Disability Justice & Disabled Graduate Student Labor in Higher Education

Naty Rico, Janelle Chu Capwell, & Sav Schlauderaff

July 22nd, 2022
Access Statement

Please exist in this space in ways that are most comfortable for you. You can stand up, sit down, lay down, stretch, walk around, leave the room, stim, use your electronics as needed. Understand that everyone exists in spaces in different ways, and how someone can best engage and listen might look different than how you do.

In order to facilitate an inclusive and equitable environment for our disabled presenters, please wear a mask during this workshop.
Land Acknowledgement

The University of Arizona

"We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service."
Greater Cleveland, Ohio

In recognizing the land upon which we reside, we express our gratitude and appreciation to those who lived and worked here before us; those whose stewardship and resilient spirit makes our residence possible on this traditional homeland of the Lenape (Delaware), Shawnee, Wyandot Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and other Great Lakes tribes (Chippewa, Kickapoo, Wea, Pinakahsw, and Kaskaskia). We also acknowledge the thousands of Native Americans who now call Northeast Ohio home.
Overview of Workshop

• What is Disability Justice?
• Ableism in Higher Education
• Break 1
• Graduate Student Labor and Expectations
• Graduate Student Experiences: Ableism & Exploitation
• Break 2
• Disability Justice in Practice
What is Disability Justice

Disability Justice: created in 2005 by Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern, and joined later by Leroy Moore, Eli Clare and Sebastian Margaret. As a way to specifically center multiply oppressed disabled individuals e.g. BIPOC, queer, trans, immigrant, poor, homeless, and incarcerated disabled folks.

It addresses the roots of harm and oppression towards disabled individuals and recognizes that true liberation should also be achieved by other social movements since they are interlinked with ableism and oppression.
**What is Disability Justice**

10 principles of Disability Justice

Created by Patricia Berne, Aurora Levins Morales, David Langstaff, Sins Invalid

---

**10 PRINCIPLES OF DISABILITY JUSTICE**

1. **INTERSECTIONALITY** “We do not live single issue lives” -- Audre Lorde
   Ableism, coupled with white supremacy, supported by capitalism, underscores by heteropatriarchy, has rendered the vast majority of the world “invalid.”

2. **LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED**
   “We are led by those who most know these systems.” -- Aurora Levins Morales

3. **ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC**
   In an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds.

4. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING**
   Shifting how social justice movements understand disability and contextualize ableism, disability justice lends itself to politics of alliance.

5. **RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS**
   People have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.

6. **SUSTAINABILITY**
   We pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long term. Our embodied experiences guide us toward ongoing justice and liberation.

7. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY**
   We honor the insights and participation of all of our community members, knowing that isolation undermines collective liberation.

8. **INTERDEPENDENCE**
   We meet each others’ needs as we build toward liberation, knowing that state solutions inevitably extend into further control over our lives.

9. **COLLECTIVE ACCESS**
   As brown, black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other.

10. **COLLECTIVE LIBERATION**
    No body or mind can be left behind -- only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require.
10 Principles of Disability Justice

1. Intersectionality
2. Leadership of Those Most Impacted
3. Anti-Capitalist Politic
4. Cross-Movement Solidarity
5. Recognizing Wholeness
6. Sustainability
7. Commitment to Cross-Disability Solidarity
8. Interdependence
9. Collective Access
10. Collective Liberation
What is Ableism?

Ableism: 1) A system of oppression that favors being ablebodied/ableminded at any cost, frequently at the expense of people with disabilities. (via Stacey Milbern “Ableism is the Bane of My Motherfuckin’ Existence”)
What is Ableism Continued

2) A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, "excel" and "behave." You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism. (a working community definition by Talila "TL" Lewis*, 2022)
Individual Writing Reflection (5 minutes)

Given these definitions around disability justice and ableism, does this shift how you frame your work within disability services and/or higher ed?
The Current State of Ableism in Higher Education

Academic Ableism has long been a focus of disability studies and disability activism.

“Disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher education” (Dolmage, 2017, *Academic Ableism*). 

Ableism in Academic Culture & Expectations

“The culture of academia presumes that the bodyminds (Price, 2015) best suited for academia are those that demonstrate discipline, restraint, productivity, and autonomy. Too often, disabled, neurodivergent, and chronically ill bodies are framed as unproductive, impaired, dependent, disorderly and, therefore, of little intellectual or productive value. Graduate students with disabilities, therefore, encounter significant barriers to participation.”

(Carter, Catania, Schmitt & Swenson, 2017)
Impacts of Academic Ableism

In what ways does Academic Ableism show up?

