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The Space between Pedagogy and Praxis: Enacting an Accessible, Critical Disability Studies Pedagogy through the Course Syllabus

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This thesis explores the practical implementation of an accessible critical disability studies (CDS) writing pedagogy within the framework of course design, with an emphasis on the syllabus as a transformative tool of invention and possibility. By interrogating the course syllabus as a mediator of access, this project works to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and tangible movement towards access and seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusive and accessible pedagogy, encouraging educators to reimagine their classrooms to better serve diverse student populations. This research focuses on the intersection of pedagogical strategy and praxis, institutional policy, and inclusive intention, while imagining the possibilities of the syllabus as a possible vehicle for doing this work.

KEYWORDS: syllabi design, course design, accessible pedagogy, critical disability studies, writing studies, academic ableism

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: COURSE DESIGN, DISABILITY, AND AN ETHICS OF ACCESS

Purpose and Exigency

Classrooms and related institutional spaces continue to be constructed, physically and conceptually, in ways that communicate the types of bodies, identities, and abilities that are valued and welcomed and the types of bodies, identities, and abilities that are not. This includes not just physical classroom spaces, which are by design inaccessible for certain mindbodies, but also the ways that courses are designed with features that emphasize conformity and uniformity, and that are not poised to respond to even the most common of corporeal-, neuro-, cognitive and/or dispositional divergence. Messages that are both explicitly and implicitly compulsorily-able-bodied are routinely accepted as the-way-we-have-always-done-it and/or can appear to be fixed in place. Despite growing attention toward issues related to classroom accessibility and course design, as well as related advancements in accessible and socially just pedagogies, there remains a gap in discussions that imagine possible strategies to accommodate diverse needs proactively and by design, instead of by retrofitting. I propose with this project that scholarship in critical disability studies (CDS) and accessible pedagogy (AP) can together offer a framework that opens up a space to imagine strategies that [1] address a diversity of student identities when inscribed into the everyday practices of a writing classroom; [2] interrogate spaces of possibility for access within course design; and [3] create opportunities for instructors to enact an ethics of access to design a course that plans for diverse student needs instead of reacting to them.

Course design, as I conceptualize it, is both a process and a product. As a process, course design includes the planning and creating of a course, including course content, structure, sequence, and policies for the classroom environment. As a product, a course design text is the full articulation of the shape and plan for a specific course, which might include: [1] the syllabus; [2] a teaching

statement that includes a description of the course and rationale for design choices; [3] a description of major projects; [4] a full course schedule; [5] an assessment plan.

This issue of course design and especially how it responds to the diverse needs of students is an important topic to explore because disability is always and already present in our writing classrooms. A 2019 study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics found that 21% of undergraduate students and 11% of graduate students identify as disabled. This equates to a likelihood of three to four students with disabilities enrolled in the typical first-year composition (FYC) classroom, assuming an average enrollment of twenty-three students. Seventy-five percent of those disabilities are statistically likely to be non-apparent, meaning that instructors may not even be aware of the number of diverse learners that are enrolled in their courses. Non-apparent disability can include chronic diseases, neurodivergences, and mental, emotional, hearing, vision, and/or intellectual disabilities. This list is non exhaustive and doesn't capture all disabling embodied differences, especially those that are not routinely pathologized or categorized and/or that are present in students who don't have access to the medical system and therefore lack official diagnosis and documentation ("Invisible Disability").

Additionally, disability is present in our classrooms, regardless of whether instructors receive official requests for accommodations. According to several studies, many students don't disclose documented disabilities to their colleges, which means that "a large number of students with disabilities fail to register for disability support services" (O'Shea and Meyer 6). Unless these students are disclosing their disabilities directly to instructors, instructors will not be aware of students' potential access needs. Some studies estimate the rate of non-disclosure of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary classes to be around 72% (Newman et al. 31). Students with disabilities are also less likely to graduate with a degree, when compared with the general student population, marking them as an already at-risk student population (Newman et al. 47).

