HopePunk: Persevering, Building Community, Chasing Hope



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Introduction and Background

The 5th Including Global Disability Summit (IDGS) [former University of Maryland Disability Summit] was held April 25-27, 2023, online via Zoom and, thanks to our sponsors, free for all attendees. A total of 539 individuals from 26 countries registered for the Summit, and attendance for various sessions reached capacity from 50-100 attendees. The sessions were on a wide variety of disability-related topics focused on the theme, *HopePunk: Persevering, Building Community, Chasing Hope.* What is HopePunk? HopePunk is a type of speculative fiction that stands in contrast to the imagined dystopias of tomorrow – and the real dystopian trends of today. HopePunk centers fighting for positive change, kindness as a radical act, and finding strength in the community to overcome challenges. The term was coined via a Tumblr post in 2017 by fantasy author Alexandra Rowland. It upends narratives of apathy, cynicism, and hopelessness by imagining worlds where collective rebellion and resistance lead to liberation.

The Pandemic, accelerating climate change, widespread economic uncertainty, supply disruptions, inflation, school and work moving back and forth between online and in-person, a land war in Europe. The last few years have been hard for everyone, but many of these problems have hit disabled people especially hard. We have to work to persevere, but we need to want more than to just persist. We need to figure out what we need, how to convey those needs, and how to achieve them in society, politics, education, employment, health care, and everywhere else. The theme for the 2023 Summit is a call for agitation: What can we do now so that the future is far better than the present for disabled people?

To answer this question, the Summit featured 20 presentations or panels plus four pre-recorded sessions, opening and closing keynotes, a poetic workshop, and a film screening. Fifty presenters, eight moderators, and over 25 volunteers, in addition to the seven members of the Summit Organizing Committee, pitched in to make this event possible. Complete Summit information, including the full program and presenters' bios, can be found on the IDGS website.

During the Questions and Answers (Q&A) portion of the sessions, attendees were sent a survey with four questions to identify any pressing needs, as well as what they took away from these presentations and how satisfied they were with the content. Following the Summit, attendees were asked to complete an online survey with 21 questions about their experiences, including accessibility, program content, and feedback for improving future Summits. The following report includes information from registration data in Eventbrite, chat exchange during Zoom presentations, and analysis of survey results in Qualtrics from 62 respondents (in-session survey - 19 responses, post-Summit survey - 43 responses).

The Including Disability Global Summit: Why is it unique?

The Including Disability Global Summit prioritizes accessibility, and therefore we have maintained a free and open space for scholars, researchers, activists, and allies. Presentations were not only research-based but also featured poetry, dance, sports, film, technology, and more. Founded by Dr. *Paul T. Jaeger* and Dr. *Stephanie J. Cork* in 2016, leadership has always been shared by disabled and nondisabled community advocates. In creating a free cross-disability, cross-disciplinary space IDGS is unique and would not be possible without the support of our wonderful sponsors. Donations from our sponsors support accommodations for attendees and presenters including American Sign Language

(ASL) interpretation, Black Sign Language (BASL) interpretation, Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) closed captioning services, as well as honoraria to recognize the time and expertise of our keynote speakers, and film streaming that helped to draw in a diverse group of attendees across the world. We strive to ensure that the Summit continues to provide a forum for engaging conversations and networking across and within the disability community not only in the United States but internationally as well.

Registrants and attendees: Who actually attended?

The Summit attracted **539 registrants**, representing researchers or teachers in an area related to disability, nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, corporate entities, health care service providers, federal, state, and local government agencies, libraries, and independent activists and advocates (Figure 1) from **13 states** in the **United States** and **26 countries** (Figure 2). A higher proportion of international attendees attended the summit this year than at the last summit held in 2021, when attendees came from 15 countries. Most attendees came from the United States (385), Canada (50), Germany (13), United Kingdom (11), New Zealand (4), Ireland (4), Portugal (3), Sweden (2), Israel (2), Brasil (2), and Australia (2).



