

Conference Proceedings

Welcome to the Conference Proceedings of the 40th Annual Pacific Rim International Conference 2025

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Abstract

This is a welcome message for the Conference Proceedings of the 40th Annual Pacific Rim International Conference 2025 hosted by the Center on Disability Studies, College of Education, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

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The 40th Annual Pacific Rim International Conference, held April 15 and 16, 2025, in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, marked an extraordinary milestone for one of the world’s longest-running gatherings devoted to disability inclusion. Hosted by the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the conference celebrated its 40th year with the theme, “By Us and For Us: Legacy and Future of Our Movement.” This year’s anniversary theme invited participants from around the world to reflect on forty years of leadership and learning while charting the future of global disability scholarship and activism. This year’s event brought together hundreds of presenters, researchers, artists, and advocates who shared innovative ideas, strategies and lived experience, offering a vivid portrait of people committed to celebrating and improving the lives of people with disabilities.

The 2025 conference featured sessions across ten strands—Adapted Physical Activity, Disaster Resilience and Built Environments, Early Childhood and Early Intervention, Employment, Health Justice, Indigenous Epistemology, Low Incidence Disabilities, Neurodiversity, STEM Pathways, and Technology. The conversations across these areas underscored the importance of intersectional and community-led approaches to disability inclusion, situating the work of Pac Rim within a broader global dialogue on rights, representation, and belonging.

Many of the conversations were concerned with how support may honor autonomy. In “Risk as a Right: Supporting Dignity of Risk in Disability Services,” Lindsay Piper reframed risk as a condition for growth rather than a problem to be eliminated, while “Beyond

Compliance: Cultivating Compassionate Care in Residential Disability Services,” by Brittany Clendening, pressed for practices grounded in presence and mutual respect.

Extending this attention to autonomy into the educational sphere, “Creating Inclusive Campuses: The Impact of Disability Student Advocacy Clubs,” by Amanda Patrick, Megan Theobald, and Kiriko Takahashi, traced how student-led organizing cultivates belonging and peer mentorship. “Examining the Effects of a Multi-Sensory Class on Teachers’ Classroom Practices,” Rene Rotondo’s contribution, showed how sensory-rich instruction may energize participation for all learners, and Sharnet Chavis’s “Mindfulness to Support Diverse Learners” offered a culturally affirming approach that joins awareness, breath, and compassion to sustain student well-being and attention.

Another current followed the pathways that connect learning to livelihood. “Building Disability Knowledge Through Community-Based Internships and Service-Learning Programs,” by Kelle Murphy, A. Josephine Blgrave, and Alex Stribing, detailed partnerships that weave academic preparation with community contribution. “Meanings of and Barriers to Work: Narratives from Japan,” by Yumi Yuzawa, attended to the hopes and hesitations of older adults with mental illness seeking re-entry into work, while “Employment of the Physical Disability in China: A Social Capital Approach” explored how networks and mutual support shape opportunities and mobility. Together, these perspectives highlighted employment as a site where dignity, structure, and aspiration meet.

“AI Innovations for Person-Centered Empowerment,” by Syard G. Evans and Lindsey Parker, introduced the Visioning an Empowered Life (VEL) project—an artificial intelligence tool co-developed with Awake Labs to strengthen person-centered planning. The project’s emphasis on collaboration underscored a broader lesson: technology deepens care when it follows the lead of the people it serves.

Several contributions turned toward culture and practice as engines of change. “Sports Cultures of Young People with Disabilities as Challenges to the Ideals of Ability,” by Susan Eriksson, showed how youth athletes redefine achievement on their own terms; and “Opportunity in Action: Neurodiversity in a STEM Career,” by Jacquelyn A. Ruffner, traced a professional journey that transforms difference into method, arguing for workplaces where neurodiverse problem-solving becomes an organizational strength.

Taken together, the scholarship and creative practice represented in these proceedings demonstrate how far the field of disability studies has evolved since the first Pacific Rim conference. The 2025 gathering affirmed that disability research and activism are most powerful when they are participatory, community-driven, and intersectional. Each presenter contributed to a growing body of knowledge that not only documents experience but transforms it—moving towards building structures of care, justice, and possibility that are truly by us and for us.

The Center on Disability Studies extends gratitude to all who presented, attended, and supported Pac Rim 2025, ensuring that this annual tradition remains both a celebration of legacy and a blueprint for the future.



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