The purpose of this research project is to address these exigencies by shedding light on the seemingly routine and perhaps even undervalued ways that classroom spaces are constructed. This includes a focus on the course design choices that that work in ways that reify institutionally mandated, hegemonic, ableist practices and policies that often result in classroom spaces and practices that are inaccessible to specific mindbodies and that create intersections of oppression for many. In her thought-provoking exploration of an accessible pedagogy, Allison Harper Hitt challenges these routine approaches to accommodating students with disabilities. She writes,

> What if, instead of following a set script or applying accommodating practices based in disability diagnosis, the goal of engaging with disabled and nonnormative student writers is to create multiple access points for creating and sharing knowledge. One way to do this is by designing anti-ableist, accessible multimodal practices that are rooted in the principles of UD [Universal Design] and different embodied experiences. (78)

This project considers the course syllabus as an important rhetorical document that both conceptually and physically constructs a writing course, one genre within the larger framework of course design that serves as a focal point for enacting inclusive and accessible pedagogical practices, and an avenue for interrogating the potentials that exist for accommodating diverse student needs proactively. Anis Bawarshi establishes the purpose of the syllabus as not just a practically important document, but also one that makes specific actions within the classroom possible. The syllabus, he explains, "organizes and generates the classroom as a textured site of action which locates teacher and students within a set of desires, commitments, relations, and subject positions. At the same time, the syllabus also manages the set of genres that will enable its users to enact these desires, relations, and subjectivities" (117-18). This project considers myriad ways that this discursive artifact could be constructed to plan for, be responsive to, and situated towards accommodating a diverse spectrum of potential access needs and focuses on offering a framework for reevaluating what are

often considered fixed, routine practices of an FYC course design. It interrogates the spaces of possibility for access within course design and imagines ways that an instructor can adopt an ethics of access to explore ways that a writing course can be designed that is not only accessible but emancipatory for disabled students.

To do the aforementioned work, this project will be guided by one central research question: What are practical ways that an accessible, critical disability studies (CDS) writing pedagogy can be enacted in course design through the syllabus? I will also explore several related questions, including:

- What are the legal and institutional limitations that apply to the course syllabus?
- What ways can this topic be explored while avoiding the creation of a checklist, the rhetorics of which work to create a mistaken belief that once all the boxes on a list are checked, inclusive design has been achieved?[1]
- Where are opportunities for course design decisions that emancipate rather than subjugate students?
- Where are opportunities to push back on institutional narratives and beliefs about who is invited (and who is not) into the academy?

As educators, we are entrusted with the profound responsibility of creating accessible and inclusive learning environments that honor and respect the diverse needs and identities of all students. But academia, as Jay Dolmage reminds us, is constructed in ways that project a compulsory able-bodiedness perspective onto students and educators ("Academic" 7). It is my hope that teachers will take from this project not a set of prescriptive directives or items to check off of a to-do list, but rather a broad understanding of how they might work towards constructing their classrooms in ways that are accessible and inclusive and that actively reject academic ableism while

[1] This issue regarding the dangers of a checklist are explored further on page 9 of this project, as well as Chapter II, page 37. For more information, see Dolmage, "Risks".

also successfully navigating the complexities of institutional constraints and obligations that often limit options for course design available to teachers. Ultimately, I advocate with this project a movement towards implementing an anti-ableist pedagogy, which is one that works to confront the non-visible structures of power that inform and shape the writing classroom and the related ideology that offers agency for some while denying agency for others, marking specific mindbodies as welcomed while rejecting others. This requires a deliberate examination of structures that have historically marginalized certain identities, perpetuated ableist norms, and limited or excluded the participation of all students.

