Holding Space Season 1, Episode 4 Transcript
"Accessibility is Inclusivity"
Hosted by Dr. Joan Collier. Featuring Bill Welsh and Desiree White.

Dr. Joan Collier: Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us for another episode of *Holding Space*. I'm your host, Dr. Joan Collier, senior director of institutional equity and strategic initiatives for University Equity and Inclusion at Rutgers University. On this podcast, we make room for conversation and learning that covers all sorts of topics related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Each episode, I speak with the guests or guests about the specific work they do to advance equity within the Rutgers community. This episode we'll play a conversation I had with Bill Welsh, Associate Vice President for Rutgers Access and Disability Resources, and Desiree White, former IT accessibility analyst for the Office of Information Technology Accessibility. We recorded this conversation late this past summer, while Desriree still held that role, you'll hear us refer to her in that capacity. Throughout the episode, we examined the impact of the pandemic on accessibility and talked about what practices from the past 19 months we should hold on to. Bill and Desiree, so glad to have you all joining us today for a really important conversation that impacts large portions of our populations. One that some people will say no one talks about disability into which I would respond back to that people are engaging around ability and access and we are not paying attention to those conversations in those services. And so you to our primary people who represent areas of our campus that are our literal experts on this topic around services and experiences. And so I'm glad to have y'all here. At some point in grad school, I learned that ability is our most transient identity, some people would say because we move in and out of it very quickly, and you can anticipate at some point in time being in much closer proximity to a change in that status than you will not be having proximity to it. So with that, welcome to the show, and let's dig in. So this may be the first time that many of our audience folks are even hearing about your areas, they might be like, what? We have that? What do they do? Who are these people? And so can you talk us through your journeys on how you came to work at Rutgers and do the work that you're doing? I'm going to defer first to Bill.

Bill Welsh: Hi, how are you doing, Joan? Thanks for having us. Appreciate it, I came to I came to this journey about 25 years ago. And when when I get together with colleagues in the field, we all have this kind of different journey that we've all taken to get to disability or accessibility. And it's all very interesting and very different. But mine started as I got out of college and graduated from my undergrad degree, I worked in the mental health field. And I did that for about five years, both inpatient, outpatient, learned a lot, learned a lot about mental health. And after about five years, I realized that there were some things that were indicative of some burnout. So I decided that I maybe needed a little bit of a change for

because I just didn't want to go down that road. So believe it or not, I had no idea what I wanted to do. And I think most folks are in that, that when that as they get their career journeys. Most folks don't have no idea what they want to do, and just fall into it sometimes. And that's how I fell into this field. I started applying for different jobs, and somebody hired me to be a Director of Disability Services at a community college in New Jersey. And I had no idea what I was getting myself into I had no idea about other than the mental health field, what other disabilities existed and what that even entailed in higher education. So it was a grant funded position and lasted only a year. But I found I really loved the work that I was doing with students. I love the work I was doing with faculty and could really make a change. So I left that community college and went to Drexel University to be their first Director of Disability Services. And I was there for five and a half years. And then I got a calling to go to Pennsylvania and work at Penn State. And I was there for 14 years working with all 24 of their campuses across the state of Pennsylvania. And we made some really great changes there and and I really I'm proud of the work that everybody did there accessibility started to become more embedded in the culture. Unfortunately, we had to come to a place where we were sued by the blind organization nationally, and was one of the first suits across the country that a university was sued for not providing appropriate services for blind and visually impaired individuals. So unfortunately, we came at it because we had to, because of a lawsuit, but from that came some really great work and some great climate culture changes that are still in place at Penn State today. And then, about eight years ago, I was recruited to Rutgers, and to do a similar type of transformation at Rutgers. And we've, we've really hit the ground running and have made some major changes here at Rutgers as well, which I'll tell you about, hopefully, throughout our talk.

Dr. Joan Collier:Thank you, that is a fascinating journey, I'm always fascinated by how people got to their role, but how they got here, and then how the work that they've done in the past informed what they're doing here, given similar and very different contexts, and anyone who's been here for five days knows how extraordinarily complex our organizational structure is, how that can sometimes be a barrier to the work, because you can get work done in one area, and then another area, it's as if the work does not even exist. And you're like, I just did that and you're like, but not over here. So hang on to that, and Desiree, how did you get here? What's your work like?

