Re/Framing Disability

American Association of Colleges & Universities
Dr. Amanda Kraus
To achieve meaningful and equitable inclusion, we must reflect on what we believe about disability with humility.
Due to a physiological difference, diagnosis, injury or impairment, **individual is at a deficit.**

The individual is the problem - must be **cured** or **pitied** or **accommodated**.

Fear, separateness, burden.

Language, media, design, policy.
**Emerging Thinking**

The environment disables people with impairments **by design**.

The environment is the problem and must be **redesigned**!

**Access is a right**, not a special need.

Social Justice, Civil Rights, Disability Studies, Universal Design
How do we shift our thinking?

- Pity
- Cure
- Compliance

→

- Social Justice
- Universal Design
- Disability Studies
Critically analyze language, media and design.
Identify Common Stereotypes (in Higher Ed)

Negative
- Tragic, pitiful
- Needy
- Scary
- Lazy
- Liars
- Angry

“Positive”
- Inspirational
- Heroic
- Special
- Resilient
- Preferential treatment
  - help, attention
Disability Microaggressions

1. Denial of identity
2. Avoidance/Separateness
3. Helpless/Secondary Gain
4. De-sexualization
5. Denial of privacy
6. Patronization/Infantilization
7. Spread effect
8. Second class citizen/Burden
Abnormal
Afflicted
Sickly
Simpleton
Suffering
Needy
Invalid
Freak
Lame
Deaf and dumb
Maladjusted
Maladjusted
Turn a blind eye...
Blind as a bat...
Brain Dead
Insane
Stupid
Spaz
Maniac
Crazy
Psycho
Retard
Gimp
Maladjusted
Brain Dead
Metaphor

• She turned a blind eye...
• It fell on deaf ears...
• The company was crippled with debt...
• He’s a real stand-up guy...
• You’d have to be crazy to...
• Paralyzed with fear...

• The economy limped along...
• He’s a lame duck candidate...
• She doesn’t have a leg to stand on.
• I can run circles around...
• Stand on your own two feet...
• Cut him off at the knees...
“Disability” Language

- disABILITY
- Special needs
- Differently-abled
- Handicapable
- Physically-challenged

- Confined to a chair, wheelchair-bound
- The disabled, the blind, the deaf,
- Person-first language
Person-first versus Identity-first Language

What are the implications?
Critical Media Representation
Media “Bingo”

- She didn’t let her disability stop her!
- He suffers from...
- Confined to a wheelchair!
- If you saw her doing [anything], you’d never know she was disabled.
- Defying the odds...

- Most of us could never imagine [insert horrific impairment] happening to us, but...
- Through the miraculous assistance of [something completely non-miraculous]...
- Courageous battle...
- ....proving you can achieve anything if you really try!
Limitations live only in our minds.

Jamie Paolinetti
WATCH: THE EMOTIONAL MOMENT HER HEARING IMPLANT IS SWITCHED ON
How do we do the work?

• Disabled people share a history of oppression.

• Consider disability an identity and community, a value-added perspective.

• Seek out input and feedback from disability community.

• Hold disability on par with other lived experiences.

• Critically consume media. Question language and policy choices.

• When there are barriers, ask why?
Lessons from student development theory

- Involvement and engagement (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 1998)
- Marginality and Mattering (Schlossberg, 1989)
- Validation (Rendón, 1994)
- Identity development
- Role of environment
How can design disable?
Letter of the Law vs. Spirit of the Law

What do we have to do?

What can we do?
Communication & Info

- Include information on access features/requests on all marketing and materials
- Hand-outs in advance, electronically, large font
- Infuse disability and diversity content and images into marketing and programming
- Captioning
- Describe images in presentations
- Accessible emails, PDF’s
- Use the microphone!
- Commit to inclusive language
Physical Space

- Common entrances, exits, paths of travel
- Accessible parking, transportation, elevators, restrooms
- Good, clear signage for access features
- Distributed seating
Curricular

- Check our biases.
- Hold all students to the same standards.
- What is essential?
- Multiple methods of assessment, engagement, participation.
**Events:** To request disability-related accommodations or with questions about accessibility, please contact:

**Syllabi:** At X, we strive to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability or pregnancy, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact Disability Resources to explore reasonable accommodation.
Disabled by design, not impairment.
Access ≠ Equity