication, February 18, 2019). It took me a long time to reach out for help. It took me even longer to ask for help for *myself*, be completely honest about what I needed and open about how I felt.

Mentors absolutely can face failures in the mentorship process. Facing failure does not revoke your role as mentor. These misdirections, mistakes, and failures are part of mentorship. Failing means that effort was given, and that an attempt at achieving something was made. Sometimes these failures can bring a person to feel like a "bad mentor". The phrase itself is an oxymoron (Johnson, 2016, p. 23). In order to be a mentor, a person has to have experience in the area they were mentoring. Mentoring requires that an individual have valuable skills and experiences that are worth learning from or aspiring to have. It's not possible to be bad at having positive skills worth sharing. If you're a "bad mentor", you're not really a mentor at all.

Supporting Self-Advocacy

Mentors do not do everything. Well, a good mentor does not do everything. A mentor has to "take the front seat and the back seat at the same time" (Fasching-Varner & Bible, 2011, p. 1). You have to provide enough support to lead, but also provide enough room for the mentee to grow and learn on their own. Doing everything would not provide room for independence and time for self-advocacy. "There's no reason to overstep if [you] don't need to" (M. Goldberg, personal communication, April 10, 2019). If you are "constantly over supporting, it's going to make that growth hard and it's going to make it harder for them to reach those goals because

they're not doing it on their own and not learning on their own" (J. Ruiz, personal communication, April 5, 2019). The whole goal is to support independence, not just to get things done.

In some cases, "when you give people too much help it kind of pushes them away" (R. Vachereau, personal communication, April 7, 2019), limiting future opportunities to provide productive, wanted, and appropriate support that can lead to success and independence in a healthy way. Being helped when it's not needed or wanted is not a good feeling. Feeling more anxious, frustrated, and unconfident (C. Payne, personal communication, March 4, 2019) all come with having too much support. It's challenging and awkward to turn away support, even it brings one to feel "incapable of things that [they] know [they] can do" (L. Pecori, personal communication, April 3, 2019).

Mentors may not know if they are providing too much in the moment. It's hard to speak up and say, "I can do this all by myself" (O. Baist, personal communication, April 7, 2019) in the moment. It's awkward and uncomfortable to tell someone to stop helping you, especially if it's that person's role to provide support. We all have to "work on speaking up beforehand" (L. Pecori, personal communication, April 3, 2019) and communicate our needs with one another. Easier said than done.

Providing too little support is just as harmful. Not having someone to support you and be there with you when you need the help can be stressful and upsetting (M. Sardino, personal communication April 9, 2019). Not having the right support can prevent a person from trying, from pushing themselves, or feeling like you have a community to support you. It can be isolating.

It's easy to think of someone else's need for homework help, support in a class, or company at a social event as having an easy solution. It's easy to wonder "why don't you just ask?" (M. Brozaitis, personal communication, April 5, 2019) until it's you that needs the help and you that has to ask. Even just hinting at a need for help can be uncomfortable (M. Sardino, personal communication April 9, 2019). The reality is that "[n]ot every student is going to advocate like that. Everybody is different" (J. Ruiz, personal communication, April 5, 2019).

For others, the feeling of having too little support can be comforting. It can feel good to know your own needs well enough and empowering to self-advocate in order to get the right support. For some, asking for help itself is a comfort (L. Pecori, personal communication, April 3, 2019). But sometimes, it's just hard to know what your own needs are, and even harder to know the needs of someone else; "sometimes you can't tell what another person needs or wants" (A. Benbenek, personal communication, February 18, 2019). A need can change frequently, and really just depends on the day or situation (D. Voron, personal communication, February 19, 2019). You'll never know what someone else needs. But essentially through trial and error and consistent communication the balance between too much and too little can be found. "It's important to know...what people do want help with and to communicate those things" (R. Vachereau, personal communication, April 7, 2019) with each other.

