

A Disability Toolkit

Introduction

“Disability is a social construction, the meaning of which shifts over time and place and is influenced by political ideology, economic conditions, and cultural values.”

Nancy J. Evans, *et al*, [*Disability in Higher Education: a Social Justice Approach*](#). (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 54.

There are multiple models by which we might understand disability, and each model has a [varying set of strengths and weaknesses](#). These models are culturally and historically specific, and ask us to consider context when thinking about, talking about, and taking action in regard to disability.

A precursor to thinking about [ableism](#), including the stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression of disabled people, must have us grapple with the fact that institutions of higher learning have created, facilitated, amplified, and implemented eugenic belief systems over time.

- Academic testing metrics like the SAT and ACT are tied to [practices of quantifying intelligence](#) that are [deeply racist](#).
- The study of subjects such as (although not limited to) [genetics](#), [speech pathology](#), [psychology](#), [evolution](#), and [education](#) have historically rested on theories of eugenics. This context is rarely addressed in contemporary curricula.
- Universities have funded eugenic research.
- “Reason” is a weighted term that is deeply connected to eugenic thinking—what is “reasonable” has traditionally been that which is coded as white, male, able-bodied, neurotypical, straight, Christian, and middle class. What, then, [constitutes a “reasonable accommodation” of disability](#) for faculty and staff?, and who makes such determinations?

Ableism runs through the structures, policies, and practices of all our institutions. It is in the very design of higher ed; it is part of academic culture. Only once we understand this can we begin to make real and lasting change that stretches beyond the matter of “accommodating” disability.

The institutional focus of most campuses regarding disability focuses on students. Faculty and staff are instrumental in providing support to disabled students, including through academic accommodations. Yet tools and resources to support disabled faculty and staff are thin. Caring for faculty and staff must also be a priority. Care enables individuals to be fully supported in their own work, and has the added benefit of equipping people to provide fulsome care to students.

Disability, accessibility, and ableism are rarely considered within DEI metrics. It is imperative that institutions recognize that there is no diversity, equity, or inclusion on our campuses while disabled faculty and staff are marginalized.

Education

Each institution should:

- Produce a document about the barriers to practicing Disability Justice inside of academic institutions. Take the [ten principles](#) and explore the challenges for implementation specific to your academic setting.
- Produce a statement on an intersectional approach to understanding disability justice and how it fits into DEI work

Sponsor and support reading groups on disability and ableism. Suggested titles can be drawn from the following resources:

- [Crippling Pandemic Learning: Collaborative Academic Resource Reading List](#)
- [Jessica Bacon and Steven Singer, eds, "Ableism in the Academy" \(Part 1\)](#)
 - [Part 2](#)
 - [Part 3](#)
 - [Part 4](#)
- Aimi Hamraie and Jay Dolmage, "#EugenicsSyllabus" <https://bit.ly/EugenicsSyllabus>
- Elizabeth Patitsas, Critical Disability Studies for Education Syllabus, <https://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~patitsas/cds/2020/>

Further titles:

- Nicole Brown (ed.), [Lived Experiences of Ableism in Academia: Strategies for Inclusion in Higher Education](#). Bristol, U.K.: Policy Press, 2021
- Nicole Brown and Jennifer Leigh, eds., [Ableism in Academia: Theorising Experiences of Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses in Higher Education](#). London, U.K.: UCL Press, 2020.
- Jay Timothy Dolmage, [Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education](#). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- _____, "Universal Design: Places to Start," [Disability Studies Quarterly](#). 35:2 (2015).

- Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, et al, eds., [*Negotiating Disability: Disclosure and Higher Education*](#). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- Ariel Mae Lambe, "Seeing Madness in the Archives," *American Historical Review*, September (2022): 1381-1391.
- Travis Chi Wing Lau, "Slowness, Disability, and Academic Productivity: The Need to Rethink Academic Culture," in Christopher McMaster and Benjamin Whitburn, eds., [*Disability at the University: A Disabled Students' Manifesto*](#). Bristol, U.K.: Peter Lang, 2019.
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, [*Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*](#). Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018.
- Margaret Price, "Time Harms: Disabled Faculty Navigating the Accommodations Loop," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 120: 2, (2021): 257-277.
- _____, [*Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*](#). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.
- Price, et al, "[Disclosure of Mental Disability by College and University Faculty: The Negotiation of Accommodations, Supports, and Barriers.](#)" *Disability Studies Quarterly*. 37:2 (2017).
- Katie R. Guest Pryal, [*Life of the Mind Interrupted: Essays on Mental Health and Disability in Higher Education*](#). Chapel Hill: Blue Crow Publishing, 2017.
- Tanya Titchkosky, [*The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning*](#). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.
- Sami Schalk, [*Black Disability Politics*](#). Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2022.

