DISABILITY AS DIVERSITY

What You Need to Know to Change The World

KATE STRICKLAND
College of Liberal Arts, The University of Texas at Austin
My Story

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TOGETHER BUT APART

How University Accessibility Standards Fail to Deliver Full Inclusion and Why It Matters
Disability and Higher Education

- Students with disabilities still face significant barriers to participation and opportunity despite antidiscrimination laws (Gavira and Moriña, 2014)
- Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Texas Accessibility Standards provide for access
  - **Formal Equality vs Full Inclusion**
- **Full Inclusion**: Equitable access in classrooms, buildings, pathways and the social framework of a university
  - **Disability as Diversity**
- The number of students with disabilities in higher education increases each year (Riddell and Weedon, 2014)
My Arguments

1. ADA compliant campuses are not *fully inclusive*

2. Students with disabilities consequently experience diminished inclusion in ways that adversely affect their university experiences
Campus Measures of Full Inclusion

- **Classrooms**
  - Only 42% of general-purpose classrooms have the capacity to be fully inclusive
  - 10% of classrooms do not have any access to the front of the room

- **Buildings**
  - 30% of buildings measured have inaccessible front entrances
Pathways of Travel

Nondisabled student (7:29)  Student in a wheelchair (9:27)
Student Perspective

**Online Survey**
- 15 students of varying disabilities
- 92% called for greater disability awareness among faculty and/or student body
- 62% reported feelings of isolation
- 46% reported difficulty finding study groups
- 40% reported difficulty making friends
- 40% reported instances of discrimination

**One-on-one Interviews**
- Five students of varying disabilities
- Lack of disability awareness
- Discrimination in student organizations
- Forced to explain accommodations to faculty
- Grades adversely affected by non-fully inclusive classrooms
- Difficulty navigating campus
The following stories are the lived experiences of UT students with disabilities.
Scenario 1: Testing Mix-up

A student with a significant physical disability requires a scribe and extended testing time to take a test. The professor sends her the short answer, short essay makeup exam instead of the 50-question multiple choice exam that everyone else is taking. Although she answers every question correctly, she did not elaborate enough according to her professor (who failed to write that requirement in the instructions), ultimately receiving a significantly lower grade than she would have made taking the same exam as everyone else.
Result: Testing Mix-up

Upon raising this concern to the professor, she not only wasn’t allowed to retake the multiple choice exam, she was pressured into continuing to take the make up exams for the next two exams, not knowing that the professor’s actions violated her rights as a student with a disability. She ended the semester with a lower grade than she deserved because of the first exam.
Scenario 2: Participation Grade Boost?

A student who uses a power wheelchair finds himself unable to sit anywhere but the back of a large auditorium style classroom for a government class. Although he frequently tries to participate early on—he is a government major and loves to interact and ask questions—the professor is unable to hear him at the front, and the student was unable to yell any louder to be heard. As a result, he gives up trying to participate in class discussions.

At the end of the semester the professor decides to award the students who actively participated throughout class all semester with a grade bump to their lowest exam score.
Result: Participation Grade Boost?

Despite going to his Professor about the issue, the classroom was still held in the minimally accessible auditorium and the student was not able to actively participate. As a result, he did not receive the grade boost which would have elevated his grade the next letter, effectively disadvantaging him because of an access issue.
Scenario 3: Group Work!

A professor assigns her students to work in groups to practice speaking French. Leaving the students to form their own groups, every single student in the classroom immediately turns away from the one student in a wheelchair. Immediately discouraged by the unwelcoming nature and unable to move around the tightly-packed room, the student works by herself. This practice continues despite her efforts to strike up conversation with those around her.
Result: Group Work!

The student is forced to work alone until the professor finally steps in (almost a week later) to force other students to work with her. The student with a disability finds herself incredibly embarrassed and humiliated that it had come to that point in order to get other students to work with her.
Scenario 4: Group Work! (Not again…)

A professor assigns four students to work in a group on a major project. In one of the groups, a student with a significant physical disability and a wheelchair user finds himself struggling to engage with his group because they only want to meet late at night and in inaccessible private apartments (no elevators) where he is unable to meet with the group. Despite suggesting alternate meeting times and locations, the group refuses to adjust, leaving him participating via skype, messaging and shared documents.
Unfortunately for the student, on the peer evaluation forms other members of his group cite his unwillingness to meet with the group and his lack of participation at their group meetings (despite his skyping in when he could). These reports led to his grade being marked down significantly compared to his group mates.
Scenario 5: First Day Horror Story

On the first day of a human rights class, a student in a power wheelchair got to class right on time only to find the classroom entirely filled with other students in all but the furthest away desks. Because the desks were fixed to the floor, she could only navigate to a narrow aisle between the wall and the first column of desks which were all occupied by other students. The professor, clearly aware of the situation, watched the students refuse to move despite being asked to do so by the student in the wheelchair.
Unfortunately, the professor decided upon inaction for fear of making the situation worse by calling out the student with a disability. As a result, the student spent the entire class time uncomfortably crowded between the students and the wall while her assistant was forced to stand behind her.

Thankfully, however, the professor did come up to the student at the start of the next class to apologize for her inaction and to have a conversation about how to do better in the future.
Conclusion and Recommendations

- Improving Access to Higher Education Act
- Mandatory Faculty Training
- Student Diversity Module
- Accessibility Mapping
- Room Viewer for Registration
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

What you can do as a teacher and as a human to make a difference.
What Everyone Should Know

- Support, Listen, & Learn
  - Don’t Expect Disclosure
- Don’t Assume
- Language Matters
  - Person First vs Identity Based
- Don’t Qualify Success
- Be Mindful

When in Doubt, Start a Conversation!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual in a wheelchair</td>
<td>Wheelchair-bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student with a disability/disabled student</td>
<td>Handicapped student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accessible parking/entrance</td>
<td>Handicapped parking/entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual with a physical disability</td>
<td>Crippled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual with an intellectual disability</td>
<td>Dumb/retarded person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual with [insert disability]</td>
<td>Suffers/afflicted by/struggles/victim</td>
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What Professors Should Know

Disabilities come in many different forms.

You are setting the example!

Show interest, listen, and learn from your students.

Be mindful.

When in doubt, reach out!
The Big No’s

**NO** grabbing a person with a disability without permission

**NO** forcing your prayers on a person with a disability (especially in public!)

**NO** avoiding speaking to a person with a disability by only talking to his/her assisting person

**NO** using accessible parking spaces because you’ll “only be a minute!”
Sources


Questions?