Literature Review

Multimodality

Scholars are recognizing that traditional approaches to writing instruction may inadvertently exclude diverse learners, a point taken up by Shannon Walters in relation to the technical writing classroom. She explains that, especially from an "impairment-specific perspective," multimodality by-design is poised to accommodate a diverse array of access needs—including those related to disability—and because it offers multiple modes for access, a student "experiencing difficulty in one mode can express or receive information in another mode" (437). Like Walters, scholars in critical disability and composition studies also suggest multimodality as an important and inclusive teaching practice to enact in the composition classroom (Alexander and Rhodes; Butler; Hitt; Selfe; Yergeau et al.). Multimodality can apply to both texts and physical spaces, as described by Remi Yergeau and colleagues. They write, "Multimodal texts use a variety of semiotic resources that aim to activate multiple senses (most often those of sight and hearing); multimodal environments entail multiple channels and interactional resources that, taken together, convey meaning." A multimodal pedagogy, then, centers accessibility in its approach by offering multiple modes of access for students. Allison Harper Hitt describes these kind of access-focused modes as "multiple access points" and describes

them as opportunities for students to engage, learn, and compose in the writing classroom (22). Hitt explains that these "multiple access points" create space for students to act as agents in "discussions of pedagogical accessibility," and stresses that the approach always "be reflective, adaptive, and focused on the material needs and embodied experiences of disabled student writers—in addition to the other students who would benefit from the multiple access points these practices create" (Hitt 88).

By reimagining diverse ways of knowing, learning, producing, and meaning-making, scholar-educators have sought to create courses that foster inclusive participation through multimodal design. Hitt explains that "emphasizing the different modes of composing through a multimodal pedagogy recognizes students as agentive, resourceful, and creative meaning-makers … which is valuable for students to take control of how they best receive and create knowledge" (74). Multimodality has also been conceptualized as a way of making classrooms more accessible spaces specifically for students with disabilities and other divergent mindbodies that may not be planned for in standard, rote course design. Hitt explains,

> The crafting of multimodal pedagogical spaces make room for students to perform disability and different literacy practices that acknowledge, respect, and privilege a wide range of embodied processes of meaning-making. This privileging not only more wholly enacts socially just and inclusive pedagogies, but also makes room for composition of more robust, rhetorically rich texts. (21)

Multimodal approaches have likewise been identified as including practices that acknowledge and celebrate the richness of diverse communicative and learning practices but are often focused on the types of texts students are asked to produce—or inversely, the material design of text produced for students—and do not typically extend to conceptual accessibility related to the design of course policies with a few exceptions (currie and Hubrig; Wood; Womak, et al.). This common perspective

is evident in the description Hitt offers for multimodal teaching practices, which does not include any mention of the design of the course policies. She explains that "multimodal teaching practices acknowledge that students benefit from information presented in different ways, brief lectures accompanied by slides or videos, collaborative work, large-class discussions or paired discussions, and interactive workshops" (45).

Hitt's explanation of multimodal pedagogy reflects a more commonplace focus on the ways that information is communicated to students and the types of assignments students are asked to complete while lacking a similar focus on how the foundational policies of a course might be multimodally designed to likewise include a focus on access and issues of embodied variability. This project, while focusing on the syllabus as a genre of invention and mediator of access, demonstrates that these same multimodal teaching practices Hitt and others describe can be directed towards the overall design of a writing course and that there exist myriad opportunities within this construction for creating expansive modes for student access and to identify novel areas for students to exercise agency, in potentially overlooked and/or neglected places.

Universal Design

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), or "the use of multiple and flexible strategies to address the needs of all students," has been suggested as another way to address accessibility in course design (Dolmage, "Risks"). Similar to multimodality, UDL focuses on offering multiple modes of representation, engagement, and expression that are designed to consider the diversity of student identity and ability (Brueggemann; Dolmage, "Disability", "Universal"; Dunn and Dunn De Mers; Hitt; Kiedaisch and Dinitz; Smyser-Fauble; Womack; Zdenek). UDL proposes that inclusive design is better design for all and privileges flexibility and redundancy, building accommodations directly into the framework of a system (Womack 497). UD is viewed in disability studies as a "continual process... a push towards seeing space as in-process … UD does not cancel out the need

for individual accommodations, particularly because difference is in flux, but it begins by incorporating difference and disability" (Womack 500).

