Integrating Disability Studies into the English Department

Kristen Ruccio

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INTEGRATING DISABILITY STUDIES INTO THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

by

KIRSTEN A. RUCCIO

Under the Direction of Lynée Lewis Gaillet, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Disability Rights Movement has its beginnings in the 1960s, alongside the Civil Rights Movement, culminating in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1993. Yet because of a long history of eugenics approaches to “cure” disability rather than to include disability as a positive identity, ableism exists throughout the structures of our society, including in higher education. This project seeks to resist ableism in higher education by using the English department as a location of positive change for disabled students. The project seeks to create a disabilities studies orientation across the pedagogy and administration of the English department because virtually every student at the college or university must take an English course; therefore, creating inclusive culture of the English Department can positively affect a majority of disabled students.
Disability studies as a discipline was born from the activism of the Disability Rights Movement. The project at hand demonstrates how incorporating theories and practices of disability studies into the English department can be accomplished seamlessly. The project offers ideas for implementing disability studies into all levels of the English department, rather than resting on critique alone.

INDEX WORDS: Disability studies, Ableism, Activism, Inclusive Education, Writing program administration, Writing pedagogy, Student-centered pedagogy
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KRISTEN A. RUCCIO

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INTEGRATING DISABILITY STUDIES INTO THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

by

KRISTEN A. RUCCIO

Committee Chair: Lynée Lewis Gaillet

Committee: George Pullman

Elizabeth Sanders Lopez

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my students, past, present, and future. This was always for you.
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I could not have completed the project without the support of many family, friends, and loved ones:

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1 PREFACE: OPENING THE CONVERSATION

“You gather more flowers with an open hand than you do with a closed fist.”
—Zen Proverb

“I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again,
I am to see to it that I do not lose you.”
—Walt Whitman, “To a Stranger”

This project culminates my experiences of teaching at two-year college satellite
campuses and research one universities over the last thirteen years and a research agenda almost
wholly dedicated to disability studies. In this dissertation, I confront the question of how the
culture and curriculum of the English department, and to some extent, the university culture
itself, can be better constructed to actively include students with disabilities.

My experience with teaching first-year writing (FYW) and other English courses began
in Huntsville, Alabama—a city that has one of the highest levels of neurodiverse people in the
country (Huggins). In the last few years, disability activists and disability studies scholars often
use “neurodiverse” instead of “autistic” or “on the autism spectrum,” in order to focus on the
strengths of neurodiverse thinking, rather than formulating it as a defect (Honeybourne; Flink;
Brosnan, et al). I use these terms interchangeably because arguments for all three have merit—an
important aspect of disability studies, and of this dissertation, centers on calling people what they
want to be called. As a new teacher in Huntsville, I realized that I had no guidance about how to
accommodate my disabled students except, “follow the accommodations form” and “it’s the
student’s responsibility to bring you the form.” Little training or discussion of disability and of
disabled students’ needs represents the norm at most institutions.

I had many questions when I started working with students registered for
accommodations, and I made mistakes. I feel haunted by one instance when we had an end-of-
term exam that was given by the department as an assessment measure. Because the exam had no individual grade, I did not think about providing accommodation (the department aggregated all the data collected to get a general overview of student writing at the end of the FYW sequence). I was wrong. I ended up causing several of my students distress. I had to navigate phone calls and emails from parents, my department chair, and upper-level administrators, including the vice-president of the institution. I learned how many stakeholders exist in FYW at a concrete level, rather than understanding it theoretically. We may feel that we are often on our own in the classroom since we teach by ourselves (usually), and I have certainly found a sense of overwhelming isolation. Support exists on every campus, but it may not always be easily accessed by students and instructors. This project not only offers ways to substantively use resources but it also imagines new ways of creating support and inclusivity.

Fundamentally, we engage our students as individuals when we teach writing classes, but we also have to meet generalizable, replicable standards of curricular outcomes, often called course learning outcomes or CLOs. We have to connect these seemingly disparate responsibilities and activities into a pedagogically-sound, coherent whole. How to balance the needs of the individual student—whether disabled or not—with the broader goals of creating inclusive pedagogy, training, professional development, and writing program administration gives this project its scope and meaning.

Within the question of scope, however, lies the complexity of the disability. Disability, like the terms queer or Latinx, encompasses multitudes. Some disabled people embrace disability as a positive identity and some disabled people embrace the idea of having their disabilities cured. For the purposes of this project, disability is an identity; it is a reality in the lives of disabled students and in the lives of many students who have disabled loved ones or disabled
friends. The student-centered pedagogy I argue for throughout acknowledges and celebrates disability as another aspect of diversity and inclusivity.

The rationale for this project involves creating a holistic plan for inclusion for disabled students in English courses and in the culture of the English Department, which includes investigating local cultures as well as the culture of national leadership, conferences, and scholarship. It addresses the needs of students and faculty at two-year and at four-year institutions. With that in mind, while critique of our field and our practices does exist within this project, achievable, positive, and inclusive practices ground each chapter. This project intends to start conversations about inclusivity.

1.1 Outline of the Project

The dissertation begins with an introduction to ableism in higher education and the impacts ableism has on disabled students. The foundational argument is that no matter how much we follow the ADA or encourage a diversity of students, if we are working from a space of ableism in the first-year writing classroom, we will never have inclusivity in terms of disability in the English Department. Since virtually every student in the university takes first-year writing, we are therefore in a unique position to enact inclusive, equitable practices that can reduce structural ableism in higher education. The first chapter offers an analysis of ableist rhetoric used in foundational works in composition studies (including texts that are used to teach writing pedagogy). I discuss three types of ableism: ableism-through absence of disability as a theoretical frame or embodied reality (it is often the category left out of diversity statements), subtle ableism, and egregious ableism. While most of the ableist rhetoric falls under the first two categories, I argue that the end result is the same: a lack of awareness of inclusivity in terms of disability in our discipline, and thus, in first-year writing classrooms. In Chapter 2, I trace some
of the Classical beginnings of ableism as it has affected the study of rhetoric and the connections among these Classical beginnings and our current culture. It ends with a model of inclusive first-year writing, including a course design for an inclusive first-year writing sequence. Chapter 3 examines how to holistically create programs in English, because the number of disabled students in advanced undergraduate and graduate programs remains shockingly low. I offer a detailed analysis of how Romanticism can be used as a lens to teach about disability inclusivity in either a literature classroom or in a rhetoric classroom. Because one way to encourage inclusivity is to offer courses that appeal to students with disabilities, the course design for this chapter is a special topics course in disability rhetorics. The design entails a graduate-level class, but the course can be scaled down for undergraduate work. In Chapter 4, I turn to teacher training and writing program administration (WPA). I analyze how different leaderships that affect writing program administration ignore disability inclusivity, which leaves a gap in that area of the English department. By working within the institution to partner with disability services and the community, teachers can begin with an awareness of disability studies informing their pedagogical and administrative practices. Rather than a course design for this chapter, I offer a training program that can be used for new instructors or graduate teaching assistants. Chapter 5 looks forward to further research. I also discuss the potential of writing-across-the curriculum (WAC) as a site for cross-campus inclusivity. The design for the chapter presents a model for an interdisciplinary disabilities studies certificate program, which takes the focus beyond the English department while also offering a concrete plan for setting up interdisciplinary certificate programs—a rapidly-growing area of academic interest.
2 DEFECTS INSTEAD OF DIFFERENCE: COMPOSITION STUDIES’ ABLEIST CULTURE

“The ‘Enlightenment’, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines.”

—Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish

“A man should never be ashamed to own he has been in the wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.”

-Alexander Pope, poet (1688-1744)

Ludwig Wittgenstein, arguably the most important philosopher of language in the modern era, opens his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus with a silencing. He writes, “what can be said at all, can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about, we must pass over in silence” (3). Writing studies has certainly treated disability as something we historically cannot talk about, because our long disciplinary silence on the topic broadcasts our lack of attention to disability and how it impinges upon our classrooms. A review of the literature in our field indicates that although some interest in disability studies certainly exists—an interest that grows every year—many opportunities for improving inclusivity across our discipline remain. The field’s critical lens takes in the wider cultural landscape, but we have almost completely shied away from examining the ableism in our own discipline’s history and present until very recently. Notable exceptions to this exclusion are Margaret Price’s Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life and Jay Timothy Dolmage’s Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education. Both of these works interrogate the ableist structures and rhetorics of higher education, but neither takes as its focus our specific discipline’s ableist history and language. I propose that we stop ignoring our ableism by investigating the language used in many of our foundational and currently popular texts. To that end, I examine several incidents of ableism and place them in a continuum
of categories: ableism through absence, subtle ableism, and egregious ableism. All contribute to a problematic relationship between composition studies and disability studies. This results in alienation of disability in our scholarship, and I fear it contributes to alienation of our students with disabilities.

Ableism can easily be understood if we consider it in the same light as we consider racism. Racism, whether personal, structural, or rhetorical, not only causes violence against people of color, but also creates the conditions in which violence against people of color can happen. Lydia X. Z. Brown who writes on her blog, Autistic Hoya, that “Ableism is not ‘bad words.’ It’s violence.” (n.p.). Brown, in the tradition of many activists, wants clear focus on the results of “bad words,” or what I refer to as ableist rhetoric. Ableist violence may take the form of harassment or bullying of disabled students, but it might also take the form of structural inequality that leads to disabled students dropping out or never attending a college or university at all. My research found very little deliberate ableism in higher education, yet the result of structural ableism nevertheless results in a lack of inclusion of disabled students in higher education. This project seeks to offer ways to change elements of structural ableism, so that the structures change to actively include disabled students. The eradication of ableism lies beyond the scope of this project, but what can be achieved are elements of structural inclusivity across English departments. The building of structural inclusivity starts with analysis of the foundations of writing and composition studies, since these foundations inform the teaching of first-year writing.

This project takes a mixed-methods approach due to the wide array of sites of inquiry involved in the tracing of ableism in the discipline of composition studies. Since the project utilizes existing theoretical frameworks and also engages in theory-making, a mixed-methods
approach must be chosen. John Creswell writes in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* that mixed methods approaches to research allow researchers to “both test theories and generate them…mixed methods research may contain a theoretical framework within which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected” (51).

I engage in discourse analysis, archival research, and my own experience of teaching for the last decade to inform the project’s hypothesis that ableism in the history and present of composition studies affects the inclusivity of the English Department, and I offer solutions to creating vertical and horizontal inclusivity across the department. I deliberately sunder “rhetoric” from “composition studies” in this project because the focus absolutely rests on the first-year writing classroom. However, in practice, the history of the two aspects of rhetoric and composition are tied together, which is reflected in the discourse and historical analysis in this chapter.

2.1 Theoretical Framing

In this project, I adopt a disability studies methodological framework modeled on both Price’s process in *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* and an ecofeminist methodology based on the process of meaning-making described by Susan Griffin in “Ecofeminism and Meaning.” Price’s work begins by making historical connections among academic and medical discourses, moves to the creation of her own theoretical framework, and ends with the voices of students with mental disabilities engaged in academic work. Price also uses a feminist (and sociological) methodology by acknowledging her positionality throughout the project, a practice I follow by including my own experiences as a first-year writing instructor and as a WPA. Interrelation of the bodymind holds a central place in disability studies methodologies, a model also used by ecofeminist scholars and scientists. Griffin writes:
Within an ecosystem a tree is only provisionally a tree. Its root system cannot really be separated from the soil which nourishes it and which it shapes. It is constantly in an active exchange with the air whose very nature is defined by the leaves of the tree. Those same leaves fall and become part of a process of composting, and eventually become soil. (216)

The actions and reactions that take place among ableist rhetoric in foundational works of rhetoric and composition, instructor and faculty training, the embodied experience of students with disabilities in the first-year writing classroom, and treatment of disability by the WPA are as complex and as interconnected as the relationships Griffin describes above. An ecofeminist view, because of its focus on interconnectivity, helps us fully understand cause and effect, so that inclusivity, rather than ableism, can be centered in our discipline.

2.2 Acknowledgement of Controversy in Framing

The framing of this project acknowledges ableism exists and it negatively impacts societal institutions—including educational institutions. That may not be welcome information for many of us who work to achieve goals of social justice in our lives, and such framing can create hostility toward the project itself. Further discussion of theories of ableism and the rejection of ableism’s existence illustrates the controversies surrounding the discussions of ableism and its impact in society. Thomas Hehir defines ableism as:

the devaluation of disability [which] results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read text than it is to read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids. (3)
Margaret Price’s definition of ableism makes a similar claim in that ableism “contributes to the construction of a rigid, elitist, hierarchical, and inhumane academic system” (8). However, the existence of ableism has been rejected, particularly in the discipline of philosophy. Elizabeth Barnes succinctly summarizes the philosophical objections to disability rights:

Disability rights activists often claim that being disabled isn’t something that’s bad for you. Disability is, rather, a natural part of human diversity, something that should be valued and celebrated, rather than pitied and ultimately “cured.” But though this view is common among disability rights activists, many, perhaps most, philosophers find it implausible and radical. A major objection to such views of disability is one which tries to reinforce the idea that the position is deeply implausible is this: were they correct, they would make it permissible to cause disability and impermissible to cause nondisability or impermissible to “cure” disability, to use the value-laden term. (88)

Barnes ultimately argues that neither of these arguments works from an ethical standpoint, but I argue from the theoretical orientation that disability contributes to the vast spectrum of human experience and that it should not be looked down upon, segregated, nor should ableism be allowed to flourish in academia and education.

But ableism often does not express itself in the same way a racist-correlated oppression such as a blatant KKK rally does, an admittedly extreme example. However, subtle ableism presents a potentially more insidious threat because of its subtlety. Although I witnessed instances of egregious verbal abuse of students with disabilities by professors and instructors—always spoken outside of the presence of the students, thankfully—the majority of ableism seems
unintentional and institutional, rather than personal. Therefore, changing the structure of the institution by integrating disability studies into the English department will open conversations about how to work toward eliminating structural ableism.

Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Brenda Jo Brueggemann’s work *Disability and the Teaching of Writing: A Critical Sourcebook*, remains the only composition studies-based anthology of disability studies-based writing pedagogy. Most of the pieces in this slim anthology do not come from researchers in the discipline of rhetoric and composition. James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson’s edited collection, *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*, explores rhetorics of disability in identity, culture, and literacy. The 2011 special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, edited by John Duffy and Melanie Yergeau, took as its subject the rhetoric of disability¹. This special issue ranges widely from the rhetoric surrounding Oscar Pistorius (before his murder trial of 2014), neurodiversity, disability narratives, and closed captioning. A handful of other articles about neurodiversity and autism, primarily about autism narratives and the rhetoric of autism, appear in *College English* (Lewiecki-Wilson, et al) and *Women’s Studies in Communication* (Jack). Melanie Yergeau and Paul Heilker also contribute widely to the discussions of disability in writing studies. The conversation around disability continues in Kathleen Gould’s “What We Talked about When We Talked about Disability” and Paul Heilker’s response to it. Gould discusses study of her representations of disability in a literature-themed course, “Illness and Disability in Literature,” and the mixed reactions both she and her students had to the experience (28). Heilker expresses “reservations” about Gould’s practice of conflating the experience of both disability and illness as “fundamentally alike” (38). He argues that “the experience of these various conditions and our responses to them may be far

¹ It is worth mentioning that the journal has only been in publication since 2008 and it carries the subtitle *the first journal in the field of disability studies*. Disability Studies is a relatively new field.
more different than they are alike, even within the context of a single condition” (38). He uses as an example the belief among many with autism that they are in no way disabled by the condition when he writes “they see autism as a diversity issue and themselves as a diverse community” (39). Despite this critique, Heilker’s response ends with his thanks to “Professor Gould for beginning this crucial conversation within the pages of *TETYC [Teaching English at the Two-Year College]*, to point out how very far we have to go, and to urge all college English teachers to engage with the issues and join the discussion” (39).

Similarly, Bruggemann et al.’s groundbreaking article “Becoming Visible: Lessons in Disability,” raises a call to more strongly intersect composition studies and disability studies. They write:

> Why should these things—the attention to disability and the disappearance of such entirely unclear distinctions in the first place—matter? Issues of disability matter in composition studies and classrooms, first, because we have a long, proud history of making the invisible visible and of examining how language both reflects and supports notions of Other. We should be receptive to disability studies’ powerful exposure of the dehumanizing societal constructions of disability and difference. Second, we also rightly pride ourselves on our attention to practice—and on our refusal to separate it from the theoretical assumptions that explicitly or implicitly inform it. Disability and the presence of disabled students in our writing classrooms return us squarely to issues of practice that both interrogate and enrich our theories about literacy and empowerment. (371)
Succinctly, they make connections among disability studies, literacy studies, and composition studies, while returning to the reality that disabled students exist in writing classrooms and we must account for their needs.

Another project sharing my goals is a short commentary in *Composition Studies* by Elizabeth Brewer, Cynthia Selfe, and Melanie Yergeau, which discusses the need for the creation of a “culture of access” in our discipline. Creation of such a culture is not easy. They point out that, “complicating accessibility efforts is a shifting understanding of access itself. As a term, access is a moving target, a concept that sounds promising on its surface yet frequently offers little more than empty gestures” (151). The terms surrounding disability do shift as disability studies, and to an extent, writing studies work to calcify and create themselves as disciplines. This liminality of language and the need for critical awareness of that language underpins my project. We need to understand where we are in our own body of scholarship before we point fingers about access elsewhere. Brewer, Selfe, and Yergeau seem to understand that we have a long way to go when they clarify:

[w]hile we do not believe that composition studies has established a culture of access, there are significant efforts…that indicate a culture shift is underway…despite these efforts, our field too often remains attached to a vision of access that has more in common with helping the Other consume inaccessible texts than it does with radical transformation of the profession (153).

They end with a familiar call to “all colleagues to join in this project of questioning and re-thinking—for the future of the profession” (154).
Bess Fox’s article in *Computers and Composition*, “Embodying the Writer in the Multimodal Classroom through Disability Studies,” more fully engages the question of “whether multimodal composition can compel the academy to revise its vision of writing as an exclusively intellectual practice, a vision that limits the authority students can claim in their academic writing” (266). Fox later asserts:

…disability studies in the multimodal classroom offers more than just theory, story, and tools. Disability studies offers the opportunity for students to apply theory to multimedia compositions, and it is in this application that students may gain the most toward a revision of their disembodied models of writing. (276)

Fox’s work moves toward a pedagogical model which enacts not only acknowledgement of embodied writing, which in itself opens a space for discussions of difference among students’ abilities, but also empowers the students as creators of multimodal projects which map their own contextualized, embodied experiences, rather than encouraging replication of the “intellectual model” of writing practice (267).

Kristie Fleckenstein’s work, *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching*, emphasizes a pedagogical model suffused with empathy. She writes, “it [empathy] provides a starting point for transformation. Empathy enables not only the sharing of situations and perspectives, but also the changing of situations and perspectives. It is an ‘agent of transformation’” (101). I intend to portray these situations of ableism so that we may recognize them, work through them, and come to teaching in a space of empathy with all our students—including students with disabilities. Fleckenstein argues that empathy “mitigates our reliance on a single story or a single narrative” and it “transforms the tyranny of the rhetorical ‘I’” which causes “students to embed multiple identities within that singular instance of ‘I’” (101-102). We
can begin to encourage the sharing of everyone’s story in composition studies and to develop empathy with disabled students and their narratives.

James L. Cherney’s “The Rhetoric of Ableism,” which appears in the previously-mentioned special issue of Disability Studies Quarterly on rhetoric and disability, examines the specific ways in which “rhetoric can shape the way disability is understood and (in)forms its political implications” (7). This goal most closely mirrors my own. Although most of Cherney’s article examines the larger cultural context in which rhetoric and language create conceptions of disability, he works to “expose and critique” how Stephen Toulmin’s rhetorical structure known as “the warrant” is utilized to enact norms of ableist language (12). Warrants, according to Toulmin, serve as the reasoning that represents “previously agreed general ways of arguing applied in the particular case” (qtd. in Cherney 12). Cherney uses the term “rhetorical norms” to describe warrants that become commonplace assumptions that govern interpretation and promote an ideological orientation throughout a culture” (12). He then argues that some rhetorical norms have become so common that they actually become “arhetorical”—they are simply seen as commonsensical (12). The most damaging warrant that has become a rhetorical norm in terms of ableism is “seeing deviance as a sign of evil” (13). Cherney writes, “Using physical deviance to render evil visible saturates the Western artistic tradition, and it plays a crucial role in such genres as horror stories and films about demonic possession” (13). He then moves on to the rhetorical norm that “normal is natural” and claims that Aristotle’s Generation of Animals is the work which “established the basis of the modern aetiology of congenital deformity” (14). Cherney argues that this ideology of “constructing the abnormal body as unnatural ultimately attached very negative connotations to disability” (16). He concludes with the claim that we literally need new words in order to construct non-ableist language and uses the Burkean concept
of the neologism to enable this critique (18). That Cherney’s article was given pride of place in the special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly* indicates that we are aware that we need to do work with our own historical language and rhetorical norms. My work diverges from Cherney’s in that I seek to “critique and expose” pedagogical and rhetorical norms in our discipline not only in our past, but also in our present.

David Barton’s book, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*, does not directly address issues of disability, but “literacy” often stands in for “writing ability” in the composition classroom, especially for teachers who hold popular views of literacy as a set of skills, rather than a series of contextualized, socially-grounded events. Barton offers a refined and updated version of Kenneth Levine’s taxonomy of the ways in which we discuss literacy (13). The first category is “Condition” with “Sickness” and “Handicap” as the first two conditions identified; the response to these two conditions are “Treatment” and “Rehabilitation,” respectively. The “Means” undertaken is a “Clinical Intervention” (13). These categories would be familiar to anyone undergoing medical treatment. Categorizations such as these affect any student in a basic writing program, an adult literacy program, or in a first-year writing classroom. For example, a student with dyslexia will not be diagnosed until the teacher reads her work, and sometimes the diagnosis will not occur, particularly if the dyslexia is mild and the student does not self-identify. The teacher might just consider the student “bad” at grammar and spelling and move on. If a student comes to class in a wheelchair, however, she will be immediately identified as having a “Condition,” simply because of her mobility aid and will thus be targeted for a “Clinical Intervention,” even though no intervention may be needed. For students with a non-neurotypical disorder and a visible disability, the “Handicap” diagnosis will be even more
strident. Alienation will follow, simply on the basis of a “Diagnosis” of otherness and the rhetorical norm Cherney identifies as “deviance as a sign of evil” (13).

