

# STS Teaching and Thinking With Disabilities

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Introductory Quote: “I don’t just want technical and logistical access. I don’t just want inclusion, I want liberatory access and *access intimacy*. **I don’t just want us to get a seat at someone else’s table, I want us to be able to build something more magnificent than a table, together with our accomplices.** I want us to be able to be understood and to be able to take part in principled struggle together — to be able to be *human* together. Not just placated or politely listened to.”

— Mia Mingus

## Notes

- Academic ableism
  - Captions can help a range of people
  - Fighting against ableism by reconsidering mandatory attendance
- Crip technoscience
  - Can make you think about who does the work of access, who fights for access, historical movements, and who *hasn’t* benefited
- Students may have internalized ableism before stepping into a classroom, but also in academia with standards for performance
- Disability access being viewed as compliance based is not the way to approach the situation
- Crystal references an influential essay talking about how biological enhancements reference disabled people
- Benefits of disability studies-informed approach:
  - Not just getting a seat at the table, but rethinking what the future can look like with various possibilities
  - Reorganizing social relations that center community rather than technological innovation
- Question Section
  - 1: How do each of you practice disability-forward teaching? Scholarship?
    - Cora Olson: Be flexible with testing, quizzes, etc.
    - Ashley Shew: Give the true “flavor” of the class and syllabus right off the bat for students.
    - Ashley Shew: Tell students about her own disability and what resources personally used, facilitates openness and shows a willingness to be flexible in future circumstances.

- Crystal Lee: Values giving leniency in work with a day of extension in their back pocket. Never a need to legislate what an appropriate excuse may be.
- Crystal Lee: Collaborative experiences in class, injecting material in different ways (participation looks different for everyone).
- Crystal Lee: Creating a community of care, hours to talk available but not mandatory.
- Crystal Lee: Providing opportunities for all, in hopes of helping at least one.
- Alison Kenner: Wants to change the mandatory attendance policy that has been in place for years. Always justified this by wanting a robust learning community, but that could stem from personal fear of students not showing up.
- Shannon Conley: Calling out the ways infrastructure is impacting accessibility. Acknowledged own disability in classes, and is going through an undergraduate program where you can see what students have to do -- gaining empathy to move to the future.
- Ashley Shew: The way we qualify disabilities is a little messed up. Personally cannot let people know willingness to accommodate undocumented students with disabilities because it is against school rules. Desires better opportunities for helping people in all different situations. Questioning the systems that hold up arbitrary barriers.
- Shelby Dietz: Teaches some small seminars and some larger courses. Would like recommendations for those large classes.
- Ashley Shew: Talking with faculty with more rigid thoughts of pedagogy, wants to ask why we hold the structures in place that we have, etc. Why is this deadline firm? Can we change this to make it better? Has seen some steps, but it is not a totally disability led/forward class because they have an idea of what education should be that they don't share. Female faculty in STEM fields may also shy away from care because they could be seen in stereotypical gender ways.
- Cora Olson: Always falls back on valuing learning rather than the norms in the space. Introduced some students to learn about disabilities perhaps in a different way to medical students and there was still some pushback. Seeing attitudes shift is nice.
- Crystal Lee: Oftentimes in negotiating boundaries, quality of the work is the best argument and proof of teaching style.
- Crystal Lee: Wants to recognize the labor of accessibility in some cases. While there are some easy changes, there is also a need to constantly evolve what teaching can be with larger changes. Cautious about how much time this takes up.
- Ashley Shew: When we give students the opportunity to make choices, they will want to engage in the space that disability forward teaching permits.

- 2: Are there differences between planning for accessibility and practicing disability-forward teaching and planning?
- 3: How do you expand opportunities to students (and fellow teachers) in your pedagogical spaces?
- 4: We can think about disability as offering both a methodological toolbox (e.g., crip technoscience and as an object of study. How does / could this change how we teach STS?
  - Crystal Lee: Thinking about why other faculty are so sure that flexibility will lead to absence. Digging into the root of the thinking. Asking questions to colleagues to facilitate this.
  - Crystal Lee: Thinking about disabilities as also outside the body. Being more critical about what kinds of bodies are fetishized or accepted. Considering this alongside race, gender, and class.
  - Cora Olson: Accessibility is a construct from the university, disability forward is asking the questions like “How can I help you excel in my class?”. Need to have conversations with students, they can lead to big changes.
  - Cora Olson: Does have a participation grade, which can look different in a lot of instances.
- In response to Anna’s Question from the Zoom chat: “Can I ask a different question on the evaluation specifically? In teaching premed students in particular, but also engineers to some extent, I find that evaluation is actually much more important to them than to me. They are, after all, on a path to credentialing. So what they want from me is a clear formulation of expectations, not flexibility (at least, as to what counts as good performance—they are very happy to have flexibility on deadlines). Do you ever find these kinds of more flexible approaches (vocabulary changes, etc) producing anxiety in them? How do you avoid that?”
  - Crystal Lee: Yes, clear expectations are helpful. Explicit is accessible. Building clear info into a rubric is enumerating what things look like (discussion posts, adding a point, asking a question, etc).
  - Crystal Lee: These types of thinking do fall more on marginalized faculty.
  - Cora Olson: This past semester, some students didn’t understand, had to rework to be more explicit.
  - Ashley Shew: Over specifying can be really good, but does require students to meet individually and think about their plan to help.
  - Emily York: Created a collaborative learning space in a group with undergraduate and graduate students, which really helped.
- Closing Remarks
  - Ashley Shew: One professor cannot change the system, but changing the way of thinking and “swerving” to get out of a rigid space is important.
  - Cora Olson: Reminds students that racism and ageism is important, but that ableism is the fire underneath and underpins so much about how our society is structured. We need a collective force to stop oppression.