UDL has been suggested as a framework for course design that works towards broader and more effective classroom accessibility and encourages "designs that address diversity rather than particular student-users" (Nielsen 6). Additionally, UDL emphasizes designing instruction and learning environments that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of all students. Dolmage offers a three-part approach to bringing UDL into the classroom that includes

> multiple means of representation, to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge; multiple means of expression, to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know; and multiple means of engagement, to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation. ("Writing")

Like concepts explored through multimodality, a course designed according to UDL plans for disability, instead of reacting to it, by paying attention to the ways that information is communicated and distributed, leaving room for students to access course information in myriad ways. UDL considers the diversity of a classroom as a given and is prepared for it, in the broadest sense. The universal of UD "suggests that disability is something that is always a part of our world-view" (Dolmage, "Mapping" 27). This can be inclusive and beneficial to all learners in a classroom because it attends to diverse learning styles and needs. Danielle Nielsen explains,

> Presenting the same information, multiple times, in different ways benefits not just students with cognitive disabilities, but also helps any student whose comprehension improves when they hear or read something multiple times. These distribution methods also give the students more agency and responsibility; they choose how to access the information, with the knowledge of how they best understand it. (13)

However, Dolmage cautions that this sort of design-for-all approach threatens to erase disabled and otherwise marginalized identities and experiences, and reminds us that these have the potential to serve as valued and agentive identities within the classroom ("Universal" 3). He calls attention to the risk of interest convergence—a term coined by legal scholar Derrick Bell and used by Critical Race Theorists to describe the idea that dominant race-related advances for minority groups are more likely to occur if they align with the interests of the dominant group (Bell 522; Dolmage, "Universal" 4). Dolmage cautions that it isn't that "the product or technology is not good for everyone. It very well might be. But there is an inherent problem whenever we begin arguing for the rights of minority groups only—or mostly—when what we are arguing for also benefits the majority" (Dolmage, "Universal" 4). This risks a homogeneity of a different type but is just as problematic, especially when inclusivity is valued only when it helps everyone or is considered beneficial for all, rather than in response to the access needs of some. He reminds us of the "importance of disability as a situated knowledge" and as a "unique and important perspective" that is at risk of erasure (Dolmage, "Disability").

Additionally, there is a danger in creating what could amount to a checklist for accessibility, an issue taken up at length in scholarship related to Universal Design (Dolmage, "Risks"; Hitt; Nielsen; Walters; Womack). Dolmage cautions that UDL is "becoming a neo-liberal industry within higher education," critiquing the ways that UDL has been co-opted and commodified as a marketable solution to issues of access and in danger of being reduced to a superficial checklist of accommodations, rather than an approach or orientation towards accessible design that addresses the diverse needs of students ("Universal").

This project contributes to this ongoing conversation by considering accessibility beyond UDL, focusing on the course syllabus as a mediator of access (a concept I explore in more detail in Chapter II) and one that also considers a shift towards principles of inclusive design. Additionally, I

respond to several of the questions Dolmage poses in the "Implications" section at the end of his 2005 article, "Disability Studies Pedagogy, Usability and Universal Design." These questions include: [1] How might a course be designed that responds to accessibility and inclusion without erasing disabled identities? [2] How might UDL be operationalized to conceptualize accessible, ethical, inclusive teaching practices that both reject retrofit as a solution and also move beyond the kinds of texts students produce and the ways that students engage with course materials to focus on an accessible course design?

Accessible Pedagogy

Expanding on and inclusive of multimodality and UDL, there has been a shift in writing studies towards a culture of access in course design, which advocates for a more transformative approach to FYC. Current scholarship in writing studies theorizes accessible writing pedagogy as an approach that recognizes the diverse needs of students, is flexible and inclusive, and is prepared to respond by design to the diverse needs of students. This includes the traditional concepts of course design and also includes the physical spaces of writing classrooms, institutional buildings, and professional conferences (Brewer, et al.; Cedillo; Dolmage, "Disability", "Mapping", "Universal", "Writing"; Hubrig; Konrad; Vidali, et al.). Adopting a culture of access does not mean the simple act of identifying and removing potential or perceived barriers but can be further conceptualized as a way to move and a way to position oneself in the classroom and towards students. Tanya Titchkosky explains that access can be conceptualized as a "questioning orientation" that includes ways to understand, describe, and engage with "the relations between bodies and social space" (x).