Dignity of Being a College Student

Every individual, whether they have a disability or not, has the right to have the dignity to take risks and make their own choices. In the context of college, dignity of risk might mean being honest about college lifestyles. Want to drink? That's your choice. Want to sleep till two o'clock? That's your choice. Want to spend your free time on Tinder? That's your choice. It's

college. Playing it safe is incredibly boring, not what growing up is all about, and will decrease your chance of making lifelong friends - especially during your college years (M. Goldberg, personal communication, April 10, 2019). It's important for parents, supervisors, mentors, and mentees to be aware that "the only way to be totally safe is not to have a life" (Katovitch, 2009, p. 224). Everyone, both matriculated and non-matriculated students should have equal access to informed dignity of risk.

In regard to the role of a mentor, dignity of risk doesn't mean turning ignoring risky choices. Nor does it mean influencing mentees to make poor choices in the name of risking a "college experience." None of my peers ever wanted to prevent someone they were supporting from enjoying college life. We did find that it was important to talk through the risk-reward of enjoying college life too much. By all means, live your own life; being a student-mentor does not mean you cannot make "risky" choices either. But never, ever, ever cross the line of peer pressuring another student into taking risks. Information and dignity are enough to allow a peer to make their own choices. (Also, follow the law).

Professional versus Personal Relationships

In this context, mentors were technically employees, working students. We were all hired to work specific hours, with specific people, and for certain tasks. Being hired implies that the relationship should be professional. But obviously (and thankfully) that's not at all how things played out.

Over time, the professional relationships shifted to personal relationships, often again shifting to genuine friendships. Literature on mentorship warns that "boundaries between personal and professional lives are becoming blurred such that one or both are uncomfortable, or

the mentorship is at risk of becoming something else" (Johnson, 2016, p. 204). Studies have even proven that student mentors struggle to "navigate between being a friend and acting more as a professional in their mentor role" (Freedman & Eisenman, 2017, p. 2). But honestly, on a college campus and with student-student mentorships, this blur is bound to happen.

It's natural when you spend time with another person and really get to know them (M. Brozaitis, personal communication, February 18, 2019). The reality is that "[mentors] are paid to work our shifts. We're not obligated outside of that to help someone with a paper or whatever it may be. When you're with these people every day you build relationships. You become friends...if a friend needs you, you help out" (J. Ruiz, personal communication, April 5, 2019). It's common for mentors to see a shift in their role as time moves on. When the mentality around roles changes, the dynamic of the relationship is bound to change too (Freedman & Eisenman, 2017, p. 2).

The line between friendships and mentorships might blur: "Just about all of my friends are a little bit of a mentor in an aspect" (A. Benbenek, personal communication, February 18, 2019). This can feel great! Who doesn't want another friendship? Who doesn't want to support a friend? There is a slight difference that needs to be maintained however in the instance "where a friend could kinda tag along and do everything with you, a mentor has to make sure that the person that they're supporting is safe and is making positive decisions" (A. Jandrew, personal communication, April 3, 2019). We can make sappy jokes about friendship all day long, but the complexity of mentorship-friendships does have to be acknowledged.

Not everyone forms a friendship with their mentor or mentee. Sometimes the relationships start as professional and stay that way, only working on classwork or homework

together. That's okay! It's better to stick to a functioning professional relationship than a forced friendship.

If a friendship does form, I can attest that this transition sometimes feels awkward. It feels awkward to be "working" (and sometimes paid) to hang out with someone you have become friends with. At the same time, we're college students, no one wants to turn down being paid. The title and role can make you feel stuck, like you're supposed to remain a professional relationship. I've found that it helps to embrace the personal relationship and genuine friendship. Do fun things! Hang out outside of "working" hours (J. Ruiz, personal communication, April 5, 2019)! Do things with other friends and mesh friend groups!

There are supposed to be four "phases" of mentorship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. I was supported to meet Olivia, cultivate a relationship of supporting her independence as a residential college student, foster independence and separate slightly, and then redefine my supporting role. No matter the phase, I tried to remind myself that "[o]ne of the major pitfalls in mentoring involved over-reliance upon one's mentor and failure to allow the relationship to grow and change over time" (Bey, 1992, p.17). Things were supposed to change. As Olivia and I got to know each other better, we formed a genuine friendship in addition to our mentorship and roommate-ship. This closeness, in addition to our admittedly sometimes unhealthy dependence on each other made it increasingly difficult to "separate" as the year continued on. We didn't want to separate. We had found routines that worked and struggles to grow friendship and decrease mentorship.