Figure 1. Post-summit survey respondents' affiliations

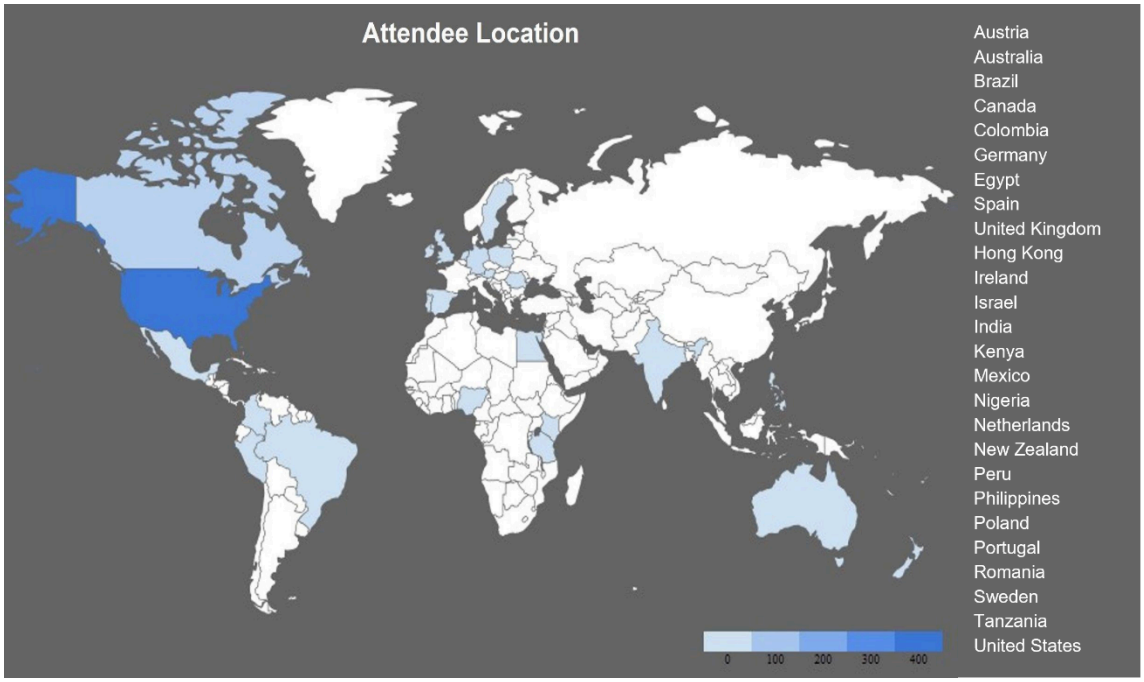


Figure 2. Locations from which attendees accessed the Summit.

58.3% of those who registered **(314 out of 539 unique individuals)** attended at least one day of the Summit, roughly the average rate of attendance[1,2] for free online events. 7.6% (41 participants) attended the full summit. Participants attended an average of three sessions. Note that this number does not capture registrants who may have attended the Summit with others (i.e., group viewings). Pre-Summit email communications also indicate that there were individuals who registered solely to receive access to the session recordings after the Summit; video views will be a good way to track the reach of the Summit after the event. Attendance by day is shown in Figure 3.

During the Q&A portion of the session, a short four-question survey was distributed to attendees through Zoom chat, and received a total of 19 valid responses. In addition, a post-Summit survey was distributed via Eventbrite and Twitter and received 43 valid responses, for a response rate of 8%.

60.5% (23 respondents) self-identified as either a person with a disability or a family member, spouse, or partner of a person with a disability. The breakdown of respondent affiliations is shown in Figure 4.

[1] Rappaport, R. (2020, December 18). *10 Virtual Event Benchmarks to Know for 2021*. https://blog.bizzabo.com/virtual-event-benchmarks
[2] Tiffany, A. (2019, April 4). *10 Webinar Benchmarks Every Marketer Should Know—GoToWebinar*. GotoMeeting. https://blog.gotomeeting.com/7-webinar-benchmarks-every-marketer-should-know/