Desiree White: Hi, so I kind of fell into this field by accident, like a lot of people do. And I experienced a little bit of hardship early on in life. And so I've always had this strong belief that we are, you know, meant to make the world a better place than it was when we got here. And so I thought for a while that maybe I wanted to be a social worker. When I graduated from undergrad, I took a bridge job, what I thought was gonna be a bridge job, to think about whether or not I wanted to go to grad school to get a social work degree. And the company that I ended up taking a bridge job with is this. It's an organization that used to be called a Mac, the Alternative Media Access Center. Now, they are called CIDI, the Center for Inclusive Design Innovation, they're based out of Georgia Tech. And they're sort of like a one stop shop for accessibility. And it's kind of fun, because while I was there, I actually produced materials for records before I worked here. But while I was there, I worked in the tech department. And so I got a good taste of what it means to work in digital accessibility, and how folks who have different types of disabilities use technology. Because one of the common things that we hear early on when you're talking to someone and they're not familiar with accessibility is like, oh, it never occurred to me that like, blind

people use Twitter to you know, blind people have smartphones, oh, I, you know, I never thought about how like a deaf person attends a virtual conference. And it's important to get your, you know, get your teeth familiar with those things. So while I was there, I got a taste of that. But they had other departments that handled things like Braille captioning, they had an assistive technology consulting organization. So if you needed some sort AT, because a lot of this assistive technology can be very expensive. They have a lending library, so you could try it before you buy it. And you could have experts consult with you to help you figure out what's going to be the best for you and your needs. So it was a really great place to cut my teeth on accessibility. And I did not realize when I was 22, and fresh out of college, just how lucky I was to be in that place. So what I thought was going to be a bridge job ended up being a five year stay with the organization. And then we moved up here to New Jersey, and I started working for Verizon. So I learned how to do mobile accessibility and testing for mobile devices there and really got my teeth sunk into QA work. And then after Verizon I moved to Prudential in a very similar role. And then finally, from Prudential, I came to Rutgers. And I was excited at Rutgers because it presented the opportunity to kind of build up an area because our department is very small, very new OITA was only established in I believe, 2016 2017. So we're relatively new for the history of the university. And one of the the pieces of feedback that we get most often is like, Oh, I had no idea that you existed. And so it's been exciting, and an honor and such a great thing for me professionally to be able to like build that up and try to like break through the silos of the university. And that's where I am now.

Dr. Joan Collier: That is really fascinating. So I did not go to Georgia Tech, but I'm familiar with it. I'm an Atlanta girl. So that's always fun to hear that they have all those cool things happening there. And yes, when I found out about your particular office, and then we learned about all of the workshops and skill building that comes out of there, I've taken two so far. And every time I then go to Twitter and like if you're at Rutgers and have not taken these workshops, you should go do that now. And so again, fascinated, I don't need them in air quotes, but it's I don't need them to function, right. But it's helpful and important that I understand how people how my practices can actually create access or create a barrier to someone else being able to engage my content on social media. I'm not quite there with all the things yet. But I signed up specifically for the social media class. So that I would know how to do that for myself and our comms team has been going through all of the different workshops. So it's a fascinating resource. Now, for the people listening and for me, how do your areas work together?

Bill Welsh: Sure, so believe it or not, my office and our CIOs office, actually created Desiree's area, and they used to report a dual reporting role to me and to our CIOs office. And that, that was a really great synergy. We started working together on accessible websites. We actually had our own complaint here at Rutgers on our websites and had a settlement agreement. And so I felt like it was deja vu from Penn State. But we we work really closely together. And because of the the complaint, we were actually able to build Desiree's office more so than it was in the past. And we got much more support from the administration. And I always believe in, you know, making lemonade out of lemons, you know, and that's something that I've found that people just don't know what they don't know. Yeah, when we get a complaint, it actually brings some of that it's not a negative, it's not that anybody did anything really wrong. They just didn't know what they didn't know. And we created the Office more, you know, and we've added been able to add physicians to Desiree's office because of that. But it's really brought a much stronger emphasis in the

university, to accessibility to websites to course accessibility. And I'm just excited because I now have somebody to refer some of the stuff that i use to with regards to accessible technology so that I don't have to do at all, but we work very closely together,

Dr. Joan Collier: you all can't see we're um, we are recording via zoom. So as Bill is talking, Desiree is chuckling fiercely, about him being able to refer people to an area that they can get some support for, which for me is a chuckle like, there's someone else. So let me go into some more work. And so I actually jumped ahead, can you help the people understand what your offices are actually responsible for? So they're like, there's these two people talking, but what exactly do they do in their areas? And so how are they different? So you got to some of that with the Office of oh boy information accessibility, technology, accessibility, Desiree

