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CCCC Position Statement

A statement on an education issue approved by the CCCC Executive Committee

Disability Studies in Composition: Position Statement on Policy and Best Practices

Conference on College Composition and Communication

March 2020 (replaces A Policy on Disability in CCCC, November 2006, Reaffirmed April 2011)

Executive Summary

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) recognizes the need to promote inclusive approaches and praxes responsive to the needs and experiences of disabled people. Committing to full access and inclusion guarantees the rights of those with disabilities in classrooms and in the profession and energizes practical and intellectual discussions regarding inclusive space-making, especially as disability inclusion is enmeshed with other forms of access and accessibility. This document describes concepts and processes intended to assist members of the field practice active inclusion across the discipline beyond mere compliance measures.

Part One: General Overview

Advocacy for ethical and inclusive practices in teaching, learning, and research practices must pay attention to issues of disability. Scholarship in disability studies shows that language and rhetoric shape our attitudes toward disabled people and that those attitudes, in turn, affect matters of access and inclusion in education, culture, and society (see, e.g., Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric, Academic Ableism*, and "Mapping Composition"; Price, *Mad at School*; Cedillo).

Visible and invisible disabilities invite us to rethink language, the body, the environment, identity, culture, power, and the nature of knowledge itself. Disability studies research in the fields of composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies has yielded variations on the composing process, alternative ways of working with students in classrooms and writing centers, histories of oppression in education and literacy practices, theoretical explorations of queer and disabled subjectivity, and critiques of "normate" pedagogy's exclusionary power. These findings provide a foundation for inclusive approaches that revise ableist attitudes and transcend the limited legal standards of accommodation.

As we work to build a more inclusive professional practice and community, we exhort members of the discipline to

- recognize that students, staff, and faculty on college campuses include people with a wide range of dis/abilities, not all of which are readily apparent;
- recognize that disabled people bring vital knowledges and experiences to our classrooms, universities, and professional organizations;
- acknowledge the contributions disability studies makes to composition and rhetoric, to communication, and to literacy studies by advancing theories of difference, critiques of "norms" and "normalcy," and access for all;

- understand that disabled people remain a marginalized group with specific educational, social, cultural, and political needs that cannot and must not be erased in the classroom or in policy;
- strive to create fully inclusive environments that enable meaningful engagement at multiple levels, from the personal to the disciplinary; and
- recognize that disability intersects with gender, race, nationality, sexuality, and other identities, and thus, access work should be approached through an intersectional lens.

The guidelines provided below advance inclusion and equity in the writing classroom and in WPA work; guide those in departmental, college, and campus leadership positions; inform professional development and instructor preparation; and promote the full inclusion of disabled people across the discipline and beyond.

Part Two: Guidelines for Writing Instructors

Revised Perspectives

Disability enhances learning and teaching in college composition by helping us to think through and develop inclusive approaches rather than approaches based in deficit and *retrofit*, or modification that responds to problems only after they arise (Dolmage, “Mapping,” *Academic Ableism*). Instructors should participate in professional development opportunities focused on inclusive unit/lesson design and access. Inclusive design means going beyond reductive “checklist” approaches and instead preparing to work with students “within the times and spaces of disability” (Wood et al. 147).

Classroom Environments

Instructors must follow student accommodation requests with an understanding that accommodations matter beyond legal liabilities, and that they often fall short of anticipating the particular needs of each classroom. Engaged and thoughtful class adaptations are crucial ethical and pedagogical components of learning. Instructors should embed accessibility into the fabric of the classroom by providing multiple teaching and learning formats for all students by following the tenets of Universal Design for Learning, a framework for creating inclusive and flexible learning outcomes and spaces (Dolmage, “Universal Design”). Teachers should provide accessibility statements on all syllabi that are discussed at the start of the course and then referred to throughout the semester (Wood and Madden). They may also learn to collaborate with their campus disability services offices, as recommended by Dolmage, Helquist, and Wood (“[Connecting Writing Programs and Faculty with Disability Services](#)”).

Part Three: Guidelines for Writing Program(s) and Writing Program Administration

Just as it is imperative to bring the subject matter and authors of formerly excluded groups into the classroom and canon, disability as a subject of study must be a vital part of the curriculum. Writing programs and writing program administrators (WPAs) play a vital role in shaping the accessibility and inclusivity of classroom spaces, practices, curricula, and instructor culture (Ross and Browning). Disability should be considered in all components of program administration, and disability studies scholarship should be used to rethink the goals and standards of writing programs at large (Yergeau 2016; Vidali 2015; Nicolas 2017).