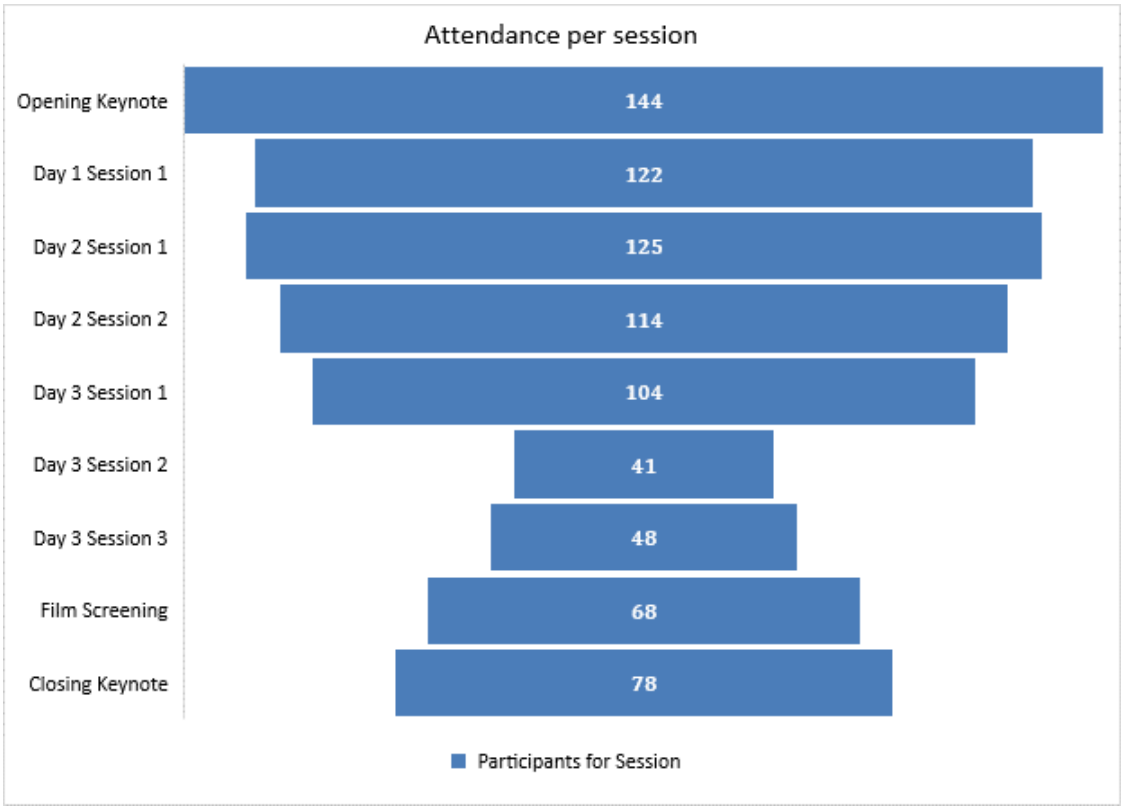


Figure 3. Number of attendees per session

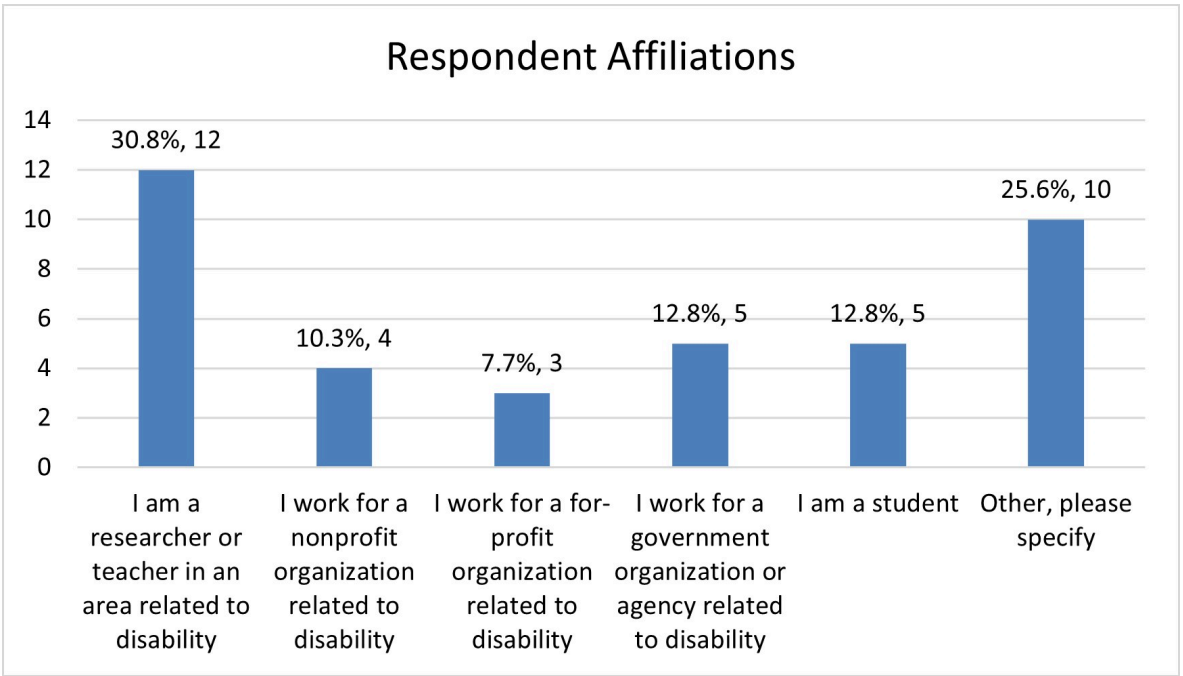


Figure 4. Participants demographics

Among the 25.6% who chose “Other, please specify” and provided additional details, there was a wide variety of affiliations, including a “curious learner,” support professionals in disability services at universities, university staff supporting diversity, equity and inclusivity, a consulting firm, a business related to disability, and retired Human Resources and DEI specialist.

41.5% (22 respondents) reported that this was their first time attending a Disability Summit, suggesting that the reach and appeal of the Summit continues to greatly expand, most likely due to the online format and free registration. Most respondents reported learning about the Summit from an email announcement (42.9%, 21 respondents) or from a colleague or classmate (22.5%, 11 respondents). The Summit website and Twitter posts do not seem to have been a primary mechanism for learning about the event.

The vast majority of respondents (76.9%, 30 respondents) attended from the United States and represented 13 different states (CA, DC, FL, IA, IL, MD, MI, NY, OK, OR, PA, SC, VA).

Summit Accessibility

94.7% (36 respondents) rated the accessibility of the Summit as either “Extremely good” or “Somewhat good,” with the remaining 5.2% (2 respondents) rating it “Neither good nor bad” or “Somewhat bad.”

28.2% (11 respondents) reported **using the CART closed captioning** and said they were “Extremely satisfied” or “Somewhat satisfied” with the service. There were no respondents who indicated they were “Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,” “Somewhat dissatisfied” or “Extremely dissatisfied” with CART.

