

Student Empowerment Day 2024

By Sara Lynch

On February 26, 2024, I had the opportunity to represent SUNY Canton at “Student Empowerment Day,” organized by the New York State Disability Service Council. Students and support staff from across the state of New York gathered in the Legislative Office Building in Albany to show that students with disabilities are an important part of higher education, and that our support programs need more funding.

Currently, there are 94,735 self-disclosed disabled students in college across New York State, a number that grows every year. With current funding of \$4 million, this translates to just \$42.55 for each student in need of support.

I was never diagnosed with a disability in primary school, nor in college when I first enrolled. However, when I went back to school in my thirties, I realized that I was struggling in ways that weren’t typical. Fortunately, in working with my school’s counseling center, I was referred to accessibility services, where I found support and understanding for my individual needs and developed a plan for future success. Without their help, I would have dropped-out after my first semester. Instead, I finished my Electrical Engineering AAS; will complete my Electrical Construction & Maintenance certificate in May ’24, and I am now applying for internships to embark upon this summer.

Last year, a SUNY-wide program for students to become disability ambassadors was introduced, and I immediately applied to take on this role. Since then, I have spoken with many folks about the need for accessibility services, particularly for non-traditional students who may not even realize that they would benefit from them.

It was incredible to be a part of a group advocating for support at our Capitol in Albany. I urge you to read up on Student Empowerment Day and to ask your elected officials to help make college more accessible. \$42.55 is NOT enough to help those who need it. Disability support is an investment in our collective future, and we need to fully fund it.

