

IN COLLEGIATE CONFERENCING

It is finally happening: a full summer conference season after a two-year pandemic sabbatical. CU Conference Services (CUCS) is projected to welcome roughly 133 programs, 12,700 daytime attendees and 8,200 overnight attendees in-person during the 2022 summer, a roughly 27 percent growth in numbers over the summer of 2019. The campus is going to be busy!

The pandemic certainly impacted CUCS's ability to plan and host in-person events, but we found ways to advance and innovate our operation. This time last year, we were excited

about the growth in our virtual and hybrid event services. A change of pace also allowed us to really examine our priorities: how CUCS shows up for its staff, Student Affairs and the university as a whole and even the broader field of collegiate conferencing. One of our biggest takeaways is that we have the opportunity to be doing more to further inclusive excellence into every area of our business.

While CUCS has not historically collected formal feedback around diversity, equity and inclusion, we have received a variety of anecdotal evidence that suggests it is critical to guests' overall satisfaction while on campus. Every summer, we receive a variety of accommodation requests regarding gender inclusive facilities, assistive

technology devices and ADA accessible spaces. There are, however, inclusion efforts that are not as common that should become part of our standard operating procedures, like buffet lines at functional heights for wheelchair users at both catered and dining center lines, policies that allow for adult caregivers to stay in a building with their neurodivergent charges attending a youth program and a mechanism for participants to report unwelcoming and harmful behavior.

We have had real concerns shared with our staff that we hope to address, like

concerns reach beyond campus into the community, for example a restaurant manager that racially profiles a guest of color and the impact that has on the sense of safety while attending a conference in Boulder. If our student staff feels that tolerating rude guests is a direct violation of social justice, what does that say about our overall commitment to balancing inclusion with customer service?

monthly "lunch and learn" sessions about diversity, equity and inclusion topics. Local and national events often

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Collegiate conferencing is an interesting and sometimes challenging juxtaposition of running a revenue-focused business within the parameters and expectations of higher education and student affairs. Aspects of our work are certainly informed by student support and development; however, other parts really function in a vastly different way programmatically. How, then, do we combine both priorities and balance our personal and campus commitments to inclusion with providing customer focused service?

One of our first initiatives as a team was establishing a baseline of where our team might need growth in diversity, equity and inclusion work. To do this, our team completed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and debriefed our cultural competency as individuals and as a team. Like many who complete the IDI, our perceptions of our cultural competency were higher than our indexed competency. We used that initial training as a springboard for

have made, there are additional goals we want to address. These include

- Creating an inclusive meeting checklist. This list will be a tool to help our clients think through whether or not their event plans are inclusive to everyone, including making all event spaces ADA accessible, making buffet lines accessible to individuals using wheelchairs, ensuring that conference brochures use inclusive language, requiring all presenters to use microphones, including closed captioning on all virtual and hybrid components, having an anti-bullying policy and allowing options to include pronouns on name tags.
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