10.3% (4 respondents) reported **using the American Sign Language (ASL)** interpretation during the Summit. 7.7% (3 respondents) reported being “Extremely satisfied” and 2.6% (1 respondent) reported being “Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with the ASL service. During the closing keynote session, an attendee shared their excitement by having a Black ASL interpreter. There were also live time reactions to having a black-identified individual interpret Janelle Monáe’s - Tightrope, stating this was a unique and exciting experience.

Survey respondents were asked for **additional comments** on how we could make the next Summit more accessible; responses were generally positive and highlighted the accessibility benefits of the online format. One respondent noted, *“I loved that you both made available the Zoom captioning AND Streamtext, and that the ability to save was enabled for both. They tend to offer different affordances for access, and I find I use both when they are available.”* See Figure 5 for the general layout of Streamtext, a platform for providing real-time closed captions by a CART professional. Users can customize the font size, background, text color, scrolling, hyphenation, and save the transcript.



Figure 5. Streamtext for providing real-time closed captions by a CART professional

Although the respondents didn't learn about the Summit from social media, several respondents suggested advertising more on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media.

A small number of survey respondents pointed out specific technical issues (e.g., suggesting presenters checking their microphones and making sure their presentation videos are closed captioned, plain text captioning option, difficulty locating the links to the presentations, issues with a screen reader when viewing PDFs) that we will look for ways to address in the future.

All three days of the Summit were well attended and the respondents rated highest the opening and closing keynote sessions, as well as the film screening of Dani's Twins. Three respondents watched the pre-recorded sessions, too.

Overall, participants were "Extremely satisfied" or "Somewhat satisfied" with the Summit experience as shown in Figure 6.

