Ross Edelstein

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CURRICULUM VITA

**Education**

Ph.D. in Special Education, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana (2025, Expected)

M.A. in Museum Studies, Indiana University – Purdue University – Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana (2021)

B.A. in History, minor in Classics, Truman State University, Kirksville, Missouri (2019)

**Professional Experience**

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| 2021-Present | Graduate Assistant, The Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands |
| 2019-Present | Cultural Accessibility Consultant (includes work with the Kennedy Center Office of VSA and Accessibility, the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, The Eiteljorg Museum, the Indiana State Museum, Conner Prairie and other organizations) |
| 2020-2021 | Public Programs Intern, The Eiteljorg Museum |
| 2020 | Archives Intern, The Great American Songbook Foundation |
| 2019 | Engagement Specialist, The Indiana State Museum |

**Research**

**Current Projects**

1. Park Autism Knowledge Synthesis Project – The Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands

**Publications**

1. Edelstein, R. (In Press). New Foundations: Principles for Disability-Inclusive Museum Practice. *The Journal of Museum Education*.
2. Edelstein, R. (2019). “Contrary to Justice, Humanity, and Policy:” The Slave Trade as an Instrument of British Power, 1803-1820. *The Apprentice Historian*.

**Training**

1. The Kennedy Center (2022), workshop with the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands at the Leadership Exchange for Arts and Disability 2022 Conference
2. The Eiteljorg Museum (2022), training presentation on autism, museums, and sensory friendly events for staff, as well as specific training consultations on developing sensory friendly programming for public programming staff.

**Speaking**

**Academic/Professional Conferences**

1. Edelstein, R. (2022). Accessing History: The Intersection of Historic Preservation and Accessibility. To be presented at the Kennedy Center’s Leadership Exchange in Art and Disability Conference 2022.
2. Ideishi, R., Grady, A, and Edelstein, R. (2022). Self-Advocates Perspectives and Roles for Sensory Friendly Program Development. To be presented at the Kennedy Center’s Leadership Exchange in Art and Disability Conference 2022.
3. Edelstein, R. (2022). Informally Speaking: Collaborating for Excellence In Special Education Field Trips. Presented at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community Early Childhood Center Promoting Positive Outcomes Early Childhood Special Education Conference.
4. Edelstein, R. (2021). Welcoming People with Autism: A Brief Summary of Best Practices and Emerging Strategies. Presented at the Association of Midwest Museums 2021 Virtual Conference.
5. Edelstein, R. (2021). We Matter: Art for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Presented at the Indiana Arts Homecoming 2021.
6. Edelstein, R. (2021). Let’s Talk Quiet: Developing and Implementing Quiet Spaces. Presented at the 2021 Art Reach Cultural Accessibility Conference.
7. Silverman, L., Beard, A., Edelstein, R., and McAvoy, E. (2021). Museums and Social Well-Being: Fostering Healing Relationships. Presented at the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries Conference.
8. Edelstein, R. (2019). “Contrary to Justice, Humanity, and Policy:” The Slave Trade as an Instrument of British Power, 1803-1820. Presented at the Truman State University Student Research Conference.
9. Edelstein, R. (2017). The Student Archivist: How Real World Experiences Enhances Study and the Community. Presented at the Missouri Association of Museums and Archives Conference.

**Webinars/Professional Development Events**

1. Edelstein, R., Dixon, P., Madden, C., and Frasard, S. (2022). Moderator, April Storytelling Series: Autism Acceptance Month. Hosted virtually by Conner Prairie.
2. Edelstein, R. (2021). Presenter, Within, Not Without: Setting Up Success at the Eiteljorg Museum. Presented at the Chicago Cultural Accessibility Consortium and Museums, Arts, and Culture Access Consortium’s “Adapting and Advancing: Cultural Accessibility During the Pandemic and Beyond Day 2: FUTURE” Event.
3. Edelstein, R. Martin, C., Saunders, J., and Theirault, S. (2020). Panelist, “Engaging Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities.” Presented by the Chicago Cultural Accessibility Consortium.
4. Deitcher, N., Edelstein, R., and Flint, C. (2020). Presenter, Webinar Episode 1: Autism Self Advocates. Presented by InfiniTeach.

**Other Media**

1. Edelstein, R. (2022). Autism Acceptance: Where We Have Been To Where We Are Now. Conner Prairie Blog.
2. Edelstein, R., Killy, C., and Theirault, S. (2021). S03. Episode 6: Ross Edelstein and Sam Theriault. Part of Aspire Chicago’s Amplify Inclusion Podcast series.
3. McCoy, D., Gaines, L., Edelstein, R., Hansen, C., Nevins, M. (2021). New Challenges in Special Education. An episode of *AllIN* on WFYI Indianapolis (radio).

