

Disability and Access in Higher Education

Overview and Resources

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Accommodations: Center for Disability and Access

Excerpts from the [University of Utah's CDA website](#):

The University of Utah is mandated by law (the Americans with Disabilities Act) and by policy to provide reasonable accommodation to all qualified students who request an accommodation.

If a student requests a change or modification in the course requirements based upon a disability, you should refer the student to the Center for Disability & Access. The Center for Disability & Access is the designated and only campus office that is authorized to determine whether or not a student is qualified for accommodations.

A faculty member is not required to provide an accommodation or modification to course requirements without being notified to do so by the Center for Disability & Access.

Faculty are not entitled to know the diagnosis of a student and should not ask students to disclose the specifics of their disability.

Faculty are not permitted to deny an approved accommodation issued by the Center for Disability & Access without engaging with CDA to discuss their concerns.

Limits of the Accommodation Model

- Difficulties getting documentation; cost of "proving" disabilities; presumption of fraudulence
- Exportation of labor of inclusion onto students
- Limitations of accommodations
- Separation, stigmatization, medicalization
- Making access a matter of individual exceptions
- Failure to address ableism of instructional modes and institutional practices

Academia and Ableism: Some Examples

- Norms of “professionalism” or “collegiality”
- Normative expectations for participation, communication, and other behavior
- Value placed on verbal contributions over and against other forms of communication
- Physical presence required without opportunities for virtual (or other forms of) participation
- Presumptions of certain levels of literacy or shared language(s)
- Presumptions of certain physical capacity and/or endurance
- Expectations to manage, hide, or assimilate disabilities or illness
- Resistance or hostility to accommodations requests
- Lack of representation; stigma
- Limited resources and support
- Institutional bias compounded with damaging interpersonal interactions

Universal Design

“Universal design (UD) helps to ensure the provision of inclusive, flexible, and supportive learning environments for students with disabilities, as well as students from other diverse populations”

--*Disability in Higher Education: A Social Justice Approach* (2017) by Nancy J. Evans, Ellen M. Broido, Kirsten R. Brown, and Autumn K. Wilke.)

Rather than “retrofits” (Jay Dolmage), the piecemeal and individualized exceptions and alterations of the accommodations model, Universal Design seeks to proactively anticipate different needs and preferred modes from the outset of the design process.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY’S CENTER FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN: SEVEN PRINCIPLES (1997)

See: [Universal Design Principles](#) (Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State)
[7 Principles of Universal Design](#) (Center for Excellence in Universal Design, National Disability Authority)

- Equitable Use
 - useful, marketable, and appealing to people with diverse abilities
- Flexibility in Use
 - accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities
- Simple and Intuitive Use
- Perceptible Information
 - different, legible modes for presentation of information
- Tolerance for Error
 - minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions
- Low Physical Effort
- Size and Space for Approach and Use

Universal Design for Learning

- [Universal Design for Learning Principles](#) (CAST: Center for Applied Special Technology)
- Multiple means of engagement, to tap into learners' interests and increase motivation
- Multiple means of representation, to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.
- Multiple means of action and expression, to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know.

—see also: Jay Dolmage, [Universal Design: Places to Start](#)

Collective Access

The work of many disability scholars seeks to expand and push beyond Universal Design, examining, in the words of Aimi Hamraie, “ways in which to conceive UD as a project of collective access and social sustainability, rather than as a strategy targeted toward individual consumers and marketability. A conception of UD that is informed by a politics of interdependence and collective access would address the multiple intersectional forms of exclusion that inaccessible design produces” (“[Designing Collective Access](#)”).

Collective access considers the involvement of everyone in creating access or inaccessibility, centering people's necessary interdependence.

Hamraie expands on collective access in their book *Building Access* (noted in resources below); in their “[Mapping Access](#)” project at the Critical Design Lab; and in a developing academic field called “critical access studies.”