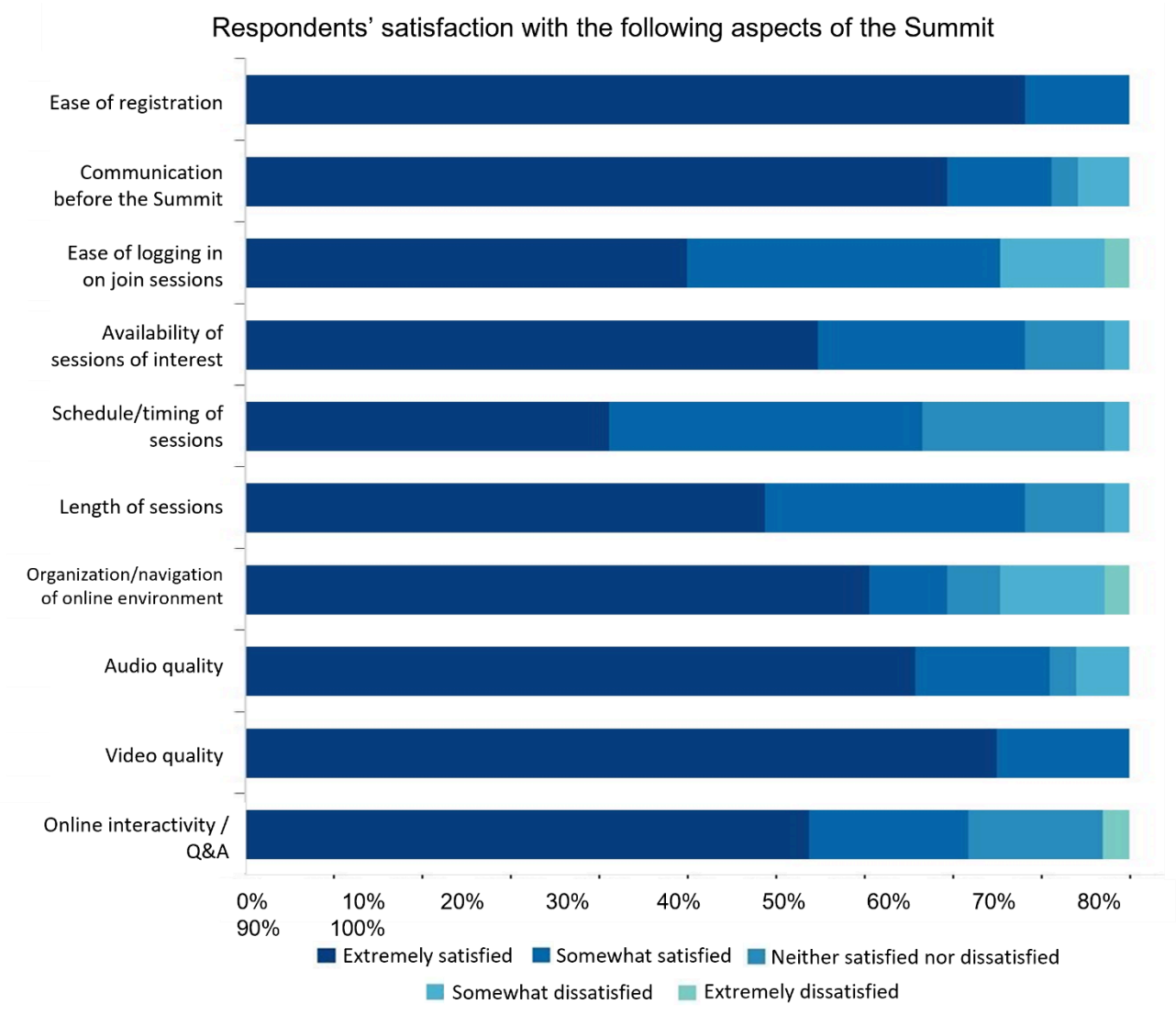


Figure 6. Respondents' satisfaction from the Summit

Positive Experiences & Takeaways

Overall, survey respondents were very pleased with the Disability Summit experience, and **94.6% (35 respondents) reported they would be "Extremely likely" or "Somewhat likely" to attend a future Summit**.

Survey respondents were asked to select their three favorite sessions of the ones they attended. Besides the opening and closing keynotes and film streaming, all of the presentations received fairly equal numbers of votes, but the most favorite session was *Using Technology While Disabled* (Figure 7).