Accessibility is likewise framed as an antidote to the accommodation model, which relies on pathology, diagnosis, and retrofit, which Dolmage explains is "an after-the-fact construction. It is always supplemental—always non-originary. But as a supplement, to retrofit is to fix in some way.

Unfortunately, this 'fixing' provides little opportunity for continued refitting, for process." (Dolmage, "Mapping" 26). A culture of access, then, is "a culture of participation and design" (Brewer, et al. 153).

Dolmage asserts that to enable all students to access the spaces of writing, we must ensure that disability is not only recognized but also respected within pedagogical environments. He emphasizes that physical barriers to access are so common in the academy and are a material manifestation of the underlying ideological structures that perpetuate exclusion and marginalization ("Mapping" 14). Dolmage emphasizes that access "can only be fully realized as a circuit of interchange borne of interdependency" ("Mapping" 14). Likewise, Julie Jung emphasizes the necessity to shift our general understanding of access away from a top-down model of distribution towards one of interdependency, where interdependency is the norm, and where classroom practices are viewed as inherently relational (106). Instead of viewing access as something that is controlled and/or granted by those in power, it should be understood as a reciprocal process of exchange, similar to the ways that we conceptualize uptake, learning, and other processes of exchange in the classroom, where it is a given that folks rely on each other—the norm instead of the exception. This includes an understanding that teachers do not have perfect answers for inclusive design, and that this work is only successful when students are included in conversations about access, as experts of their own embodied identities and individualized access needs.

Relatedly, the current model of accommodation used by most universities relies on a medical model of disability, basing accommodations on individual diagnosis and pathologizing embodied difference. Unlike retrofit and accommodations-based approaches, accessible pedagogy seeks to create an inclusive educational environment that values diverse identities. Creating more accessible classroom spaces is not about cure and it's not about solving problems—it's about discovering ways to assume a positionality that seeks to leave room for student agency, advocating for physical, social,

and conceptual access and inclusion, and rejecting the common narrative that difference equates to deficit (Schalk).

Hitt's text, *Rhetorics of Overcoming,* offers us an example of a framework that is applied to the ways that *students* engage in composing practices and offers us much in the way of a framework that can be useful in the context of course design and from the perspective of educator. In this text, Hitt explores ways to move past notions that disability is an issue for the individual student to overcome, suggesting that centering accessibility and concepts of universal design in the classroom are ways to do this. Hitt also reminds us that disability, while often treated as an individual problem, is the result of "inaccessible infrastructures" and cannot be solved alone, but instead requires institutional/societal change, which reflects the social model of disability (36).

Responding to an individual accommodation request, instead of designing a classroom with issues of accessibility at the forefront, reinforces the belief that disability is an individual issue. Accommodations are typically retrofits meant to assist those who exist outside of the expected, welcomed, average mindbody and help those to "fit in" instead of challenging the oppressive design of the space we are asking students to fit themselves into (Hitt 19). This is one of several reasons Hitt offers as to why reactive accessibility (e.g., accommodations offered in response to an institutional request) will never resolve ableism in the academy nor make a classroom accessible because barriers to access are systemic and institutional (42).

Additionally, students who are required to seek retrofitted accessibility through institutional accommodations are vulnerable to "access fatigue," a term coined by Annika Konrad to describe the fatigue experienced by disabled students and is associated with repeated requirements to negotiate physical, social, and institutional barriers to successfully access spaces, services, and opportunities that are not designed with diverse mindbodies being considered. This labor may include advocating for accommodations, educating others about accessibility needs, or constantly adapting to

inaccessible environments. Over time, this ongoing struggle for access takes a toll on individuals with disabilities, leading to feelings of fatigue and frustration (Konrad 196). The burden for access in the current retrofit-based model expects disabled students to perform the majority of the work of inclusion.