**Service**

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| 2021-Present | Diversity Council Member – Indiana University Bloomington Graduate and Professional Student Government |
| 2021-Present | Review/Advisory Committee Member, Art Reach |
| 2021-Present | User/Expert Advisor, Access Smithsonian |
| 2020-Present | Board Member, DFB&T, Inc. |
| 2020-Present | Accessibility Advisor, The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis |
| 2020-2021 | Advisory Board Member, Engage All Abilities Project |

**Awards, Honors, and Features**

Featured, IUPUI Graduate Office Student Successes, 2020

Departmental Honors, Truman State University History Department, 2019

Phi Alpha Theta History Honors Society, Induction 2019

President’s List, Truman State University, 2018 and 2019

**Personal Philosophy Statement**

Special education is a field of advocacy. Teachers advocating for students, parents advocating for their children, researchers advocating for policies, and students advocating for themselves. The latter has been growing in importance as more and more attention is given to the importance of schools preparing students for post-school outcomes, not just college admissions (Hart & Brehm, 2013; Morgan et al., 2017). This is one of the defining factors of my engagement with special education, as well as one of the defining factors in my own life.

My name is Ross Edelstein. I study cultural experiences, and help create them. I research access to culture, and help make it a reality. I am a person with autism, and an autistic person.

My research aims to center the experiences of disabled people in ways that foster tangible changes in cultural institutions. This is the work I do to help develop “cultural special education” – the concept that learning for people with disabilities does not end at the school bell, but instead permeates all aspects of life experience are a form of learning just as valuable as learning math, history, English, and science. My work focuses primarily on access and inclusion in these spaces of culture – whether it is an art museum, science center, theater, park, or any other place where cultural experiences occur. These are the spaces that fostered my own love of learning, and helped lead me to be the person I am today, and yet many disabled people lack the chance to engage in these spaces thanks to the numerous social, economic, and structural barriers faced by people with disabilities, both at the organizational and societal level. It is why I use the fact that I have had good fortune in life to help place the voices of those who do not have my platform or privilege at the forefront of my work.

My connection to special education and the role of culture in promoting positive life out comes started when I was young. In kindergarten, I was diagnosed with autism by the staff of my school. I was fortunate enough to have a supportive family and be in an environment through the Special School District of St. Louis County, an independent school district that provided special education services for most schools in the county from its own funding sources, where I had the best services possible. Not only did I receive years of support for social skills such as speech therapies and social interaction, but I was also fortunate enough to receive assistance in areas of organization and handwriting, using assistive technologies. Early on, I was in my school’s gifted and talented programs, even while receiving these services. In high school, I was given the chance to be a part of the planning of my special education services, and at that point learned more about my disability as well as myself – a process which created new, unexpected struggles, and caused me to fail classes even as I continued to show the ability to succeed in honors and AP courses at the same time. My experience in special education was the ideal of special education, in many ways, and helped improve my outcomes in high school and kept me on the track to graduate and go to college, despite classroom failures due to struggles with my identity and learning to understand and advocate for myself.

Even facing failures and struggles in the classroom, I still had a supportive home that valued education, both inside and outside of the classroom. Whereas a normal summer vacation might be a trip to Florida, or New York, our longer vacations sought out museums and the Presidential Libraries. Even when visiting my grandparents, residents of Indianapolis, my favorite activity each year was visiting the Children’s Museum, as well as going to the Indiana State Fair – both of which were cultural activities. I was given the chance to attend concerts and theater performances thanks to my dad’s work in radio, and unknowingly was able to receive accommodations that, while meant for other family members, have continued to inspire me to this day in these situations.

While I was able to graduate high school, with some academic and emotional difficulties, college and beyond is where I really found myself. While I received higher education special education services, through a transition class and through the school’s Disability Services Office, they became less and less important as time went on, and I found my footing. I was able to graduate with honors with a degree in history, yet found myself looking for a niche – I did not, ironically, want to pursue a career in education at the time, as I did not think I would do well in a public school setting for history, and instead went to Indiana University – Purdue University – Indianapolis for my master’s in museum studies. This is where I found my calling. Though work in the museum field, I discovered that there were programs for people with autism – people like me. These had not existed during my youth, which was uniquely filled with museum and cultural experiences, and I found myself wanting more. Not only through this work did I connect with many of the foremost museum professionals in the field of accessibility, across the country, I found my niche, and found that there was a real need for people doing this work. This is what lead me to Indiana University – to develop the ideas of “cultural special education,” or the way that cultural organizations can develop their programs and experiences, as well as their organizations, to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