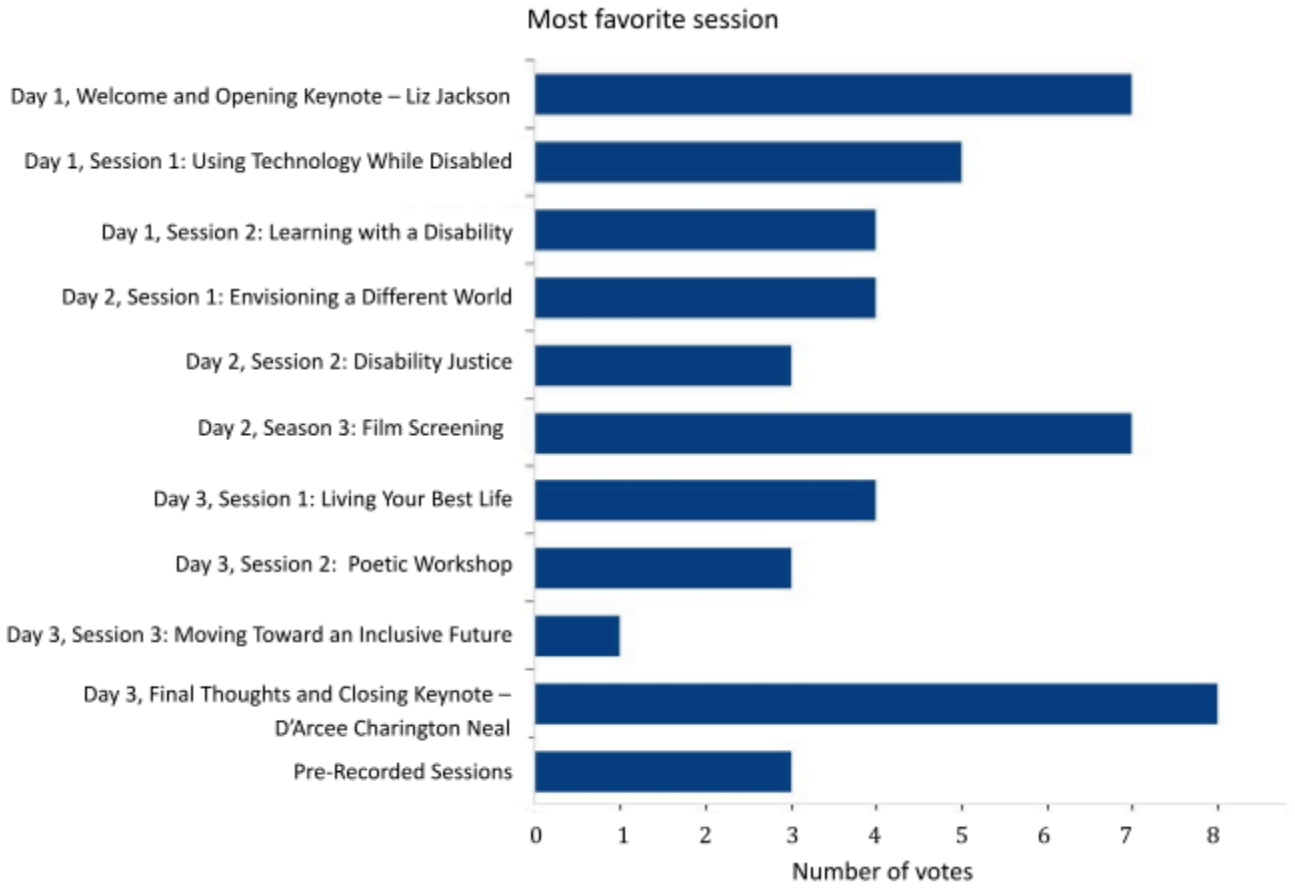


Figure 7. Survey respondents' votes for the most favorite session.

Many positive comments were received via both in-session and post-summit survey responses, in the Zoom chat function during the Summit, and by email after the Summit. Some common themes emerged, including:

- **Exchanging ideas.** During the Summit, there was a great dialogue and resources being shared among participants. Attendees were inspired with new ideas to improve their work for:

- **Teaching.** One attendee loved the term "disability dongle" (created by the opening keynote speaker Liz Jackson) and was planning to use it in their Disability Studies class. Another attendee emphasized the importance of Jackson's work as it *"matters and impacts us and elevates our work professionally and personally."* Another attendee is planning to spread the knowledge and experiences described in Dani's Twins film, *"The goal to have this film screened at our Medical School. It depicts an important message around pregnancy and disability that my own mother experienced and it's good to see a film that I can share with others going forward."*
- **Advocacy.** Another attendee loved the case study about demonstrating the role of Twitter in advocacy, especially the different approaches to online advocacy.
- **Professional development.** A chat discussion surrounded the audio descriptions and resources were shared regarding a certification program for Web Accessibility Specialist where they could get certified as International Association of Accessibility Professional or get training at the Audio Description Project. Another chat was devoted to the Personal Knowledge Management resources (PKM, e.g. software overview, paper-based PKM, a PKM introductory article) where attendees shared resources from their own experiences (e.g. Google Assistant) in addition to the presenter's information.
- **Miscellaneous.** Other ideas and exchange of experiences encircled to using technology in a disabling society (e.g. crip cyborg, disability at home, technology & disability), the future of interface, experience of students with diabetes in college, dating app for disabled communities, using plain language (e.g. in journalism, overview, need of plain language translator professionals, etc.), to name a few. What is more important, one attendee expressed solidarity and was *"genuinely delighted to see these topics […] being discussed. [You don't see it in a corporate world]."*

- **Organization and logistics of the Summit**. Attendees seemed very pleased with the organization and logistics of the Summit, particularly that all the sessions during the Summit were recorded as noted by one attendee, *"Fantastic presentation! THANK YOU!!!!!!! Glad this is recorded [and] I'm immediately thinking of all the folk* [sic] *I want to have see this."* Another attendee commented favorably on the translate feature of the IDGS website to meet the language needs of the international audience. This year, the Summit launched its new logo and one participants exclaimed, "LOOOOVE that logo!"
- **Content, approach, and accessibility of the Summit**. Attendees praised a variety of aspects of the conference content, including*"incredible level of speakers overall," "high level conference," "diversity of content,"* free attendance and *"Great set up, well moderated, good info from a diverse set of presenters (it wasn't just all academic Disability Studies or rehab engr*)."

  One respondent invited students *"who are new to thinking about disability"* to the Summit and showed them this venue as an *"excellent example of accessibility."* Another respondent found the material *"quite unique and interesting."* They appreciated *"different presentation techniques, and change-ups in the presentation format throughout the program."*

  Another respondent boosted their confidence in the things they do, *"I loved the talk yesterday about the future of interface. It makes me feel good to think that my struggle to make my one*

little product more accessible is just an interim measure on the path to a more expansively accessible digital future 😊*."*

- **Opportunities to explore new disability studies concepts**. The keynote speakers introduced new disability concepts and several respondents shared their insights and feelings:
    - *"Liz's presentation was out of this universe. I learned a lot of content, but it was so emotional that I also got to connect through my heart, not just my mind. Fantastic.*
    - *"The movie was really informative and inspirational, as was the Q&A afterward."*
    - *"In my mind, the closing keynote, D'Arcee was the star of the summit: Engaging, funny, and so informative! I could listen to him all day."*
    - *"It gives me time to view the world through different lenses and then gives me time to think and process that."*

  In addition to the keynote speaker sessions, respondents were fascinated by the opportunity to learn and experience new areas in disability studies through other sessions:
    - *"I learned a lot from the speakers - very rich perspectives as well as very diverse topics available so was engaging."*
    - *"The sessions covered such varied topics, I was continually running into my own self-limiting beliefs and biases. It was self-growth experience over 3 days. I'm still thinking and talking about my learnings!"*
    - *"Absolutely loved the discussions on capitalism/neoliberalism and how it directly impacts disabled individuals."*
    - *"I enjoyed listening to the different individuals' stories and learning how they navigate an able-bodied world."*
    - *"Learning so much about things I didn't know."*
    - "*Learning to live with disability."*
    - *"The various speakers giving various views, concepts, experiences. I found it interesting to hear about the theater experience for those with low vision. Where a scaled model was given to use for those with low visibility in the theater lobby so that anyone can understand the performance stage /space settings even before the performance begins."*
- **Building a community**. In addition to learning *from* the presenters and presentations, some respondents indicated that the Summit was a way to connect with them afterwards, either directly or through social media. During the sessions, several participants expressed a sense of community and belonging. One participant exclaimed, *"I love attending events and reading so many names I know! YAY!*"

Opportunities for Improvement

When asked what they would **improve for future Summits**, respondents again were generally positive (Figure 8); they simply responded with "*I don't have anything,*" "*N/A*," or praise such as *"It's great. Don't change much, please,"* or *"I thought it was so cool, and I liked the presentations I saw!"*



Figure 8. Word cloud created with survey respondents' comments (generated with WordClouds.com)

Several respondents rang the bell high and loud for **more opportunities and time *"meeting and mingling with others."*** One respondent even suggested bringing back the Summit **in-person**.