Hitt instead suggests that issues of accessibility be incorporated into course design for all students, instead of singling out just the students who have been granted official rights to accommodation (46). She refers to this as an "ethics of accessibility," which positions accessibility as a social justice issue, acknowledging the diversity of human abilities and the importance of creating classroom environments that are inclusive and accessible to all minds and bodies (48). Thus, the concepts of universal design and accessibility are thoroughly explored in the first two chapters of her book.

But then, as is common in writing studies scholarship, rather than offering concrete ways to enact these theoretical frameworks in the composition classroom as related to the overall conceptual design of a writing course, Hitt instead illustrates how she works towards disrupting ableist notions of overcoming specifically through the design of writing assignments. She works towards this concept of "multiple access points" that resist valuing one form of composing over another and allows for non-normative writing and composing practices not in the way that she designs her course, but instead focuses on the work she asks students to do and the modes that students are welcomed to use to complete this course work. This, she explains, reflects an "understanding that difference is not something to be overcome but rather allows students more options for rhetorical expression" (Hitt 53).

My project will contribute to this ongoing conversation by applying the framework of an accessible pedagogy and the concept of transformative access—a form of access that challenges "the institutional logics that made a space inaccessible in the first place"—to analyze the course syllabus

as a genre that helps invent the everyday practices in a writing course (Hubrig 121). In doing so, I will move beyond considering consumptive access, which "involves allowing people to enter a space or access a text," to examine possibilities for transformative access, which "questions and re-thinks the very construct of allowing" (Brewer 154).

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

My project will be informed by a hybrid methodology that brings together scholarship in critical disability studies (CDS) and accessible pedagogy. A CDS framework focuses on and challenges traditional understandings of disability, emphasizing a social perspective that advocates for recognizing the agency and autonomy of people with disabilities, acknowledges the intersection of disability with other marginalized and vulnerable identities, and recognizes the compounding effects of multiple forms of oppression. CDS also advocates for physical, social, and conceptual access and inclusion, rejecting the common narrative that difference equates to deficit. A CDS framework further emphasizes the importance of understanding disability as "a social system that impacts all of us in a wide variety of systemic and quotidian ways" (Schalk).

Scholarship in CDS examines relations of power within institutions, and there remains ample opportunity to direct our focus to specific areas where "common sense" continues to direct and influence decisions related to the wielding and yielding of power, the ways instructors and students negotiate their roles within the classroom, the ways that institutions and instructors create and diminish room for agency within the design of a course, and the messages we intentionally and unintentionally communicate as we go about the business of teaching-as-usual (Annamma et al.; Birdwell and Bayley; Erevelles; Vidali, et al.). CDS offers us a perspective that invites robust interrogation of these so-called "common sense" practices, because "inequities are mediated and perpetuated by common sense beliefs about ability, race, and racialized communities, which facilitate human interactions and relationships within educational milieus" (Mendoza, et. al. 72).

There has been a more recent focus on composition course design through a CDS framework that focuses on issues related to embodiment and identity, and interrogating the material effects that result from course design choices (Hitt 75; Propen 44;). More specific foci include rejecting a reliance on student resilience in course design (currie and Hubrig; Konrad); challenging academic ableism (Dolmage, *Academic*; Kerschbaum et al.); theorizing access intersectionally (Kerschbaum et al.; Smyser-Fauble); and engaging in projects that center issues related to access and disability (Brewer; Browning; Brueggemann; Butler; Libow).

As discussed in detail in my earlier review of Hitt's work, an accessible pedagogy (AP) framework rejects the disability-focused accommodation model; recognizes and values linguistic, cultural, and embodied diversity in the classroom; and adapts teaching approaches to be inclusive of diverse student identities, recognizing that one size does not fit all in the classroom (Hitt; Walters).

