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Introduction

The 4th University of Maryland (UMD) Disability Summit was held April 12-14, 2021, online via Zoom and, thanks to [our sponsors](#), free for all attendees. A total of 872 individuals registered for the Summit, and there were 469 unique attendees for at least one of the three days of sessions on a wide variety of disability-related topics focused on the Summit theme, *Access and Crisis: Disability and the Collapse of Everything*. Complete Summit information, including the full program and presenters' bios, can be found on our website, <https://pcdi.umd.edu/summit-home>.

Following the Summit, attendees were asked to complete an online survey about their experiences, including accessibility, program content, and feedback for improving future Summits. The following report includes information from registration data, informal assessment by the Summit coordinating committee, and analysis of survey results from 108 respondents.

What Makes the UMD Disability Summit Unique?

The UMD Disability Summit prioritizes accessibility, and therefore we have maintained a free and open space for scholars, researchers, activists, and allies. Founded by Dr. *Paul Jaeger* and Dr. *Stephanie Cork* in 2016, leadership has always been shared by disabled and nondisabled community advocates. In creating a free cross-disability, cross-disciplinary space the UMD Disability Summit 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 and Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) closed captioning services, as well as honoraria to recognize the time and expertise of our keynote speakers, who help to draw in a diverse group of attendees. We will strive to ensure that the Summit continues to provide a forum for engaging conversations and networking across and within the disability community in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia and beyond.

The Summit Program

In total the Summit featured 20 presentations or panels plus five pre-recorded sessions, opening and closing keynotes, a spoken word workshop, and the President's Commission on Disability Issues (PCDI) Awards ceremony. 44 presenters, 10 moderators, and over 25 volunteers, in addition to the 8 members of the [Summit Organizing Committee](#), pitched in to make this event possible.

Who Registered and Attended?

The Summit attracted **872 registrants**, representing nonprofit and religious organizations, K-12 and higher education institutions, corporate entities, health care service providers, federal, state, and local government agencies, libraries, and independent activists and advocates from 32 states and 15 countries.

53.89% of those who registered (**469 unique individuals**) attended at least one day of the

Summit, roughly the average rate of attendance^{1,2} for free online events. 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 Summit after the event. Attendance by day was as follows:

- **Day 1:** 292 attendees
- **Day 2:** 283 attendees
- **Day 3:** 301 attendees

The post-Summit survey was distributed via email and social media and received 108 valid responses, for a response rate of 23%.

51.9% (56 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 on Table 1.

Affiliation	Count	Percentage
I am a researcher or teacher in an area related to disability	18	16.67%
I work for a nonprofit organization related to disability	11	10.19%
I work for a for-profit organization related to disability	4	3.70%
I work for a government organization/agency related to disability	13	12.04%
I am a student	10	9.20%
Other, please specify	52	48.15%

Table 1. Participants demographics

Among the 48.15% who chose “Other, please specify” and provided additional details, there was a wide variety of affiliations, including:

- Independent activists and advocates
- Unaffiliated individuals with disabilities
- Parents of individuals with disabilities
- Support professionals in disability services at universities, government agencies, museums, and commercial entities
- University staff in units other than disability support services, such as housing, academic advising, facilities, and admissions
- Employee at a law firm that represents people with disabilities

69.05% (87 respondents) reported that this was their first time attending a Disability Summit, suggesting that the reach and appeal of this year’s Summit had greatly expanded, most likely due to the online format and free registration. Most respondents reported learning about the Summit from an email announcement (41.79% 56 respondents) or from a colleague or classmate

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/>

(35.07%, 47 respondents). The Summit website and social media posts do not seem to have been a primary mechanism for learning about the event.

The vast majority of respondents (84.20%, 91 respondents) attended from the United States, but there were also responses from North America (non-USA, 12.4%, 13 respondents), Europe (2.78%, 3 respondents), and Asia (0.93%, 1 respondent). Respondents from the U.S. represented 16 different states (CA, CO, DC, DE, IA, IL, IN, MA, MD, MI, MO, NE, NY, PA, WI, and WV).

Summit Accessibility

97.17% (103 respondents) rated the accessibility of the Summit as either “Extremely good” or “Somewhat good,” with the remaining 2.83% (3 respondents) rating it “Neither good nor bad.”