Disability Justice: A Note

Disability justice is a radical and transformative social justice project, most directly linked to the work of queer, disabled, BIPOC activists and organizers in Oakland, CA, particularly those within the Sins Invalid performance/activist/arts collective. It addresses the deep intersections of racism, sexism, ableism, anti-queerness, capitalism, and other forms of oppression, and it centers the knowledge, perspective, decisions, and choices of the most marginalized and those most impacted by practices of exclusion. It argues that we cannot consider disability apart from race, gender, sexuality, class, and other axes of identity/experience.

Sins Invalid's “[Ten Principles of Disability Justice](#)”

See also Mia Mingus's concept of “[Access Intimacy](#),” her follow-up talk/column, “[Access Intimacy, Interdependence, and Disability Justice](#),” and her piece on “[Disability Justice](#).”

Some Strategies to Increase Access in Course Design and Classroom Practices

SOME KEY RESOURCES

- Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*, 2011.
- Jay Dolmage, “[Universal Design: Places to Start](#),” and [Appendix](#) (2015)
- [Accessible Syllabus Project](#), by a collective at Tulane University
- Others listed throughout

GENERAL PRINCIPLES: Build in options, flexibility, and feedback opportunities. Build in redundancy: repeat important information and content and communicate it in multiple ways

SYLLABUS AND SYLLABUS PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION

- Along with the institutional disability accommodations statement, provide your own access statement
- Access Statement Example: “I am committed to making this course as flexible and accessible as possible. If you are finding some aspect of the course inaccessible, please let me know, and we can discuss possible alternatives. You are also encouraged to let me know if any circumstances affect your participation in the course or your ability to keep up with coursework. You do not need to share private information unless you choose to; we will focus on alternative arrangements and adjustments as needed.” (Angela M. Smith)
- Access Statement Example: “I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including the Writing Center and the Learning Resources Center, are available to all students.” (Margaret Price, cited in [Wood and Madden](#))
- In presenting the syllabus to the class, acknowledge disability accommodations and the role of the Center for Disability and Access, and discuss your accessibility policy

CLASS NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS

Make Expectations/Norms Explicit in Conversations About...

- How information will be shared
- What constitutes discussion and participation (e.g., valuing not just new ideas but also thoughtful paraphrasing) (92)
- Expectations around presence
- Use of devices

Consider having a class discussion about collective access and creating a collective policy for the course around access and the course or classroom environment

EXPAND OPTIONS FOR PRESENCE AND PARTICIPATION

Create ways for students who miss class or who struggle with verbal participation to receive content and demonstrate their learning:

- Collective notetaking
- Online posting of class materials
- Online discussion boards for posts by absent students; online tasks to complete in lieu of attending/speaking in class.
- Options for remote access to class sessions

CREATE MULTIPLE CHANNELS OF FEEDBACK

- Request feedback about students' learning process via impromptu writes, emails individual conferences, online chat spaces, letters.
 - Incorporate feedback and self-reflection into assignments
- Provide feedback: "Offer frequent feedback on how well the class as a whole is responding to your concern for participation" – redesign what's not working (Price 96).

CREATE OPTIONS AND FLEXIBILITY FOR ASSIGNMENTS

- Offer multimodal assignments: digital formats, creative exercises, collaborative exam design, etc. (Price 97)
 - Options for written papers, but also podcasts, recorded video or PowerPoint presentations, creative options with reflective/written elements
 - varied presentation options (in-person, video recording, audio recording, recorded PowerPoint)
- Share models of successful work
- Provide clear and generous extension policies
- Drop the lowest scores in some kinds of assignments
- Scaffold assignments; provide options for practice and review

PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE COURSE MATERIALS

- **PDFS**
 - **Use OCR** (Optical Character Recognition) to turn image-based PDFs into text
 - **BUT:** be aware that it's best to have PDFs that are text-based from the beginning, from online sources such as journals or e-books.
- **Word Documents (e.g., handouts, lectures)**
 - Use headings, provide captions/alt-text for images
- **PowerPoints/Visual Media:**
 - Provide clear, uncluttered, large-font slides
 - Provide verbal descriptions/reading in class
 - Provide text (captions or alt-text) for images
 - Play/assign videos with captions