Barton’s taxonomy provides useful perspective on language researchers of literacy or disability, and I have modeled my methodology upon his taxonomy. My research found that absence of disability exists in many works wherein disability should have been acknowledged as a category, a scenario I call “ableism through absence.” The absence seems most problematic in textbooks used to train graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). If GTAs do not learn about disability studies as a pedagogy at the beginning of their careers, they may never encounter it later. Even more troubling are examples of ableist language in many of our foundational works. Although the occurrences fall along a continuum, I separate these findings into “egregious” and “subtle” examples of ableist language, so that we recognize that not all ableist rhetoric presents in the same ways, but that all ableist rhetoric contributes to structural ableism. Of note are many of the works from the 1970s and the 1980s which reflect the culture of their eras. We should not forget how much has changed since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Revising or discarding these works has never been the crux of this project; rather, since we use so many of these works across our discipline, I propose we acknowledge the problematic language and absences, so that inclusivity and awareness of disability get built into the rhetorical choices we make in our classrooms.

2.3 Ableism through Absence

In Society Must Be Defended, Michel Foucault posits that society is a living organism; society has many parts and its main function is to ensure its own existence by means of keeping bodies engaged in the defense of society at all times. He theorizes in Discipline and Punish a more pervasive, yet hidden bodily enslavement, which he calls the creation of “docile bodies” by
the state (135-169). Simply put, the Foucauldian docile body is a body almost completely without freedom to choose its own destiny because it is the object of state power; coercion shapes the body until it becomes a cog in the machinery of the state (Discipline and Punish 164). Yet we are never sure if we are surveilled in the panoptic world—that absence of certainty contributes to power of the state over our consciousness.

Still, Catherine Prendergast argues that the Foucauldian model does not represent the realities that disabled individuals face in contemporary society. She writes, “nor, for that matter, [does] Foucault’s meditation on confinement throughout the ages…represent the current conditions under which the mentally ill are held involuntarily” (50). Foucault’s model in Madness and Civilization portrays insanity as disruptive to the social order, and the creation of the idea of the institution as a place for the mad came about under the most repressive of circumstances. He writes:

And yet, it is necessary to emphasize it in order to understand how the consciousness of madness was transformed in the course of the eighteenth century. It did not evolve in the context of a humanitarian movement that gradually related it more closely to the madman's human reality, to his most affecting and most intimate aspect; nor did it evolve under the pressure of a scientific need that made it more attentive, more faithful to what madness might have to say for itself. If it slowly changed, it was within that simultaneously real and artificial space of confinement. (223-224)

Foucault argues that confinement drove the creation of our modern conception of insanity, yet Prendergast believes Foucault does not adequately represent the current conditions
under which Western countries treat mental illness. The uncertainty rampant in both the historical and current models of institutionalization and the docility enforced by that uncertainty speak to the constant presence of power designed to discipline those who do not fit the normative models of behavior approved by the state. That absent presence coerces compliance from us all, but those of us who are already seen as deviant via disability risk much more from breaking those norms of acceptable behavior.

How much does the history of our discipline engage in that absent presence of coercion? Composition Studies is a discipline concerned with its own history; Sidney Dobrin uses the term “enamored” to describe the discipline’s relationship to its past (6). Dobrin’s argument focuses on the need to remove student writers as subjects of our discipline, and a concurrent thread of the work calls for the dissolution of the administrative function in composition studies. I agree with Dobrin’s model, and assert that the subjection model of composition theory and pedagogy can no longer function. However, I disagree with Dobrin as to the causal element of this dysfunction. In the consumerist economic model of the university, students-as-consumers simply will not put up with being subjects; they are embodied customers of education. This unintended consequence of the commodification of education has many liberatory aspects from the students’ point of view. But Dobrin’s secondary argument presents more problems for the disability studies researcher.

Writing Program Administrators, or WPAs, have many tasks, and very few of those tasks lead to the development of strong theoretical models or of the uncoupling of composition pedagogy from the subjection model (Dobrin 92-93). But WPAs are also tasked with training teachers of composition and implementing policies of the university, including policies concerning students with different abilities and challenges. Certainly, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides a framework for educational equity for students with
disabilities, but the ADA’s sparse framework leads to different interpretations of ADA guidelines.

Gail A. Hornstein’s “Why I Dread the Accommodations Talk” appeared in The Chronicle of Higher Education on March 26, 2017 and in it she attempts to establish her positionality as an ally to disabled students by stating:

...not because I don’t want my classes to be accessible to every kind of student. I emphatically do. I am a professor of psychology, have taught and written about mental health for 40 years, and am an outspoken ally of many disability-rights activists and groups. Fostering greater openness about people’s mental-health needs lies at the core of all my work. (n.p.)

Despite her good intentions, Hornstein places herself in the role of diagnostian and fixer of student disabilities, also writing that it is the job of professors to “intervene” if disabled students “cause problems for others in the class” (n.p.). Ableism infuses every word of Hornstein’s paternalistic response, never minding the very title places her at odds with any student who will approach her with accommodations in the future. Unfortunately, the ADA’s lack of clear guidance on how to implement and facilitate discussions of accommodations contributes to the structural ableism in which Hornstein partakes. The Chronicle of Higher Education maintains a website with robust traffic for subscribers and for the general public. In addition to news, scholarship, and opinion pieces, the site also hosts an employment site with academic job postings, as well as a service for uploading one’s curriculum vitae. The organization also maintains a strong social media presence; they have over 166,000 followers on Facebook—every piece published results in a comment thread discussing the issues related to the content of the piece. The Chronicle represents a significant amount of the public face of higher education in the
United States. That Hornstein’s piece was cleared for publication in such an important venue reflects how ableist the culture of higher education remains because nobody stopped to question how the piece would affect disabled students; the lived reality of disabled students (and of disabled faculty) who read or listened to the piece remained an absence despite the presence of disability throughout her entire essay. Hornstein’s article has generated many responses, including an official response from the members of the Disability Studies Standing Group for CCCCs. Alice Wong of the Disability Visibility Project’s response took a more direct approach when she called it “a dumpster fire of an article.” While Wong’s colorful prose makes an impact on the reader, examining the conditions that created Hornstein’s frustration with the process of navigating disability accommodations provides an opportunity to find solution. Hornstein clearly desires to help her students succeed, but she has had no access to institutional support that helps her stop “dreading” the accommodations talk.

This absence leads to real consequences for disabled students. Disability studies theorist Scot Danforth writes of “Five Dimensions of Alienation” for students with disabilities (94-98). These dimensions are Powerlessness, Meaninglessness, Normlessness, Isolation, and Self-Estrangement. Unfortunately, Mina P. Shaughnessy’s critically-acclaimed and still-groundbreaking work, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, participates in these five dimensions of alienation through omission and one horribly ableist passage. She begins the introduction, which is the portion excerpted in the Norton anthology, with a recitation of the lot of students at CUNY when open-admissions began in 1970. She lists: academic winners and losers from the best and worst high schools in the country, the children of the lettered and the illiterate, the blue-collared, the white-collared, and the unemployed, some who could barely afford the subway fare to school and
a few who came in the new cars their parents had given them as a reward for staying in New York to go to college; in short, the sons and daughters of New Yorkers, reflecting that city’s intense, troubled version of America. (387-388)

Shaughnessy employs revolutionary rhetoric in many parts of this passage—she uses “sons and daughters” rather than relying on the male to stand for the whole and she mentions poverty, an almost-forbidden term that still causes intense discomfort to many academics. But left from this remarkably inclusive passage are the sons and daughters of New York who are disabled. Later in the introduction comes a passage with extremely troublesome language. Shaughnessy discusses the students who faced the most challenges in the basic writing program:

those who had been left so far behind the others in their formal education that they appeared to have little chance of catching up, students whose difficulties with the written language seemed of a different order from those of the other groups, as if they had come, you might say, from a different country. (388)

Here, Shaughnessy compares students with the severest limitations—some of whom were undoubtedly disabled—to literal foreigners. While she spent much of the book discussing the challenges English Language Learners face, nothing can be more alienating than to be characterized as an outsider in one’s own home. Were Mina Shaughnessy alive today, I feel certain her work would make a move toward more inclusivity for disabled students. We honor, rather than tarnish, her legacy by pointing out language that alienates the very students she worked with at CUNY, because then as now, many students with disabilities end up in developmental or basic writing courses because of problematic testing requirements.

Commonly used textbooks/anthologies used to train graduate teaching assistants (who often teach the developmental or basic writing courses, in addition to FYW) often also neglect
including disability studies in their content. My MA Writing Pedagogy course from 2009 adopted Victor Villanueva’s *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader* (second edition). The text contains a selection of readings from composition theory and is meant to provide a grounding in the discipline to students of rhetoric and composition and/or graduate teaching assistants. *Cross-Talk* is a top-seller, according to the NCTE website. The book went into a third edition in 2011, but it remains organized around broad, thematic topics such as “The Writing Process,” “What It Is, How It’s Taught, and “Talking about Writing in Society.” Many of the classic pieces remain in the book, although works like Adam Banks’ “Oakland, the Word, and the Divide: How We All Missed the Moment” provide new contextualization for some of the classic works. Still, disability remains the absent presence throughout the entire 869-page text.

Another often-adopted text in composition pedagogy courses is *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* edited by Gary Tate et al. (second edition, the most current at the time of this writing). This work does recognize disability in that there are five mentions of disability studies. However, the book is organized by chapters, not readings. Each chapter contains a summary of a theory of composition pedagogy; a chapter in the third edition on disability studies-based pedagogy would do much to raise awareness of these issues. The five mentions of disability present in the Tate collection may give an overblown sense of how much space the editors give to disability studies, because most of the mentions of disability are not substantive explorations.

Tate’s “Basic Writing” chapter has a single sentence devoted to universal course design, which is said to “arise” from disability studies (31). No context of disability studies is provided. The “Collaborative Writing, Print to Digital” chapter has the most substantive pedagogical modeling of disability-conscious classroom practice. An entire page is given to considerations for group work when students with disabilities are a part of the classroom (41-42).
“Feminist Pedagogies” chapter accounts for the remaining three mentions of disability. Disability is listed as one of the “variety of contexts” feminist pedagogues must consider (129). Further into the chapter, Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Debra Moddelmog are cited for their work on coming out, which they characterize not just as an important cultural practice for LGBT persons, but as “the act of making visible an identity that has been largely invisible, discredited, or actively ignored in the academy” and can be linked to those claiming a “disability identity” (137). The chapter ends strongly with a paragraph devoted to James Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson’s work regarding a perspective shift for “adaptation of classrooms with teachers and institutions [changing] rather than the students [with disabilities]” (139). This anthology offers at least some recognition of disability and disability studies, but it needs much more discussion to fully represent the breadth and depth of disability studies and its concomitant pedagogy and theory.

2.4 Subtle Ableism

Consistently, incoming students to FYC classrooms believe writing is a solitary activity, which takes place in the mind of the writer and has very little to do with culture or society. They hold this view because it is the image of writing bolstered by our own discipline’s Romantic underpinnings which promote the idea that:

a proper education produces deep thoughts, which cannot help but find their proper expression. And the thoughts that most improve one’s writing naturally come from studying the great writers, the masters of the art which cannot be taught. (Russell 136)

Community, culture, and interaction with other, living people do not inform this model of learning at all, yet they help create a disciplinary culture wherein students without the ability to synthesize the masters’ arts into proper writing immediately seem defective to the instructor.
Disabled students often fall into this category, which inhibits their integration/inclusion into educational culture, particularly in the FYW classroom through the prevalence of medicalized language and subtly ableist language.

David Bartholomae’s 1993 “The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum” speaks eloquently of the replication of “otherness” to students in basic writing courses:

I find myself characterizing basic writing as a reiteration of the liberal project of the late 60s early 70s, where in the name of sympathy and empowerment, we have once again produced the "other" who is the incomplete version of ourselves, confirming existing patterns of power and authority, reproducing the hierarchies we had meant to question and overthrow, way back then in the 1970s. (18)

The idea of the basic or disabled writer as somehow incomplete reinscribes an academic culture that seeks to cure the incompleteness of writers who do not meet the model of perfection in the teachers’ minds and replicates the ideals of Romantic ideology in liberal education. Since the situation Bartholomae creates “incomplete” versions of professors, no shift in the power dynamics can take place. Bartholomae hopes to introduce real change into the power structure of the university and to create a system wherein “complete” students can come into being. Yet many disabilities are not curable in any traditional sense of the word; to teach or learn within a culture that endeavors to cure the ills of writing, above all else, sends a message of futility to both instructor and student, since disabled students will never reach the benchmark of completeness as determined by the societal norms currently in place. Transformation of our ableist culture in writing studies will aid in dismantling these norms through creation of
awareness and acknowledgement of difference as something valuable, rather than something defective.

Along with a strong history of Romanticism (Russell), FYW theory and pedagogy has an undercurrent of medicalization culture, most prevalent in works of basic writing and in literacy studies, both of which disproportionately affect students with disabilities because they often place into basic writing courses via entrance tests. I have discussed Barton’s categories for the treatment of illiteracy and the medicalized language surrounding that model of treatment, but other examples of this medicalized language abound. The choices we make for writers with disabilities in terms of extra support also reflect medicalized language. Often the first writing students perform in any FYW class is called a “diagnostic” writing, whereas historically (and sometimes currently), virtually all students in FYW are diagnosed as bad writers in need of a cure. They can be assigned a tutor (nurse) or sent to a writing studio or center (formerly known as writing labs—similar in function to medical labs). This process effectively oppresses disabled students “through a series of techniques of exclusion” which include:

…cultural stereotyping; identification of impairment with loss or lack of some attribute necessary to be fully human; and the assumption that treatment or cure, rehabilitation or therapy or control, pity or compensation, is always the appropriate response to impairment. (Swain and Cameron 75)

Treatment, cure, and rehabilitation all work well as synonyms for “remediate,” which is what basic writing classes often are, despite the discipline’s shunning of that name since the late 1990s.

Mike Rose’s “Politics of Remediation” in Lives on the Boundary recounts his experience working in a tutoring center with students who had been sent to the center because they had
either been admitted to the university contingently and were in danger of failing to reach the required grades which would allow their continuing at school or they were placed in remedial classes. These were students who, mostly, had never been considered “remedial” before college (173):

They simply had little experience of being on the academic fringe. Thus it was not uncommon for visitors to the Tutorial Center at first to deny what was happening to them…They did not want to be marked as different. Students who were placed in Remedial English would ask us to go look at their tests, hoping there had been a mistake. Tutors often had to spend their first session working through the various emotions this labeling produced. (173)

Rose portrays these students as conscious of their diagnosis and quarantine from the rest of the student body through their placement in Remedial English and/or assignment to the Tutorial Center. Later in the chapter, Rose quotes an unnamed dean who calls these students, “the truly illiterate among us” (201). The “truly illiterate” are “among us” but they do not belong to the group, as evidenced by their being sent to a special place (the Tutor Center) which treats their illness of illiteracy. Despite the mandate of inclusion provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act, disabled students often feel different even within the already quarantined confines of the basic writing classroom. In my experience of teaching basic writing at an open-admissions community college’s basic writing program, 20%-30% of the students in the classroom provided me with accommodation letters from Disability Services, and many were uncomfortable with the process of accommodation because they felt the process marked them as different from their classmates, despite the preservation of their anonymity and the confidential
nature of accommodations, as mandated by the ADA. While the high percentage of students registered with disability services in my community college basic writing courses was connected to my gaining a reputation as a teacher who worked toward inclusive classrooms, the experience of students’ discomfort with the accommodations process remains stable across my teaching experience, no matter the class, no matter the institution. Indeed, many disabled students do not register for accommodations at all. Some look to leave behind their disabled identity once they enter college, others lack a formal diagnosis (which, as required by the ADA students need in order to receive accommodations), and many simply do not want to navigate the sometimes-complex process. Yet these disabled students remain in our classrooms, whether they are registered with disability services or not. By creating inclusive classroom spaces, we can alleviate the pressures associated with formal accommodation.

Patricia A. Dunn’s study, *The Perspective of LD College Students*, provides more personal perspectives about the impact of the medicalization model. Students with disabilities are treated as patients too weak to engage in the “regular” work of the classroom. Remediation becomes rehabilitation—students are not pushed, lest they suffer. One of Dunn’s participants recounts his experience of being treated differently because his teachers know he has a learning disability. Nick says “…they’re not making us do the work. Therefore, they set a lower standard and that perpetuates a continuously low quality of work. I see that happen continuously in high school as well as college” (149). Dunn follows this with:

the supreme irony here is that serious, hardworking students like Nick are still being told, verbally or nonverbally, that they’re lazy, when some are spending every waking moment doing homework. They internalize what uninformed people say or imply about them” (149).
Lamentably, we embody the “uninformed people” in Dunn’s scenario because composition studies training often omits disability studies.

Another example comes from Fleckenstein’s *Embodied Literacies*. In the book, she builds an argument for a new type of pedagogy based on a poetics of teaching. In the chapter, “The Shape and the Dynamic of a Poetics of Teaching,” she explains to the reader just what the poetics of teaching is and how it interacts with literacy practices. One of her foundational claims is that “literacy practices are linked inextricably with habits of seeing” (99). She continues, “their success in the academy rests, in part, on their ability to segue from one way of seeing to another” (99). I understand that Fleckenstein may not literally mean the act of using one’s eyes to process sensory information here, despite her focus on visual rhetoric in her scholarly works. Yet the example rests on a metaphor that encourages conformity in that it excludes those with visual impairment and also those who may see/understand things in a fundamentally different way. Neurodiverse people often process information quite differently than do individuals with a neurotypical profile. Disability could account for vast differences in both what is seen and in the process of segueing among types of seeing. The narrative Fleckenstein engages in this chapter shuts down several types of “I” from the rhetorical process, which although not intended, remains in the language. The need for awareness of and agreement on terms and discussion surrounding these varied disabilities in pedagogy and rhetoric continues.

Janet Emig’s influential book of 1971, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, also uses sense-bound language, which reflects the culture of the era. She cites Anthony Tovatt and Ebert L. Miller’s study that “proceeds from the premise that ‘we write with our ears’” (239). This immediately alienates hearing-impaired and Deaf persons from inclusion in the dataset or the study, as they, emphatically, do not write with their ears. Nancy Sommers’ “Revision
Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers” from 1980 uses similarly-alienating language when she writes of the experience of student writers:

the students solve the immediate problem, but blind themselves to problems on a textual level; although they are using different words, they are sometimes merely restating the same idea with different words. Such blindness, as I discovered with student writers, is the inability to “see” revision as a process: the inability to “re-view” their work again, as it were, with different eyes, and to start over. (327)

Later in the article she uses a similar sight-bound metaphor, “to see their writing with their ‘own’ eyes. Seeing in revision—seeing beyond hearing—is at the root of the word revision and the process itself” (emphasis in original) (331). Using terms that denote sight and seeing should not necessarily be avoided around Blind or visually-impaired persons, but when we use language for instruction, we need to be very careful not to alienate our students. Simply drawing awareness to these dated uses of ableist language will cast awareness of disability issues to our students; the task become especially crucial when training graduate teaching assistants and new instructors, who will then model either ignorance or knowledge of disability studies in their own classrooms.

2.5 Egregious Ableism

Although rarer, one instance of egregious ableism appeared in College Composition and Communication from a piece still famous two decades into the new millennium. Joseph Williams’ “The Phenomenology of Error” serves as an important piece on the construction of error and also provides a challenge and opportunity for humor, as he placed at least 100 grammatical errors in the text and challenged readers to find errors he may have missed (426). The article opens with Williams taking aim at William Zinsser’s descriptions of error. Zinsser
uses words such as “horrible,” “detestable vulgarity,” “garbage,” and “idiot” to describe those who make and the process of making grammatical errors (qtd. in Williams 414). Williams means to draw attention to the hyperbole utilized by Zinsser by explaining, “what happens in Cambodia and Afghanistan could more reasonably be called horrible atrocities. The likes of Idi Amin qualify as legitimate oafs. Idiots we have more than enough of in our state institutions” (414). In a society based on rights of free speech, we give much leeway to comedy in the name of our message. However, for Williams to use the derisive term “idiots” and to pair it with a reference to state institutions insults the vast suffering encountered by those condemned to those institutions. It is shocking that both Zinsser (whose *On Writing Well* Williams caricatures in “The Phenomenology of Error”) and Williams used the term in the early 1980s, although, perhaps it indicates that progress can be made when awareness of exclusionary language and practices becomes part of the conversation of academia and of our wider culture.

Ableist language in our discipline’s works and the lack of acknowledgement of disability in at least two popular textbooks for graduate students in training to be teachers points to the continued absenting of disability studies from our discipline. More troubling is that since these foundational works continue to be taught to those just entering the discipline, a culture of viewing disability as defect rather than difference lives on in composition studies. While not specific to composition studies, Beth Greenbaum, Steve Graham, and William Scales’ work with adults with learning disabilities provides somewhat disheartening results of these adults’ occupational and social status after college. The 1996 study found that 71% of participants were employed, but their average income was only slightly above $20,000 per year (169). It may be easy to consider $20,000 as a generous wage when the poverty level for individuals is half that amount; however, actually living on $20,000 a year proves challenging. More positive results
were found with respect to their social lives—82% of participants were “satisfied” with their social lives (170-171). The FYW classroom provides an opportunity to be a site of positive impact for these students, because it is the course which often builds the most tightly-knit community in students’ first year of college. Acknowledgement and abandonment of our ableist practices could impact the lives of all our students.

I am no composition abolitionist. I do not believe we should abandon the tradition or discipline, despite our ableist tendencies. We have not abandoned Cicero, Aristotle, or Socrates for their absolute misogyny or erasure of women in the rhetorical tradition, but we do acknowledge that absence. I hope that we begin to acknowledge and transform our ableist culture. We can begin to change our ableist culture by working at the level those of us who teach are comfortable with—in the classroom.

2.6 Pedagogical Suggestions

Jim Swan writes, “The tie between disability studies and an embodied semantics will be tested most immediately in the classroom, where it may be useful sometimes to offer students an opportunity to experience what it is like to be physically or perceptually impaired” (229). Our foundational works and current materials used to train instructors contain enough ableist language or absence of disability to create a very uncomfortable surmise about the future of disability and an embodied semantics.

Recent experiences at the College Composition and Communication Conference (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2019) indicate that a wave of scholarship is slowly building in our discipline. Many panels and presentations about upcoming publications and dissertations take disability studies as their focus, as does the publication of Stephanie Kerschbaum’s *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference*. But we all know that in our discipline’s history, it takes time for
things to trickle into the classroom from even our flagship conference. As counterpoint to the enthusiasm felt at CCCCs, I am troubled by the almost-hostile reaction this project has received from many of my peers—people who are otherwise generous and focused on critical and/or feminist pedagogies. One of my peers responded, “Are we supposed to make sure nobody can ever get their feelings hurt by anything we say?” Another asked me to provide him with inclusive language to replace the ableist terms I pointed out in some of our readings—with an implication that ableist language must be my problem, and therefore the onus rests with me for fixing it. A third friend said, more positively, but still with a slight grimace, “You’ve completely transformed how I think about disability and language and I’m searching for new metaphors. It’s hard work.” How, then, to provide a space for resistance to our ableist overtones without alienating those who must enact inclusive pedagogies in the classrooms of now? Frustration does not help.

