

# UW-W Participatory Action Research for College Students with Disabilities

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## Introduction

Despite the high prevalence of U.S. college students with disabilities, estimated at 21% of undergraduates (National Center for Education Research, 2024), this population is under-studied. College students with disabilities are often invisible to educators, leadership, and policymakers in higher education (Moriña, 2022). This presentation sheds light on this gap by providing insight into an ongoing undergraduate participatory action research (PAR) collective centering disability justice.

## Researcher Experiences with Action Research

**Participatory Action Research (PAR)** is research with the community not on the community and employs a model of research mentorship where mentors engage in distributed leadership and power sharing with the group. Student researchers are equal in the decision making process in every part of the research process. The primary goal is to impact change in the disability community alongside the production of knowledge.

**Critical Reflexivity:** Student researchers reflect on data in relation to their own experiences and assumptions regarding disability.

- Fully immersed in the research process as participant-researchers
- Reflect on their own impact on data and leverage meaningful engagement with peers with disabilities

## Research Questions

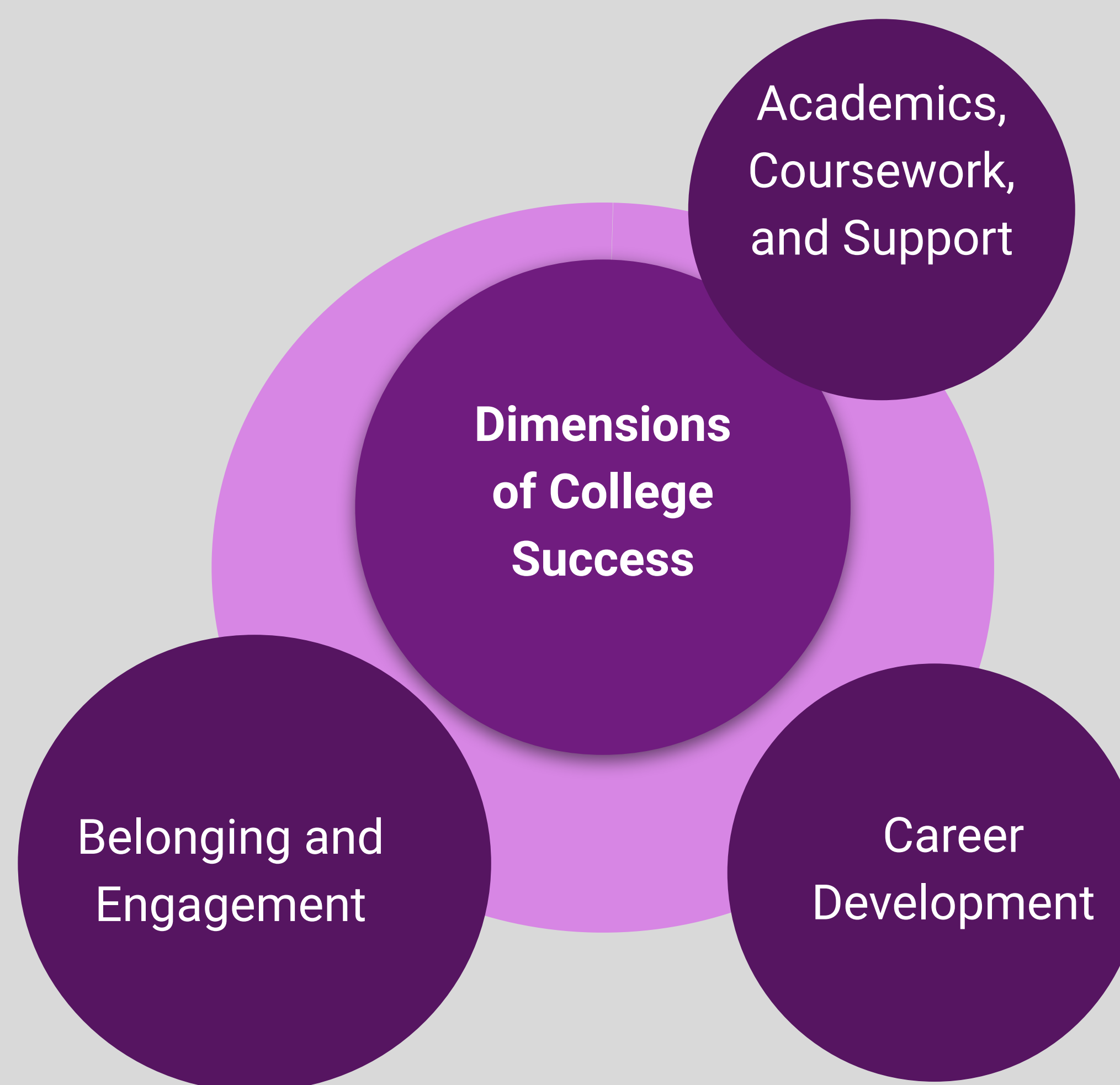
### • General Research Question:

1. Do students experience or perceive ableism on campus?
2. How do these experiences impact feelings of belonging on campus and future planning?

- **Sub-Research Questions:** What are barriers and experiences along three central dimensions of college success (Morningstar et al., 2017)?:

## Example Interview Protocol Questions

- Has the need to show or obtain documentation of your disability(ies) impacted your ability to receive supports and services?
- Have you made friends with a person or people with a disability? What was that experience like, And did it differ from making friends with a person without a disability?
- Have you ever disclosed you have a disability in an interview or on the job? Did you have to negotiate for work related accommodations? Please explain.



## Emerging Themes

## Participants

Thus far, nine participants have engaged in an interview, who have different majors with different racial, gender, and disability identities. Additionally, students participate in many areas, including athletics.

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01

Disclosure and Vulnerabilities

- Persisting stigma around disability
- Threat of not being believed: Cut across social, academic, and career dimensions
- Burden of Proof: Students responsible for 'legitimizing' needs for accommodations and supports

02

Identity Development and Self-Advocacy

- Early experiences with ableism K-12 schooling
- Opportunities for self-understanding
- Relevant intersections and managing multiple stigmas
- Differences in age/ journey to diagnosis or disability-identity

03

Strategic Resistance to Ableism

- Sharing experiences with others
- Proactively collecting 'proof' of disability', accommodations, and communicating needs with instructors
- Mitigating discrimination by accessing formal supports (e.g., CSD, mental health provider)



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