Desiree White: Information technology accessibility. So I have the perfect explanation for this. I like to explain that my office is kind of the clot that exists between all of the other offices. So we have radar, which handles primarily student accommodations. They oversee the offices of Disability Services at each of the Rutgers campuses. We have the I think it's the Office of Equal Employment that handles faculty and staff accommodations. And then my office is sort of in between. So our primary responsibility is basically all things digital accessibility related. That's us. So we're in procurement, checking to make sure that products and services are as accessible as possible, and that those contracts have accessibility clauses in them whenever we can. We're doing trainings to help people make content more accessible. And we're also working with Bill and the other relevant offices to address complaints as they come in when people do encounter difficulties.

Dr. Joan Collier: Okay, that's super helpful. Bill, what's going on over here in your shop?

Bill Welsh: Yeah, so my office is actually a fairly new office at Rutgers as well. We were formed in 2016. And the emphasis was to really pull – you mentioned the word silo. And I think that explains a lot of places in higher education. Right. And so one of the our previous Senior Vice President Barbara Lee approached me and said, You know, I'd really like to bring the Disability Services office at all of our campuses together, and form a central group that helps everybody do what they need to do, not only from a compliance standpoint, but it's the right thing to do. And prior to that, we worked closely with all the campuses, but there wasn't a lot of synergy. And there weren't policies, processes, procedures – things were being done differently, if anybody kind of understands how that's done in various institutions. And so our office works with the Chancellor's offices, the administration, but more importantly, the Office of Disability Services at each campus. And actually, even each Rutgers location, because people think that Rutgers is just made up of Newark, Camden, New Brunswick and RBHS, but we have locations all over the state. And so we also pulled those folks in and, and any student that comes to Rutgers can get the same services, the same process, the same procedures, we even keep the same data systems together. And so that their experience can be the same, as well as if they transfer from one location to another, they don't have to go through a whole new process, which some of our folks do. It's seamless, everybody does the

same thing. And we work very closely together. And so far, Central Office provides central support to all the campuses. So if somebody needs a sign language interpreter, or computer aided real time captioning, or captioning videos in their classroom, or some type of assistive technology, we have folks in our central office that work with the campuses to make sure that those services are provided. And we also have a central budget that helps to pay for all of those accommodations at every campus. And so we're kind of the glue that pulls everybody together. So we can ensure that there's not only compliance, there's lower risk, but also that students are served appropriately, we have a similar message, we have a similar process, we even now have the same website. So one, students can go to one website where they can get all the services, all the information, all the resources in one place. And so to me, it's kind of a model that we've created in just five years for what could be maybe at the other institutions. And, you know, I hear a lot that folks say, Well, you know, there's bad relations here, there. We just don't talk about that, you know, we just talk about, you know, how can we work together. And it's not about creating barriers, it's about breaking those barriers down and making sure that everybody is working together. So it doesn't matter what campus your at, it really, that's, that's kind of the beauty of what we've set up with Rutgers Access and Disability Resources,

Dr. Joan Collier: I really appreciate that. Talking about the barriers that are in place, and thinking about just having a singular place for folks to go when these things arise, as we are attending to the business, you don't have to go to a bunch of different places, there's a singular space, that can be a resource across what I call the big R. So wherever you are, within that R big R you just can go to this particular place. And I will be radically candid and say My mind is blown, that your area is only five years old, and it's structured space. Now, I will come to peace with that. But it's just like, woah, because people have needed services in a systematized way for much longer than five years. And that does not, did not exist prior to that. But as someone who studies, higher education, and particularly student development, I'm just like, wait, what? So let's talk accommodations and accessibility. What, how, how do you define accommodation? How do you define accessibility? And what's the interplay between those two? And what are the differences? I know accommodation, some of them are by law, because we have the ADA, we just celebrated a big milestone with that. But that's not the end all be all of accommodations. And even I know there are models for accommodations, there's the medical piece, which is like we think it's just compliance, but then there's the like, is just the proper piece to do when we think of a universal design that is just that you have the right is a justice perspective that you just have not just just is very dismissive, but that it is not just that it's a compliance thing is that it's a human thing to do to make sure that people as much as possible, have access and equitably to a space to a resource, etc. So what I'm asking you is talk accommodations, talk accessibility and the different frames that folks might be understanding it through so that we can better understand how to invite folks into conversation based on where they might be.