A simple answer, of course, cannot be given to a cultural problem of such immense historical weight and ideology. My interpretation of JL Cherney’s arguments also makes a strong case for the ways in which ableist language shapes our culture. Disabled people will, unfortunately, still face horrible remarks, non-disabled people sitting in the disabled seats on the train, and eye-rolls that I have seen far too often from instructors who believe disability accommodations provide unfair advantages to disabled students. Classroom practices that can move toward inclusion are possible and the following list offers some beginnings, most of which will not radically impact any teaching practices, of inclusive practices:

1: Acknowledge that disability exists. When developing prompts for high- and low-stakes assignments, provide options that allow for disability to be part of the project. Literacy
narratives, Community Literacy, and ethnographic projects could all include a wide variety of people, including the disabled.

2: Be sure to include Braille or American Sign Language as options if a multiliteracy or multilingual project is part of your pedagogy.

3: Have a representative from Disability Services come speak to your classroom. Many students simply do not know that virtually every institution has such an office. The bureaucratic legitimacy an official visit lends can be more compelling than a personal experience.

4: Become familiar with the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (the DALN). There are many narratives that address disability—including many that are in ASL with translations into English. An analysis of a few DALN narratives makes a great follow-up assignment for a personal literacy narrative project in FYC or in upper-level courses.

5: Include works that include themes of disability for the course readings. Blogs such as Autistic Hoya, Tales from the Crip, and The Disability Visibility Project provide a wide array of topics, content, and perspectives about disability. For a literature-based course, you could add Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein if literature is part of your course content. Seeing “the creature” in terms of a disabled child can be powerfully transformative.²

6: Invite a disability activist to your classroom.

7: Invite open discussions in your classroom, and actively create freewriting prompts that address issues surrounding disability. Discuss ableist language in readings and other materials that you use in your classrooms.

8: Create a visual or sonic rhetoric assignment that focuses on representations of disability in our culture.

² This suggestion is provided, with permission, from Instructor Molly Felder.
9: Cull ableist language from your vocabulary and classroom.

10: Use Jason Palmeri’s term “remix” instead of “revision.” Not only does “remix” eliminate the ableist overtones of the sight-centered term “revision,” it encapsulates the experience of students who work in a multimodal world. Acknowledgement of different modes opens up potential pathways for discussing different abilities and non-neurotypical experiences of the world, because the experiences of individuals with these differences can be described in terms similar to multimodal language.

11: Create a unit on the rhetoric of eugenics for an upper-level class. This will be disturbing material and students should be forewarned, but it can be done with sensitivity, and it will change a worldview about disability irrevocably.

12: Include disability studies scholarship in your readings. I recommend this for courses at all levels. The excerpts in the Lewiecki-Wilson and Brueggemann anthology are especially appropriate for FYC because they are generally only a few pages long.

13: Implement any of the course designs in this project.

None of the suggestions offered above will upend current pedagogy or classroom practices, but they can help create an inclusive atmosphere in FYW classrooms. This chapter focuses on the presence of ableist rhetoric and language across the scholarship we value in writing studies, but we can easily work to acknowledge and to minimize the effects of ableist rhetoric and language by adopting praxis that includes disability as a positive aspect of human being.

3 THE CLASSICAL ROOTS OF FYW PEDAGOGY

“What if higher education isn’t creating knowledge and ability but instead is systematically disabling?”
Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Academic Ableism*

“*I feel that it is my obligation and that of other academics to employ our privilege in the construction and support of activist and deliberative movement spaces and activities.*”

– Dana Cloud, “Reflections on Academia and Activism”

Rhetoric and Composition traces its disciplinary history to the Classical Era in the West with the works of Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero influencing pedagogy across the spectrum of courses offered in the English department, whether that department is housed in a two-year college or a research-intensive university. Virtually every student who attends an institution of higher learning passes through a first-year writing course because a first-year writing requirement exists at almost every institution, despite the fraught history of the composition requirement (see Crowley, *Composition*, and Harker for further discussion of the history of FYW). The focus of this discussion is that despite the structural inclusivity of the composition classroom, students with disabilities are often excluded from the university itself. Before discussing the specifics of how the Classical era rhetoricians influenced the FYW classroom, I trace some of the societal influences that affect whether students ever make it to the FYW classroom.

Statistics tell us that students with disabilities are largely left out of higher education. In the United States, only 60% of high school students who have used special education services in K-12 education pursue higher education (Congressional Research Service). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 11% of U.S. undergraduate students self-reported as having a disability; the number falls to 5% of graduate students with self-reported disabilities. These percentages stay relatively stable across Western and Western-colonized countries among students who self-report disability (HESA; Fichten, et al.; Mutunga). However, methods for
determining how many disabled students attend any institution of higher learning vary. The easiest data to gather exists with offices of disability services for many researchers at colleges and universities. Self-reporting of disability remains contested as an imperfect measure of the population of people with disabilities, as it offers no external proof of disability beyond self-reporting, whereas registration with disability services requires proof of diagnosis. However, complications with the methodology of using students registered for special education or disability services exist since economic and cultural barriers affect which students can afford to or who choose to obtain the diagnoses necessary for registration for disability services (see Emerson et al., and Kerschbaum et al. for further discussion of the issues surrounding disclosure of disability). As mandated by the ADA, the practice at U.S. institutions relies on registration with disability services (or similar office) before an instructor is legally bound to provide accommodations to a student with disabilities, and because this project focuses on changing institutional norms in order to create a more inclusive culture, registration with disability services is used as the method for accounting for the population of students with disabilities in almost all cases. However, no matter how researchers account for the presence of disabled students in higher education, they are clearly an underrepresented population because of structural ableism. Many students choose not to register because of the stigma associated with disability or because of their past, negative associations with the accommodation process (Lightner et al.). Ableism also contributes to their underrepresentation in higher education.

Kim Nielsen writes that disability is perceived as deficiency and weakness, which undermines the American values of independence and “standing on our own two feet” (xii-xiv). But ableism also intersects with other identities and structural inequalities. In the 1940s, ableism combined with racism denied access to education and healthcare for Black Americans who had
contracted polio (Nielsen 137). Structural ableism led to the placement of workers with disabilities into wartime factory jobs that were the most dangerous and lowest-paid (Nielsen 148-149). From the 1950s to the 1970s, students with disabilities remained segregated in public schools, even though segregation by race was outlawed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Dolmage “Disability and the Shape of School”). Despite the development of disability activism in the 1960s and the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which addressed many of these acts of violence against people with disabilities, ableist violence remains. Violence today causes men and women with disabilities to be sexually assaulted at a rate that is seven times higher than the rate of assault for the nondisabled population (Shapiro). Ableist language, such as “That’s crazy” and “I’m acting so OCD” or even slurs like “You’re acting like a retard,” remain in use both in the media and the classroom. These incidents of ableist rhetoric contribute to continued violence against people with disabilities. By including disability studies into the English department, we can build on the disciplinary history of melding theory with practice. Disability studies was born from activist roots, but the discipline also creates robust theoretical models to use in the classroom.

Tobin Siebers’ 2008 concept of the “ideology of ability” works alongside the concept of ableism to frame this project. He offers a long list of definitional aspects of the ideology of ability, but most connect to two major points (9). The first point defines disability as a solitary, individual feature, not something shared by all human beings (10). The second point defines the able body as an unaware body, that is, the body is only noticed when something goes wrong (10). Both these points serve to make disability very much outside the norm of human experience and segregate those who have disabled bodies from the rest of the population. Unfortunately, despite his respected position as a theorist of disability, the term “ideology of disability” has not caught
on in the scholarship. The concept of the ideology of ability remains valuable to this research, but the term ableism is used most often, as it is most accessible—an important consideration in any work in disability studies research—and generally understood.

The issue is how can FYW classrooms create an ideology of disability and inclusive pedagogy? To begin, we need to acknowledge that the Greco-Roman canon of rhetoric has helped create ableism. Classical Era rhetors endorsed the use of rhetoric to sway the masses, and they used it, in part, to justify the euthanasia and infanticide of individuals with disabilities. Thomas Joseph Kiefer notes, “The importance of such argumentation is that the very existence of individuals with disabilities becomes an icon or embodiment of disorder, dysfunction, and injustice that must be purged” (n.p.) In Disability Rhetoric, Dolmage argues that the “rhetorical histories of disability” provide us with a lexicon of disabled bodies:

Homer, the mythical seer Tiresias, Oedipus, the great orator Demosthenes, Paris’s killer, Philoctetes, Croesus’s deaf son, and others form our view of disability in antiquity. These men overcame their disabilities, or compensate for them with poetic genius, or bear with them as punishment, therefore, they both adhere to and perhaps provide archetypes for some of the most prevalent modern myths about disability. (63)

We can trace the thread that goes back into antiquity and connects to the ableist culture we live in today, but we tend to ignore the fact that rhetoric claims, in its Greco-Roman foundations, the ability to persuade the masses. Unfortunately, the masses believed in ableism because of the many ableistic and frankly eugenicist teachings in Plato. However, rhetors of today can change that message by directly engaging with these problematic elements of Classical rhetoric. Indeed,
as I turn to the discussion of the *Dissoi Logoi* later in this chapter, we can find examples of Classical rhetoric that push against the dominant cultural narratives in Plato.

Psychagogy, the practice of persuading the masses, began in the Classical Era. Paul Kolbet discusses the birth of psychagogy thusly:

> In its earliest uses, it was a ‘term from magic; it is the raising of the spirits of the deceased.’ Psychagogy later came to be used in rhetoric and poetics to refer to the influencing of the souls of the living: ‘bringing into ecstasy (the mind of) the audience by the magic of speech, carrying it away to the fictitious world that one (as a poet) has created, or to the emotional state that will make it take the decision one (as an orator) hopes for.’ This kind of...seductive enchantment, often carried with it negative connotations of manipulation, flattery, or beguilement as well. (8)

As the title of Kolbet’s book, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, implies, the practice was embraced by Augustine of Hippo, better known as St. Augustine to Catholics and Anglicans. Philosophers still study Augustine’s Neoplatonism and its influence on European philosophical inquiry. Charles Baudouin, a French-born psychoanalyst, used the tenets of psychagogy in his 1923 work, *The Power Within Us*. His concepts of suggestion and autosuggestion remain central to contemporary psychology, and he believed that we all have the power to influence others, if we develop the skill of how to inspire and persuade others (188). While nobody uses the title of “psychagogist” these days, the influence of the practice definitely echoes in contemporary culture. And we can trace it all back to Plato, who represents one of the foundational figures upon which the discipline of rhetoric and composition was built. Those beginnings echo into the
FYW classroom of today in the ways we teach argumentation, particularly in the pride of place given to Greek rhetorical practices.

Plato denigrated and ridiculed the Sophists for their handbooks of rhetoric. In the *Phaedrus*, the characters of Socrates and Phaedrus enter a conversation about the value of rhetoric as taught by the Sophists. Socrates asks, “Won’t someone who is to speak well and nobly have to have in mind the truth about the subject he is going to discuss?” (259e). Phaedrus replies:

What I have actually heard about this, Socrates, my friend, is that it is not necessary for the intending orator to learn what is really just, but only what will seem just to the crowd who will act as judges. Nor again what is really good or noble, but only what will seem so. For that is what persuasion proceeds from, not truth. (259e-260a)

That response does not sit well with Socrates, who was no friend to the Sophists (with the possible exception of Gorgias), and he argues that a rhetor who speaks from any source other than a source based on real truth (dialectically gathered, I presume) will yield a “poor quality” crop that can convince folks that a “miserable donkey” is a horse (260d).

Socrates then makes a fairly unexpected turn, given his previous treatments of Sophistry in *Gorgias* and his argument for the ascendency of philosophy in *The Republic*. He posits the possibility of a handbook of rhetoric that does not yield a bitter crop of falsehood. Although Plato argues that students should learn philosophy before rhetoric (260d), he claims that as one of the “arts,” rhetoric has value (260e). In one of the best descriptions of rhetoric that will ever exist, Plato says, “[I]sn’t the rhetorical art, taken as a whole, a way of directing the soul by means of speech, not only in the law-courts and on other public occasions, but also in private?”
In this speech, Plato lays the groundwork for the necessity of training people the correct way in rhetorical practice, because the power of “directing the soul” has much greater potential consequence than fooling people into believing a donkey is a horse. Phaedrus and Socrates discuss how problematic a rhetor who can convince people of the wrong direction is, because his practice would be the “chasing of opinions” rather than the practice of an art based on truth. Plato never addresses some of the more practical implications of a rhetoric based on opinion chasing, but we can easily imagine the consequences since we have seen the damage in our history. We know that subsequent generations of philosophers and scholars venerated Plato and his students, and Greco-Roman thought remains irrevocably tied to our own culture and to our own choices. And since Plato often focused on the content and appropriateness of one word versus another word of seemingly close meaning, we know his choices were deliberately made. When considering Classical cultural influences foundational to our own contemporary world, we can never definitively argue that “Plato created____.” What we can do is recognize tendencies as they have filtered down to the culture of the English department and how they inform and influence our pedagogical choices.

Plato points to the example of clearly indicative words, such as “iron” or “silver,” versus words that have messy meanings, “just” or “good” (263a). We can agree on the former, but the latter get us into all sorts of debates. Plato writes that in order to have rhetoric as an art, we need “a systematic division and grasp [of] the particular character of each of these two kinds of thing, both the kind where most people wander in different directions and the kind where they do not” (263b). His final admonition comes after a discussion of “love,” a term for which he and Phaedrus cannot come up with a definition. Socrates uses a metaphor of butchery to describe what must be done to understand the truth of a situation and craft appropriate oratory for it.
Socrates says the rhetor who wishes to practice the art must “be able to cut up each kind according to its species, along its natural joints and try not to splinter any part” (265e). When we consider his own recommendation of eugenicist policies, we must recognize that brutality and ableism remain constant threads through Plato’s rhetorical praxis. Dolmage writes, “The dominant message that we have about classic rhetorical oratory is that it was a sphere for only the most able-bodied—we link this with ideas about delivery that connect only with very narrow interpretations of the rhetorical body” (Disability Rhetoric 84). Plato limits the potential of disabled rhetors and thus limits the potential of rhetoric itself.

Socrates and Phaedrus then turn to what a guide such a rhetorical handbook would look like. He does not want to use the term “handbook,” but he lays out a systematic method that entails three crucial elements. The teacher of rhetoric needs to know what kinds of souls there are and if they are homogeneous or multipartite (271a). She must be able to explain how the soul is acted upon and how it acts on other things (271a). Finally, she must be able to explain the kinds of speech and soul and, most importantly, the various ways in which they are affected as well as what causes them to be affected (271b). Plato has given us a map of how this rhetoric-as-psychagogy will play out, but he does not continue with the mapping. Instead, he turns to the perils of writing, rather than speaking, as a form of discourse (274b). A critical concluding point regarding the Platonic vision of rhetoric is that Socrates does not differentiate between psychagogy and rhetoric in the Phaedrus. The guiding of the soul encompasses the end point of all the art of rhetoric. Kolbet’s reminder that psychagogy originates in magic also lends a magical aspect to the art that we see described in Plato’s work. Yet, bodies that have no speech or bodies that have no souls—a common description of people with mental disabilities throughout European history—are automatically left out of the schema entirely.
Aristotle picks up where Plato left off in *Rhetorica*. Or it seems that he does. Several important differences exist between the project laid out in Phaedrus and the handbook that Aristotle produces. Plato may not have been an egalitarian champion, but he does focus on truth as the basis for the rhetorical art; indeed, it is his primary point of contention with the Sophists, because they were persuaders for hire rather than truth-seekers. Plato also uses the term “soul” repeatedly when he discusses the method of psychagogy. Plato was absolutely a stickler about precision in terms and definitions; using soul was a deliberate choice, as opposed to “person” or “audience.” An idealistic tone infuses Plato’s description of the art of rhetoric in *Phaedrus*. Aristotle absents idealism and magic from the *Rhetorica*. Although it is the handbook that Socrates predicted as “those who now write Arts of Rhetoric” near the end of *Phaedrus* (271c), and all writers have variety of style, Aristotle’s work has very little to do with truth, and souls are not mentioned at all in the Kennedy translation. Perhaps that dryness can be excused considering the difference in rhetorical situation. Plato explains the theory in *Phaedrus*, whereas Aristotle gives us the manual. Instead of “directing the soul,” Aristotle focuses rhetoric on the practice of “defend[ing] and attack[ing] others” as the basis for his guidebook to the rhetorical arts as he asserts in Book 1 (30). Aristotle makes an even more troubling assertion when he claims, “but rhetoric is useful, [first] because the true and the just are by nature stronger than their opposites, so that if judgments are not made in the right way [the true and the just] are necessarily defeated [by their opposites]” (35). Aristotle’s formulation sounds very close to “might makes right.” Plato does focus on the idea of truth as a foundational element of rhetoric, but Plato also believed in dialectic as the way to find out any truth. Truth would have been defined in the dyadic relationship of the dialectic for Plato and it would have been contingent on the discussion at that time and place, between the two involved in the dialectic.
The dialectic relationship to truth and its use as a method to get at the truth (or Truth) does not leave room for difference. By forcing a relationship between two people for dialectical method to work, both rhetors must be rational actors. Little room is left for anyone who does not qualify as rational in the search for truth. Ancient Greeks may not have meant to discriminate, although the arguments for infanticide and euthanasia in The Republic remind us that a eugenics-based ideology was a huge part of these philosophies and rhetorics (Kiefer). And, often, if we raise an objection to Greco-Roman rhetorics, the idea of moral relativism rears its ugly head, because if we cannot seek Truth the only alternative offered is a world with no truths.

Debates about moral relativism cause controversy in many cultural circles but are best exemplified by the entry for Moral Relativism in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

It might be thought that MMR [Metaethical Moral Relativism], with respect to truth-value, would have the result that a moral judgment such as “suicide is morally right” (S) could be both true and false—true when valid for one group and false when invalid for another. But this appears to be an untenable position: Nothing can be both true and false. Of course, some persons could be justified in affirming S and other persons justified in denying it, since the two groups could have different evidence. But it is another matter to say S is both true and false. (Gowans “Metaethical Moral Relativism”)

The statement “[n]othing can be both true and false” contradicts the very nature of the first four sections of the Dissoi Logoi. Few of us are comfortable with a morality based on “anything goes,” but a relativist position does not mean “anything goes.” Relativism means that we take the time to think about the situation in which an event occurred, rather than make a snap judgment based upon an objective rule of right and wrong. Cultural relativism occupies some of the same
ontological space as moral relativism, although people tend to be more accepting of it. A cultural relativist position recognizes that what is “true, valued, or expected” in one culture will not be the same as what is true, valued, and expected in another culture (Johnson 71-72). Critics of cultural relativism argue that it leads to moral relativism and the end of the world; some people are that hyperbolic about the topic. Strangely, at least in terms of its antiquity, the *Dissoi Logoi* offers a way out of the dilemma created by the relativist/objectivist swarm of debates. The author(s?) of the *Dissoi Logoi*, in the first four sections, simply offers situations wherein truth, benefit, or what is right depends on situation. These concrete examples undermine objections to relativism, because they contextualize how simple the relativist position truly is. The introduction and first example can really stand for the rest of sections 1-4, because they iterate along these same lines with different examples:

On the matter of what is good and what is bad contrasting arguments are put forward in Greece by educated people: some say that what is good and what is bad are two different things, others that they are the same thing, and that the same thing is good for some but bad for others, or at one time good and at another time bad for the same person. (2) For myself, I side with the latter group, and I shall examine the view by reference to human life, with its concern for food and drink and sex. For these things are bad for those who are sick, but good for the person who is healthy and needs them. (3) Or again, lack of restraint in these matters is bad for those who lack restraint, but good for those who sell these commodities and make money out of them. And illness is bad for the sick but good for the doctors. And death is bad for those who die, but good for the undertakers and the grave-diggers.
The first section also resonates most loudly in the cultural/moral relativist debate because the section’s title, “On good and bad,” focuses on that which most concerns us all (at least all who consider such things)—the nature of good and evil. If we stop to consider that death shatters the bereaved but feeds the children of the undertaker, a whole new world of possibility opens to us. If we are to practice rhetoric, we have to be aware of the idea of truth and what is right, even if those truths or rights are situational (which gibes perfectly with the idea of dialectically discovered truths). Rhetors have caused great harm; we have to learn how to temper that potential for damage with the building of empathy, and the *Dissoi Logoi* fosters empathy because we are asked to put ourselves in another person’s shoes when considering the contrasting arguments. Allison Hitt writes on her personal blog of the “all or nothing” mindset of much of classical, non-Sophist rhetoric:

For example, Gorgias describes the invisible body as the “finest,” the ideal. It is the able body that is invisible and able to seamlessly blend in. Disability by its very nature of difference makes the body visible, Other. Perhaps for Gorgias, this visibility would take the form of stuttering that interrupts the cadence of speech or partial deafness that affects pitch and volume. If an orator is physically unable to perfect this delivery of rhythmic enchantment, to *pass* as an able-bodied orator, they are unable to affect the emotional state of their listeners, ultimately failing to move those listeners to action. (“Crippling Ancient Rhetorics”)

In this explanation, Hitt argues that the foundations of our own rhetorical practices generally rest on assumptions of “this but not that” for the rhetor (or the rhetorical body, to use Dolmage’s terminology). Yet, we can look to works such as the *Dissoi Logoi* to find ways out of the ableist
foundations that are a rhetorical inheritance as much as enthymemes, the rhetorical appeals, or any of the much-valued practices of writing pedagogy are.

Rhetorical practice relies on taking the pulse of culture because persuasion cannot happen without audience awareness, and that takes knowledge of culture, subculture, and morality norms. Rhetors must be readers of culture, in essence, or else we wouldn’t know how to persuade anyone, because we would not discover an audience’s expectation of what is true, valued, or expected unless we could consider others’ expectations and how they might clash or mesh with our own. Even if we only practice rhetoric on a group sympathetic to our own, we have to be aware of counterpoints in order to create unity or anger responses in the audience by playing on their perceptions of outside attack, interference, or simply that the other side’s beliefs are completely wrong. By including awareness of disability, alongside other aspects of audience awareness, we begin to practice an approach to teaching and rhetoric that no longer alienates disabled people from the discipline or disabled students from our classrooms.