For the love of all things good, don't limit genuine friendship.

Chapter 5: A Sappy Conclusion

Now, I'm a senior. I'm throwing myself into situations where I am out of my comfort zone and accepting a spotlight that I previously would have shied away from. Embracing new opportunities feels easier now that I've addressed the stigma I felt towards seeking support. In fact, I've embraced opportunities and experiences that will push me to need support and am learning more than I ever have. I'm prioritizing friendships and my social life more, making a conscious effort to develop a healthy work-life and school-life balance. Living off-campus in a house is a major upgrade from living in a freshman dorm as a junior, and I'm enjoying every minute of it with my closest friends. I've learned how to be more in touch with my emotions, utilizing new hobbies and positive outlets to actually address my feelings and move forward.

I'm no longer a mentor in a technical sense. I'm enjoying being a friend that only sometimes takes on a supporting role. Olivia and I hang out regularly, window shopping in thrift stores, dancing all around campus, fulfilling our caffeine addictions, and collaborating on the editing process of our film. Things are different though. Our relationship has changed so that the goofing around is prioritized over the supporting. This is not better or worse; we both just have a new feeling about what our relationship is for.

Already, I'm seeing growth in Olivia as a sophomore in college. To be honest, seeing that growth gives me mixed feelings. Other mentors are already succeeding where I didn't. It's frustrating to see new mentors come up with ideas within a week that never occured to me over the course of nine months. The fact that Olivia even has new roommates serves as a reminder that our time as roommates is over, an obvious fact that didn't hit me until I returned to campus

again. But above all else, I'm proud of how Olivia has become more sure of herself and owning her new mini-goals to achieve greater independence. Within the first week of sophomore year, she was comfortable in her new living situation, making consistent efforts towards a mutually beneficial relationship with her new roommates, taking ownership of her daily schedule, and volunteering to show new students around campus. She's already giving back to the cycle of mentorship, sharing encouragement and empathy for the new students on campus.

Inclusion works - it's hard but it works. My experience as a Residential Mentor and sharing this research through film and writing was worth it. The success that Olivia and I found together, and the success that our eleven friends shared was made possible by open conversations, equitable support, shared responsibilities. It's a step towards fully inclusive higher education opportunities being an accessible opportunity for all students, regardless of (dis)ability. Inclusive mentorship on a college campus can be mutually beneficial, when the right conversations are had, and when all roles are equitably supported and valued.

Inclusive mentorship is complicated and challenging, but also amazing. Just because it works and is worth the dedication and extra effort does not mean that it cannot be viewed in a critical sense. If the purpose of further research is to support the growth of such mentorship programs it needs to be student-centered, and presented with honesty and in accessible forms. The confusion and stress in working to make diversity on college campuses is valid, and should be shared along with the proof of success.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Dorm Room Visuals

Image Description: Chart titled "When Kylie is not here or is doing homework" with 18 choices written on 18 squares of neon paper. Choices include options such as "hang out in the lounge", "listen to music", "go for a walk" and "text a friend". Two pink sticky notes are placed on top of two choice cards, with one of the sticky notes reading "right now I choose too…." and the other reading "up next I will…."

Image Description: Four pieces of paper are tabled to a wooden wall, the top paper reading "Right Now", decorated with different color arrows. Below this are three cards in a horizontal line "Free", "Will be free soon", and "Not free". There are also two sticky notes on this chart. The pink sticky note reads "Olivia is…" and is placed on the "Free" card. The green sticky notes reads "Kylie is…" and is placed on the "Not free".