21.9% (23 respondents) reported **using the CART closed captioning**; 17.15 % (18 of 23 respondents using CART) said they were “Extremely satisfied” or “Somewhat satisfied” with the service, while 3.81 % (4 respondents) said they were “Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” and 0.95 % (1 respondent) was “Somewhat dissatisfied” with CART.

4.7% (5 respondents) reported **using the American Sign Language (ASL)** interpretation during the Summit, and all five reported being either “Extremely satisfied” or “Somewhat satisfied” with the service.

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, *“It was the most accessible conference I have attended.”* On the day of the Summit, another attendee noted via the chat function: *“This conference has by far been the best event I have attended in the last year in terms of accessibility, with **clear reader friendly slides, captions and interpreters.** Thank you.”* (Fig.1)

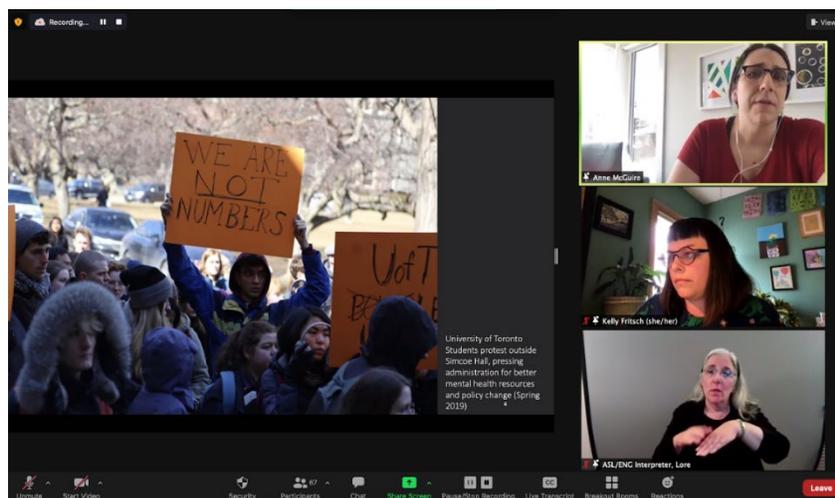


Figure 1. Accessibility via Zoom: user friendly slides, ASL interpreters and CART closed captions provided

A small number of survey respondents pointed out specific technical issues (e.g., difficulty locating

the links to the presentations, issues with a screen reader when viewing PowerPoint slides) that we will look for ways to address in the future.

Overall, participants were “Extremely satisfied” or “Somewhat satisfied” with the Summit experience as shown on Figure 2.

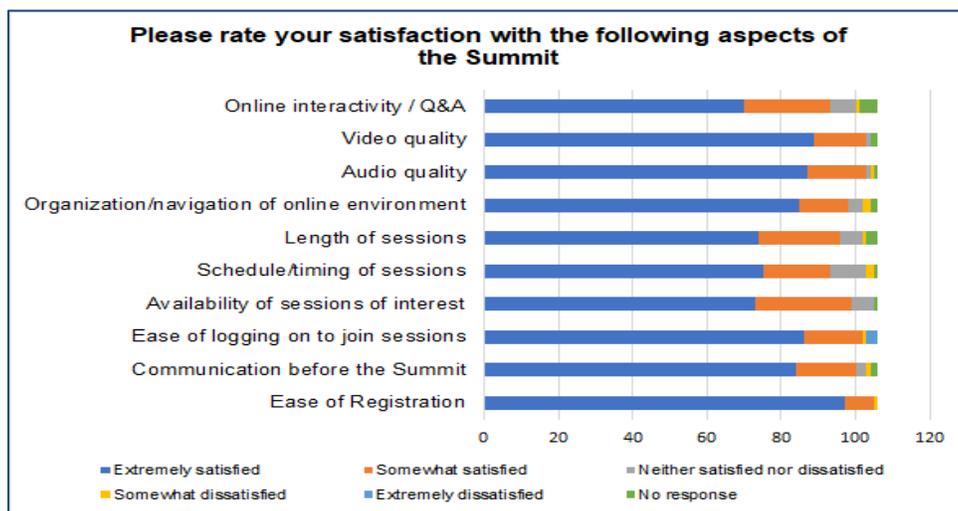


Figure 2. Respondents satisfaction from the Summit

Positive Experiences & Takeaways

Overall, survey respondents were very pleased with the Disability Summit experience, and **96.29% (104 respondents)** reported they would be “Extremely likely” or “Somewhat likely” to attend a future Summit. Additionally, 87.96% (95 respondents) reported that they either “Definitely would” or “Probably would” be interested in attending other Disability Summit-sponsored events.