Since we have built composition studies and FYW pedagogy so strongly on the Classical Greco-Roman model, we have to recognize that we imported much of our ableistic practices from that era as well. Yet, we have revolutionary writers such as Ira Shor, Peter Elbow, Mina Shaughnessy and so many others who moved to democratize our classrooms. In 2015, Asao Inoue’s *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future* asked us to consider how structural racism influences our assessment practices. He asks:

How does a college writing instructor investigate racism in his classroom writing assessment practices, then design writing assessments so that racism is not only avoided but antiracism is promoted? What I mean is how does a teacher not only
do no harm through his writing assessments, but promote social justice and equality? (3)

A primary way we can meet Inoue’s charge lies in how we teach Classical rhetoric. We can acknowledge and unpack the cultural freight of ableism as a parallel to racism alongside the positive aspects of our rich tradition of rhetoric. The inclusivity for which I argue does not entail throwing out millennia of rhetorical knowledge and practices, but, rather, I argue that we robustly acknowledge where ableism and other structural injustices were built into our culture from those beginnings. That means discussing the eugenicist or ableist portions of Plato or teaching the Sophists in contrast to Plato rather than as enemies of Plato. Most importantly, we should also create classroom environments that welcome and include all students.

3.1 Inclusive Course and Assignment Rationale

No matter the extent to which the foundations of our pedagogy may have problematic roots from the Classical Era, a balance can be found among pedagogy based in Classical ideologies and democratizing, inclusive pedagogies that build upon that foundation. A course design that models inclusivity can include changes to methods of grading and types of assignments. A brief discussion of ideas surrounding these areas of a course are followed by the documents of such a course I taught in 2018-2019.

Grading

Although contract grading has its origins in the Expressivist Movement, Asao Inoue’s work in *Antiracist Writing Ecologies* has reinvigorated the debates surrounding contract grading. While Inoue rightly points out that racism often serves as a synecdoche for other kinds of oppression and that we should attend to racism (6), multiple intersections of identity often exist
in each individual. Therefore, his focus on contract grading models the kind of inclusivity we should strive for in our classrooms, so that no student feels left out.

To balance historical pedagogy, rhetoric and inclusivity, the course design in this chapter utilizes modified contract grading. Lynda Radican defines contract grading clearly and concisely: “Contract grades essentially transform the grading process from teacher-developed criteria into an agreement between teacher and student, with considerable freedom for students to propose and assess work on their own initiative” (285). Ira Shor argues throughout When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy for grading contracts that are political and connected to real-world structures of injustice; Shor’s entire course, policies and rubrics, were student-created, for example. In contrast, Peter Elbow and Jane Danielewicz take a very different approach in “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching.” They argue for a depoliticized classroom that focuses on writing. They explain:

> Our approach would seem to be highly unpolitical and ‘uncritical’—ideologically unaware. For our goal is to create a classroom where both teachers and students get to give as much time and attention as possible to writing—not politics and culture. Of course political and cultural issues turn up in student writing, but our tendency is to discuss the effectiveness of the writing more than political and cultural issues themselves (not that one can ever completely separate the two). (4)

The students do not participate in the construction of the contract or course policies in this model, which could be interpreted as a less democratic classroom, which may be what they wanted. However, given the nature of their other works, I believe the lack of student participation in construction of the contract simply places the in-class focus on writing.
There are many more ways to construct grading contracts than the examples listed above. The Shor/Inoue models exemplify the more ecologically-based, critical pedagogical approach to contract grading. These kinds of contracts are very student-centered and student-negotiated, with a focus on labor. The Elbow/Danielewicz model replicates some of the more traditional elements of the classroom, such as a teacher-created contract, depoliticized atmosphere (at least on the surface), and some grading as projects progress, but their model guarantees a minimum grade of B if the students follow the contract minimums. What unites all contract grading is that it has, overwhelmingly, been found to be good for students and for student writing.

Negative critiques of contract grading exist, however. In Joyce Olewski Inman and Rebecca A. Powell’s article, “In the Absence of Grades: Dissonance and Desire in Course-Contract Classrooms,” from a late 2018 *College Composition and Communication*, they acknowledge that their quantitative data shows the positive aspects of contract grading that most other researchers have found, but when they “listened to their data” the “success story got complicated” (38). Using Affect Theory, Inman and Powell argue that the absence of grades actually harmed their students because that absence ignores the emotional impact and emotional attachment students have to grades as a marker of their institutional and intellectual standing. The piece has some problematic issues at the end when Inman and Powell attempt to inject decolonial practices into their argument, with little contextualization or acknowledgement that decolonial practices rest on a history of indigeneity; however, their assertion that students miss grades resonates. Knowing their progress in the course as represented by a grade is a tradition. Students also often must maintain an A or B grade point average to qualify for scholarships. These are crucial issues to students who could not otherwise afford school.

*Assignments*
Following the feminist and critical pedagogies upon which contract grading and my own modified version of Bottom Line grading were built, the students engage in activities to know each other, they lead discussion, they freewrite, and I include ways to be part of the community that don’t involve speaking in class, such as online discussion board posts and in-class writing turned in at the end of class. The students stay engaged in writing almost every day in order to demystify the practice of writing itself. They build a skill and write to learn as they engage with subjects like topic choice for a project, progress reports for projects, and mini-presentations that present their results to their peers as an informal introduction to conference or business presentations. Students choose the languaging (they can choose to write in their own dialects or in standard academic English), topics, mode of delivery, and collaborative or solo work for each project so that they remain empowered in their educational journey. They are adults and the main stakeholders in their futures, so they decide, under the umbrella of the type of project, what they are doing and how they are going to do it. This course design and the assignment sequence utilize Bottom Line Grading, but the inclusivity of the course happens in the interactions among students as well. A description of the assignment sequence for the first half of the FYW sequence helps explain the student-empowerment model I use.

The projects are titled and focus on Awareness, Interpretation, Application, and Conversation because they define a progression of scholarship by the students in the course. The sequence is truly a sequence—these projects don’t work in isolation because each one builds on the previous assignment, while the sequence comes together to present a portrait of the student as emerging scholar. I use the term “portrait” rather than “scaffolding” because I believe this sequence models a more recursive and reflective process than the more typically vertical model
of a scaffold, but the interconnectivity of the sequence does the same work that we typically see in scholarship that defines scaffolded assignments.

The Awareness project asks students to investigate a literacy practice of their own, or possibly someone close to them. Literacy is defined broadly, because I find that students do not always get excited about writing, but they do get excited about learning to skateboard, the literacy practices they learned while in the military, or other rich experiences in their lives that involved learning a new skill. The broad configuration of literacy also builds in inclusivity, because students who are blind or visually-impaired often do not learn to write text in the way writing traditionally appears in literacy studies, for example. The students tap into their own experiences rather than having their choices for literacy dictated to them, which places them in the position of being experts. As primary research also grounds several of the assignments in the sequence, thinking about awareness of ourselves and what we know introduces the idea of primary research seamlessly into the course design. It is not a scary thing when the Interpretation project comes along—it is something they already know.

The next project, Interpretation, asks them to build on their self-awareness as observers of a quotidian space. They learn about qualitative data gathering, ethical ethnographic practices, and positionality as researchers in this project, but the scope of a spatial ethnography is narrow enough to not intimidate a first-year student. The assignment asks them to specifically observe how the space of their chosen site of observation affects the people within the space. By narrowing the scope of the ethnography, the students have a firm grasp of their task. And, by focusing on the effects of space on people, the project includes students who may use mobility aids or who may have other disabilities because they can observe how the space affects their own experiences, as well as the experiences of other people. The students’ ability to choose their own
mode of delivery for their spatial ethnographies works toward inclusivity as well, because the students can submit a video ethnography that sketches out the space or a graphic depiction, such as an animation or a comic strip that defines the space and its effects. For this project the collaboration option works quite well when students can compare and contrast their experiences of the space with those of the people they observe.

The third project, Application, asks them to then apply a skill—perhaps the very one they describe in their Awareness project, providing the opportunity for students to deeply study one topic for the whole course. For this project, students have turned in resumes, music samples, film projects, archives, and application materials for scholarships, internships, or other opportunities. They are also completely in control of what they turn in, which incorporates both independent and critical thinking skills. Much classroom support is provided for this project in particular, and I encourage the students to email me with their ideas early in the project, so that they do not choose something too broad to accomplish. Since they apply a skill of their choice, inclusivity builds itself into the project from its beginning.

The final project, Conversation, asks the students to bring all their skills together into an argument. Preliminary activities for this final project involve the students bringing in examples of argumentative rhetoric, and I also bring in examples (often advertisements, which by definition try to convince the audience to purchase the item being advertised). As with the Application project, the students have to decide on a topic early on so that they don’t choose too broad a topic. I often discourage students from choosing hot button issues such as the death penalty or gun control. I set up my objections to those kinds of topics by revisiting the rhetorical appeals and remind students that there is very little new information to be argued on any of these topics; in other words, I rhetorically frame these topics as boring for the students to engage. I
take a more overt approach to inclusivity in this project, too, because we discuss what voices and bodies have typically been left out of the academic conversation. The benefit of this project as capstone for the first class of FYW centers on persuasion and argumentation. Since they must use secondary research (primary research is optional) to support their arguments, they are prepared for the second class of the first-year writing sequence, which focuses on persuasive rhetoric and supported argument. The deliverable for this project tends to be similar to a traditional research project, which is my intention; students will have to write such papers throughout their careers. The entire sequence works to prepare students for their future writing courses, but it also meets the course learning outcomes as set by our department, which are based on guidelines set by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. In order to provide readers with a full picture of how the course works, my course syllabus and assignment sheets for each project follow. I used a newsletter template in Microsoft Word to create the syllabus, and students have responded to its multimodality positively. However, I always have a text-only version of the syllabus at the ready for students who may need accommodation for visual disabilities or neurodiversity, as the version I use now does not work with screen readers and other accessibility software. (See Appendix for screenshots of the syllabus design.)

**Awareness Project**

English 1101

We first have to become aware of our own personal history—in this case a literacy history—before we can begin to look outside of ourselves. The Awareness Project is a literacy narrative. A Literacy Narrative is a special genre of memoir. Memoir, simply, is the story of some event of your life. When memoir is expanded to tell the story of an entire life, it transforms into biography (the story of a person’s life told by someone else) or into autobiography (the story of a person’s life told by that person). The Awareness Project focuses instead on the question of
experiences of reading, writing, and speaking (or signing) for the author. While there is a narrower focus than in a memoir, the Awareness Project can encompass a wide variety of experiences. Do not feel that you must focus on learning to write in 1st grade! This project should be the story of some general or specific incident in which reading, writing, or speaking affected your life.

Questions you can consider: (All are from the excellent website, The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, daln.osu.edu, which has many resources available. We will watch and read a few sample literacy narratives from the DALN in preparation for this assignment.)

What is your literacy history? Where did you grow up or go to school? What literacy values did your family have? Was writing important in your family or to the profession of your parents or grandparents? Do they have any stories about what literacy means to them (this would involve an interview conducted via email, over the phone, or in person)? Do you remember reading anything in a newspaper or online that changed how you felt about the world? How, why, and when did you learn to write? What was your first experience with public speaking? Did you enjoy reading or dislike reading as a child or as an adult? Why or why not? Was the reading of holy texts important in your household or to you? What was/is your favorite book/poem/play? What does literacy mean to you as you embark upon your college career? What role do social media and/or cell phones have in your literacy practice today? Can you tell a story about a time when you felt illiterate? Have you ever felt ashamed of a literacy practice?

Keep in mind that you do not have to consider any of these questions; you may already have a great idea for your literacy narrative. Also keep in mind that there are probably thousands of other angles you could engage for your narrative. This is your story (or the story of your
family.) If you are interested in the literacy practices of someone else, interviewing an older/elderly friend or relative could be quite rewarding. Be sure to take notes as you interview. Don’t rely on your memory!

*If there is an outside source that is relevant to your topic, chat with me about it and we will determine how it can fit in your narrative.

This brings us to another aspect of this term—our assessment practices. In the words of Asao Inoue, “all assessment is racist.” We’re going to talk about why that is throughout the term, but I’m using modified contract grading this term to try to mitigate the effects of structural racism in my assessments of your work. Essentially, if you meet the bottom line and meet the minimums of the learning outcomes listed for each project, you are guaranteed a grade of B- on that assignment. If you exceed the bottom line and/or the learning outcomes (CLOs—refer to page 2 of the Syllabus for the CLOs), then your grade will reflect that. My feedback to you will detail the ways in which you met, exceeded, or failed to meet the bottom line and/or learning outcomes, so please attend to it.

**Bottom Line for This Project:** So, where’s the stuff about page length, word count and such? This semester we are going truly multimodal. You can decide on the mode of delivery (a handwritten book, a video, a website, a traditional paper…) for this and every other project this term. You can also collaborate with one or more of your classmates, if you choose to do so. Collaborative projects will be given the same grade for all participants. The bottom line is that I must understand the story of one significant literacy event in your life (or a set of interconnected events).

**CLOs:** 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9
Interpretation Project

English 1101

This project asks you to look more deeply into the everyday spaces we generally inhabit without seeing critically. You’ll be interpreting the familiar. Our class discussions and readings from *The GSU Guide to First-Year Writing* and *Becoming a College Writer* will inform this project heavily.

You will undertake your ethnographic observation in a quotidian space. Perhaps you will observe the train on your ride home or a common area in your dormitory or Classroom South or the Plaza or a restaurant. You pick the space. For this project, you will be an observer, not a participant observer, so you do not need to interact with anyone, unless it is a necessary aspect of being in that space (for example, if you observe a coffee shop, it would be poor manners to sit for an hour without purchasing something). Be sure to have a field notes sheet prepared in your research journal and take detailed notes as you observe (and example of the field notes sheet is on page 298 of *GTFYW*). An hour’s observation will be the minimum for a project of this scope; ideally, you’ll go to your chosen space twice and spend an hour each time. Please take into account the ways in which the space itself affects the dynamic of the micro-community of the time and place you choose to observe. Be detailed in your field observations, but resist the urge to come to conclusions during your observation. Let the space speak to you and always remember that more description is better than less.

**Bottom Line for This Project:** As with every project this term, you’ll determine the mode of delivery, but there’s a special caution for this project. While the Supreme Court has resoundingly upheld the right for people to be filmed when they are in public spaces, I believe courtesy should be our guiding principle. If you chose a video or pictorial mode of delivery,
don’t invade the privacy of the other people in the space, but focus on the general aspects of the space itself. The bottom line is that I should have a good idea of the space you chose by experiencing or reading your project. I should understand how the physical space itself impinges on the people in the space, why people go to the space, why you chose that space, and what conclusions you can draw about the space itself and the kind of community created by that space. There is an excellent example essay by Monjima Kabir at the end of Chapter 6 that begins on page 299 of GTFYW. If you choose to collaborate on this project, all members of the collaboration receive the same grade.

CLOs: All

Application Project

As we enter the third section of the course, let’s pause and consider the first two stages: Awareness and Interpretation. We’ve written pieces that make us aware of ourselves as people who’ve engaged with (and maybe struggled with) literacy. We’ve also become critically aware of and interpreted our surroundings through ethnography and spatial analysis. Now, it’s time to apply those skills in this Application Project.

What is application? It can mean many things, as the introduction to the section in Becoming a College Writer tells us. But, for the purposes of this project, the most relevant definition entails using skill and critical thinking. You’ve probably noticed that personal choice centers all of our projects in this course—that’s because there’s a wealth of data that shows that students write best when they write about things that matter to them. For this project, you’ll be choosing to apply a skill that matters to you in a mode that also matters to you. Are you headed for a finance degree? Then you might want to shadow a financier for a day or two and write up that experience. Are you already looking down the road and know you’ll need a writing sample
for nursing school? Then you might want to write a more traditional research paper and work on it for your application materials. Maybe you are applying for an internship or job and you need a polished CV or resume? Then you can work on that for this project. Are you looking to work as an actor in Atlanta? Make an introductory reel. I want this to be useful to you—for you to apply yourself to a piece of writing or communication that is relevant to your life.

**Important Dates:** There’s a few pieces to this project. On 18 October we are going to be doing idea sharing. During that class period, you need to convince me and your peers that you’ve got a good, doable project idea. On the 25 October, you’ll do a more formal presentation for this project, although I’ll still mostly be grading for completion with detailed feedback. Final project and reflection due on 30 October. As ever, anything turned in after 11:59 PM on 30 October is subject to the case-by-case late penalty described on page 4 of our syllabus.

**Bottom Line for this Project:** On 30 October, you’ll turn in your final deliverable and also a 1-page (double-spaced, 12-point font) reflective piece on the project. In that reflective piece, you’ll discuss how it went, what met your expectations and what didn’t, why you chose the application you chose, and anything else that comes to mind about the process. The bottom line is that you’ll be choosing your own adventure here for both the application and what the deliverable will be. My job will be to see if you followed-through on your original idea. This may seem scary, but self-starting is one of the most important skills you can develop in college. We will workshop with these ideas a bunch, so you won’t be as on your own as it might initially seem. As always, I’ll be available for meetings and via email to chat about ideas. You can also collaborate with one or more of your classmates, if you choose to do so. Collaborative projects will be given the same grade for all participants (for this project only, each collaborator must turn in an individual reflection).
CLOs: Potentially all, depending on the type of application chosen.

Conversation Project

English 1101

You’ve made it to the end! (Almost). Over the course of this semester, we have discussed and entered into a variety of conversations. You are all part of the ongoing conversation of academia in this country at a time when that conversation rapidly changes. For this project, you’re going to enter into a conversation that you find interesting. Again, I will not be choosing your topics for you, but I am always available to chat with you about some of the conversations you’ve already engaged and conversations you might be interested in joining for this project.

Are you interested in hashtag activism on Twitter? Investigate that. Do you feel strongly about the anti-vaxxer/vaccination conversation that’s occurring? Join that. Did one of our readings spark an interest in you? Explore that further. Did you find ethnographic observation fascinating? Expand your field research for a final project. You will, once again, choose the deliverable and topic of this project.

Bottom Line for this Project: I must have a clear idea of what conversation you (or your collaboration team) are entering. I must have a clear idea of the audience for your conversation. You must make an argument as to why your audience should attend/pay attention to this conversation. Your argument can be supported by primary research, but it must be supported by 3 secondary scholarly sources. You should, near the end of your project, discuss where you think the conversation is going—that is, what are the next important issues surrounding your conversation? You do not have to propose solutions, but you must describe how the conversation is evolving. If you collaborate on this project, each member of the collaboration team receives the same grade on the project.
CLOs: All

The syllabus, assignment sequence, and the assessment method for this course design provide a solid foundation for students to become advocates for their own education—something disabled students experience throughout their lives. Importantly, this course also includes a foundation in Classical rhetorical strategies and methods of persuasion. Because of the classroom structure of student empowerment, disability studies readings, and an assessment method that uncouples student writing from practices that can be unintentionally ableist, inclusivity becomes part of the foundations of the course itself. Classrooms such as the one modeled in the course design not only benefit disabled students, but they also benefit students who have disabled friends and/or disabled family.

4  ROMANTICISM, WRITING, AND ACTIVISM: PEDAGOGIES ADAPTABLE FOR ANY INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

“The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.”

—bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom

“When we are making up our minds as to when we shall begin, the opportunity is lost.”

—Quintilian

The beginnings of this project, and its foundation, lie in the argument put forth in the preface and the first two chapters that the discipline of rhetoric and composition has a problem with ableist rhetoric, which leads to unintended ableism in the FYW classroom. But the English department consists of more than rhetoric and composition courses and pedagogy; indeed, in many departments there might be a lone composition specialist or one writing program administrator who likely has an advanced degree in rhetoric, writing studies, or in rhetoric and
composition. Some departments have no rhetoric and composition specialists, although we find fewer and fewer as rhetoric and composition programs spread. Nevertheless, this project seeks to explore some of the shared ableism of English as a discipline alongside the history of rhetoric and composition. This chapter examines more deeply the Romantic underpinnings of ableism in literature studies, investigates freewriting practices, and provides a special topics course design that could be scaled up or down for undergraduate or graduate students. The course also could be more literature focused, depending on the needs of any English department to expand their focus on inclusivity. This chapter does not seek to provide exhaustive details and ideas for every classroom, but instead seeks to provide ways of imagining inclusion of disability studies across the pedagogy and curriculum of any English department. And, as I discuss more fully in the following chapter, inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility appear on the mission statements and QEP plans of many institutions; English departments that model inclusivity also garner recognition from administrators for following institutional norms that value inclusivity and diversity. Disability studies impacts literary studies and disability studies-themed works often engage theories and theorists more familiar to literature scholars than they are familiar to rhetoric and composition scholars. Disability studies scholarship provides models for us to work with more interdisciplinarity in our own projects, in addition to allowing us new ways of approaching literature in our classrooms—whether those classrooms examine rhetorical theories or literary theories.

Fuson Wang opens “The Historicist Turn of Romantic-Era Disability Studies, of *Frankenstein in the Dark*” by acknowledging:

>The field of literary studies has been playing catchup ever since the scholarship issued its daunting challenge: the wide-ranging hypothesis
that various forms of impairments have informed nearly all human cultural production. (1)

I have argued throughout this project that the English department represents a space of unique possibility because of our engagement with virtually every student in the institution, but to use Wang’s terminology, what we must do is “catch up” with other disciplines posthaste. Wang offers a framework for us to engage in that work by maintaining that the Romantics wrestled with disability in problematic and revolutionary ways. Romantic works such as *Frankenstein* offer a path to reading literature from a disability studies lens that both acknowledges the ableism of the literature and celebrates the tolerance found within those same works (9-10). Theories of Romanticism provide another lens through which we can engage disability studies in advanced courses in the English department because theories of Romanticism and disability provide us with a new gap in the scholarship that we can explore.

Slavoj Zizek writes in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*:

Lacan conceives this difference between the two deaths as the difference between real (biological) death and its symbolization, the ‘settling of accounts,’ the accomplishment of symbolic destiny (deathbed confession in Catholicism, for example). This gap can be filled in various ways; it can contain either sublime beauty or fearsome monsters. (135)

He then describes this place between two deaths as the “empty place of the Thing which enables us to conceive the possibility of a total, global annihilation of the signifier’s network: the ‘second death,’ the radical annihilation of nature’s circular movement is conceivable only insofar as this circular movement is already symbolized/historicized, inscribed, caught in the symbolic web” (157). Zizek’s framing of ideology as perceptible only as a space between two deaths—our
symbolic death and our actual death—may seem downright anti-Wordsworthian. My argument here centers on going deeper than Romanticism’s surface and looking at the darker aspects of Romanticism as well as the more familiar joy in nature aspects of the movement. English studies—whether literary, comp-rhet, or creative—owe much to a shared Romantic ideology, and critically engaging this ideological foreground allows for the teaching of English courses that embraces the richness and controversies Romanticism brings to our field.