To consider cultural special education is to take the context of education out of a purely classroom environment, and add it to other areas. As a field, special education tends to consider the home and school contexts as those which deserve the most attention. Even when special educators look at work outside of a school context, often it involves how to bring that context into the classroom (Cho & Jolley, 2016) To this, I say that education is everywhere, everything, at all times, and goes beyond even the studies that do look at transitions out of special education (Morgan et al., 2017; Perryman et al., 2020). Special education needs to prepare for all contexts – something that even my wonderful support did not do. Sure, my high school prepared me for college, but it did not prepare me for the realities of work, or to understand how to date, or how to find my own hobbies and way in the world. I was not told how to handle being overstimulated on a bus, at a store, or at a concert, nor was I taught how to set limits, ask for accommodations, or how to find any that might already exist.

Beyond that, cultural special education is something where it is the voices of disabled people who drive the conversation, not the ideas of those who operate in positions of power. Many supports that do exist are based off of a theory, which is then tested on disabled people. One of the most prominent works in museums regarding autistic visitors, by Langa et. al., does exactly this – even though it asks what is needed to provide support, they instead look at only a virtual set of supports as opposed to basing their support off of their own survey (2013). And in other areas, despite it being a well-known feeling among autistic people, the concept of “autistic burnout” was only described in 2020 (Raymaker et al., 2020). Cultural special education, and the way to make the world a more welcoming, inclusive place, must be done in a participatory manner. Most who work in the cultural fields are outsiders to the perspectives and existence of disabled people. Most in these want to do the right thing, but without considering the disabled experience, and actively seeking the perspectives of disabled people, no matter how good their programming or supports are, they are not making the world any more inclusive.

My work will be to change this space. Already, I work with cultural institutions locally, regionally, and even nationally on access. My research will be similar – culture is broad, and there are many varied types of cultural institutions. Because of this, I will likely be in many types of organizations, testing many different populations. Ideally, I will most often be working to find and expand upon the experiences of disabled visitors to these organizations, but I will also study how the staff at these organizations works to make their organizations more inclusive. One of the problems with being one of the first to study the things I am interested in is that there is little to build on, and many areas to work with. My research therefore must be flexible – while it will all be connected to these driving ideas of inclusion and helping organizations welcome disabled people, it will also need to adapt to new trends, as well as what disabled people are interested in in a broader sense, and so who and what I will specifically study will, therefore, need to change.

Imagine not being able to go to the movies, or to your favorite museum, or even just finding a simple visit to Wal-Mart a massive undertaking. Imagine a world where those around you were so focused on checking a box – grades, attendance, or any other more tangible need – that your humanity was forgotten about. This is the world that many disabled people – including myself – live in. This is the point of my work, and what I bring to the field. So often we forget that we are working for people – not just in the sense that we are trying to provide supports, but as scholars we serve those who will benefit from our research. When we lose sight of this, we lose sight of what we wanted to do in the first place: make the world a more inclusive place. That is the road I seek to travel; the classroom experience may be important, and being able to work is also important, but it is how we engage with culture – as simple as talking to a friend, or as complex as seeing an opera – that gives life meaning and purpose. And, I hope to clear a path, so that the immense work that needs to be done can find others who want to help make the world a more welcoming place.

**Works Cited**

Cho, H., & Jolley, A. (2016). Museum Education for Children with Disabilities: Development of the Nature Senses Traveling Trunk [Article]. Journal of Museum Education, 41(3), 220-229. https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2016.1193313

Hart, J. E., & Brehm, J. (2013). Promoting Self-Determination [Article]. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 45(5), 40-48. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991304500505

Langa, L. A., Monaco, P., Subramaniam, M., Jaeger, P. T., Shanahan, K., & Ziebarth, B. (2013). Improving the Museum Experiences of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Families: An Exploratory Examination of Their Motivations and Needs and Using Web-based Resources to Meet Them [Article]. Curator, 56(3), 323-335. https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12031

Morgan, R. L., Kupferman, S., Jex, E., Preece, H., & Williams, S. (2017). Promoting Student Transition Planning by Using a Self-Directed Summary of Performance. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 50(2), 66-73. https://proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1163973&site=eds-live&scope=site

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Raymaker, D. M., Teo, A. R., Steckler, N. A., Lentz, B., Scharer, M., Delos Santos, A., Kapp, S. K., Hunter, M., Joyce, A., & Nicolaidis, C. (2020). "Having All of Your Internal Resources Exhausted Beyond Measure and Being Left with No Clean-Up Crew": Defining Autistic Burnout. Autism in adulthood : challenges and management, 2(2), 132-143. https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079