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Inclusive innovations break down barriers



by **Amaris Ford** — April 19, 2023 in [Albany County](#), [Community](#), [News](#), [Township](#)

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ALBANY — NYSID (New York State Industries for the Disabled) is holding a competition Monday, April 24, at the Empire State Plaza in which college students across New York will display their specialized inventions to help people with disabilities.

The CREATE Symposium is hosted in Meeting Room 6 on the Plaza's North Concourse and will provide the opportunity to review the inventions, talk to the creators and meet with the agencies that they work with.

CREATE (Cultivating Resources for Employment with Assistive Technology) is a program through NYSID. The academic challenge encourages assistive technology innovation for New Yorkers with disabilities to remove barriers in the workplace. Their member agencies are corporations that are disability service providers. NYSID connects them with college engineering students.

The 2022-23 CREATE Symposium will have five academic institutions that are working with six NYSID member agencies to develop 10 different assistive technology innovations. These colleges span throughout New York, from the University at Albany and the SUNY Polytechnic Institute to Manhattan College.

"There are great relationships between the agencies and colleges," said Maureen O'Brien, President and CEO of NYSID. She reflected on the students' "constant thought process on how they can create something interesting that can assist."

Dr. Jonathan Muckell, professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University at Albany, describes the CREATE Symposium as a "high-energy, rewarding event."

His students work in teams of three to design innovative technology that has the "most impact."

"I tell the students that this is a real-world exercise," he said. "Someone truly wants what they're building."

The engineering students come into the NYSID member agency workplaces where individuals with disabilities are working. They collaborate to come up with a solution to a problem that they may have at work so that it makes the workplace more inclusive and accessible.

At the CREATE Symposium, the 10 projects by the students will be displayed. The judges will decide which is the most innovative, and awards will go to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places to honor their achievements in design.

As a part of their contribution to the symposium, a team of students at SUNY Albany teamed up with the Center for Disability Services to create their Automated Paper Ream Opener, which is

designed to efficiently assist with cutting paper reams.

Mazin Chater, a senior at the University of Albany majoring in electrical and computer engineering, described his team of three as “motivated.” Their invention is an automated tray that enables the user to neatly split a paper ream with the press of a button.

“It’s exciting to take it out and showcase what we’ve been working on,” Chater said. “It’s going to help real people in a real workplace, I think it adds way more meaning than just the engineering aspect.”

O’Brien said it’s important to always be thinking about how to make the workplace more inclusive.

“I think what people realize when they come to an event like this is that inclusivity is a lot easier than most people think,” she said. “There are simple things that we can do every day that make the workplace more inclusive for people with disabilities.”

For a list of the schools and the inventions in the CREATE Symposium, visit www.NYSID/create.org. Individuals are encouraged to reach out to the agencies and colleges to see what their plans are post-event and how to support them moving forward.

“This is a workforce that we want people to notice and engage better with,” O’Brien added.

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