Survey respondents were asked to select their three favorite sessions of the ones they attended. All of the presentations received fairly equal numbers of votes, but the most favorite session was *Self Advocacy* (Figure 3 and Table 2).

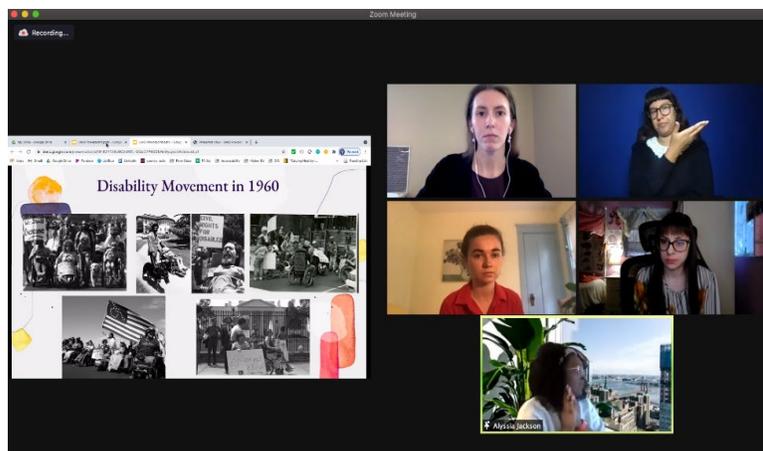


Figure 3. Presentation from the Self Advocacy session

Session	Votes
Day 3, Session 1: Self Advocacy	31
Day 1, Session 2: Policing the Disabled Body	28
Day 2, Session 2: Accessibility in a Pandemic	27
Day 1, Welcome and Opening Keynote	26
Day 1, Session 1: Disability Represented as Crisis	25

Table 2. Survey respondents’ votes for the most favorite session

We received many positive comments via the survey responses, in the Zoom chat function during the Summit, and by email after the Summit. Some common themes emerged, including:

- **Advantages of the online format**, including the accessibility of online programming for people with disabilities (e.g., *“On-line accessibility is much less exhausting than in person”*), the ease of navigating to the sessions/presentations, the ability to drop in or leave during sessions without disrupting others, the possibility to work on other tasks while listening to a session, and eliminating the need to travel (e.g., *“As a Canadian it was really great that this was hosted online. I never would have been able to attend this event if it had been in-person”*).
- **Organization and logistics of the Summit**. Attendees deemed the Summit *“extremely well organized for an online conference.”* They responded positively to the lack of concurrent sessions, which means they could attend all sessions of interest without worrying about scheduling conflicts, as well as to the generous pacing of sessions with *“breaks in between talks to move around.”* Another respondent notes, *“I [...] felt the moderators and speakers created a safe and collaborative environment, and really helped each other out. The conference had a great ‘feel’ to it, even though it was all virtual.”*
- **Content and approach of the Summit**. Attendees praised a variety of aspects of the conference content, including the *“extremely important and often overlooked”* topics, *“quality of sessions, info, and presenters,”* *“variety of presentations and perspectives,”* discussion of *“current solutions to challenges,”* *“fantastic and valuable information for parents, educators, and people in the field,”* and the *“good mix of more academic and more community-based presentations.”* Related comments:
 - *“The tone and directness of the conversation. Hearing facts and practical experience from people with disabilities was useful.”*
 - *“I liked the cross-section of speakers, and the fact that the content was so diverse and internationally-focused.”*
- **Opportunities to learn**. *“I learned so much”* was a common refrain from respondents, and many used the survey to describe the *“new knowledge or information”* they received from the Summit. A few examples:
 - *“I learned that it is important to include disabled persons (in a committee) when considering modifying physical structures on campus or signage when considering ADA modifications.”*
 - *“I would enjoy learning more about the Intersectionality of identity.”*
 - *“Interesting new perspectives on varying aspects of disability - I learned some new terminology and new perspectives on old terminology.”*
 - *“I enjoyed hearing other people’s stories as those are always a good learning tool for me.”*

One respondent described the Summit as *“A virtual Master’s program in three days,”* which we take as a high compliment to the variety, depth, and applicability of the program.

- **Connections with others working in disability and related fields**. 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.