We should definitely not begin on the first day of class by telling our students that the course will be based on a theoretical conception of ideology that has us only understand it in terms of the annihilation of all that we know. They also may be discouraged if we argue that annihilation taps into ableism. But I do recommend starting out the semester with one of the main Classical influences on Romanticism—Longinus’ “On the Sublime.” Sublimity influenced the Roman rhetorical tradition and the Romantic poets/writers, so beginning the term with a nod to Longinus’ instructions blends the traditions from the outset. He writes, “For the effect of elevated language is not to persuade the hearers, but to amaze them; and at all times and in every way, what transports us with wonder is more telling than what merely persuades or gratifies us” (114). A brief introduction to the Classical themes that appear in Romantic works, and the ableism of those Classical themes, could then feed directly into the works of the British Romantic poets—arguably the most famous and enduring. Famous poems by Romantic writers such as “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Coleridge, “Augeries of Innocence” by Blake, “The Eve of St. Agnes” by Keats, and “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by Wordsworth on the surface seem to completely embody the traditional view of Romanticism owing all to Nature as muse and as guide. Yet these poems also contain existential angst and other complex themes that open the door to a discussion of ethos and pathos. An entire course could be built on discussing
the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Ciceronian influences on the Romantics and the ways Romantic works partake of ableism—but, importantly, how these works also explode ableism.

One of Wordsworth’s most-quoted poems is “My Heart Leaps Up.” It is short enough to render here:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So it was when my life began;
So it is now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety. (van Doren, 1125)

Romanticism grounds itself in the idea of childhood and innocence being the best states of humanity. Romantic poets laud the innocence of children for their connection to the Divine, as Wordsworth does here. In Authoring Autism: on rhetoric and neurological queerness, Melanie Yergeau argues, “If autism is a childhood thing, then autistic adults are read as children, as hovering toward the severe edges of a demi-rhetorical continuum” (156). For Wordsworth, to be “read” as a child would be the highest of Romantic compliments, but for Yergeau, and for many disability activists, the infantilization of disabled adults represents one of the most serious ableist violences against people with disabilities. Exploration of the tensions among Romanticism, disability activism, and disability rhetorics could be a strand or focus of new course creation and for new scholarship for graduate students involved in advanced study or dissertations.
Disabling Romanticism, a collection of essays edited by Michael Bradshaw, “examine[s] disability in the lives and work of Romantic writers, seeking to demonstrate meaningful connections between concepts of disability, including both bodily and mental differences, and that which makes Romantic texts distinctively ‘Romantic’” (3). The collection would be an invaluable addition to any course that examined Romanticism alongside disability and through a disability studies lens. W.D. Brewer’s essay in the collection makes the revolutionary claim …that Robinson understood disability as a social construction: she regarded herself as abled as long as her financial resources and caregivers permitted her to have a social life, write prolifically, and visit London’s cultural sites. Constantly harassed by debt-collectors, she considered her poverty a more serious impairment than her lameness. (107)

Most social-construction interpretations of disability emerged in the 1960s alongside other social justice movements (Neilsen 128). Yet Brewer makes a compelling case and only a focus on Romanticism led to this important discovery.

However, we could also focus the course on process-oriented discussions. Indeed, when we read the writings of the Romantics about their own writing processes we find “stress on the natural powers of the mind and the uniqueness of the creative act” (Richard Young qtd in David R. Russell’s “Romantics on Writing: Liberal Culture and the Abolition of Composition Courses” 138). Discussing how “natural powers” can alienate many writers, including disabled writers, leads us to question how inclusive Wordsworth’s work can be, despite its continued popularity. However, Daniel Robinson’s book about Wordsworth’s “The Prelude” immediately problematizes the idea that all of Wordsworth is “about daffodils.” Robinson writes, “Wordsworth explains the relationship between the remembered past and the active, creative
present...as his experience of seeming to be ‘two consciousnesses’ myself and some other being’ (*Myself and Some Other Being* is the title of Robinson’s book, incidentally).

Wordsworth’s being caught between these two entities sounds a lot like the life between two deaths that we began with in Zizek; we can bring a disability studies perspective on the study of Wordsworth into the intersection of the two conflicting, views in Young’s and in Robinson’s scholarship.

Russell’s “Romantics on Writing” argues the focus on “Brahmanical Romanticism” served as justification for many early composition abolitionists to argue for erasing FYW from the college curriculum altogether. After all, life experience and the study of great works of literature were all any young man needed to become a college writer, according to Thomas Lounsbury, one of the first composition abolitionists. Consistently, incoming FYW students believe writing is a solitary activity, which takes place in the mind of the writer and has very little to do with culture or society. The new students’ view is the popularly held image of writing, bolstered by our own discipline’s Romantic underpinnings which promote the idea that:

> a proper education produces deep thoughts, which cannot help but find their proper expression. And the thoughts that most improve one’s writing naturally come from studying the great writers, the masters of the art which cannot be taught” (Russell 136).

By constructing a belletristic approach to writing pedagogy, embodied realities of writers and links to communities of learners disappear. What is left for students is to attempt to synthesize the masters’ arts into proper writing, or to be seen as defective to the instructor. Disabled students often fall into this category which inhibits their inclusion into educational culture, particularly in the English classroom, but many students who are not used to the culture of higher
education also fail to properly “absorb” the “masters of the art.” Inclusive programs not only welcome disabled students but other students who do not fall into the category of the mythical “traditional student.”

Encountering all the world in a grain of sand might be something very different for people of differing abilities. Rousseau’s *Emile* is a central Romantic work in this construction of the course and readings from Disability Studies—especially selections from Tobin Siebers’ *Disability Theory* and Margaret Price’s *Mad at School* which underscore the ways in which Romantic ideologies place burdens on all writers but even more so on writers with disabilities.

**Classroom Practices and More Pedagogical Suggestions**

Ableist foundations bring an obligation to all instructors to create spaces in our classrooms that resist that ableism. Acknowledging the presence of ableism represents an excellent start, but there are also methods, such as the modified contract grading model proposed earlier, that we can use in our classrooms to create more inclusive spaces. Here, I discuss a community-based pedagogy model that begins with using freewriting in the classroom.

I use the terms “inkshed” and “freewrite” in my classes to signal whether or not sharing will be required to my students **before** they write. Ninety-nine percent of my prompts are freewrites that I develop to match course content or ones I get from a variety of sources—there are many sites devoted to freewriting prompts. Freewrites are never a mandatory share, and I never take them up, although sometimes students want to turn them in to me to read. Sharing is optional for a freewrite. The number of students who want to share usually goes up exponentially as people begin to feel safe in the classroom, so be sure you have time to dedicate to sharing—because that’s really what builds the community—when you begin with a shared prompt. I never call on people to share, but I use gentle nudges like “C’mon everybody, sharing is caring!” or
“We’re going to have to move on to the reading quiz if nobody feels like sharing.” (I know that last one is unfair.) But allow time for people to share. Sometimes getting over that first moment of panic will open a space for students to share. The most effective way to encourage sharing is to be willing to share your own writing with the group. I almost always write with my students, and I share some of the time, more at the beginning of term than the end, because I don’t want to make it all about me. The inksheds, the other 1% of my prompts, have a different purpose.

Inksheds are a mandatory, everybody shares event, but I never have a personal prompt for an inkshed. Instead, they will be something like: What is your research question? What is your topic for the Community Literacy project? How are you finding sources for your annotated bibliography? Freewriting, because of its timed nature, can be somewhat controversial among disability studies scholars of writing studies since the timing can run against accommodations that allow for disabled students to have more time for assignments (often, time and a half or double time). However, I mitigate this potential problem by telling everyone they can keep writing if they want after I stop the timer, by the fact that freewriting is never graded, and by allowing students to turn in freewrites and inksheds later if they want to or need to do so.

However, in my experience of teaching classes with a high percentage of disabled students, I have had no complaints about freewriting or inksheding. But, crucially, we must always discuss student accommodations with students during office hours (chatting about them during class is not desirable because the conversation might be overheard and the student’s confidentiality thereby breached). The accommodations chat needs to be a conversation, however—one that continues throughout the semester. We need to make sure the class works for our disabled students as the semester or term progresses, which is why I acknowledge that there may come a time when freewriting does not work for a disabled student or students in my classroom, and if
that time comes, I will seek alternate exercises and activities (a quick solution is to have freewrites and inksheds as untimed exercises). Yet, with my current experience, I find that writing together in class creates a sense of cohesive community, and that creates inclusivity for all students.

Why does it work to build a community? Peter Elbow writes, “It wasn’t until after I wrote *Writing Without Teachers* that I discovered something remarkable: everyone in the world wants to write” (xi). I think this is mostly true. The act of writing together forms a bond that isn’t easily broken—freewriting promotes sharing of ideas and feelings, humor and sadness (try to shy away from utterly devastating prompts. I tried “create your bucket list” shortly after film of the same name came out and that ended up being an emotional rollercoaster. Emotion should not be considered all bad, but it is tough to get back to teaching when many in the class are crying). Simply being a little vulnerable can have a positive effect on the group’s sense of camaraderie. These are the ways we build friendship and it helps build relationships inside the classroom, too.

**Caveats:**

1) **It will not be all rainbows and sunshine.** You will have students who hate freewriting, you, and/or the class, especially at the outset. Work with them. Try to engage them and get them involved. If you show that you care about your students as humans, they’ll usually at least stop glaring during freewrites.

2) **I repeat: This Takes Time.** It takes time to develop a community wherein people want to share, and it takes time to actually do the prompted writing and sharing. My first experiences with 50-minute classes challenged my use of freewriting and inkshedding. As it happened, those shorter classes coincided with two very share-oriented groups. Sometimes half the class would go to freewriting. I’m okay with that—not every day, but
sometimes. Freewriting helps all writing because it demystifies the process. If you have a super-sharing group, you may have to limit the number of shares if you have a short class timeframe. Try to keep track of who is sharing and let it rotate. I generally like to work up to 5 minutes for a prompt, but in the 50-minute class, I never got above 3 minutes, simply due to time constraints.

3) In that vein, try not to overwhelm them at first. I usually start with a minute or two on the clock when the class first begins to practice freewriting together. Work up to whatever length you think is appropriate for your students’ needs. In longer summer classes, sometimes we write together for 10-15 minutes.

4) Don’t treat it as a chore yourself. The attitude you bring to it will transfer to the students. If this exercise does not fit into your approach to writing, it might not be the best pedagogical tool for you!

These freewriting and inkshedding methods help build community, which goes far towards creating an inclusive classroom space, no matter what topic, level, or course in the English department. The following course design can also be used to integrate a disability studies sensibility and inclusion into the department in the form of a disability activism course that could easily work as a film-based, literature-based, or rhetoric-based course design. The focus of the course remains disability activism no matter what content the instructor decides upon, and by adjusting the number of assignments, the course can be scaled-down for undergraduate work. This version takes rhetorics of disability and activist responses to those rhetorics as the main focus, but multiple examples for readings, films, and other content provide a starting point for any of the three focal areas.
4.1 Course Design and Rationale for Graduate-Level Special Topics Course: Repression and Resistance: Disability in the United States

Course Description

This course provides background into the historical foundations of the rhetoric surrounding disability in the United States by first examining the Greco-Roman rhetoric of rationality and the ways in which those concepts have been taken up in the Western Tradition. By examining the rhetoric surrounding several significant events regarding disability and disability rights activism in U.S. history, a portrait of the rhetoric of disability will emerge. The course traces these histories to our era, and the students will look at the rhetorics of disability across a variety of media and in both academic scholarship and in popular culture. Finally, the course engages the rhetoric surrounding Crip Studies and the Mad Movement. By the end of the semester, students will have developed expertise in one or more areas of the rhetoric of disability through their final project and individual presentations, and they will have developed broad knowledge through their final exam. It is recommended that students take at least one course in Classical Rhetoric before taking this course, as it builds on those foundations.

Theoretical Rationale

Most people who are interested in disability studies are connected to the discipline in a very personal way, through being disabled themselves or through having a close relative, friend, or partner who is disabled (Capuzzi Simon). This is not particularly surprising, as it is the case with many identity-based fields. I believe this brings a level of passion to the study of disability studies that can be missing in other disciplines of academia, but it also brings a cautionary framework. Scholars of disability studies must be even more rigorous in their work to avoid accusations of bias. Tobin Siebers writes, “it carries a tremendous burden” (70). Therefore, I have designed this course with the Freirean concept of decoding at the forefront (87). This course
rests on the assumption that we will be decoding the rhetoric that surrounds disability in the United States, and to do this we must, in Freire’s words, “investigate people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality, which is their praxis” (87). Rhetoric represents the methods, subtle and overt, that we use to shape how the world thinks about reality. By studying the rhetoric of disability, the students in the course will connect their personal experiences of disability to the larger praxis.

The Media Analysis project is the first project to ask the students to consciously examine an everyday media object (or set of objects) and analyze the ways in which the rhetoric used in the media affects reality and our thinking about reality. Disability has become more visible in recent years, through the actions of many disability rights activists, but also through negative actions, such as memes that mock people with disability, Donald Trump’s mockery of Serge Kovaleski, a reporter who has a congenital health condition that affects his joints, or Oscar Pistorious’ murder conviction. By beginning the semester with a project that challenges prevailing assumptions, the students will enact the Freirean decoding and begin to see that the rhetoric of disability is a complex, changing landscape.

The presentation and the reading notes foster what Ira Shor calls “dialogic pedagogy” (85). The students will lead a substantial portion of the class on the day of their presentations, which is not only good practice for all instructors, but also creates a “democratic, directed, and critical discourse different from teacher-student exchanges in traditional classrooms” (Shor 87). While I have provided a substantial list of potential topics for the presentations, the students also have the option to choose their own topics, which will lead to further areas of discussion that I have not considered. The reading notes posted to the discussion board create this kind of
environment in another mode and will embed a discussion of how rhetorical practices change across modes in the course.

The Tiki-Toki (a free, user-friendly software for a timeline) provides the impetus for another one of Shor’s foundational claims: that education can and should promote social change. The Tiki-Toki remains available as an archive to any student who has ever taken the course, which means it becomes a shared resource, not simply a standalone assignment, and because of its format, it provides a visual reference for the ways in which the rhetoric of disability has changed over time. The students can pick any rhetorical event, activist, or theoretical incident in the history of disability studies from the Classical Era to today. Shor argues that this historical representation of “the knowledge of a discipline…comparing what is thought now with what was thought fifty or a hundred years ago…enables them [students] to imagine change and perhaps participate in making change” (191).

Disability rights is one of the newer civil rights movements, so there is a strong thread of activist readings in the material, particularly Margaret Price’s *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. I include Price’s work, not only because she is one of the leading voices in disability studies in rhetoric and composition, but because her work in the book recounts some of the most problematic and ableist elements of academia, particularly the academic job market. Since many graduate students plan to enter jobs in academia, Price’s work also serves as a primer for self-advocacy and for countering structural ableism in higher education. I want them to leave the class with the knowledge to make academic spaces as just, as inclusive, and as equitable as possible.

Similarly, Dolmage’s *Academic Ableism* introduces readers to the concept that academia, like all other societal structures, reflects the values and structural injustices of the larger cultural
milieu. Unlike Price’s work, however, Dolmage focuses on the historical precedents of eugenicist and ableist structures that led to specific ableism in academia. He also offers some solutions to the ableist problems of academia by providing example letters faculty members can use to advocate for more inclusive commencement proceedings and physical spaces, such as fully accessible classrooms.

Siebers’ work, although written before Price or Dolmage, builds a complex theoretical framework for understanding disability, which is why the class reads it last. Siebers’ writing style invites the reader to engage and even to challenge his assertions but then reasserts his original point(s) with well-researched examples and historical evidence. Siebers’ works represent canonical works in disability studies, but for an undergraduate version of the course, I recommend substituting *Disability Discourse* by Corker and French, or an edited collection such as *Negotiating Disability* edited by Kerschbaum, Eisenman, and Jones, as Siebers can be difficult to engage.

I include a final exam in the course based on my own experience as a graduate student and as an instructor for the last 13 years. Although an exam is perhaps not appropriate to all graduate courses, particularly courses that teach research methods, I have found that I retain knowledge from survey-style classes if a final exam is part of the course. My peers have had a similar experience, and I have seen students recover a failing course grade by doing well on a final exam. I dislike giving exams, frankly, as students are often stressed by the experience, but I also believe exams can tap resources within us that even the most detailed, well-researched, and polished project cannot.

The final projects for this class ask the students to produce work that they can use for a conference presentation or a publication. The students will engage in original research and not
solely use theories surrounding rhetoric and disability, but will engage in their own theory-making. bell hooks exhorts all activism-oriented teachers to “claim theory as necessary practice with a holistic framework of liberatory activism. We must do more than call attention to ways theory is misused…We must actively work to call attention to the importance of creating a theory that can advance renewed feminist movements” (69-70). As an intersectional scholar myself, I believe that advancing theories of disability will advance social justice for all, which is a central concern of feminist pedagogical praxis. The students have the power to choose their own topics and mode of delivery for the final projects, although I will consult with them about issues of scale and we will workshop the ideas as a community. This hearkens back to the original theoretical underpinning of the course: for the students to engage in their own decoding of the world.

This course design partakes mostly of critical and feminist pedagogical practices and centers on the idea of each classroom as a community of learners. For the classroom to be a healthy community, everyone must be free to reach his or her full potential. One way to facilitate a healthy community includes an expanded accommodations statement in every course syllabus. We must all use the mandated language regarding student accommodations for our institutions (which is often taken from the Americans with Disabilities Act), but we can go further and also include the invitation for students to use the space as they need to for their own comfort and learning processes. Margaret Price gives this acknowledgement to her audience as embodied learners at the beginning of every presentation; inclusivity begins from the first moment she begins to speak with this invitation. An example from my own experience comes from a student who was an Afghan War veteran and who had severe PTSD. Luckily, he was very much a self-advocate and asked me if it were possible to get up and move around during class—the student
sat at the back of the room, so it was not disruptive at all. That small action allowed the student to stay in the class. Price reminds us that not all students speak up to the instructor about their needs; to enact the truly democratic classroom we must foster inclusivity in large and small ways.

The communal and democratic themes of the projects allow the students to bring their own power for creating positive change to the dynamic. Freire reminds us:

> Domination, by its very nature, requires only a dominant pole and a dominated pole in antithetical contradiction; revolutionary liberation, which attempts to resolve this contradiction, implies the existence not only of these poles but also of a leadership group which emerges during this attempt. This leadership group either identifies itself with the oppressed state of the people, or it is not revolutionary. To simply think about the people, as the dominators do, without any self-giving in that thought, to fail to think with the people, is a sure way to cease being revolutionary leaders. (emphasis in original) (113)

What makes the study of the rhetoric of disability so fascinating is that it can be very difficult to know which is the dominant pole and the dominated pole because of the very nature of persuasion and because of the nature of disability. The state of being disabled is a state many of us will inhabit at one time or another in our lives—and it will be a state some will enter for all their lives. A woman with severe migraines can be disabled for the period that the migraine persists, whereas a man with Down’s Syndrome is disabled for his entire life. However, since the majority of students come to disability studies with a strong drive to create positive change, they will be primed to “think with the people.” The course itself merely encourages a spark already within them.
This course design provides space that has room to grow or to shrink, depending on the needs of the students and the English department in which readers teach. The course designs throughout this project are designed to serve instructors at every type of institution and at every intersection of academic teaching identity. My experience as a contingent faculty member taught me that sometimes no matter how much interest exists for creating innovative and new course designs, there simply may not be time to create a new syllabus from scratch. This course design probably overreaches in terms of the number of assignments, even for a graduate course. I designed it deliberately to overfill, so that readers can cut an assignment or modify a couple to make them a fit for virtually any institution.

Course Syllabus

Special Topics: Repression and Resistance: The Rhetoric of Disability

Course Description

This course provides background into the historical foundations of the rhetoric surrounding disability in the United States by first examining the Greco-Roman rhetoric of rationality and the ways in which those concepts have been taken up in the Western Tradition. By examining the rhetoric surrounding several significant events regarding disability and disability rights activism in U.S. history, a portrait of the rhetoric of disability will emerge. As we trace these histories to our era, we will look at the rhetorics of disability across a variety of media and in both academic scholarship and popular culture. Finally, we will engage with the rhetoric surrounding Crip Studies and the Mad Movement. By the end of the semester, students will have developed expertise in one or more areas of the rhetoric of disability through their final projects and individual presentations and they will have developed broad knowledge through their final exam.
It is recommended that students take at least one course in Classical Rhetoric before taking this course, as it builds on those foundations.

**Course Texts**

Dolmage, Jay Timothy. *Academic Ableism*.


There will also be readings posted on in the course LMS and readings available from the Library’s Database. (For a more literature-focused version of this course, works by Romantic authors, *Frankenstein*, or speculative fiction could be switched out for the more rhetoric-heavy texts listed above.)

**Course Objectives**

1. To trace the history of rhetoric surrounding disability in the United States, including the Greco-Roman foundations of the Western rhetorical traditions.

2. To demonstrate familiarity with the tenets of disability studies and disability theory, which inform any inquiry into the rhetoric of disability.

3. To recognize the contested and changing rhetoric surrounding issues of disability, as well as past and current disability rights activists and activism.

4. To evaluate and critique representations and rhetorics of disability across a variety of media.

5. To familiarize yourself with current disability studies scholars and scholarship in rhetoric and composition.

6. To integrate knowledge gained in objectives 1-5 into your own original research.
**Assignments**

**Reading Notes (10%):**

You will be required to post reading notes to the Discussion Board by 10 a.m. each Wednesday Week 2 through Week 11. These need to be substantive responses to the day’s reading that end with at least three questions to foster our discussion in class. I encourage you to respond to your classmates’ posts as well.

**Individual Presentations (20%):**

You will present on one of the following topics. You may make the presentation as multimodal and interactive as you would like it to be, but you need to plan for 30 minutes, with at least 10 minutes of that time allotted to discussion. Two required elements must be included: A brief summary of the topic (biographical information for individuals) and an analysis of the rhetoric surrounding the topic. The presentations will be at the beginning of class from Weeks 2-11.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 
- Mad Pride Movement 
- Cross-Disability Movement 
- Deaf Culture 
- Gallaudet University 
- Dame Evelyn Glennie 
- Temple Grandin 
- Paul Longmore 
- Fed Fay 
- Marilyn Golden 
- Title IX

Judith Heumann
Lydia Brown
President Franklin D. Roosevelt
The Disability Rights Movement
Crip Theory
*My Left Foot* (Film)
*Rainman* (Film)
Inclusive Classrooms (K-12)
A topic/figure/event specific to our area
A topic of your choice (must be approved)
Media Analysys (10%): You will write a 2500-word analysis of a single (or a group of) media and analyze the rhetorical content. You might consider, although you are not limited to, documentaries, news stories, memes, films, fine arts, television shows, literature, scholarship from rhetoric and composition or another discipline, or webtexts. Due by 30 September.

Entry for Class Tiki-Toki (Timeline) (15%): You will be required to do an entry of 3000 words (or multimodal equivalent) with a multimodal element or elements on the class timeline; the project can be entirely multimodal, if you prefer that. Please email me or chat with me about your topic by 1 October. Entries are due by 31 October at midnight.