Critiques or recommendations included several responses suggesting in several areas:

- **Summit program**. Some respondents were overwhelmed by the number of presentations per day and the number of speakers per presentation as *"there was a lot of information to take in."* Another respondent observed the casual attitude of some of the presenters, *"Several of the larger group presentations where it appeared that there was very little coordination and planning beforehand, and the attitude appeared to be a little too casual."*

- **Access to the sessions.** Streamline the process of sharing the Zoom links; the availability of both Google doc and Eventbrite information caused confusion as links in Eventbrite were not working for some respondents.
- **Breaks between sessions**. One respondent wished to have *"longer bio breaks and generally less 'stress' with keeping time."*
- **Length of the sessions.** One respondent commented that many of the sessions were too short to fully discuss their topic.
- **Printable documents.** Another respondent suggested providing printable documents to participants for future learning and as guidelines to teaching others.
- **Technology needs.** During the sessions, attendees expressed via chat their technology needs to be provided by presenters and Summit organizers:
    - Presenters to turn on their cameras
    - Presenters to provide closed captions on videos they are showing as part of their presentations
    - Presenters to have the slides with larger fonts
    - Organizers to set up a community Jamboard with different spaces for reflection, takeaways, thoughts, links to share, etc.
    - Organizers to provide a web-based group gathering during an online conference using Wonder.
    - Organizers to enable saving the Zoom chat and Streamtext transcript

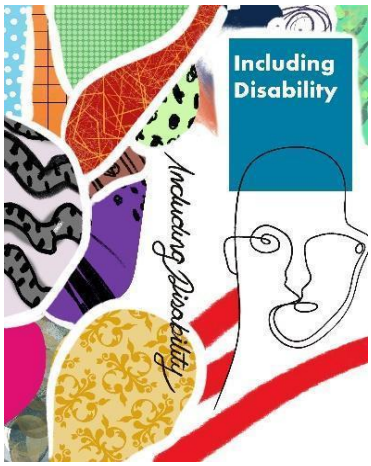


Figure 9. Cover page of the Including Disability Journal.

Perspectives singled out for future Summit sessions included more presentations related to intersectionality and discussions on class, race, gender, sexuality, and how capitalism impacts each; and addressing the issues affecting the disabled in low-income countries. After the closing keynote session with the "exceptionally knowledgeable" D'Arcee Charington Neal, one attendee noted, *"I want more! I appreciated the inclusion of such important scholarship and perspectives!!!"*

We would like to close the discussion of the chat discussions and survey results with this comment from a participant:

"The feeling of being part of a community, the way the backend people handled things so wonderfully, range of topics meant new horizons."

After the Summit, the IDGS Organizing Committee is continuously sailing toward new horizons and is looking forward to continuing building this community. While we are preparing for the next Summit in 2025, we invite you to continue the discussion via the *Including Disability Journal* (Figure 9). Please consider submitting a paper, reflection, poem, anything you like!

Summit Organizing Committee

The Summit organizing committee began planning for this year's Summit in September 2020. Members include faculty, staff, and graduate students from the University of Maryland and UMD alums from other institutions in Maryland and Ontario, Canada.

- *Dr. Paul T. Jaeger*, Co-Chair
- *Dr. Stephanie J. Cork*, Co-Chair
- *Dr. Sara H. Olsen*, Director of Content
- *Ron Padrón*, Director of Academic Involvement
- *Nedelina Tchangalova*, Director of Digital Initiatives and Fundraising
- Alexander Pilon, Artistic Director
- *Alex Peterson*, Director of Logistics

The committee was praised by many attendees:

- *"Also wanted to compliment you all on how well everything for the conference has been put together, from the logistics and planning documents to the emails sent out to folks that registered. It is really well organized and impressive!"*
- *"Continued compliments to you and the team! Everything seems to be going so well!* 💞"
- *"Wow! You are doing so much right!"*

Thank You to Our Sponsors

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Fearless Sponsors

- College of Information Studies (iSchool), University of Maryland
- President's Commission on Disability Issues (PCDI), University of Maryland
- Maryland Developmental Disability Council (MDDC)

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Thought Partners

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- Maryland Initiative for Digital Accessibility (MIDA), University of Maryland