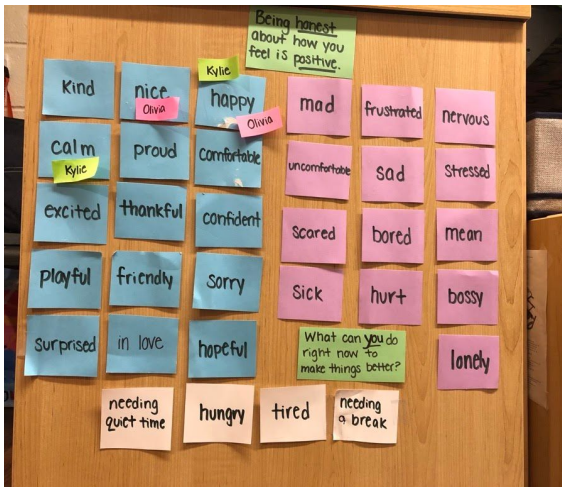


Image Description: A green card at the top of the chart states "being honest about how you feel is positive". Below this is a grid of smaller cards with different emotions, categorized by color. The blue cards have the feelings such as "positive", "happy", "friendly", "in love" handwritten in black. The white cards have feelings such as "needing a break", "hungry", "tired" handwritten in black. The purple cards have feelings such as "uncomfortable", "scared", "stressed". In the section of purple cards, there another green reads "what can you do right now to make things better?". Four sticky notes are also shown on the chart, two pink sticky notes read "Olivia", and two green "Kylie". The sticky notes are currently placed on the feelings "calm", "nice", and "happy".

Image Description: An index card is taped onto a wall, with the words "Fire Drill Steps" handwritten in black on the top. A series of steps follows in a numbered list, in different colors: "(1) Grab your shoes & jacked, (2) Leave the room, (3) Lock the door, (4) Walk down the stairs and out of Flint, (5) Sit on the sidewalk across the grass, (6) Wait". The list ends with a smiley face. Below this list "Kylie will hold your hand. If Kylie is here, ask a floor-mate for help!" is written with another smiley face.

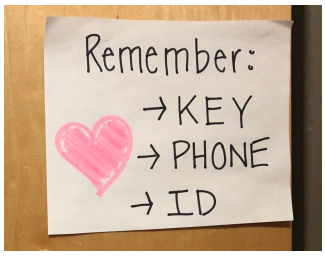


Image Description: A white piece of paper is titled "REMEMBER:" and has a bulleted list below with "KEY", "PHONE", "ID". A pink heart is drawn next to the list. The paper appears to be taped to a door.

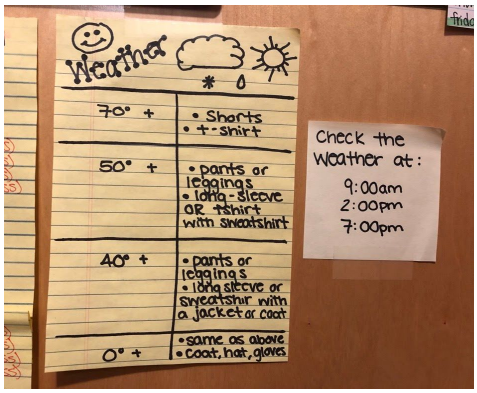


Image Description: A piece of yellow lined notepad paper is taped on a door, titled "Weather" in a fun handwriting with an image of a smiley face, cloud, snowflake, rain, and sun, next to it. The rest of the paper is broken into a 2x4 chart. The right side of the chart shows a temperature range (ie. "70° +") while the left side shows a list of appropriate clothing items for that temperature (i.e. "shorts, t-shirt"). Next this is a piece of white paper that reads "check the weather at: 9:00am, 2:00pm, 7:00pm".