President's Commission on Disability Issues (PCDI) Awards

Since 1988, PCDI has recognized the contributions of individuals and campus groups, departments, or other organizations that have had an impact on the lives of the disabled community at the University of Maryland. Since 2017, these awards have been given biennially, in conjunction with the UMD Disability Summit. This year's award winners are:

- **Faculty Award:** *Dr. JoEllen Barnhart*, Oral Communication Lecturer, Institute of Applied Agriculture
- **Graduate Student Award:** *Mollie Greenberg*, Doctoral Candidate and Junior Lecturer, Department of Sociology
- **John W. King Staff Award:** *Cassandra Lytle*, Manager of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and Data Management Operations
- **PCDI Chairs' Special Commendation Award:** *Alex Peterson*, M.A. Candidate, Department of Hearing and Speech Services and Graduate Assistant, President's Commission on Disability Issues

The PCDI Awards Ceremony also included the announcement that **the award honoring the achievements of units and organizations will henceforth be named for the [Trace Research and Development Center](#)**, in honor of

Trace's phenomenal support for the UMD Disability Summit, their notable achievements in creating accessible technologies and guidelines (Figure 5), and their ongoing and impactful advocacy for accessibility.

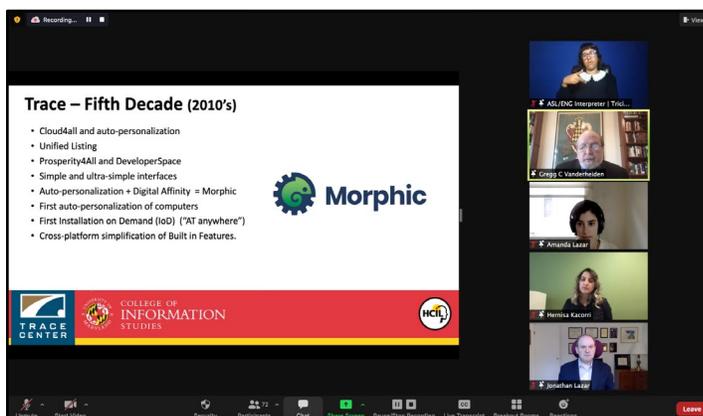


Figure 5. TRACE's presentation on their achievements in creating accessible technologies

Summit Organizing Committee

The Summit organizing committee began planning for this year's Summit in September of 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 Jaeger*, Co-Chair
- *Dr. Stephanie J. Cork*, Co-Chair
- *Tim Hackman*, Director of Professional Outreach
- *Sara Olsen*, Director of Content
- *Ron Padron*, Director of Operations
- *Alex Peterson*, Director of Fundraising and Finance
- *Amanda Strausser*, Director of Communications and Logistics
- *Nedelina Tchangelova*, Director of Digital Initiatives

Thank You to Our Sponsors

Title Sponsors

- [The President's Commission on Disability Issues \(PCDI\)](#)
- [Trace Research & Development Center](#)

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- [Mid-Atlantic ADA/TransCen](#)
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- [College of Computer, Mathematical and Natural Sciences](#) (CMNS), University of Maryland
- [College of Education](#), University of Maryland
- [Counseling Center](#), University of Maryland
- [College of Information Studies](#) (iSchool), University of Maryland
- [Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education](#) (CHSE), University of Maryland
- [Division of Information Technology](#) (DivIT), University of Maryland
- [Office of Diversity & Inclusion](#) (ODI), University of Maryland
- [Office of Graduate Diversity and Inclusion](#) (OGDI) - the Graduate School, University of Maryland
- [Robert H. Smith School of Business](#), University of Maryland
- [University of Maryland Libraries](#)

Accessible Sponsors

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- [College of Arts and Humanities, University of Maryland](#) (ARHU), University of Maryland
- [College of Agriculture and Natural Resources](#) (AGNR), University of Maryland
- [Office of Undergraduate Studies](#) (UGST), University of Maryland
- [Philip Merrill College of Journalism](#), University of Maryland
- [School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation](#), University of Maryland
- [Swenor Research Group, Disability Center](#), Johns Hopkins University

Thought Partners

- [RespectAbility](#)
- [Ontario Tech University](#)
- [Information Policy & Access Center \(iPAC\), University of Maryland](#)

Press Coverage

[Disability Summit to Examine Advances in Access, Equity](#)
(*Maryland Today*, UMD Office of Strategic Communications)

[UMD's Disability Summit Focuses on Intersectionality,](#)
[draws 1,000 viewers](#)
(*The Diamondback*, UMD student newspaper)