Course Content

WPAs should support instructors in including disability issues and perspectives in course content (e.g., disability as a thematic frame, scholarly writing and/or creative work by disabled authors, accessibility as a criterion for in-class assessment; see Brueggemann and Lewiecki-Wilson). Attention to these issues should inform all standardized syllabi distributed by the writing programs office or administrator. Syllabus statements on access, inclusion, and disability should supplement traditional accommodation statements that reference campus disability services (see Wood and Madden). WPA leadership might also revisit mission statements, philosophy articulations, and other public-facing documents with purposeful attention to the presence of disability/accessibility as a value.

Professional Development

WPAs must include topics related to disability, accessibility, and inclusive pedagogies in all teacher training programs, including graduate course practicums. Effective teacher training and professional development should address ways to create inclusive classrooms and curricula that are sensitive to both students and teachers with disabilities. Workshops should train educators to make documents and other course content accessible (see Yergeau et al., [Multimodality in Motion: Disability and Kairotic Spaces](#)). We also suggest that WPAs and instructors engage deliberately with other institutional entities, such as the campus disability office and/or teaching centers, to learn more about these practices, but not rely on them exclusively (see, e.g., Wheeler, "[Communities of Access: A Program Profile of the University of Central Florida's Faculty Liaison Program in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric](#)").

Institutional Perspective

Beyond a focus on disability in the writing classroom, WPAs should learn about disability in the context of writing centers (Hitt 2012) and administration (Vidali 2015). This broad focus will help programs establish policies that center accessible educational experiences for all students and teachers.

Part Four: Guidelines for Departmental, College, and Campus Leadership

Teachers and scholars with disabilities require active and ongoing support throughout the processes of recruitment, hiring, promotion, and tenure in order to participate fully in the profession. This support should include attention to the specific needs of disabled graduate students, adjuncts, and part-time scholars in the interest of equity. To this end, CCCC encourages WPAs, administrators, educators, and members of the organization to work together to assess the current state of accessibility and work with their respective local disability and access experts to ensure the full inclusion of all disabled students, faculty, and staff in the field.

Hiring

To ensure the fair hiring of people with disabilities, leaders should develop hiring guidelines for committees that include considerations for disabled applicants (for example, providing opportunities for conversations about accommodations and access prior to any interview stage). Search committees should be trained to better understand how matters of disability and inclusion affect the hiring process. Campus leadership must ensure that once hired, disabled instructors (and their students) are provided with accessible classrooms, offices, and other workplace spaces, as well as a clear explanation of the accommodation process for both faculty and students (see the [CCCC Statement of Best Practices in Faculty Hiring for Tenure-Track and Non-Tenure-Track Positions in Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies](#) and the [MLA Disability and Hiring: Guidelines for Departmental Search Committees](#)).

Representation

Leadership should work to guarantee representation for disabled faculty and students on campus committees and governing bodies while advocating for accessibility on campus at large.

Part Five: Guidelines for Full Inclusion of Scholars with Disabilities in the Field of Rhetoric and Composition

Conferences

Academic conferences are critical sites of making knowledge in the profession; however, they also pose steep obstacles for scholar-teachers with disabilities (Price, "Access Imagined"). Accessible conferences incorporate accessibility principles and planning from the initial stages of site selection to the solicitation of conference feedback, including opportunities for ongoing feedback and revision of practices according to attendees' and participants' needs. Accessibility should factor into conference site selection, accounting for issues raised by previous CCCC accessibility audits. CFPs, programs, presentations, apps, and schedules should be designed with attention to accessibility across platforms, disabled experiences, and levels of expertise. Ensuring conference accessibility includes building all attendees' capacity for considering accessible practice, including disseminating guidelines about accessible presentations (see, e.g., [Composing Access](#)) and providing spaces where

digital copies of presentation materials may be made temporarily available for attendees (Dolmage, *Academic Ableism* 190).

Across the Discipline

Inclusive and ethical research practices require us to actively center the experiences and perspectives of disabled people when engaging in research about disability (see, e.g., Kerschbaum and Price). Research methodologies should take into account how bodies inform meaning-making and writing and help to counter ableist fixations on productivity at the expense of researchers' health and wellbeing (Ray 2018). Scholarship should be made available in open-access and accessible formats that broaden the potential readership and the impact of inclusion work (Dolmage, *Academic Ableism* 32). Methodologies should also stress the use of "plain" language so that people with disabilities and diverse literacy needs have access to important information (Grace 2013).

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