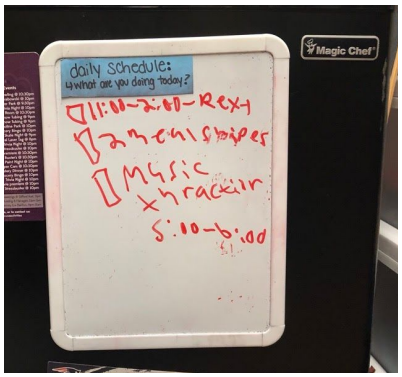
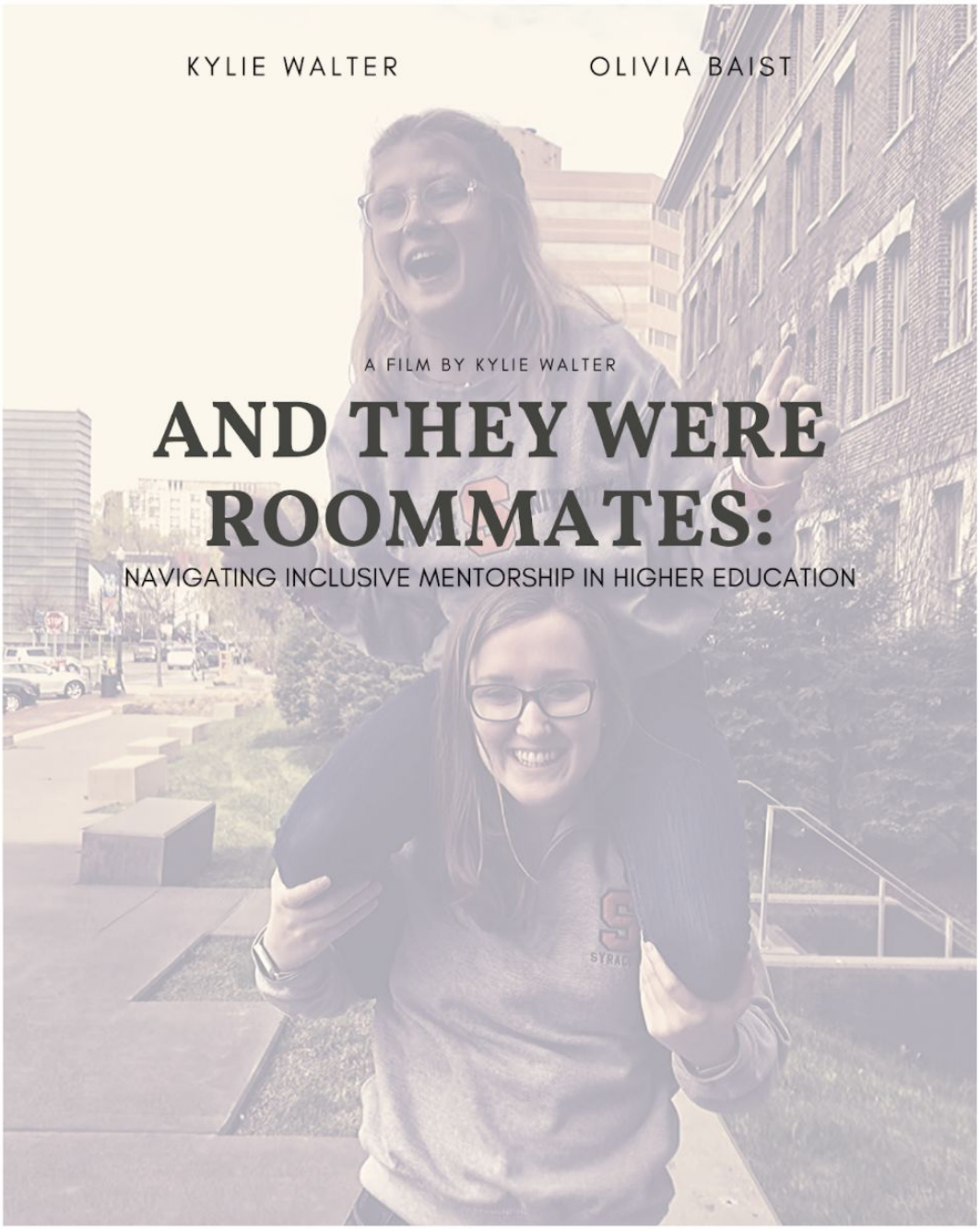


Image Description: A small whiteboard attached to a black mini-fridge as a blue piece of paper in the top right corner. The paper reads "daily schedule: what are you doing today?". Below this, in a different handwriting with a red whiteboard marker, a list of three items with unchecked checkboxes is written. The list reads "11:00-2:00 - rexy", "2 meal swipes", "music theater 5:00-6:00".