Bill Welsh: So to me, accessibility is as you said, is more of a compliance term. But it's really about when a person cannot participate equally or effectively In a program or an activity, or a course or a building, they can't get into a building. And so so that's, that's what accessibility the term really kind of comes to. And yeah, there are some legal ramifications of that. And we're required to do so. But the thing that I want people to understand is if we, the reason our office and Desiree's Office and Office of employment equity and academic labor relations, that the reason we have to provide so many accommodations is because there are barriers that exist for people to participate. And the accommodation is really to help

remove those barriers. Unfortunately, if the barriers didn't exist in the first place, we would have, we may be out of jobs, which would be okay with me. But I think we have pretty good job security at this point, because of what we deal with every day, unfortunately. So to me, accessibility is about equal access, making sure that people can get into a building, making sure that they can access equally, of course. And accommodation is unfortunately what we have to do when somebody can't. And the piece that if we can all be proactive, and make sure that we build and develop things to be more accessible from the get go, we would have to do much less accommodations. And so if a video is captioned, we may not have to caption it later, when students just enter the class and all of a sudden, the professor goes, Oh, I guess I have 30 videos that need to be captioned. And the students already in the class, you know, that's the wrong time to think about it, you know, accommodation or accessibility. And I'll let Desiree talk about it because I know she has some terminology too, and would like to break it down.

Desiree White: So if this was a live training, this is when I would whip out a little basket of blueberry muffins for you guys. Because I love the blueberry muffin metaphor. So there's this idea in the accessibility community. And this gets brought up a lot, I wish I could remember who created this, I have it written down somewhere, it's not in the top of my head. But trying to fit accessibility into something after you make it is like trying to smash blueberries into the muffins after they've already been baked. Right? It's just not going to work. It's expensive. It's messy, it doesn't look, it's not appetizing. But if you build it in from the beginning, then you get this awesome little blueberry muffin in the end, right. And the other thing that we'd like to talk about a lot in this space is the curb cut effect. So the idea behind this is that the idea is that when curb cuts were first introduced, I believe it was around World War One, you had folks coming back with mobility issues using wheelchairs. And so they were having a hard time getting up on sidewalks. And so when you add in these curb cuts, it's a thing that's done in the name of accessibility, right, these curb cuts are here so that wheelchair users are able to get up and down as needed. However, what we find frequently is that things we do for accessibility go on to benefit other groups of people, right. So those curb cuts don't just get used by wheelchair users, they also get used by people who are riding bikes, people who are pushing strollers, people who have bad knees, and just don't feel like dealing with a curb that day, right? Like there's all sorts of uses. So it's important to keep those things in mind. Because ultimately, at the end of the day, accommodations are the patches to fix the problems that human beings encounter. But accessibility is building it in so that there are as few problems as possible.

Bill Welsh: And the other piece that I wanted to throw in there, that was excellent. Desiree, by the way, is that I also find that that folks blame people with disabilities that it's their problem. When it's everybody's problem, you know, it's and if the barriers didn't exist, there wouldn't be issues, whereas, we wouldn't have to do things. So if people put curb cuts in and caption their videos, or made sure that their software was accessible, or they're, you know, rather than an image of a PDF, which we encounter each and every day that you can't read, if you're blind, and using a certain specific software, there would be no need for for a lot of accommodations, there would still be need for some accommodations, but there would be very limited because, you know, you can't build for everything. But if you can really make some time and get people to understand it's their responsibility. It's not the person with a disability problem. It's everybody's responsibility to make sure that they think about accessibility, they think about design, they think about

usability, you know, how is somebody who's in a wheelchair going to use this, or I hurt my back a couple months ago, and there wasn't a building that I could get into that had stairs. I just didn't go. So there are businesses that I didn't go to because there was no way to get into the door because all they have are stairs. So you know, it's also good business. It's also good for everybody.

