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PRESS RELEASE

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Western Carolina University University Participant Program First Postsecondary Program for Students with Intellectual Disability to be Accredited by New Agency

Boston, MA — May 10, 2023 — The Institute for Community Inclusion’s (ICI) Think College and the *Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation Council (IHEAC)*, a new accrediting agency for postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disability (ID), jointly announced today that the [Western Carolina University \(WCU\) University Participant \(UP\) Program](#) is now fully accredited for the next seven years. The WCU UP program is the first program to be accredited by the council.

“The Council is delighted to award accreditation to the outstanding WCU UP program and appreciate their willingness to be the first to undergo accreditation. The documentation provided, site visit, peer reviewer report, and strong support from the university clearly demonstrate that the UP program merits accreditation,” said Stephanie Smith Lee, IHEAC Board President.

Two [Think College National Coordinating Center \(NCC\) Accreditation Workgroups](#) created the [model program accreditation standards](#) as part of a grant from the US Department of Education. The [current NCC Accreditation Workgroup](#) developed a process for accrediting programs using those standards, including a self-study, guidance manual, site visit, and plan for piloting program accreditation.

Dr. Kelly Kelley, UP Program Director and Professor at WCU said, “I am so proud of our

program. I believe that receiving IHEAC accreditation highlights the quality of the educational experience our students have here at Western Carolina. I am pleased to be the first program to go through this newly established accreditation process. While the process was rigorous, it is clear that our field will benefit from the collaborative, thoughtful approach to accreditation.”

The [Think College NCC launched the IHEAC in 2023](#) with pioneers in inclusive postsecondary education, all of whom are parents of people with intellectual disability. Madeleine Will, Stephanie Smith Lee, Elise McMillan, and Tom Sannicandro are the founding board of directors for the Council. Read more about this historic accomplishment in a recent [Inside Higher Education article](#).

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About the Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation Council

The Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation Council (IHEAC) accredits programs serving students with intellectual disability and is an independent, non-profit, accreditation agency based in Massachusetts.

About the Institute for Community Inclusion

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities in their communities through training, consultation, clinical and employment services, and research. ICI is a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities based at the University of Massachusetts Boston and Boston Children's Hospital.

The Think College National Coordinating Center (NCC) is a project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, funded by the US Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education (Grant No. P407B200001). Think College is dedicated to developing, expanding, and improving research and practice in inclusive higher education for students with intellectual disability.