

# RESISTING THE LABEL: DISABILITY IDENTITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Drs. Hunter Duncan and Amanda Bell



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# Overview

## Goal of Presentations

- Grapple with how disability identity influences and is made meaningful within the context DS services
- Presenter Positionality
- Interactive and Engaging
  - “Say it Ugly”; “Call a thing, A thing”
- Disclaimer: Our goal is to not give you answers, because we don’t have them, but to give strategies or a lens to reflect and grapple

# Introductions

## Dr. Hunter Duncan, PhD



- PhD, English Literature May 2020 (Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI)
- Areas of Specialization: Disability Studies; Victorian literature; the long nineteenth-century; rhetoric and composition; pedagogy; universal design for learning

## Dr. Amanda Bell



- PhD, Educational Studies April 2017 (Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI)
- Areas of Specialization: Disability Studies; Disability Identity; Intersectionality; Student Development; Stigma; Microaggressions

## Reflecting about identity

What do you think  
when you hear the  
word “**identity**”?

# *Reflection*

## Reflecting about disability

What do you think  
when you hear  
**“disability”**?

## Reflecting about disability

- Do you think the population of people you work with identify as disabled?
- Do need to identify as disabled?
  - Faculty?
  - Students?
  - Staff?
    - Correlation between services and identity?

# Scenarios

## Scenario 1: Newly disabled/ diagnosed

Jesse is a sophomore in biology who was recently diagnosed with depression and anxiety in Fall 2020. They are requesting extended assignment deadlines and flexible attendance. Jesse provides very summative responses and doesn't go into a lot of detail about their condition. Additionally, they did not provide documentation, but mention that a doctor shared in passing that they may be depressed. During the initial meeting, it becomes clear that Jesse is not functioning as a student, as they have missed 6 weeks of school and not turned in assignments. When you tell them that the accommodations, they are requesting are unreasonable and would not provide access, they become frustrated because they have a diagnosis.

# *Reflecting on Scenario 1*

## Reflecting about Scenario 1

- Have you ever encountered a situation like this?
  - What did you do?
  - If not, what do you think you would do?
- How would you help Jesse understand that a diagnosis does not always result in accommodations?
- How would you help Jesse explore other educational resources and strategies?
- How would you encourage Jesse to learn more about how their depression and anxiety impacts their academic engagement?
- Would you connect them to medical/psychological professionals?



# Scenarios

## Scenario 2: Inhibiting Disability Identity/Intersectionality

Jamie is a freshman majoring in nursing, they are transitioning from female to male. They are reaching out to the DRC to request an ESA cat and housing accommodations (i.e., single room with private bath). Due to their transition, Jamie reports depression and anxiety. However, they have not been formally diagnosed with these conditions, because their doctors believe that this is a part of their transition.

# *Reflecting on Scenario 2*

## Reflecting about Scenario 2

- Have you ever encountered a situation like this?
  - What did you do?
  - If not, what do you think you would do?
- How have/would approach this scenario?
- How do you do see intersecting identities impacting the student experience in this scenario?
- Would you refer them to other campus resources and partners?
- Other thoughts?

# *Emily Ladau*

Quote from Salon Article about Movie: “Me Before You” ...

“[D]isability can be a messy, agonizing, and emotionally trying part of life, but far too many mainstream outlets portray disability in ways far from everyday reality for the millions of people who live in disabled bodies. We can thrive. We can leave our homes, hold jobs, have families, love, laugh, and live our lives. This isn’t radical thinking. It isn’t inspiring. It’s just the truth”(Ladau, 2016).

## Scenario 3: Internalized Ableism

Josie is a deaf Spanish major, with a minor in communication. She has not required accommodations during her first 5 semesters at the university. Josie reached out because she is encountering unexpected barriers in an upper-level Spanish course. She reports being unable to read lips in her Spanish 4 class because the instructor is a non-native English speaker. When you broach solution like real time CART, the student is reluctant to out herself, because she has overcome so much despite her disability.

# *Reflecting on Scenario 3*

## **Reflecting about Scenario 3**

- Have you ever encountered a situation like this?
  - What did you do?
  - If not, what do you think you would do?
- How have/would approach this scenario?
- Has the students outlook on their condition been productive or destructive?
- How does student attitude and perspective play a role in requesting accommodations?

# Scenarios

## Scenario 4: Co-worker interaction

Jim is a new DS professional who is shadowing a fellow DS professional in his office. While observing his coworkers interaction with a student, he becomes uncomfortable because he notices that the student seems to be shutting down after his colleague uses demeaning language (**e.g., you are so inspiring; you can read just like your peers, it just looks different; you are more than your blindness; being different isn't bad; you are the first blind student so you are pioneering a path for others**).

# *Reflecting on Scenario 4*

## Reflecting about Scenario 4

- Have you ever encountered a situation like this?
  - What did you do?
  - If not, what do you think you would do?
- How have/would approach this scenario?
- Upon reflection, have you used similar language?
  - Why do you think language matters with a DS office?
- How do you or can you stay current or responsive in your use of language and how it frames the disabled experience?

# Roadmap for the future

## Developing A Language and Identity Toolkit



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# *Applying this to Day-to-Day Operations*

## **Hitchhikers Guide to Accommodation Process**

- Helping students frame and present their accommodations
- How to use non-deficit language vs. Super-Crip Trope
- How to co-pilot identity exploration and facilitate access
- Coaching students/ Roleplay faculty interactions
  - Working with students to unpack and understand their accommodations
  - Differentiating between accommodations for access and strategies for survival/success

# ***THANK YOU***

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# References

- Ladau, E. (2016, May 25). *Spare me, "Me Before You": Hollywood's new tearjerker is built on tired and damaging disability stereotypes.* Salon.