Dr. Joan Collier: Yeah, I am just again. Yes. And yes, yes. So the Blueberry metaphor is super near and dear to my heart, one because I love a blueberry muffin. But when we call diversity, equity and inclusion, we talk about baking it in, that is not sprinkled on top, it's not the cream you – you actually have to bake it. Because if you don't, it's secondary. And so what happens is that people build something, create something, have an event. And then it's after the fact when the critique rightfully comes of what this can do to that can do it. And then there are folks who are upset because they've been brought, it has been called unto them. And what I offer back to folks is, whenever people bring you information about what was not accessible, be it intellectually or physically or in any sort of dimension, that they're bringing you feedback, that's helpful. So part of what we say is thank you. And then we lean into curiosity, and say, Ah, interesting. One, I didn't know that that was a thing. I apologize. Two, let me figure out how to get this done. And now people know who to go to to think about as references and resources, who can help. But then also, what I wonder, where else am I planning? I need to include this in my thought work, and so had a conversation with Anna. And part of what her questioning for folks was around capacity building waswhat did you do to be ready? And so what I asked folks listening in or consuming this right is what are you doing to be ready to create spaces that reduce and or eliminate barriers for access around the senses around ability. And even if you can't get to all of them, be aware of where the barrier is, so that you can continue to think about it. So there are some things and I'm still learning tremendously about ability, I can function without any assistance. And I don't even know that all my language is the most accurate, but that's kind of what I have for it for now. But when our colleagues in disability and accessibility are talking about access, we're moving into our pandemic piece neck, but even as the pandemic moves on, the thing that you hit with your elbow, or I should say that I hit with my elbow to get me into the building. That's actually for people who use wheelchairs. It is a feature that was added to a building, the doors so that they have to come up try to pull it and then get in and here I am just like tapping with my elbow waiting. Moving in that you know we've had to grab. But again, it's useful for people for whom it was not primarily designed. When we think about snow on the ground and clearing entrances, we clear steps first, don't clear the steps clear ramp, because guess what, I can click clack my legs right on up that ramp the same way I can click like up the stairs. But people who use a device that rolls actually can't get up the stairs in their device, so clear the ramp. So thinking of who's at the margins, right, versus who we're centering, right? If we do it this way, if we design it in such a way that is exclusive to these people, then let's think about who we're leaving out. And who can't then get it and or what we need to build in so that they can access it, right? Yes. Okay. So we're still in this pandemic, it's still going on, all around us. And we went to all remote basically, there were very few people who remained on campus. And I do want to stop, acknowledge that there are people who remained on our campuses through the entire pandemic and never left. But for many of us, we went wherever we call home or somewhere that's not here. And we got on our computers, and we made it do what it do for the past year. And I don't know how long in some of the practices have probably been really helpful and made learning and the work environment a little bit more accessible. So if you can talk about what those shifts were, that have been helpful and help us think about or consider what practices we actually should keep as we move forward and transition to more in

person work and learning. Because I think that conversation will be helpful to have here. So People can just hear it, or take it in or make sense of it and then wrestle with it where they're like, I hadn't thought about that. So Bill and Desiree, take it away, what do people need to know?

Bill Welsh: So I think it was a difficult time for everybody. Everybody, when we went to completely remote, they just, they just push things out, you know, things just started to go online, and they just added to courseware. And they added to proctoring. systems, they added all kinds of things. Very few thought about accessibility. Very few thought about how is somebody with that has a barrier to this going to use this right. And so there were lots of challenges. I think we worked through a lot of those. And it was a great time for us to provide some insight to folks, you know, things like Desiree and I worked very closely together on making sure that our commencements, the first year were accessible, we had already chosen a software package that was not accessible. And, you know, we found out about it afterwards. So we had to kind of figure out and work with the vendor to try to figure out how is this going to work? Right. And it was just, it was something that people just didn't think about, right? It was, it was we put up these proctoring systems, and we didn't think How is somebody who has some mental health issues a veteran, uh, whoever, who has difficulty, you know, with a camera going to feel about being proctored by a system that is so intrusive. And, you know, it wasn't just people with different abilities, or veterans, it was all of us kind of like, how are we going to act on camera. So it was a difficult time. But I think from that we also had some really great things that happened. So a lot of our students, we surveyed all of our students, we also surveyed faculty halfway through the pandemic to say, Hey, how is this going? What's going on with you? What happened when things went online? And what did we do? Well, what did we learn from it? And what did you like about it? And what did you not like? So the students surveyed said that they liked the flexibility of being online and being in online learning, especially for those courses that were recorded. They said it was most convenient for them. So students that in the past had difficulty taking morning classes because they were on medication that made them drowsy in the morning, or students maybe who had ADHD, who, who their medication wears off at three or four or five o'clock in the afternoon. And they couldn't take evening classes, online, asynchronous recorded classes allowed them to take their classes whenever was convenient for them. But so did everybody else. People had kids, people who had to work or people had to support their spouse or their partner, it worked for everybody. And so to me, those were some of the really great things that we had happen, setting their own students being allowed to set their own schedules where if it was an in person class, that was not the case. They also really liked the professors were using creative solutions. So when the when the proctoring systems went down, and we weren't able to use one of the systems because of security reasons. And many professors realize that you know, what, this is really a lot of work that I have to review 150 students taking my exam to make sure they're not cheating, maybe there's something better I should be considering. And so many professors went to different types of grading, they resorted to getting away from the proctoring systems. And frankly, they used a lot of universal design techniques that Desiree and I have been talking about forever, right? They use different assessments and skill building quizzes, instead of giving two or three exams in the semester, they broke things out into periods of time, do some papers, and do some group exercises and different ways of learning different ways of assessing. And they actually had to think outside the box, what a concept instead of standing in front of everybody lecturing, right. I mean, we've all been there. We've all been in those types of classes, and those just didn't work for online learning. And, and students said, actually, they really appreciated when professors said, this. I'm new to this. I'm getting