1. Disclosure & fear of retaliation
2. What are the barriers?
3. Individualized approach to accommodations & mental health
“And for graduate students and faculty alike, it clearly remains a highly risky endeavour to reveal any form of mental or cognitive difference or vulnerability: our minds, our justifications for being here, must run like steely machinery, always reliable, always stable” (Samuels, 19, 2017).

Higher education as a whole “encourages students and teachers alike to accentuate ability, valorize perfection, and stigmatize anything that hints at intellectual (or physical) weakness” (Dolmage, 3, 2017).
Academic Ableism: Disclosure & Retaliation

• Assumed need to go through bureaucratic channels to be validated
• Increased risk when compounded by other marginalized identities (Samuels, 2017; Kafai, 2020) - “Who has the privilege to disclose disability?” (Samuels, 2017, 18)
• Fear (and reality) of being pushed out of academia & denied opportunities (Brown & Leigh, 2018; Wang, 2019)
• An exhausting and repetitive process (Samuels, 2017; Kafai, 2020)
Academic Ableism: What are the barriers?

• Barriers addressed by accommodations: physical, classroom, class content, communication access, testing, assistance animal, housing, etc.
• Structure of academia: rigidity, interpersonal and professional expectations
• Attitudinal: refusal of accommodations, singling out, retaliation from instructors or peers, refusal of job offers and career opportunities
Academic Ableism: Barriers Continued

- Support: Inaccessibility of resources
- Cost: “Disability tax”
- Representation: Lack of disability visibility on campus - lack of disability culture, community, and support
Academic Ableism: Individualized Solutions

The recourse for academic ableism is nearly always retroactive - and it is met by:

- establishing accommodations through disability services
- filing a complaint through the university or legal avenues
- or perhaps small changes being made departmentally or within your program.

The onus still rests with the disabled individual.
Break - 10 minutes

Please feel free to use the restroom, stretch, rest, get water or a snack, etc.
Debrief

If you have any questions or thoughts on Disability Justice, ableism, and the information on academic ableism - please feel free to share out.
TL defines Ableism (2022) “A system of assigning value to people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.” Think about:

- Looking at the role of productivity in ableism—“who is the ideal worker?”
- What are the labor expectations for graduate student workers?
Graduate student labor typically involves teaching or graduate assistantship, lab work, or research work in order to receive funding or to meet the intern/research needs of the programs. Individualized labor expectations depend on the graduate program, and post-graduation goals of the graduate student; however, most graduate student workers also have to abide by some form of hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum typically includes additional “professional” labor like journal publications, conference presentations, research studies, etc. that are aimed towards the student’s post-graduation goals.
Graduate Student Experiences: Ableism & Exploitation

Large Group Activity: Make a list of the additional expectations graduate students need to meet, and the additional work needed in order to be a student and a worker on campus
Graduate Student Experiences: Ableism & Exploitation Responses
Graduate Student Experiences: Ableism & Exploitation

Low pay, little to no benefits, and high expenses as a result of disability tax; additional expenses that disabled students need to afford.

Disabled graduate students often don’t have appropriate healthcare benefits to address their medical needs, yet they are expected to comply and accept these standards.

Expenses like transportation costs, (accessible) housing, food insecurity, and assistive devices are expected to be covered by graduate students even though they have low pay.

Disabled Graduate Students are also expected to negotiate time, in academia while considering crip time (Kafer, 2013)
Graduate Student Experiences: The Role of the University

Large Group Activity:

Work to brainstorm a supplemental list of whys the university can address these concerns that disabled graduate students experience.

How can the University better support disabled graduate students?
Graduate Student Experiences: The Role of the University Responses
5 minute Break

Please feel free to use the restroom, stretch, rest, get water or a snack, etc.
Many accommodations are created with the retrofit of a building in mind (Dolmage, 2017), this same framing is often present within the creation of academic and workplace accommodations for the (graduate) student. Seen through the process of “how we can mold the classroom and the disabled student so that they might individually have equitable access to the classroom, course content, and workplace alongside their non-disabled peers?”
Disability Services & Graduate Students

How might we rethink the ways disability services staff & centers as a whole approach accommodations with disability justice in mind?
Disability Justice in Practice

Please individually fill out the worksheet. You will use some of the disabled graduate student barriers we’ve discussed and you will work together to assess the ways disability justice principles can be applied in those respective areas.
Session Evaluation

Please point your phone at this QR code, or go to:
tinyurl.com/AHEADeval

Your feedback helps shape future programming.

Thank you for attending!
References & Resources


References & Resources Continued


1. Sins Invalid 10 principles of Disability Justice
References & Resources Continued


