

Keynote Speakers

Erik Carter, Ph.D.



Erik Carter, Ph.D., is a Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University. His research and teaching focus on evidence-based strategies for fostering inclusion, peer relationships, and valued roles in school, work, and community settings for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He has co-authored six books and 150 articles and book chapters. He received the Distinguished Early Career Research Award from the Council for Exceptional Children, the Young Professional Award from the Association on University Centers on Disabilities, and the DADD Research Award from the Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities.

David DeSanctis



David DeSanctis will be the guest speaker for this year's conference. As a person living with Down syndrome he has been a self-advocate and his journey will be sure to inspire all. David was cast as Produce, of the feature film, *Where Hope Grows* (2014) making him one of the first actors with Down syndrome to play a leading role in an English-language feature film. We hope his story will be an example of the importance of inclusion not only in education but in the workforce as well.

Alexandra Sargent Capps, M.F.A.



Alex has served on the faculty in the Theatre Department at Vanderbilt University since 2001. She designs the costumes for the four-show season, runs the University costume shop, and teaches classes in costume design and fashion history. In the costume shop, freedom of expression with design materials through a playful approach to learning is paramount. Alex feels that working with people in the discovery and development of ideas and in aiding students to gain confidence through hands-on endeavors in which they can express themselves is a tremendously important, fun, and fulfilling endeavor. Alex is thrilled that a quilt celebrating inclusive creative classrooms was recently placed on display at Vanderbilt's Center for Teaching, designed by a student from Vanderbilt's Next Steps Program, created collaboratively in her fall 2016 costume design class. Alex celebrates the connection of costume crafts and design to fine art, social history, and important issues in

our contemporary world. She loves that examples of textile art enhance the quality of our lives and teach us in a myriad of ways. Alex holds a B.A. in Theatre from Middlebury College, and an MFA in Stage Design from Northwestern University.

Nila Huddleston



Nila Huddleston is a recent 2017 graduate of the Next Steps at Vanderbilt program and comes from Thompson Station, Tennessee, with joyful exuberance. Her high level of good cheer have propelled her into the hearts of all. Nila took advantage of everything that came her way as a Vanderbilt student, which included presenting at several conferences, being interviewed by Chris Ulmer of Special Books for Special Kids when he visited campus, recording with Rascal Flatts, taking Hip Hop and Zumba classes with the Vanderbilt Dance Studio, attending numerous sporting events, being an active member of Best Buddies, and more. Nila worked closely with her Ambassadors to complete her courses, which included two Songwriting courses, Elements of Basic Design: Costuming and Makeup, and Western Art. The arts are a deep part of this creative soul as evidenced by two special

projects with her courses.