- **Alternative Formats**
 - Be aware of the option on Canvas to turn documents into audio files and other formats
 - Be prepared to convert documents to formats that work better for students' needs
- **Screen Reader Testing:** Try out [NVDA for Windows](#) or [Voiceover for Mac](#).
- **Post materials online, record/Zoom in-person classes, etc.**

[Disability and Access at the University of Utah](#)

- Forthcoming (possibly April 2022): a new university-wide accessibility website, to be linked from the U's main page
- The [Universal Design and Access Committee](#)
- @TheU story on the [Universal Design and Access Committee](#)
- "[Disabled Student Hopes New Normal...](#)" (KUER)
- "[U Student and Professor Say Return to Normal is Inaccessible](#)" (Daily Utah)

[Disability and Access in Higher Education: Selected Resources \(chronological by date of publication\)](#)

- Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.
- Bess Williamson, "Access," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, 2015.
- Margaret Price, "[Un/Shared Space: The Dilemma of Inclusive Architecture](#)" (2016)
- Rick Godden and Anne-Marie Womack, "[Making Disability Part of the Conversation](#)" (2016)
- David J. Connor, Beth A. Ferri, and Subini A. Annamma, eds., *DisCrit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education*. Teachers' College Press, 2016.
 - Revised edition: *DisCrit Expanded: Reverberations, Ruptures, and Inquiries*, February 25, 2022
- Alison Kafer, "Un/Safe Disclosures: Scenes of Disability and Trauma," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-20. (about trigger warnings)
- Jay Dolmage, *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*. University of Michigan Press, 2017. Open access through the U of Utah Library.
 - Dolmage, "[Universal Design: Places to Start](#)," *Disability Studies Quarterly* (2015)
 - Dolmage, [Appendix](#) to "Places to Start" Wiki with many UDL suggestions:

Dolmage writes: "turning UD into a checklist defeats so much of the rhetorical purpose of UD, as what I have called a "way to move" (15), or as what Aimi Hamraie has called "a form of activism" (n.p). That is, UD should be registered as action — a patterning of engagement and effort. The push towards 'the Universal' is a push towards seeing space as multiple and in-process. The emphasis on 'design' allows us to recognize that we are all involved in the continued production of space (and that students should be agents in this negotiation). With this said, I am going to very respectfully shy away from listing key

features of UD, because I fear that such lists also invite us to believe that Universal Design would stop if the boxes were all checked. I am more interested in places to *start* thinking, doing, acting, and moving.”

- Gail A. Hornstein, “[Why I Dread the Accommodations Talk](#)” (2017), **MUST BE PAIRED WITH** Tara Wood, Craig A. Meyer, and Dev Bose, “[Why We Dread Disability Myths](#)” (2017)
- Nancy J. Evans, Ellen M. Broido, Kirsten R. Brown, and Autumn K. Wilke, *Disability in Higher Education: A Social Justice Approach*. John Wiley & Sons, 2017.
- Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. See also:
 - “[Mapping Access](#)” project at the Critical Design Lab
 - Critical Design Lab, [Accessible Teaching in the Time of Covid-19](#)
- Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, Laura T. Eisenman, and James M. Jones, eds., *Negotiating Disability: Disclosure and Higher Education*. University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- Jess Waggoner et al, “[Workshop: Disability Access as Feminist Praxis at NWSA and Beyond](#)” (2017)
- Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- *Disability and the University: A Disabled Students’ Manifesto*, edited by Christopher McMaster and Benjamin Whitburn, Peter Lang, 2019.
- Nicole Brown and Jennifer Leigh, eds. [Ableism in Academia: Theorising Experiences of Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses in Higher Education](#), UCL Press, 2020. Open access. (UK context)

Websites

- CAST, [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#)
- Tulane University collective, [Accessible Syllabus Project](#)
- University of Ontario, [Accessible Campus](#)
- Sins Invalid, [Access Suggestions for Public Events](#)
- Tara Wood and Shannon Madden, [Suggested Practices for Syllabus Accessibility Statements](#)
- Jonathan Sterne, [Providing Access to In-Person Classes](#)