Final Project (25%): Both topic and mode of delivery are your choice for this project, although we will discuss them in-depth in conferences (online or face-to-face) and in a class workshop. You will turn in a brief (1 page, maximum) proposal of your project by Week 7, although you may turn it in earlier. It is my hope that this work will be a publication or conference presentation for you, so it must be 20-25 pages or digital equivalent. During class in Week 12, you will give a short (5 minute) presentation on your project and receive feedback. You will have until that Friday at midnight to incorporate any changes based on feedback and upload the final project documents, media, and/or links to project.

Final Exam (20%): A mixture of definition, short answer, and two essay questions. Given on our Final Exam day, 2.5 hours. You may bring a computer or handwrite the exam.

A Note on Accommodation: We will discuss the rhetoric of accommodation as part of this class, but I urge you to register with Disability Services if you have a diagnosis and you have not yet registered with them. The goal for this class is not just the generation of knowledge and scholarship but to create a community of learners. Therefore, if you need to stim, occupy your
hands by knitting or crocheting, get up and stretch, sit on the floor, or have other requests to make your experience in this class the best possible, please do so or chat with me about your needs.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1:** Introductions, Syllabus, Course Overview, Sign-Up for Presentations (I will fill the presentations list out on the schedule after the choices are made.)

**Week 2:** Reading: Book 1 of Aristotle’s *Rhetorica.* (Available online and at the library, if you do not have a copy). Selections from Quintillian (posted on LMS). Discussion of current media representations of disability.

**Week 3:** Reading: Selection from *Narrative Prosthesis* (Mitchell and Snyder), posted online. Siebers, Chapters 1-3.

**Week 4:** Reading: Siebers Chapters 4-7, 9-10.

**Week 5:** Reading: Cherney, “The Rhetoric of Ableism” From *Disability Studies Quarterly* 31.3 (Summer 2011) (*DSQ* is available online or through the library.) Workshopping of final project ideas. **Media Analysis due.**

**Week 6:** Reading: Selections from *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture* (Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson) and Yergeau, et al. “Multimodality in Modtion” *Kairos* 18.1 (Fall 2013) (Full piece available online). In-class sign up for readings from *DSQ*’s two special issues on the rhetoric of disability: 31.3 (Summer 2011) and 36.1 (Winter 2016). **Tiki-Toki topics due.**

**Week 7:** Discussion of *DSQ* special issues. **Final Project ideas due.**

**Week 8:** Reading: Price Chapters 1 and 2 (These chapters are quite long, so don’t put this off to the last minute.)
Week 9: Finish Price (Appendices can be skipped, although they are valuable). Tiki-Toki entry due.

Week 10: Reading: none. Film selections watched/discussed in class.

Week 11: Reading: Selections from Academic Ableism (Dolmage)

Week 12: Final Projects Due. (Short presentations—about five minutes each—on each project done in class today.)

Week 13: Exam Review, Course Wrap Up

Finals week: Final Exam

5 INCLUSIVE WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

“Bureaucracy is an iron cage.”

–Max Weber as translated by Talcott Parsons

“The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.”

—bell hooks

As the argument for inclusive pedagogy was built in earlier chapters, a key element of those arguments centered on the English class as ground zero for opportunities for inclusivity because virtually every student at the university or college must take a FYW course. Exceptions exist, of course. Some states have testing programs or CLEP exams, although most of these only allow for testing out of the first course of FYW. However, despite outliers, most students still
take at least one English course while they matriculate to higher education. Although this dissertation argues for a multi-faceted approach to spreading inclusivity across the English department, the most important aspect may be creating inclusive writing program administration (WPA) programs. If the guidelines, professional development, and classroom practices of writing classrooms reflect a commitment to inclusivity, the department as a whole will have a foundation of inclusive practices upon which we can build other programmatic elements of inclusivity.

Amy Vidali’s groundbreaking “Disabling Writing Program Administration” charges us all with “disabling writing program administration in order to emphasize the term disability and explicitly invited disabled WPAs to join the discussion” (emphasis in original) (33). This chapter observes the ways in which we are and are not emphasizing disability in WPA work and offers solutions in the form of a professional development/training designs.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) impact WPA work most in the United States and Canada. These organizations hold conferences, have executive boards that create committees and task forces, provide guidelines for teachers of writing (CWPA creates the learning outcomes most writing programs use to create their course CLOs), and produce scholarship, praxis, and pedagogy through the publication of journals and books. Within NCTE, the group that most affects English teachers in higher education is College Composition and Communication (CCC). The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), held annually, not only serves as a gathering place for teachers, administrators, graduate students, and activists, but also opens with an address known as the Chair’s Address. The event gathers a majority of the attendees in one place—something that usually does not happen throughout the rest of the conference when attendees give presentations, serve on committees, mix with people who share
their interests, and generally exhaust ourselves in all the flurry of activities. Yet not every attendee of the conference goes to the Chair’s Address. It takes place early in the morning; some people have caregiving responsibilities; some people prefer to avoid large crowds. Many reasons exist for not going. Tofacilitate inclusivity, the journal CCC publishes the address (often with a response or two) in the issue immediately following the conference and, since 2018, chairs have elected to make their addresses available via Google Docs or on the WPA listserv. The WPA listserv, as its name implies, exists for WPAs to discuss all manner of aspects of WPA work, scholarship, and activism (it should be noted that the listserv is not officially affiliated with the CWPA, although they link to it on their website). The Chair’s Address, in particular, can spark lively discussion about the message and ramifications of each address. Following Vidali’s charge, analysis of reactions to two recent Chair’s Addresses serves to foreground how much (or how little) our leaders and working WPAs attend to issues of disability.

Adam Bank’s Chair’s Address from March of 2015 at the CCCCCs convention in Tampa, Florida, was truly revolutionary. The title of the address is “Ain’t No Walls behind the Sky, Baby! Funk, Flight, Freedom,” which calls to mind a song title or even a sermon. He strutted to the podium from the audience while funk music played loudly in the background. His rhetorical style was in the tradition of a Black Civil Rights leader from the 1960s who often used the stylings of Black church ministers to awaken the passions of the audience (although many, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, were also leaders of faith and thus used to the style of church and temple ministry). Banks’ address was loud—he was loud, the audience response was loud, and the American Sign Language signers were also “loud” in the sense that their embodied movements were bold and rhythmic to convey the sense of what was happening, so that the Deaf and Hearing-Impaired members of the audience could experience the address fully.
Banks acknowledged the field’s debt to women, to people of color, to contingent faculty, and to graduate students. He did not mention disability, but I remember sitting in the audience and cheering alongside my friends and colleagues and thinking, “Things are going to change after this!” I cannot express the sense of elation that we shared that day. Therefore, I was quite surprised by what came after on the WPA listserv.

To illustrate the fallout I summarize and evaluate a thread from the WPA listserv from March 2015, titled “Video of Banks’ talk?,” which also generated a related thread “Video of Banks’ talk?/aka/now how much do we really research writing pedagogy?” on 26 March 2015. Discussion on the original thread ran from 21 March to 27 March 2015 and included 52 responses; the follow-up thread had only four responses between 26 March and 30 March 2015, but it is included because of its connection to the main thread. What began as enthusiasm for Adam Banks’ address at CCCCs 2015—the first poster, Holly Hassel, simply wanted to know if the video was accessible anywhere—ended up offering a snapshot of the most pressing discussions and tensions in our discipline. Most importantly for this project, neither Banks’ original address nor the ensuing discussion mentions issues of disability.

Many followed this thread enthusiastically, because being in the room for Dr. Banks’ speech was a watershed moment for many; the speech reinvigorated passion for the field for many who felt overlooked by the leaders of NCTE. The first six entries in the thread echoed enthusiasm and hope that the video would be posted somewhere; I know I could not wait to show parts of it to my students. I remember thinking that the thread would probably fizzle out, since the YouTube link for the entirety of Banks’ speech had been posted. I was very wrong.

Nick Carbone posted a seemingly-innocuous reply to the YouTube link. He wrote, “Adam's eulogy for the essay puts me in mind of this 1996 piece by Beth Baldwin, ‘Evolving
past the Essay-a-saurus: Introducing nimbler forms into writing classes’” and “It's really thrilling to see a CCCC Chair reiterate, powerfully, this idea.” (25 March 09:59:09). Fredrik DeBoer then responded, “I was surprised to see so many react to the speech on Twitter as a call for the field to abandon the essay as a principal intellectual concern. That abandonment happened long ago. After all, how many panels at that very conference had anything to do with the essay, or with writing instruction in general?” (25 March 10:04:09). Carbone then came back into the conversation with the claim that:

…the academic essay (whatever that is) is still the dominant form taught in most first year writing courses. The discussions in journals and at conferences take a long time to move fyc curricula. So where we are intellectual in the study of the essay as form, or where we're going in the pursuit of new forms barely touches -- with some exceptions that prove the rule -- what happens in most fyc programs. (25 March 10:13:25)

In that same response, Carbone also referred to the academic essay, particularly the Research Paper (his capitalization) as a “beast that lives.” DeBoer’s response, which felt a bit like a retort was:

The beast lives because the institutions that fund our programs believe students still need to learn to write traditional prose for their later academic and professional lives. Sensibly. Because the ability to express a cogent argument in prose remains incredibly important in the world of politics and policy, science, business, and others, despite constant claims that future is multimodal. The effect of the utter absence of pedagogy in our most prestigious journals, our conferences, and our dissertations is
that we turn that work over to the textbook companies that many of us lament. They are much more responsive to the demands of immediate institutional need, which are the needs that really motivate the at-risk labor that teach a dominant majority of college writing classes. (25 March 10:24:58)

Carbone and DeBoer’s exchange set off an acerbic thread. I include the time-stamps on their exchange to show how rapidly the exchanges unfolded, particularly following relatively slow follow-up to the original post.

Andrea Lunsford, Victor Vitanza, Kathleen Yancey, Raúl Sánchez, Charles Bazerman, and Richard Haswell all responded to the thread. Those names represent a fairly wide swath of luminaries in our field. The discussion ranged from people citing their own work as proof that pedagogy is not taking a backseat to concerns of theory (Yancey) to others claiming that their work proved that there has been a noticeable decline in pedagogy-based work appearing in our top journals (Haswell). Lunsford’s claim that Banks did not mean to dismiss good essays, just essays of the thesis-bound, five-paragraph sort netted several positive responses. Sánchez said it was simply a funkadelic experience, and Carbone came back into the fray that same day to say he predicted a dark day when we would simply shackle new media with the old hidebound rules we used for the five-paragraph essay. He wrote:

I can see a dark future where something that is media rich writing gets as pigeon holed: A multimodal essay must contain five screens, each with at least one image and one with at least a 55 second video.

Sentences must be short and the user should not need to scroll etc. Or all
presentations in the future will be Pecha Kucha\textsuperscript{3} because that's what schools will teach since it is formulaic. No form is safe when wrenched through schools.

Carbone’s response echoes the concerns of many new-media scholars who claim we only reinscribe the 5-paragraph essay into new types of media. Vitanza’s contribution centered on a claim that Montaigne had the only “real” essays which effectively shut down the thread. I return to the original point—disability does not get mentioned in any of these discussions—despite the potential for new media to open new avenues of inclusivity by offering new ways to do the work of teaching writing to students who experience the world in different ways. In many ways, this thread shows how the discussion shut down Banks’ revolutionary claims of inclusivity in terms of race, labor, and pedagogy, because it ended up being another conversation about what “bad” writing looks like. Yet a discussion of FYW research did emerge from the main discussion.

I now turn to the thread “child” of the original that only spawned four responses. It was begun, as before, by Holly Hassel, who, at the time, taught online in the University of Wisconsin system (she now teaches at North Dakota State University and serves as the editor of \textit{Teaching English in the Two-Year College}). She wanted to see if any of us really are doing FYW research—she wanted DeBoer’s original claims about a lack of pedagogically-driven articles/research in our field investigated. The three who responded also expressed a similar desire but wondered about funding availability for such research and where it would even be published. All the respondents appear to teach in two-year colleges or satellite campuses of larger universities. The thread quietly fizzled. I think it might be worth noting that a thread titled “Thai Restaurant Recommendations” netted nine replies that month, which indicates something

\textsuperscript{3} “Pecha Kucha” was the original name for the presentation software currently known as “Prezi.”
about what we value or, perhaps, what we do not want to confront in the field of writing studies. Pedagogical research takes time, and it often requires extra funding. Both time and funding are commodities in short supply at colleges and universities, which is why this project focuses on inclusive practices that can be accomplished without an oppressive amount of labor or of money.

The tone of the discourse in these threads remained civil, although the back-and-forth got slightly testy at times. Reading it all together for this project, rather than spread out, as I did as the thread unfolded, left me feeling sad about the discussion. Banks’ speech was one of those moments of transcendence that we often do not experience at professional conferences. We witnessed a man of color speaking AAVE to a room of English teachers; the speech had a funkadelic and geeky beat. Banks reminded us that our field has been built by women, maintained by contingent laborers, we have had our norms challenged and enhanced by LGBTQIA teachers and professors, that we are too-frequently selling out our field to the textbook companies, and that all the citations in the world will not save us if we do not jump back into the business of caring about justice. What response does such a kairos-laden and rhetorically savvy speech receive? Mostly responses about who is doing what research. The meta-issues fell away, and we were left discussing the five-paragraph essay again, essentially. And with no acknowledgement of disability anywhere, either by Banks or by the respondents to the thread. Banks reminded us, again and again, that justice was the center of everything we should do. Disability justice matters, and the field often follows its leaders. Including disability influences policies made by WPAs across the continent will positively impact the lives of students in English departments.

To contrast with Banks’ address and reception, I also analyzed Asao Inoue’s Chair’s address from 2019 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, alongside Banks’, not because they are both men
of color (I do note that shortly after CCCC’s 2015, Banks resigned from the executive board), but because they both took as central to their addresses the importance of inclusivity and diversity.

Inoue’s address, titled, ““How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, Or What Do We Do About White Language Supremacy?” specifically asked the audience to consider how language contributes to structural injustice. Despite the focus on inclusivity and diversity, Inoue’s address did not include any mention of disability or ableism (the address itself can be accessed in text format at the link below, but it will also appear in a future issue of College Composition and Communication: http://tinyurl.com/y374x2r6 ). The reaction to Inoue’s address has been even stronger than the response to Banks’ address. My evaluation of the resultant discussion thread on the WPA listserv found that response to Inoue has been approximately 75% positive and 25% negative. Luckily, the thread was not large enough to provide a methodological challenge. I was able to read the thread and note positive and negative responses to the address and used a simple hash-mark system under each column to classify the responses. Inoue’s charge that when we grade, we are participating in racism (“How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, or What Do We Do About White Language Supremacy” 11-12) and that racism is an “iron cage” as envisioned by Max Weber (“How Do We Language” 2-4) has created discussion. It is not the purpose of this project to recount everything that has happened, but instead to draw attention to the fact that only Brenda Brueggemann mentioned anything about accessibility in regards to Inoue’s address. On March 18 at 12:16 p.m., she thanked Inoue for providing the text of the address so swiftly, but added:

It would have been very meaningful for those of us in the audience who can’t easily access spoken words from a great distance to follow-along (especially because the delivery was so fast that neither captioners or
interpreters could do the jobs they were hired to do for that opening
session). I’m hoping that CCCC keynote speakers of the future can always
prep the interpreters/captioners with an advance copy AND also have a
few copies for “read along” during the delivery itself. Access is for
everyone.

Brueggemann wrote from a personal place; as a Deaf woman, she was unable to access
the address as it happened, but she responds to a larger issue—the same lack of attention to
disability in our field. Inoue took theories and practices of grading as central to the concerns of
justice, and grading policies are the purview of WPAs, yet accessibility again took very little
space in the address itself or in the subsequent discussions. How, indeed, can we build inclusive
programs, if accessibility is not even part of the conversation in two groundbreaking Chair’s
Addresses?

Inoue responded to Brueggemann with:

I appreciate the ideas and help with making future addresses more
accessible to all that Brenda offers. I should say that I did provide the full
text to the interpreters a full month before the address. And I was not
made aware of how they were going to caption things on the screen. I’m
still learning to ask those questions in the future. I appreciate the
reminder. I’m gonna make a note of this issue and maybe we can solve
some or all these issues in future addresses. (19 March 2019, 3:33 pm)

And that was the last the thread truly addressed issues of ability, with the exception of
Sonja Andrus’ post titled “Silence” in which she discussed the embodied reality of missing the
address because she was caring for her son, who she describes as “nonverbal” (25 March 2019,
Andrus’ point about her son and caregiving responsibilities, which have always been considered as part of disability studies, was largely ignored and, instead, many respondents to her post accused her of failing to acknowledge the privilege that comes with remaining silent in debates such as these. Nothing about how we language to stop ableistic violence appears in any of these discussions. In no way do I minimize the discussions surrounding structural racism, grading practices, how the WPA listserv moves forward from here, and the question Inoue asks in his title, by noting that disability remains hidden from these discussions. I simply argue that we can do many things at one time; multitasking centers every bit of WPA labor. We can begin by including disability into our labor, and it can be done with relative ease.

“Disability” can never be considered without its concatenated terms “agency,” “body,” and “identity,” but it serves as a very useful umbrella term that covers a myriad of intersections with WPA work and writing studies scholarship. I have chosen to discuss three models of how we can incorporate disability into our WPA work: The Society for Disability Studies, *College Composition and Communication*, and WPA. The last two may seem too obvious a choice for a WPA-related chapter, but there are some important wrinkles to consider with each of these, which will be explained in their sections.

Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, the pioneer of disability studies within rhetoric and composition scholarship, wrote the entry for “Disability” in the *Keywords in Writing Studies* collection. But, she notes, “Searching for disability does not yield much within the early decades of composition studies” (57). She argues that despite its overt absence, disability overlaps with many “debates on the access and inclusion of previously excluded groups” (57). A key difference in terms of the ideologies that surround disability, rests on our history as a discipline of focusing on “diagnosis” of writing ills, along with “remedies to ‘cure’ them” (57). Therefore,
although we must honor difference and work for inclusivity in our classrooms for all, we must recognize that those with disabilities often face even more resistance to inclusion due to these grounding ideologies in composition and rhetoric. Furthermore, Lewiecki-Wilson cites the work of Margaret Price and Jay Dolmage; both Price and Dolmage trace the Classical roots of exclusion and erasure of disabled bodies from the academy (60).

Generally, there is an Office of Disability Services (sometimes named “Student Services,” “Disability Center,” or “Student Outreach”) at every university or college because the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act “prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life” (ADA “Introduction”). These offices, or at the very least one staff member, serve to ensure every student has fair access to an education. However, as WPAs, we represent virtually every student who enters the university, including students with disabilities. Therefore, we need to begin to craft disability studies into a robust area of concern for WPA and writing studies. We will either teach (or train GTAs to teach) or welcome to writing centers disabled members of the student (and, perhaps, faculty) body. Thus, we should absolutely be as concerned about inclusivity for these students as we are for other marginalized groups.

5.1 Society for Disability Studies

The Society for Disability Studies (SDS) is currently the flagship organization for disability studies and includes the following welcome message on their homepage: “SDS is a lively scholarly association of more than 400 artists, scholars and activists who promote Disability Studies, recognizing disability as a complex and valuable aspect of human experience.” The organization hosts an annual conference. The organization embraces multi- and interdisciplinarity, and every aspect of its website and conference reminds readers that disability
studies cannot be untethered from issues of social justice and access. Indeed, the first day of every conference is devoted to a “Disability and Social Justice Summit,” which takes as its focus issues of rights, inclusion, and laws affecting those with different abilities than the perceived norms. A glance at the draft of the 2015 conference program indicates not only a wide variety of presentations but also brings awareness to the newness of disability studies as a discipline both inside and outside of the academy.\(^4\)

Just as WPA work is already always local, so too must an international organization such as SDS recognize the local influences upon disability studies, because each institution, region, and nation has different norms and cultures that impinge upon treatment of disability. The organization also publishes the journal *Disability Studies Quarterly* (the website for the journal is [http://www.dsq-sds.org/](http://www.dsq-sds.org/)). This indexed, peer-reviewed journal accepts a wide variety of genres, including academic articles, creative works, book and film reviews, and eulogies. As long as a work contains an awareness of disability, it will be considered. In Summer 2011, the journal published a special topics issue which took as its focus the rhetoric of disability. The journal is an invaluable resource to those who aim to expand disability studies within the discipline of rhetoric and composition. The website for SDS can serve as a model for those who wish to reflect an acknowledgement of disability on our writing program websites, in sample pedagogical material, in custom textbooks, or in myriad other ways.

### 5.2 College Composition and Communication

In the field of rhetoric and composition, the flagship journal is sorely lacking in disability studies-related content. Only twelve articles touching on disability have ever appeared in *College

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\(^4\) The SDS did not hold a conference in 2016 or in 2017 because of financial difficulties. However, since Margaret Price moved to The Ohio State University and gained support and funding for the SDS, the conference was held on the OSU campus in 2018 and in 2019.
Composition and Communication, and some of the articles are only loosely connected to
disability through a discussion of Queer theory or through intersectional identity.

At the 2015 CCCCs in Tampa, Florida, the searchable program for 2015
(http://www.ncte.org/cccc/review/2015program) returned 30 sessions, workshops, or meetings
with a disability keyword search. I attended approximately ten of the disability studies-themed
events or presentations myself. What I noticed most was the prevalence of graduate students
among the presenters; however, the majority of non-student presenters were WPAs such as
Margaret Price and Dev Bose (I should note that Dr. Price was a WPA at Spellman, although
since she has moved to Ohio State, she is no longer undertaking WPA work).

At the 2019 CCCC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a search of the program
panels, roundtables, and workshops flagged by the keyword “disability”—a significant growth
over a 4-year period. As before, many WPAs and former WPAs presented on disability studies-
related research, training models, and pedagogical practices. The Disability Studies Standing
Group has grown from a SIG to a Standing Group in the ensuing years as well, and I co-authored
our statement on social justice and inclusivity for the 2018 Social Justice Action Committee (the
Social Justice Action Committee has also converted to a standing committee, a process fast-
tracked by Inoue, who originated the SJAC). Issues of accessibility and access have been part of
every SJAC meeting, and I believe true change will continue to come about as disability
becomes more and more included in discussions at this conference. Our chair, Michael
Pemberton, capped membership of the SJAC at twenty members, but, importantly, eleven of us
have served as WPAs or currently serve as WPAs. Issues of writing program administration
center many of our discussions and upcoming concerns for the 2020 convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

5.3 Council of Writing Program Administrators

The Council of Writing Program Administrators (http://wpacouncil.org/) publishes *WPA: Writing Program Administration - Journal of The Council of Writing Program Administrators* (http://wpacouncil.org/journal/index.html) and hosts the CWPA conference. Both publication and conference focus on issues of concern for writing program administrators. That space does not reflect disability studies issues—at least not yet.

A search of the conference programs from 2013-2015 yielded only a handful of disability studies-themed presentations, which is surprising given the emergence of Queer Theory-based Crip identity studies, a subfield of disability studies. The 2015 CFP had a specific call for proposals that addressed “How can we be more inclusive of voices that have been marginalized in conversations about writing instruction and writing program administration? How can the work of writing program administration be made more sustainable for a broad range of teacher-scholars?” The call invited disability studies research in its very roots.

