

NCCC student advocates for accessibility at SUNY campuses

Submitted by Niagara County Community College

Collin Lacki is a sophomore at Niagara County Community College studying music in hopes of pursuing a career in music therapy one day. He decided to enroll at NCCC because of the quality education he could receive at the college, while still getting a typical on-campus experience away from his home in Brocton. As a student with a disability, a quality education for Collin also meant receiving support through the accessibility services office on campus.

As a blind student growing up in the small Chautauqua County Village of Brocton, Collin did not always have access to the resources he needed to set him up for academic success in elementary and high school.

"Many younger students with disabilities are not sure if they want to continue on to higher education, because of all of the barriers they encounter," Collin said.

He wants to push those students toward higher education and pointed to the commitment made by the State University of New York (SUNY) system in providing services and resources needed for students with disabilities to succeed.

Having years of experience advocating for his own needs has given Collin the confidence to take on a new challenge to help other students statewide. He was recently selected to be a part of the newly formed SUNY Student Voices Action Committee to advise SUNY leadership on emerging, critical issues, and challenges facing students across the SUNY system. He was chosen after receiving a nomination from Alissa Shugats-Cummings, director of career and transitional ser-



NCCC student Collin Lacki.

vices at NCCC.

"I suggested Collin for a seat on the SUNY Student Voices Action Committee because, during his time at NCCC, I have seen him develop and demonstrate skills that make him a model not only for students with disabilities but for all SUNY students. He is a hard worker, a diligent student, a friend to all. We are proud to have him represent NCCC SUNY-wide," Shugats-Cummings said.

As one of 27 students statewide to participate in the committee, Collin is using his voice to ensure the topic of accessibility remains in the focus of SUNY administration, and he hopes his contributions will promote positive changes that improve the educational experience for all students.

Collin has high praise for accessibility services coordinator Steve Burns, and Shugats-Cummings, two employees who go out of their way to assist students through their roles in the Career and Transitional Services Department at NCCC. This department is an umbrella for accessibility

services, career services, transfer services and the student resource center.

"The staff makes the office what it is," Collin said.

He is hopeful that, through relationships he has established on campus and his new appointment to the SUNY-wide committee, he can continue to make a positive impact not only for himself, but empower others as well.

Collin has advice for others with disabilities: "Don't be afraid to advocate for yourself. The only way you'll get the help you need is by speaking up!"

The mission of accessibility services is to provide academic adjustments and appropriate support to students with disabilities in the most inclusive setting possible and to enhance student independence while promoting self-advocacy.

For more information on accessibility services at NCCC visit <https://www.niagaracc.suny.edu/accessibility-services/> or call 614-6285.

Fauci weighs in

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the implementation of the state's "surge and flex" program, if a region's seven-day average hospitalization growth rate shows the region will reach 90% within the next three weeks, the region will become a "red zone."

Following updated guidance from the CDC, the governor announced that, if a region's hospitalization rate does not stabilize in the next five days, additional restrictions will be applied to indoor dining. If the hospitalization rate does not stabilize in New York City in the next five days, indoor dining will be suspended; if the rate does not stabilize in regions outside New York City, capacity restrictions will be reduced to 25%.

Cuomo was joined by Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The governor asked when it would be likely the country would fully reap the benefits of a coronavirus vac-

cine. Fauci said his best-case scenario – assuming the general public is educated on the vaccine and buys into its effectiveness – would be summer 2021. With upward of 75% to 80% of the general public vaccinated, the country has "umbrella" protection, making it more difficult for the coronavirus to spread.

"Between now and then, slow the rate of spread, slow the rate of hospitalization," Cuomo said. "If you overwhelm the hospital capacity, you will have to go back to shutdown. There are no options. That's not discretionary. That's not, 'Well, maybe there's an alternative.' You can't overwhelm the hospital system."

"Overwhelming the hospital system means people die on a gurney in a hallway. And the life you could have saved you can't save, because you don't have the staff; you don't have the doctor; you don't have the nurse; and people die unnecessarily. Those are the absolutes."

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