used to this please bear with me as opposed to them just kind of trudging through and doing a lecture without realizing this isn't working for anybody, they appreciated when professors checked in with students, you know, occasionally and said, Hey, how's this going? Or let's think about together how we can really work with this class. What do you like? What do you not like? What can I do differently? And they actually, the next semester implemented a lot of those, those those things. And so students, I think a lot of students really learned better. Now there are some that absolutely did not. But there, there are some some that really enjoyed the flexibility really enjoyed the idea of different modes of grading and flexibility within the courses. And the other thing that I think happened a lot was captioning for videos was turned on and zoom. And students had automatic transcripts and captioning for everybody. So we have professors that said, this work for my ESL students, this worked for somebody in a noisy environment, I had students telling me that I really liked the captioning, can you continue to do that? And so can we take those things that we learned during the pandemic, even when we go in person, and figure out how can we incorporate those into our regular everyday classes? Because I think that we did some really great things.

Dr. Joan Collier: I think so too. I mean, that and I love Twitter. And so part of the content. I mean, I love Twitter. And so part of the conversations plural that were happening in that space. I would probably sometime over the summer, when folks knew for sure that most colleges were moving. Were returning to physical in person spaces. We're about you know, there are people in disability communities who have been asking for some of these practices and thought patterns for a very long time, who were told it was not possible. The pandemic happened and miraculously, overnight, right? I mean, I'm being facetious here, these transitions happen, there are stumbling pieces happening, but the institutions are making progress to move in a direction that can be adapted so that there's more access. And as now many colleges, if not all, who are it who are designed to be residential, and a person returned to those, the call has been, please do not forget that you adopted practices that were helpful, that were inclusive, that remove barriers, that we do not want to lose simply, because we're returning to in person, so we still need captions in the classroom, to have it, you providing those notes is still helpful, utilizing the microphone is still helpful in a space. And so just thinking about, you know, not abandoning new practices, because what was familiar is returning because we don't have to actually return, we can move forward, right? We don't, we don't have to go back, we can go forward and maintain some of those practices and habits and thought patterns, right? Because shifting minds is important. It's not just do I have to it's how can I? How can I remove a barrier? Desiree did you have something else to add to that piece?

Desiree White: One thing I would encourage folks to think about, is to think about the things that you do for accessibility sake as an act of respect, and maybe even an act of love towards our beloved community. I know in the DEI space, we talk a lot about microaggressions, right? And a lot of times, it's so tempting to think about accessibility in these little micro spheres of like, okay, so this one PDF isn't accessible, right? It's not really a big deal is it? It doesn't seem like it is when you are somebody who is able bodied, but when you have a disability, and you keep encountering these barriers over and over and over again, potentially 1000s of times in a day. Like imagine how quickly that frustration stacks up. Imagine how quickly you no longer feel like you were a part of that Beloved Community. Disability is the only marginalized group you can join at any point in your life. It is one of the marginalized groups that you

were more likely to be a part of as you get older. And depending on what study you look at, it affects about 20% of the population. Right? So you have a normal class with maybe 30 students. If 20 How many of 20% of that, like how many students? I can't math. I'm not a math person. It gets even bigger when you go into those big like entry level classes, right? You have a freshman class, you have 300 students, 20%, 60 students with some sort of a disability in that class, potentially more, some of them who maybe aren't severe enough to be legally recognized, some of them who have not yet realized they have a disability. So taking that time to build in that accessibility in your course materials, or in your communications is an act of love towards your community, it's a way to make people feel included and respected and appreciated. And it's just the right thing to do. You know,