A search of the journal netted a mere fifteen results using the keyword “disability.” Only Marilyn J. Valentino’s “Serving Those Who Have Served: Preparing for Student Veterans in Our Writing Programs, Classes and Writing Centers” from 2012 directly addresses issues of disability, however. Generally, new fields of study emerge from the conferences and filter upwards into publications, so I was not surprised to find so few articles in the WPA journal addressing disability studies, as the conference does not appear to yet include disability studies-based presentations. However, positive steps have occurred in recent years, and I have been involved with some of them myself as a member of the WPA-GO (the graduate organization of
WPA) from 2015-2018. I led the Accessibility Task Force of the WPA, and our position statement on accessibility was adopted as a best practice for the WPA-GO; a version of it was adopted by the Executive Board of the WPA, which included guidelines for accessible presentations at WPA conferences, the creation of a quiet room at all WPA conferences, and the inclusion of several panels that took disability studies and access as their focal point. At 2018’s conference, a roundtable discussion that I proposed about Vidali’s work was accepted and well-attended. Although labor was involved with the task force and conference changes, it was not a burdensome amount of work and it could be easily incorporated into local WPA work via a committee.

Even more impactful was the Summer 2017 issue of the journal *Writing Program Administration* which was a special issue on Ability and Accessibility. One review and one article included in the issue address online writing instruction, which is outside of the scope of this project but remains an important consideration, as online instruction offers accessibility to many disabled students who cannot attend a more traditional onsite school. Other works engage making space for difference in the writing classroom (these are discussed in Chapter 3), but the overall impact of the issue centers on attending to issues of disability in WPA. Melissa Nicolas’ “Making a Difference: Challenging Ableist Assumptions in Writing Program Policies” addresses many of the ableist foundations of WPA work, and it opens the special issue. As with the work of this project, Nicolas argues that most ableism does not come from intentional ableism. For example, instructors who feel students have missed enough to “have their grades penalized” are basing their mandatory attendance policies on “ableist assumptions of a ‘normal’ student body” (10-11). She argues that these policies simply are not beneficial to any students—or to instructors. And, importantly, she reminds us, “Because we have created the conditions under
which we operate, we have the power to change them” (15). Resistance to change often appears when WPAs (and all administrators) attempt to change longstanding policies and practices. Colleges and universities, despite the perceptions of their being hotbeds of liberalism and revolution, are large bureaucracies, and large bureaucracies remain fundamentally conservative institutions in the sense that change often comes slowly. The challenge to already-overworked WPAs can make working for any change feel overwhelming.

Yet, in the examples we see from SDS, CCCCs and CCC, WPA and WPA, things are slowly (sometimes very slowly) changing as we work toward more inclusivity in our field. The labor involved in making these changes should always stay in the forefront for all WPAs. Compensation, whether in course releases, in increased salary, or in service requirement fulfillment, must be accounted for two reasons. One, decency demands that we compensate people for their labor. As socially just pedagogy and practices center themselves in our field, a spotlight shines more brightly on unfair labor practices. This includes WPAs attending to our own labor, because the impulse to do the work ourselves can easily overtake WPAs who have a desire to change things for the better. Second, and just as crucially, compensating for programmatic change initiatives eases the resistance that change often faces because those involved with the work feel literally invested in the changes, which allows for a more positive overall impact of the changes as they are presented. With that in mind, my suggestions for training and professional development mindfully account for the labor involved.

5.4 Training and Professional Development Design

I have argued that although WPAs often lead discussions of inclusivity and access, our leadership, our flagship organizations, and our scholarship have catching up to do in terms of large-scale change for writing program administration. But, as with the other chapters, I offer a
design to help facilitate changes at the level of writing program administration. I have seen these changes work first-hand. I am very grateful that my mentors and supervisors at past institutions have been collaborative with graduate students and with other WPAs.

**Inclusive Practices for WPA Work and for Faculty Training and Development**

1. Begin building institutional bridges. This could mean involving the directors of WAC, Writing Centers/Studios, Disability Services, Archives, and other relevant individuals, departments, or services to be involved with ongoing professional development. Building these relationships can usually begin with an introductory email that invites further collaboration. Involving the directors of Disability Services in the professional development meetings for all GTAs was a matter of two emails and making sure they knew how to get to the meeting space (Georgia State has a very large campus spread across downtown Atlanta). Yet their inclusion assuaged much of the downright fear many GTAs felt about how to follow disability accommodations for our students, and it has built an ongoing relationship between Lower Division Studies in English and Georgia State and the Office of Disability Services. While I understand that many institutions will not have a large (or perhaps any) number of GTAs, both new and experienced instructors and professors have questions about navigating the accommodation process.

2. If the writing program has its own website, include disability in any diversity and inclusion statements. If no website is maintained, make sure accommodation language appears in the standard syllabus language. In 2016, Lyman, et al discovered that one of the main barriers to students with disabilities seeking accommodations they deserve is an unfamiliarity with the process and services offered by disability services (“What Keeps Students with Disabilities from Using Accommodations in Postsecondary Education? A Qualitative Review”). Substantive
information about how to get in touch with Disability Services can ease that first step for students unfamiliar with obtaining their accommodations after high school or upon going back to school as a nontraditional student.

3. Make space to acknowledge faculty with disability by inviting all faculty to professional development seminars and workshops. Often, only junior faculty and/or GTAs are required to attend professional development sessions, but by including everyone in introducing these new practices, a more truly inclusive picture of writing program administration emerges. And while it is outside the scope of this project, Margaret Price’s Mad at School reminds us that disabled faculty often feel more isolated than disabled students feel.

4. Assess the language used in the program and scrub it for ableism. This could include websites, mission statements, required syllabus or instructional materials, textbooks (approved and/or in-house), and learning outcomes. Although a large undertaking at many institutions, once the work is done, it is finished. Setting aside a semester for one research assistant to do this work has generally been enough time to accomplish it, according to members of the WPA-GO.

5. Consider offering a themed sequence or term of first-year writing that is disability-studies or disability-themed. If your institution has the option of advertising courses, this would be a way to signal true inclusion to students with disabilities and to the entire college or university that the writing program truly embraces inclusivity. The course design in Chapter 3 can be adjusted for upper-level or lower-level learning outcomes.

6. If new instructors use a standard syllabus for any of the FYW courses, include readings or projects that include disabled authors or disability studies-related materials. Molly Felder, a disabled author herself, suggests teaching Frankenstein from a disability-studies perspective for a literature-based course. But, many of the scholarly works listed in the Works Cited for this
project could be used for a more rhetorical perspective on disability studies. Analyses of multimodal works such as *Get Out, Touch the Sound, The X-Men, Mad Max: Fury Road, Glee,* or *Big Bang Theory* could all be taught in first-year writing. In “How to Crip the Undergraduate Classroom: Lessons from Performance, Pedagogy, and Possibility,” Ann Fox argues that the erasure from the canon and from most pedagogical discussions of disability leads to it being a category that most students simply do not notice, because it has never been included in their education. By including disability and disability studies-related works, that absent presence becomes part of the consciousness of every instructor and the students who take these courses.

7. Give yourself and your colleagues credit for this work! Present your work at events at your institution, put together panels for conference presentations, and collaborate on publications that discuss what changes you have made. These can be vital for graduate students entering the job market or in materials for tenure and promotion.

8. Inclusivity means including everyone. Although there might be resistance at first, having somewhat regular meetings for professional development tightens the bonds among instructors. They can be a mix of informal or formal training sessions, but a meeting a few times each semester, especially if a meal or snack can be provided, softens opposition to change because everyone feels invested in the program. Crowdsolve ideas for presentations, workshops, and invited speakers. Too often, because of the immense work undertaken by WPAs, they can end up feeling isolated. WPAs can build a community among our peers. An added benefit is that it helps relieve the WPA or WPAs of some labor.

9. Consider inviting an outside assessment of your program. This goes beyond the language assessment suggested above, but looks at all aspects of your writing program administration. While this type of assessment could be cost-prohibitive for immediate
consideration, CWPA does offer program assessment services, and it can be proposed a year or two before implementation so that it can be built into budgets. If your program or institution has an upcoming accreditation assessment or QEP enaction, having an outside assessment of the program already finished can make those processes less labor-intensive, since much of the work will already have been done by the outside assessors.

10. Remember that change does take time and keep both long-term and short-term goals in mind. You can create a more inclusive program by simply listening to and working with the people who are already part of the program, faculty, and administration.

6 BEYOND THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT: INTEGRATING DISABILITY STUDIES ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

“We are less when we don’t include everyone.”

—Stuart Milk, LGBTQIA Human Rights Activist

The main focus of this project has been to argue that we are not doing enough to foster a culture of inclusivity for disabled students, teachers, administrators, and members of the English Department. The implications of a lack of inclusivity are far-ranging because virtually every student who matriculates through an institution of higher education will attend a first-year writing course. If we can sow the seeds of inclusivity in the English department, we can begin to grow an institutional culture of inclusivity. Not only do these changes enact the aims of social-justice-oriented praxis, but they also tap into a much-neglected market share of students—disabled students.

As noted earlier in the project, in the United States only 60% of high school students who used special education services in K-12 education pursue higher education (Congressional
Research Service). These students represent an opportunity for higher education at a time when enrollments are falling for many colleges and universities. Christine Marshall, a Queer Deaf activist who is a student at University of California, started a hashtag #WhyDisabledPeopleDropout on Twitter “to expose the frustration and challenges disabled students face daily in public institutions” (Sadeque). Twitter user Squaremeat writes, “Honestly, I never even pursued a post-secondary education because I was exhausted from the bullshit my high school put me through” (Sadeque). We have an opportunity to change the structures that challenge and exhaust disabled students. While enormous growth in disability studies research in rhetoric and composition occurred in recent years, much work still needs to be done. As Ella Browning argues, “too often disability is simply ‘tacked on’” (96). It is my hope that by looking at the ground level at how the culture of the English Department, through pedagogy, administration, and procedure, can become the model for inclusivity in the university, we can help spread that culture of inclusivity across our institutions. I discuss here two ways to facilitate the spread of inclusivity beyond the English Department via programs grounded in disability studies.

The discipline of disability studies has an interdisciplinary history and while there are different focuses for the discipline, all programs share a commitment to interdisciplinarity and inclusion of disability into discussions of scholarship and into society itself. The Society for Disability Studies (SDS) defines the discipline as:

Using an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary approach. Disability sits at the intersection of many overlapping disciplines in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. Programs in Disability studies should encourage a curriculum that allows students, activists, teachers, artists, practitioners,
and researchers to engage the subject matter from various disciplinary perspectives (“About” Society for Disability Studies).

The University of Michigan’s Initiative on Disability studies defines disability studies as:

Disability studies views disability as a political and cultural identity, not simply as a medical condition. Disability is not solely a set of physical or mental limitations but the product of an interaction between physical and cultural environments shaping the perception and experience of different capacities.

These two definitions share a focus on disability, but we can see that the SDS definition focuses on interdisciplinary program development and the University of Michigan focuses on disability as a political and a personal identity. The Ohio State University has both an undergraduate minor and interdisciplinary graduate specialization in Disability Studies. They describe their disability studies program as “Disability studies at OSU examines the nature, meaning, and consequences of disability in global culture from an integrated social, political, and cultural model” (Disability Studies at OSU). Like many of the identity-based disciplines that developed before and alongside disability studies, a focus on culture, on the lived reality of disabled people, and on how society impacts disabled people grounds all definitions of disability studies.

Disability studies is a rapidly-growing interdisciplinary field in academia—and not just in the United States. From The New York Times’ “Disability Studies: A New Normal,” we learn:

The temporarily able-bodied, or TABs. That’s what disability activists call those who are not physically or mentally impaired. And they like to remind them that disability is a porous state; anyone can enter or leave at any time. Live long enough and you will almost certainly enter it. This
definition creates disability as a category we may all inhabit at one time or another, which broadens the relevance of the field to one of general human concern. (Capuzzi Simon)

The Modern Language Association (MLA), which promotes the study of literature and the humanities, established disability studies in 2005 as a “division of study.” This says much about how far the field has come in the last 20 years and about its mission. The MLA is notoriously slow to change and recognize new realms of study; if they have recognized disability studies as a viable field of inquiry, then it has cemented its place in the liberal arts—and particularly in rhetoric and composition. Steven J. Taylor, who created the Syracuse program for disability studies, puts it succinctly when she writes, “Disability studies starts with accepting the disability. Then it asks the question: ‘How do we equalize the playing field?’” (“Disability Studies: A New Normal”). We, in rhetoric and composition, have concerned ourselves with leveling playing fields and to the teaching of those left outside of the purview of traditional academic concerns. For this reason, I believe housing a GSU certificate in the rhetoric and composition division of the English department makes sense, but any department with a social justice orientation could serve as home for a disability studies certificate program.

One important statistic emerges from this New York Times article:

The discipline, unsurprisingly, attracts students with disabilities, or those with a disabled loved one. Forty percent of the students in the U.I.C. master’s, minor and certificate programs are disabled; about 60 percent of those enrolled in CUNY’s bachelor’s program have a disability or a disabled child. (Capuzzi Simon)

Disability studies is almost always personal for those of us who work within it—that is certainly
the case for me—my mother is disabled with what is known as “failed spine syndrome” and degenerative arthritis; my brother is partially paralyzed after a spine deformity he had evidently had from birth entered cataclysmic failure after he tried to shovel the snow off his driveway. One of the most compelling aspects of disability studies is the focus on social justice shared by almost all who engage in it. This social justice orientation will serve not only to attract disabled students or those with a personal connection to disability, but it will also attract students interested in issues of justice, which could include almost anyone in the university, but will likely attract sociology, anthropology, medical, law, women’s studies, and education majors in addition to rhetoric and composition students.

Writing Across the Curriculum programs (WAC) and Disability Studies Certificate Programs (DS certificate programs) offer new sites to implement inclusive pedagogy and practices across the university. Both are interdisciplinary, which models disability studies itself. Again, these changes not only can serve to create a more socially just culture at our institutions, they can also help create a learning environment that values writing and that offers a material benefit to students who must compete in a global marketplace. Certificate programs are much newer to academia than are WAC initiatives and programs, and have much less research about them. Indeed, the benefits of WAC are long-established and the WAC Clearinghouse is an invaluable, free resource located at wac.colostate.edu. Here, one can find discussions, books (often available for free download), and annotated research bibliographies about WAC, Writing-in-the-Disciplines (WID), contract grading, feminist pedagogy, disability studies, and many, many more areas of interest for teachers of writing. What is absent, though, is specific discussion of how WAC programs can work toward creating an inclusive culture for disabled students across the university.
The very nature of WAC involving people from all levels of the university and from virtually every discipline centers WAC’s potential as a site of inclusivity. In 2012, Jeffrey S. Nevid, Amy Pastva, and Nate McClelland found that writing-to-learn assignments in introduction to psychology “may be of value to course instructors seeking to incorporate brief, ungraded writing assignments to boost student performance on related content on exams” (275). Additionally, they found that these writing-to-learn assignments (a core pedagogical element of WAC praxis) did not significantly increase labor for instructors (272-273). Yet, it is not always easy to implement WAC principles into actual classroom culture. Susan Plutsky and Barbara A. Wilson found that “[a]lthough faculty members appear to be supportive of WAC, they tend to incorporate its principles only minimally into their courses” (38). The primary reason the principles of WAC were only minimally incorporated was because upper-level instructors found their students to still have very poor writing skills, thus, they only assigned low-stakes, small writing assignments that the students tended to not take very seriously since the minimum standards for a grade above C were easily attainable (Plutsky and Wilson 38-40). While writing as process remains a fundamental theory of writing in rhetoric and composition, it has not necessarily caught on in other disciplines. Plutsky and Wilson based their study on students and faculty in Business and Economics courses (the students had no projects that involved revision for the courses analyzed for their study) (27). The labor of grading multiple drafts can add a considerable load to instructors’ grading, but faculty workshops led by WAC directors can explain how fundamentally important writing-as-process and writing-to-learn can be. Training and professional development seminars or workshops for WAC-participating faculty and tutors are also the sites wherein a foundation of disability studies and inclusivity of disabled students can shine in WAC programs.
Writing-Across-the-Curriculum programs and initiatives are often already housed in English departments, although not always. For the purposes of this project, I define a program as one with stable funding, dedicated faculty leaders, and approved inclusion into the curriculum or into the culture of a university. A WAC initiative is less structured and may be funded by a grant as an exploratory program; WAC initiatives might be unfunded, faculty-driven projects that seek to incorporate writing as a core element of learning across the university. WAC initiatives also exist to gather data in order to argue for the establishment of a permanent WAC program. At the practical level, both WAC initiatives and WAC programs work to implement disability studies across the university, but I want to first look at the “moving parts” of a functional WAC program.

An example from my own experience centers on my work as a WAC consultant at Georgia State. Dr. Ashely Holmes, Director of WAC at GSU, creates and facilitates training for WAC consultants (a mix of undergraduate and graduate students). Dr. Holmes meets with professors across the campus to encourage a focus on writing in courses for which it might not otherwise be a focal point. She also works in conjunction with the Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (CETL) at GSU, which sponsors a grant for faculty to create writing-intensive courses across the curriculum. While there are models that vary from that at Georgia State, on the practical, implementational level, WAC necessarily works across the curriculum—faculty training, WAC consultant training, curriculum development, faculty senate approval and other administrative aspects of building a WAC program remain relatively stable across institution. What also remains stable is the labor of all parties involved in the construction and maintenance of the program, including working with faculty, students, and administrators to
generate involvement in the WAC program. The labor requirements necessitate stable funding for the program to succeed.

Every workshop, training, or professional development function of a WAC program or initiative should include instruction about accommodating different learning styles, which will facilitate the learning styles of a diversity of students, disabled and non-disabled alike. We can go further, however, by actively integrating pedagogical suggestions, such as those listed in Chapter 1 of this project, and by incorporating the work of scholars such as Margaret Price who co-created the WAC Clearinghouse Research Bibliography with Tara Wood and Chelsea Johnson (https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/comppile/wpa/DisabilityStudies.pdf). We can also create institutionally-centered writing-to-learn projects or writing prompts that focus on disability studies or issues of disability that are relevant to a course or to a discipline. For example, when my students in the second course in the first-year writing sequence are preparing for their Community Literacy projects, I have them focus some observational/ethnographic writing-to-learn in-class activities on the physical space of our campus, which resides in the midst of downtown Atlanta. Many physical barriers to accessibility abound in Atlanta, which then affect accessibility at GSU. One focus that resounds with a majority of students is the horrible state of Atlanta sidewalks and the physical hazard they pose to students who use mobility aids (and, really, they are somewhat hazardous to all students). The students learn what stakeholders, literacies, and barriers to improvement exist in our community and the unique location of GSU’s downtown campus. Another writing prompt that usually takes the form of an ungraded freewrite centers on mental health—I generally use this prompt around midterms or finals, when student stress levels are high. I make sure to inform students of the Counseling Center at the beginning of the term, but these low-stakes, writing-focused assignments that scaffold into other projects
also remind students that mental health affects many of us, and that there are resources available to them. These are small, non-labor-intensive, and non-threatening ways to integrate disability studies into extant or in-process WAC initiatives or programs. The peril of WAC programs, sadly, remains the difficulty in quantifying the benefits of WAC programs. One way to make WAC a flagship program of any institution could be a WAC program that focuses on inclusivity and disability studies at all levels. That focus on interdisciplinarity and communication fit two important aspects of higher education in our cultural moment. Certificate programs also integrate an interdisciplinary focus on disability studies.

Certificates—graduate, undergraduate, and standalone—are changing the face of academia in the United States. According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, “Certificates are the fastest growing form of postsecondary credentials in the nation, surpassing associate and master's degrees as the second most common award in higher education after the B.A” (González). A study from Georgetown University’s Center for Education and the Workforce shows holding a postsecondary certificate can boost earnings from 13%-25%, depending on the field the certificate-holder enters (qtd. in Capuzzi Simon). Clearly, graduate certificates represent a growing trend among academia and have a concrete advantage to students who achieve them. An examination of existing certificate programs at my home institution, as well as across the United States, give an idea of the breadth and depth of these exciting new ways for students (and for institutions) to distinguish themselves in the competitive market. A case study of the graduate certificate program in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) at Georgia State follows and I proffer a design for a disability studies certificate program that can be used by readers at their own institutions.
Georgia State University currently offers seventeen graduate certificate programs, compared to Georgetown, which offers over 110 certificates (Capuzzi Simon). As a growing university we need to meet the needs of our students, and certificates offer students the opportunity to distinguish themselves. For this proposal, I use WGSS as a case study because it engages interdisciplinarity similarly to a disability studies certificate program. The proposal itself contains an activist track and a research track, in order to appeal to as many prospective students as possible. The WGSS graduate certificate requires fifteen course hours. This program is different due to the stringent entrance requirements: three letters of recommendation, transcripts, competitive GRE scores, and personal statement are all required for this certificate. The course requirements for the certificate span many departments and students can, in conjunction with faculty advisors, create their own program of study to an extent.

All of the certificate programs require 12-15 hours of coursework, which means about a year of work at the graduate level. Although the WGSS entrance requirements are an outlier at GSU, I propose following that model, since a rigorous entrance policy will add gravitas to the certificate, which I think is necessary since GSU does not have an existing disability studies program or department.

6.1 Graduate Certificates in Disability Studies

GSU is not alone in lacking a disability studies department or initiative. Only a few doctoral programs include disability studies in the United States: University of Illinois at Chicago, Syracuse, University of Maine, all have a PhD in Disability studies, and Chapman University has a PhD in Education with a concentration in disability studies. A growing number of minors, undergraduate degrees, and MA programs in disability studies (approximately 35) exist in the United States (Capuzzi Simon *NYT*; Cushing and Smith). However, I found about 25
schools that offer some type of graduate certificate in either disability studies, dyslexia studies, or disability policy and services. Disability study programs fall into two broadly-figured categories. The first are practical programs for students who wish to enter medical or administrative fields associated with disability and working with the disabled. The second are research-oriented programs more academically oriented toward the production of scholarship. Still, there is often a permeable barrier between these two categories, and no work in disability studies is completely free from activist concerns.

CUNY offers a graduate certificate in disability studies, offering both traditional and online courses (online offerings are prevalent among disability studies programs, because online classes offer accessibility for those who may face challenges in the traditional classroom). CUNY’s program is focused on the more practical side of disability studies. Disability studies offers a unique opportunity to examine disability from an interdisciplinary perspective, which includes the social sciences, humanities, science, social policy and the law. Fundamentally, disability studies-grounded work attends to the lived experiences of disabled people. Using the social model perspective of disability, the program incorporates overlapping lenses through which students discover a new understanding of disability and society.