Appendix B: THE FILM

Please contact kyewalt@gmail.com for the password-protected film, available at: https://vimeo.com/kyliewalter/andtheywereroomates

Appendix C: Press Kit



USA | English | 2020 | 44 minutes | Documentary

Contact Kylie Walter (kyewalt@gmail.com)

LOGLINE

Two roommates, one with and one without an intellectual disability, contextualized by the eleven perspectives of other inclusive mentees and mentors, navigate the challenges, raw emotions, and unique successes of inclusive residential living on a college campus.

SYNOPSIS

And They Were Roommates: Navigating Inclusive Mentorship in Higher Education is a catalyst to transform the narrative around inclusive peer mentorship on college campuses. Mentorship supports independent living and real higher education opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Yes, it's worth it, but as with anything progressive, it comes with challenges. Following the evolving relationship between an inclusive roommate pair, Kylie, a matriculated junior majoring in Education, and Olivia, a non-matriculated freshman studying Studio Arts, filmed their own roommate conflicts, college social life, designing of independent living tools, dance parties, and self reflections. Contextualizing their experience, while adding in their own accounts, is the interviews of eleven other Syracuse University students, fulfilling roles as both InclusiveU mentees and mentors. InclusiveU is a program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities that creates real higher education access through flexible, individualized, and supportive opportunities.

And They Were Roommates provides insight and counsel to the questions, emotions, strategies, challenges and successes that are found when students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities work to foster symbiotic relationships.

CREATOR'S STATEMENT

This project is not about disability. It's not about Syracuse University or InclusiveU. It's not about inclusive education. It's not about Olivia. It's not about me. This project *is* about the relationship between college students in an inclusive higher education setting, learning how to support one another in a mutually beneficial and sustainable way.

And They Were Roommates was initially just supposed to just be a research paper, my senior thesis project. The video logs (vlogs) were just a fun way for Olivia and I to document our personal experiences and reflect on how our mentorship was evolving in a way that was conducive to both of our learning preferences. Creating a film out of my qualitative research and vlogs was a feat considering that no one involved in the project had any prior filmmaking experience. But I realized that this content was worth sharing and required a medium that would be accessible to multiple audiences, no matter how they may access information.

-- Kylie Walter

KEY CREW

Kylie Walter (she/her/hers)
Producer, Editor, Cinematographer, Cast Member

Kylie is a senior in Syracuse University's School of Education, majoring in Inclusive Elementary and Special Education. She produced and edited *And They Were Roommates* independently as a first-time, female, creator, referring to educational practices and other documentaries about inclusive education to guide the creative process. During production, Kylie was a junior and Residential Mentor for Olivia Baist. Kylie is originally from eastern Massachusetts and loves photography, running and following education policy.

Olivia Baist (she/her/hers)
Cinematographer, Cast Member

Olivia is a current sophomore at Syracuse University studying Studio Arts through the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education's InclusiveU program. Olivia co-filmed the video logs (vlogs) for *And They Were Roommates* as a first-time, female cinematographer that identifies as having a disability. During production, she was a first-year student and roommate of Kylie Walter. Olivia is originally from upstate New York and loves dancing, painting, jewelry making, and participating in clubs on campus.

SPECIFICATIONS

Runtime: 00:44:09
Project Budget: 1,258 (USD)
Completion: April 2020
Production: Oct. 2018 - May 2019

Student Project: Yes
First-time Filmmaker: Yes
Female Producer/Director: Yes

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Featuring	Olivia Baist	**Advisor**	Christy Ashby
	Andrew Benbenek	**Cinematographer**	Olivia Baist
	Meghan Brozaitis		Kylie Walter
	Madii Goldberg	**Producer & Editor**	Kylie Walter
	Ashley Jandrew	**Original Music**	"Tomorrow" by Lauren Walter
	Chloe Payne	**Music**	Courtesy of *Artlist*
	Laura Pecori	**Presentation Credit**	Renée Crown Honors Program
	Jon Ruiz		Syracuse University School of Education
	Matthew Sardino		Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education
	Sally Shehatou		Erin & Ed Walter (Mom & Dad)
	Rexy Vachereau		
	Dave Voron		
	Kylie Walter		