Podcasts, workshop outlines, and collective Google Docs on the issue of disability amongst faculty/staff (not limited to pedagogy and students)

- Aimi Hamraie's <https://www.mapping-access.com/> *Critical Design Lab* project (and * Contra podcast <https://www.mapping-access.com/podcast>)
- [Crippling Pandemic Learning In Higher Education Collaborative Resource Document](#)
- [Docs with Disabilities Podcast](#)
- [Resources by and for Disability Communities in the Time of COVID-19](#)
- [Making Graduate Programs More Accessible](#)

Helpful hashtags for discovering materials on social media: #DisabledinSTEM, #DisabledinHigherEd, #DisInHigherEd,

Offer conversation prompts for disabled and non-disabled faculty and staff to grow their mutual understanding of institutionally-specific situations:

- Who writes disability policy on your campus?
- Who gains the most from those policies?
- Who is included and excluded, valued or devalued by said policies?
- What is your campus procedure for securing accommodations as a faculty or staff member? (Center contingent faculty and staff in these conversations, as they have the most difficult time securing this assistance.)
 - Are contingent faculty and staff provided with office space or workspace? If so, will that space be accessible and meet their needs?
 - Are learning spaces physically accessible? This could involve everything from parking, location of the classroom, to the layout of the classroom itself.
 - If contingent faculty and staff need and/or would benefit from technological assistance, do they have the phone number/email/name for the person to speak to on campus about those needs?
 - Will the type of materials being used work for/be accessible to contingent faculty and staff?
- What is your campus procedure for securing leaves such as FMLA?
- What resources are necessary and likely to be expended by faculty and staff seeking accommodations or leaves (including time, energy, and [spoons](#))? How long does the process take?
- What further resources does HR provide to faculty and staff with disabilities? Do those resources fully address the needs of faculty and staff with temporary disabilities?

Consider the ways in which faculty and staff might support one another outside of institutionally-sanctioned policy or accommodations.

Tips for Creating Accessible Workplaces:

- Remote options for meetings and events should be a standard practice
- Offer open accommodation statements through all stages of hiring processes. Assume all applicants have accommodation needs.
- BELIEVE accommodation requests. Deep harm is done when such requests are met with distrust, harm that is significantly greater than any harm that can be done by someone misusing the system.
- Explore crip time. Develop plans incorporating crip time into deadlines, committee load obligation, tenure timelines, meeting facilitation strategies, etc.
- Discuss the limits of university disability service offices, and the distinction between anti-ableism and care work as opposed to compliance.

- Educate staff and faculty about the microaggressions disabled faculty and staff face.
 - Faculty retreat at an inaccessible home
 - Treating medical leave as sabbatical
 - You're just always so late with your deadlines!
 - Chairs, higher ups, etc. thinking it's okay to ask for personal details about the disability
 - Lack of respect for access needs at department meetings (no biobreaks, inaccessible materials, no virtual participation option, insufficient time to review materials and consider information, etc)

- Ensure that all staff and faculty community building events are taking place [in accessible environments](#). These events provide a critical opportunity for networking, mentorship, and other opportunities, so must be organized to support inclusion and access.

Resources for Faculty/Staff with Disabilities

A resource for disabled faculty for tips for teaching

- Advocate for the scheduling and rooms that you need.
- [Technical tips, specific to each campus]
- Learn more about—and practice—active learning strategies that are good for students and sustainable for many disabled professors
- Consider blended courses so that more technology is available to help as needed (technology can serve as time savers, e.g. rubrics for grading, more options for grading and feedback such as verbal feedback or saved written comments)

Understand the Situation on Your Campus

- Develop a survey to learn what faculty, staff, and administrators know about disability and accessibility on your campus.
 - Consider liaising with Margaret Price's [Disabled Academics Study](#)

Questions:

- What does the term “disability” mean to you?
- What does the term “access” mean to you?
- What does the term “accommodation” mean to you?
- Which of the following [attach list] do you consider to be a disability?
- How well does the campus meet the needs of disabled faculty, staff, and administrators?
- How familiar are you with campus disability policies?
- Where might you look for information on campus disability policies?
- Are you aware of disability communities and/or workgroups regarding disability on campus?

- If so, how effective do you believe those communities and/or workgroups to be? Please be specific in your answer.
- Do you know what to do and whom to talk to if you have a disability that would benefit from accommodations?
- Have you requested accommodations in the past?
- What was your experience of the accommodation process?

Create Resources

- Create a slide deck that can be used in all faculty and staff onboarding to give clear information on accessibility on campus, disability accommodation policies and practices, and HR resources. Include considerations that everyone should take into account when organizing offices, learning spaces, social spaces, and event planning.
- Through continuous development, move beyond the basics of legal compliance. Provide tools and resources for disability service offices, staff leaders, and department chairs to create workplace cultures that promote better care and anti-ableism. (e.g. training resources for faculty and staff, ideas for how to facilitate meetings, ways to encourage care networks for staff needs, etc.)
- Resources for helping departments and faculty leadership to think about tenure and promotion requirements and ethical workload
- Create a facilitation/implementation guide for setting up peer-mentoring circles
- Establish networks of mentors to support for staff/faculty who need advice about disability needs: to disclose or not to disclose? How much to disclose? Who has been through this before and what happened?

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