Dr. Joan Collier: So many pieces there. I'm an external processor. So my mind is just, it's just all over the place here. So one is this act of respect. It's just an act of respect, we have a workshop called centering respect that we do with our organizational unit. So departments academic administrative, so that they can help think through how you center respect in the way that the organization operates in its climate, staff, to staff, faculty, to faculty, staff, to faculty, faculty to student across the range. And then you layer that in with this micro aggressive experience. Like it's ongoing and continuous that you didn't have the thing ready, you didn't have it ready you didn't have it ready you didn't have it ready and people experiencing folks saying, it's not that big of a deal, I didn't know it's not that big of a deal did becomes very frustrating. And you're frustrated with that one person, and then this broader, Rutgers doesn't care because they don't do the things. But

Bill Welsh: Joan, to that point, one thing that Desiree and I get asked all the time, and it's a really big pet peeve of mine is when we start talking about accessibility, and this happened in many contexts during the pandemic, well, how many students are we talking about? my thing is, is one too many. is one too many, you know, like, Why does it's and you take that, and you times that as Desiree said, the amount of times in in you have five classes, and the amount of times you get a PDF that's not accessible, or, you know, you can't enter you can't, students couldn't even in some cases, take their test, because of the proctoring system, because they're software didn't work with it. And nobody thought about that, you know, we just, we just rolled these things out. And, you know, so to me, it's always when somebody asked me how many I say is one too many. And it is, one person that can't get to your class, or can't access something, is one too many.

Dr. Joan Collier: Let's talk about the tools that are available for folks to learn, and get on board, get on the good foot and be able to expand out their capacity be able to be ready, so that when they are building out a program, when they're hosting that next conference, when they're thinking about how to put something online, because they're really proud of the department member who got this research grant? How do we do that I'm gonna shoot over to Desiree, because, again, I've sat up in these sessions, and I love them, I share them. I take the PowerPoint that you sent afterward with the class and share with my colleagues and my colleague over in McNair. Hey, Dr. Chism said that she shared it with her students, and that her students were preparing their presentations for their national conference, and that the students were able to incorporate the practices around colorblindness. And what's the low vis low vision? Is that the proper

term? Okay, I'm seeing a headnod that they were able to incorporate those into their presentations that many of them said, we just didn't know like, we knew we need to be thoughtful about it. But we didn't actually know how to do it, or like, just what to do. And so I share it with my crew over in DICE and University Equity and Inclusion. So we're on brand so Desiree what do these look like where can folks find them, help the people help themselves?

Desiree White: Well, thank you so much for sharing. First of all, we are super proud of our trainings, we've gone from about 50. In spring of 2019 to almost 600 this summer. So we're really proud of how far things have come and if you want to see what kind of trainings we're offering, you can head to OIT's website. So you can find us at a11y@rutgers.edu And a11y is an abbreviation for the word accessibility. It's an A and then 11 letters and then a Y. It's also a really useful hashtag. So for those of you who love social media, like Twitter, if you search for hashtag, a11y that's going to be your gateway into the accessibility community. It's a great way to ask questions to find resources to find experts in the field. Another option that you have here at Rutgers is dq University. This is something that's provided by my office and I love it. So we have a deal with DQ. And you get access to the full curriculum, which is a value of about $315 per year if memory serves. And so it's self guided trainings on all things accessibility. And the thing that I really love about this is that throughout these trainings, they have quizzes to check and make sure that you're actually understanding the content. And at the end of most of the modules, there's like a printout that you can stick out. So if you're someone who is constantly doing PDFs or PowerPoints, you can go take those courses, and then get yourself a little handy dandy thing that you can stick up by your desk so that you can keep you know a little checklist or something. Another thing that I think is really worth mentioning, is TLT. Teaching and Learning Technology. They have an online teaching certificate, and within that they have an entire course on accessibility. So for those of you who are going to be teaching, and especially if you're trying to do a remote entirely or hybrid, I cannot recommend that enough. Dena Novak is I believe the one who teaches those courses.

Dr. Joan Collier: Now, you know, I had to take notes, okay, because I'm looking around DQ University, I was thinking Dairy Queen, I get excited, I love ice cream. But I've signed up for it, I've made my profile. So I have access to that. And I'm working on getting my capacity up so that I have this all together. You can also find information about this race team in the diversity Education Network page on our diversity website. Her office is a part of the diversity network which is a network of diversity educators across Brunswick, Newark Camden and our RBHS. So if you go to that page on diversity website, you will see a wonderful picture of Desiree, you click by her name, you will see all the offerings that that office shares, Bill, people want to know what tools they need to have and where they can find them. So what would you tell?