The purpose of the program is to prepare students to work with people who have a wide range of disabilities; is aimed at preparing for administrative work; and “is ideal for administrators, social service professionals, educators, scholars who wish a specialization in Disability studies, people with disabilities or family members, and advocates.” In addition to the certificate, CUNY currently offers an MA in disability studies. CUNY has earned a position of respect in academia and in disability studies, so I use their certificate program as a detailed model for the proposed certificate program at GSU. The CUNY program offers a rich variety of
courses and although the program is aimed at those working with administration of disability-related organizations, including educators, the array of courses offered does allow for different focal points within the program. Since CUNY has a disability studies department, all the courses fall under the auspices of the DSAB heading, but the titles of the courses represent the interdisciplinary focus of disability studies.

**Curriculum at CUNY:** 12 credits are required for the certificate.

Students must complete the following courses for six credits:

- DSAB 601 - Psychosocial, Cultural and Political Aspects of Disability
- DSAB 602 - Embodiment and Disability

Students must also complete six credits from among the following courses:

- DSAB 603 - Disability and the Family Life Cycle
- DSAB 605 - Disability and Diversity
- DSAB 611 - Research Methods
- DSAB 620 - Disability History
- DSAB 621 - Disability Studies and the Humanities
- DSAB 622 - Disability in Mass Media
- DSAB 623 - Disability Studies and the Health Professions
- DSAB 624 - Disability Services Administration
- DSAB 626 - Disability Law and Policy
- DSAB 627 - Disability and Narrative
- DSAB 628 - Disability Studies in Education
- DSAB 629 - Students with Disabilities in Higher Education
- DSAB 630 - Aging and Disability: Multiple Perspectives and Emerging Issues
DSAB 639 - Fieldwork in Disability Studies

DSAB 651 - Special Topics Course

Although much smaller than the program at CUNY, Temple University has a 4-course disability studies certificate program. They have had an Institute on Disabilities since 1973 housed within the College of Education—that is revolutionary. Even though the course offerings are less varied, the time to completion obviously becomes shorter for students at Temple. The program definitely follows a research-track orientation; primary research seems to be an interesting focal point of the Temple program, as exemplified by the course offerings “Action Modes of Inquiry” and “Field Work in Disability Studies.” The focus on primary research would undoubtedly necessitate a strong working relationship with IRB and community organizations through which this research would take place, but it provides a valuable model for the practicum in my proposed curriculum. Nevertheless, although Temple University has a long history with disability studies, their course offerings could benefit from more specific offerings, which I include in the model proposal.

Curriculum at Temple University:

Fall 2015 - Disability Rights and Culture

Spring 2016 - Disability and Social Policy

Summer 1, 2016 - Action Modes of Inquiry

Summer 2, 2016 - Field Work in Disability studies

A rather interesting program exists at the Texas Center for Disability Studies. The School of Social Work, Texas Center for Disability Studies, School of Nursing, College of Education, College of Fine Arts, and College of Liberal Arts offers a “doctoral portfolio” program, which is, essentially, a prestigious interdisciplinary certificate in disability studies. One unique element is
the very stringent research experience requirement, which seems geared toward those in the health professions, rather than those in theoretical or academic fields of study. Their program also includes an oral presentation requirement—at an event sponsored by the center. Each of these programs offers insight into the potential of certificate programs.

Paired with the inclusivity practices laid out in the previous chapters and with the model for a DS certificate program, an institution could become a potential juggernaut of inclusive culture and practice. Inclusivity and diversity are listed prominently in all the mission statements of 100 schools in a 2019 search; these values center academia at a time perilous for higher education. Higher education faces both challenges for the 21st century, but also from the current political climate. These changes could make a difference for not only disabled students, but to institutional growth and survival.

The following is a model for a Graduate Certificate Program in Disability Studies at my PhD institution, Georgia State University. Following Jay Dolmage’s example in Academic Ableism, I offer a full proposal for a disability studies program. While there are some elements specific to GSU, there are many overlapping aspects that could be used at any institution. The last piece is a proposal for the certificate to be presented to the faculty senate. Together, they lessen the labor needed to create or grow a certificate program at any institution, and they can be scaled down or written with co-requisite programs for an undergraduate or mixed upper- and lower-level certificate program.

6.2 Proposal for Graduate Certificate Program in Disability Studies

The unique element I want to introduce into our certificate program is to offer two tracks: a research track and an activist track. The research track will be more theoretically oriented so it will be more inviting and useful to a wider area of liberal arts students. The activist track will be
of interest to those with a social justice interest, as well as law, nursing, business, and education students.

Curriculum

Both tracks would have the typical 12-hour requirement (four courses), with a 3-hour practicum. The entrance requirements are modeled after elements of the WGSS graduate certificate at Georgia State University, although this certificate will not require GRE scores, simply because they are costly to order and there are minimum score requirements for entrance into the university already in place. The letters of recommendation, personal statement, and transcript requirement would be retained to ensure that this graduate certificate represents a real benefit to students who earn it through its competitive entrance requirements and depth of course offerings.

Research Track

Sociology: (This is a required course.)

Soci 8222. Deviance and Social Control.

Theory and research regarding behavior which violates well-established social norms; social factors which engender such behavior and social reactions to such behavior; examples of typical interests would be sexually deviant behavior, certain types of mental illness, alcoholism, and suicide.

History or Anthropology: (Choose one.)

History of Disability. History is more a hobby than academic focus for me, but I would work closely with the history department to create this class. Mythology, The Enlightenment, Romanticism, Soviet and Nazi pogroms, and disability rights activities would provide ample material for such a class, however.
Disability in Non-Western Cultures. This would not have to be an anthropology course, although I think it might be the best fit, as the GSU history department has a mostly Eurocentric and United States concentration. This course would look at disability outside of the Western culture.

English:

Representations of Disability in Literature and Narrative. This course would focus on works such as Frankenstein, Flowers for Algernon, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Moby Dick, “A Christmas Carol,” “The Beast in the Jungle,” Of Mice and Men, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, A Beautiful Mind, The Secret Garden, or The Sound and the Fury. (Suggestions are welcome. Most of these are from my own reading experiences, but it is not inclusive and there are lists of books focusing on disability.)

Romanticism and Neurotypicity. This is a lit/rhet/comp combo course. We would read some Romantic poetry, but more importantly, we would read Romantics on writing (I’m thinking Emile by Rousseau would be a focal piece) in conjunction with David Russell, James Berlin, Thomas Lounsbury, Lawrence Veysey, and some neuroscience (very approachable) and Temple Grandin about the autism spectrum. Lev Vgotsky may also be useful.

The Rhetoric of Disability. I would like this course to span the Classical Era to now. Hephaestus, Spartan Eugenics, almost the whole issue of Disability Studies Quarterly about the Rhetoric of Disability, Margaret Price’s Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life, Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness by Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Rhetorics of Eugenics in the modern and contemporary eras, selections from Plato and Aristotle.

Communications:
Representations of Disability in Media. This could include films such as *My Left Foot, Born on the Fourth of July, A Beautiful Mind, I Am Sam, Nuts, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, Awakenings, Frances, What’s Eating Gilbert Grape, CinemAbility, and Without Pity: A Film about Ability, King Gimp.* Media representation and treatment in reporting could also be used.

**Practicum:**

The research track practicum would involve a study, creation, and presentation of a conference presentation and/or publication in an academic journal, or serving as a research assistant to an organization that works with the disabled.

**Activist Track**

The activist track would have a 3-hour language requirement. ASL is offered at many institutions, so it seems to be the most easily accomplished and potentially useful, although learning Braille could lead to empathy-development for those who have visual impairments. An alternative option for those who are more tech-driven in their scholarship would be to create some sort of web design, program, or tool to help enable access to the Internet for those with disabilities. If that option is taken, a directed study would replace the language requirement.

**Sociology:** (Choose one)

Soci 8118. *Aging, Health, and Disability.* Individual experience of physical aging, disease, disability, and death in old age; patterns and social causes of physical and mental illness, mortality, and longevity; illness behavior of older people, including health care utilization, compliance, patient-practitioner interaction, and health promotion behavior.

Soci 8230. *Medical Sociology.*

Health and illness beliefs and behavior; social epidemiology; sociology of nursing, medicine, and
other health professions; the social organization and financing of health care; health policy issues.

**English:**

**Writing Studies and Disability.** A course that examines the relationships, intersections of theory and pedagogy of disability and writing studies. *Women and Deafness* (Brueggemann and Burch, eds), *Disability and the Teaching of Writing* (Lewiecki-Wilson and Brueggemann, eds.), *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture* (Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson, eds.) would be our foundational readers, but articles would also be included. Focus on ADA accommodations and how to implement them in a writing classroom. Discuss the use of technology in order to facilitate access to students with differences. Ideally, guest lecturers with disabilities throughout the term for “on the ground” reality of students in writing classrooms.

**Art History:**

**Art and Disability.** This course would engage both artistic depictions of disability and examine the work of disabled artists. The International Guild of Disabled Artists would be an excellent source for this course.

**Women’s Studies:** (team teach)

**Embodiment and Disability.** This is modeled directly on CUNY’s course, which is described as: This course focuses on issues related to embodiment and the biological and medical aspects of disability. Students who complete the course will be knowledgeable about: the relationship between Disability Studies, medical sociology and the concept of the —lived body; the difference between an understanding of the disabled body as a social construction and as a medical problem; the health care needs and experiences of people with disabilities; public policies related to the access of people with disabilities to quality health care; identification,
prevalence, clinical manifestations, cognitive, behavioral and social implications and interventions associated with genetic causes of disabilities and acquired disabilities due to traumatic events; the relationship of Disability Studies and bioethics in areas such as prenatal testing, the genome project and assisted suicide; the value and possibilities of non-verbal communication and sign language to improve the quality of life of people with sensory disabilities; language development and educational options for children with cochlear implants; modes of communication with individuals with hearing impairments and other sensory disabilities; advances in our understanding of issues related to the sexual life of people with disabilities; the value of universal design and the physical accessibility of the built environment to people with disabilities and the broader community; and the potential for assistive technologies to improve the quality of life of persons with impairments and disabilities.

**Law/Business:** (Depending on how easy it is for non-law students to attend classes in the law school, this may be a business course that focuses on disability in the workplace.)

**Disability and the Law.** This course would examine legal cases related to disability, as well as the construction of disability laws and the ADA. A primary focus would be accommodating access in hiring practices and in workplaces.

**Practicum:**

The activist-track practicum would allow for a variety of expression. A creative piece of work, including a performance, would be considered acceptable for this part of the program. Internship or volunteering with a social justice organization, working as an ASL translator, or working on a brief or statement about disability rights for a political body would also fit into the activist track practicum.
This certificate design offers a flexible model for a combined, two-track program, or the two could be separated into either activist or research tracks. As with other designs in this project, some specific, institutional language and requirements appear. However, as discussed throughout the chapters, several organizations bind English departments together across the United States, and even across the world, so much of the standard language and requirements fit a variety of colleges and universities.

6.3 Future Directions: Continuing the Conversation

Notably absent from most of this work is the voice or signs of students with disabilities. As I move forward with this project, the first addition will be a survey of students who identify as disabled who are currently enrolled in colleges and universities. I plan a nationwide sample of disabled students and their experiences in the English department—with particular focus on their experiences in FYW, as that course grounds the whole dissertation. As I argue throughout the chapters, FYW serves as ground zero for building inclusive culture. Including the experiences of students with disabilities will allow the full picture of the culture of the English department to emerge and will provide primary data crucial to moving forward with disability studies as an integral part of the culture of higher education.

Including disability studies into the culture of the English department will fundamentally create a more inclusive space for disabled students because they will know they are valued by the faculty and by the administrators of the department. Engaging in reshaping the discipline of writing studies to acknowledge disability takes work. It takes critique and examination of our field’s history and practices—and this critique can sting. Too often, we engage in critique without solution because identifying problems remains far easier than solving problems. Yet, English instructors, faculty, and administrators have been the standard-bearers for change within
higher education over our long history. As we move forward together, individual instructors, writing program administrators, department chairs, and deans will provide the research, practices, and theories that can create spaces for higher learning for all students.

The solutions offered throughout this project range from course policies to curriculum development. The simple choice to eliminate late policies (or to soften them considerably) immediately makes the classroom a more inclusive space for many disabled students, but also creates space for students who are new to college to become accustomed to working independently or for students who work a night job or who have caregiving responsibilities. Similarly, working with a contract grading assessment practice instead of traditional grading not only benefits disabled students, but can be a powerful tool for antiracist assessment. The suggestions for WAC programs and a disability studies certificate require more institutional support than the smaller classroom changes, but they help build institutional bridges and cooperation, which creates a more cohesive plan for implementing other university-wide initiatives. The focus of this work remains wholeheartedly with building inclusivity for disabled students, but significant benefits for all students accrue from the solutions I suggest. Perhaps even more importantly, the suggestions allow for expansion, collaboration, contraction, and/or alteration according to the needs and goals of an individual teacher or administrator. I dedicate this project to my students, past, present, and future, but I also sincerely hope it serves my colleagues, because the work we do in the writing classroom matters. It is the space of unlimited potential, as bell hooks reminds us. I invite you to join in the creation of spaces that include all of our students.
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APPENDIX: SAMPLE SYLLABUS FOR INCLUSIVE FYW

English 1101

This syllabus serves as a contract between you and me, your instructor. If you stay in the class, you’re agreeing to abide by the polices and practices set out in this syllabus.

Course Catalogue Description

This course is designed to increase the student’s ability to construct written prose of various kinds. It focuses on methods of organization, analysis, research skills, and the production of short expository essays. Readings consider issues of contemporary social and cultural concern. A passing grade is a C.
## Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics (brainstorming, for example), gathering evidence, considering audience, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Engage in the collaborative, social aspects of written composition, and use these as tools for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Demonstrate how to use composition aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gather, summarize, synthesize and explain information from various sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences, but in particular the formal academic audience that makes up the discourse community with which you will also become more familiar in this course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Critique your and others’ work in written, visual and oral formats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Produce coherent, organized, readable compositions for a variety of rhetorical situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Reflect on what contributed to your composition process and evaluate your own work.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We are going to do a lot of writing—there’s no way around that. Every reading, activity, and assignment you are asked to do is specifically chosen to help you become a better writer. The good news is that the writing and reading skills you acquire will be applicable to all of your future endeavors, both professional and personal (yes, even if you are a budding biochemist or concert cellist). Ultimately, our course goal is to learn to communicate effectively through writing—an invaluable skill. I will ask you to consider your own experiences and interests throughout the course as well as introduce you to other ideas and approaches to those ideas.

Required Texts:


“IT was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive or who had ever been alive.” — James Baldwin
Community

We are part of a learning community dedicated to supporting a positive environment for all students. We must treat one another with respect at all times. If you are disturbing the class, I may ask you to leave, forfeiting any in-class assignments we may complete after your departure. Our community does not end at the classroom door, but extends to our iCollege space and all other out-of-class environments used for our course interactions as well. Please see (Ctrl +Click to follow links):

http://deanolstudents.gsu.edu/faculty-staff-resource/disruptive-student-conduct/

Course Policies and Procedures

Attendance and Punctuality

This course is based in community, as the sidebar to the left states. If you come to class late, you will not only be missing opportunities for in-class writing and activities (which account for 10% of your total grade, as is explained two pages hence), you’ll also be disturbing other members of the community. Do your best to arrive on time, but if that isn’t manageable, please come in quietly and attend to what is happening, rather than furthering the disruption by asking, “HEY, WHAT’D I MISS?” There is no opportunity to make-up in-class writings or activities, although you will have many opportunities to gain these points, so if you miss 2-4 classes, your final grade likely won’t be impacted too negatively. If you need to miss class for an extended period for any reason, keep in contact with me and be ready to provide documentation for the absences.

Late Work

Late work will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but the time to notify me that you’re struggling with a project is not the day it is due—contact me early and we can conference about the difficulties you may be facing. The exception to this is the previously-mentioned in-class writing and activities. There is no opportunity to make-up those assignments and activities.

Plagiarism

Don’t Do It. We will talk about what it is and what it isn’t. Here is the university policy: Bottom line: Never try to turn in someone else’s work as your own. You will fail the project and, likely, the entire course.

Project Submission

All projects will be submitted to iCollege this term. No other submission method will be accepted, unless you clear it with me via email beforehand.
INCOMPLETES
IN ORDER TO RECEIVE AN INCOMPLETE, A STUDENT MUST INFORM THE INSTRUCTOR, EITHER IN PERSON OR IN WRITING, OF HIS/HER INABILITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE. A GRADE OF INCOMPLETE WILL ONLY BE CONSIDERED FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE A) PASSING THE COURSE WITH A C OR BETTER, B) PRESENT A LEGITIMATE, NON-ACADEMIC REASON TO THE INSTRUCTOR, AND C) HAVE ONLY ONE MAJOR ASSIGNMENT LEFT TO FINISH. ASSIGNMENT OF INCOMPLETES AND THE TERMS FOR REMOVAL OF THE "I" WILL BE SET AT THE INSTRUCTOR'S DISCRETION.

Student Accommodations
Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Office of Disability Services. Georgia State University complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which an accommodation is sought. Also, please schedule an appointment with me so that we may discuss any accommodations you need in our class during office hours. To respect your privacy, we will not discuss these accommodations in class.

Community Space Outside Aderhold LC
Online Evaluation of Instructors

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.

― Be curious, not judgmental. ― Walt Whitman
### Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superior</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Failing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 to 98 = A+</td>
<td>89 to 88 = B+</td>
<td>79 to 78 = C+</td>
<td>69 to 60 = D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97 to 93 = A.</td>
<td>87 to 83 = B</td>
<td>77 to 70 = C</td>
<td>Below 60 = F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 to 90 = A.-</td>
<td>82 to 80 = B-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This is the standard grading scale for all English 1101 and 1102 courses at GSU. Note that a grade of C is needed to pass this course.

### Grading and Assignment Breakdown

Your grade will be calculated out of 100 total points, so you can easily keep up with your progress. You can always ask me your grade for in-class and iCollege activities. You'll be able to track your project grades on iCollege.
English 1101 Course Schedule

This schedule reflects a plan for the course, but deviations from this plan will likely become necessary as the semester progresses. Students are responsible for taking note of changes announced during class time when they occur. Readings and assignments from our textbooks are abbreviated as follows: GFW (Guide to First Year Writing) BaCW (Becoming a College Writer). All readings from BaCW include the headnote and activities (you don’t have to do the activities unless specified, but do familiarize yourself with them). A few readings will be linked in this syllabus or posted on iCollege (they will be noted in the third column on the day they will be discussed).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Activities</th>
<th>Readings and Homework Due</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Part of Course:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week I</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td>Note: Whatever is in this space is what is DUE on the date listed on the leftmost column. Your iCollege Quotes and Questions will be due by 8 p.m. the evening before we will be discussing the reading for class. If people aren’t doing the responses, they will become reading quizzes…believe me, you do not want that eventually to become a reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show and Tell</td>
<td>Bring an item for Show and Tell—nothing dangerous, illegal, or alive. There’s a pretty big reading assignment for next Tuesday, 28 August...you might want to get ahead. Remember, your reading iCollege Quotes and Questions are due the night before class discussion, so you’ll need to do them by 8 p.m. on 8/27/2018 for this first class (you are expected to keep up with the rest of them on your own).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Discussion of readings</td>
<td>GTFYW: Chapter 6, including student example work</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to the Awareness Project</td>
<td>BoCW: Awareness section headnote (19-21) and “A lot” (61-65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>If you intend to respond to these readings, you must post your iCollege Quotes and Questions by 8 p.m. on 8/27/2018 (you’re expected to keep up with the rest of them on your own).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Discussion of reading</td>
<td>BoCW: Selected poems (66-69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DALN</td>
<td>BoCW: Selected poems (66-69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshopping Awareness Project topics</td>
<td>Bring at least two ideas for your Awareness Project’s focus (you don’t necessarily have to stick with these ideas—they’re for workshop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of reading</td>
<td>GTFYW: Chapter 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshopping persuasive rhetorics</td>
<td>Post a link to iCollege or bring to class examples of persuasion that use logos, ethos, and pathos (they may be 3 separate examples or you may find an example that combines them all or uses two of them—advertisements are a great place to start, as are political pieces).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of reading</td>
<td>BoCW: Bell (76-85) and Dorwick (70-72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Workshopping Awareness Project drafts</td>
<td>Awareness Project <strong>Due by 11:59 p.m.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Part of Course:</strong> Interpretation</td>
<td>Discussion of readings</td>
<td>BoCW: Interpretation section introduction (89-91) and Gans (118-124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introducing the Interpretation Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Discussion of reading</td>
<td><strong>GTPWY:</strong> Chapter 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practice field research</td>
<td>No reading or responses due.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Discussion of readings</td>
<td>BoCW: Longinus (138-139) and Blog Carnival Entries (112-117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of readings</td>
<td>BoCW: Vegetarianism paired readings (150-158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Discussion of Reading</td>
<td>Erdich, “Dear John Wayne.” Follow this link to find the reading—you can take notes or work from your phone, laptop,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stryker, Introduction to Transgender History (pdf posted on iCollege under Content—read/respond to the first seven pages and we will discuss some of the terms in class, so you can read the entire chapter if you are interested/have time.

**Week 8**

**Workshopping drafts of Interpretation Projects**

**Third Part of Course: Application**

**Week 9**

**Discussion of readings**

**Epistemic writing**

**Introduction of Application Project**

**Discussion of reading**

**Further discussion of Application project**

**Discussion of readings**

**Application project discussion and idea sharing**

**GFPYW: Chapter 1**


**BacW: Murdock (218-221)**

**BacW: Davenport and Robertson (194-198) and Environmental Cartoons (199-2201)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Library Introduction (in class—don’t go to the library)</th>
<th>BoCW: Conversation section introduction (231-233)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Discussion of readings</td>
<td>BoCW: Memorials (260-266)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of readings</td>
<td>BoCW: Gentrification selections (286-293)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>I will be available via email during this break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Holiday Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holiday Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Workshop of Conversation Project drafts</td>
<td>Prepare a 2.5-minute (maximum) presentation on your Conversation project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshop of Conversation Project drafts</td>
<td>Last day of class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Finals Week | **Conversation Project due 11:59 p.m.**
I definitely recommend confirming with me that I got your final project.
There have been cases of iCollege overloading/crashing during finals. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Discussion of readings</th>
<th>Come to class with some ideas about what you’ll do for your Application project. Be CW: Menus (212-217) and Aristotle (163-179)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Almost-done presentations on Application project. (These will still be informally graded by me, but pretend you are presenting them to a prospective employer or someone you’re trying to persuade)</td>
<td>No readings. Come to class with a more polished presentation for your Application project ready Application Project Due by 11:59 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshopping of Application Project drafts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Fourth Part of Course: Conversation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Discussion of readings</th>
<th>GTFYW: Chapter 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction of the Conversation project and</td>
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</tbody>
</table>