Bill Welsh: Yeah, so our Rutgers Access and Disability Resources webpage has a lot of resources for students, faculty, visitors, people that are putting together events. And so we created a lot of things for teaching and, and accessing information for online courses. So we have the information, we have the 10 commandments on communication for people that want to learn more about communicating with people with various abilities. We have an accessibility checklist that you can go through your course and say, Alright, what do I need to do when I'm building my course, you can then take that and do our accessibility

training for how to create an accessible online course, it talks about even how to create accessible graphs, how to create accessible Word documents, PDFs, you name it, any kind, of course material, how to caption videos, we also have instructions and videos on for professors that are adding extra time to their learning management system like Canvas or Blackboard, it gives you specific instructions on how to do that if you have a student with a disability in your class that needs extra time, we have adding live captioning two online courses. It talks about the different assistive technologies that students typically used like Kurzweil or screen readers or whatever it may be Jaws, we have a whole section on creating accessible math, because math is really difficult for somebody who's blind or visually impaired to, to use. And so we have a whole whole section on how to do that for professors. And we've actually had professors use that to create their courses and make them more accessible and they'd had no idea prior to having a student in their class. So we have information on if you're holding an event, you know, and you want to make sure that your event is accessible, things as an event planner that you require to make sure that your event is accessible. So lots and lots and lots of resources on our website. And we also refer a lot to the resources that Deseret mentioned within her office and the trainings that they do as well as TLT because we refer faculty there all the time.

Dr. Joan Collier: I am so full, so full in all the best way it's been such a fun conversation. fun, informative, reflective. Insert another adjective there, folks, it's just been really good to sit down with y'all and chatted up in a way I think that is actually accessible to folks and a good entryway or an invitation for folks to continue these conversations because there are multiple conversations that are coming out of this one. And so since we're done with this part, let's head on over to office hours. This segment of this show is called Office Hours. It's where we ask our guests to share resources that will help us learn more about the topic of the episode. Desiree, we'll start with you, what do you recommend our audience listen to read or watch, that will give them a better understanding of disability and accessibility.

Desiree White: So I've got two resources for you. One of the things that I like to stress because we encounter a lot of shame and the accessibility people feel bad, but they don't know how to make something accessible or what to how to start thinking about that. There's a really excellent book called accessibility for everyone by Laura callback, that is kind of an introduction to accessibility, it's really thin, it's not an expensive book at all, it's a really great place to get started. If you feel like you have kind of a foundation level knowledge already, and you're looking to maybe find some industry experts and explore some some different topics. There is a YouTube channel called Accessibility talks, and they have a lot of really great videos where folks will come on and give, I think it's typically about an hour long presentation on topics of their expertise.

Dr. Joan Collier: Bill on to you what additional resources do you suggest for our listeners?

Bill Welsh: So I mentioned earlier, the Rutgers Access and Disability Resources website. And we have so many resources there that I think people are using, I do get a report that our numbers have gone through the roof in regards to faculty actually looking to find out how to make their courses accessible. And so

that makes me very happy. So I would suggest going there first, because I really think that people need to know more about what we do, how they can interact with our office, how they can interact with Desiree's office. So I would, I would really highly recommend they go through our resources page on records Access and Disability Resources. The other thing, there's so many other resources on the web that you can learn about how to make websites accessible, how to make and create accessible web, Word documents and PDFs. Just Google it. I mean, that's, that's what I tell my kids just google. So that, that that's something that's really important. And And if somebody does experience a barrier at Rutgers, we have created a barrier Buster website that, you know, let's say you're walking by and Joan, you mentioned that you push the button with your elbow, and that button doesn't work, you can go right on to the website on or go onto the app and just report it. And somebody from facilities or somebody from our compliance office will take a look at that. So we created that. So somebody could report barriers as they're going across campus so that it's much easier for things to happen. The other thing to mention is if somebody experiences a barrier for our websites, at the bottom of all of our websites at Rutgers, there's information for how to report a barrier on the website and please, you know, share that ink share that information, because people may not know that their websites or there's a problem with a specific website out there and we want to know that information so we can fix it.

Dr. Joan Collier: I want to thank Bill Welsh, Desiree White for that wonderful conversation about how to make our physical and digital environments more inclusive. For a deeper dive into holding space, please visit our website@diversity.rutgers.edu backslash holding space podcast. You can find breakdown of each episode that include reflective questions, terminology, and the Office Hours resources. And if you have questions about anything we've talked about, reach out to us at diversity@rutgers.edu. That's all for our show today from the holding space team. Thanks for listening.

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