When operationalized together, the combination of a CDS and AP framework provides a powerful lens for examining the power dynamics at play within the FYC classroom and offers a path towards not just challenging commonplace pedagogical praxis, policies, and points of view, but also for imagining and identifying actionable strategies for designing a course syllabus that actively promotes accessibility and inclusivity, and challenges academic ableism and compulsory able-bodiedness.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter II

I begin with a brief genre history of the syllabus as a culturally and historically mediated document, discuss some of the most common ways that the genre has been conceptualized, and explore the potential of the syllabus to be conceptualized as a pivotal point of invention, and one that offers possibilities for enacting multiple modes for student access (Hitt). I then explore institutional constraints related to composing a syllabus, including a rhetorical analysis of the syllabus

language that is institutionally required by the Illinois State University and suggested by the ISU Writing Program through a CDS and AP lens. Finally, I offer potential strategies for navigating the tension between these institutional policies and the principles of an accessible pedagogy, focused on ways to adopt an ethics of access when imagining and creating an FYC course.

Chapter III

I begin with a discussion about my own positionality related to disability and the academy. I then explore key takeaways regarding how a radically accessible course can be enacted through a course syllabus. Finally, I discuss the implications of my findings and identify areas of possibility which are opened up from this work.

CHAPTER II: DESIGNING FOR ACCESS: REIMAGINING THE SYLLABUS

The Syllabus: Contract, Learning Tool, Mediator of Access

An FYC course *becomes* through the genre of the syllabus. The syllabus has been described as a "charter document in a genre ecology," which positions the syllabus as a foundational genre within the broader context of academic systems and practices (Jones 25). Like Bawarshi, I contend that the syllabus is singularly the most foundational text an instructor will compose in constructing a course, the "master classroom genre" that establishes "the ideological and discursive environment of the course, generating *and* enforcing the subsequent relations, subject positions, and practices teacher and student will perform during the course" (Bawarshi 119). And yet, this genre commonly receives little attention in pedagogical discussions and, likewise, little innovation beyond those related to technological advancements.

In this chapter, I focus on the course syllabus: its history, purposes, and ways it has been conceptualized, positing that it acts as a mediator of access in the FYC classroom. I then rhetorically analyze institutional language and policies related to composing this document and imagine possibilities within this genre for enacting an ethics of access related to course design. My analysis is informed by a hybrid methodology that brings together scholarship in critical disability studies (CDS) and accessible pedagogy. This methodological framework provides a lens for dissecting issues of power, identity, and ability in the FYC classroom and allows for imagining course-design approaches that foster accessibility and inclusion and confront academic ableism. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the syllabus holds significant potential for the constructing of a radically inclusive FYC course.

Important to the scope, depth, and related limitations of this project is that the syllabus is a highly complex genre that is always in flux and reflective of a teacher's pedagogical beliefs, evolving understandings of inclusivity and accessibility, and prevailing institutional contexts. When discussing

genres-that-bound-action like the syllabus, it can often be taken for granted that we are all talking about the same thing when we say "syllabus." However, the variations within this genre can be quite profound, highly dependent on many factors, and evolve over time. For some, a syllabus might be a one-page document that includes the institutionally required language and checks a box off of the start-of-semester to-do list. For others, it could be closer to a full "course plan," which might include a full description of the course, day-to-day activities, readings, and expectations for student conduct. The forces that work to shape the genre might include the positionality and disposition of the educator authoring the syllabus, institutional realities and requirements, the ways that a text is planned and conceptualized, and/or the intended or potential audiences (including the political or cultural realities that serve as a backdrop when composing this genre). Because of this complexity, my focus is limited to specific sections of the syllabus that would typically be present across these variations: the required accommodation statement, learning outcomes and course work, attendance, participation, and deadlines/course schedule. I additionally chose these to focus on because I believe that they are the richest with possibilities for enacting a radically accessible FYC course.

A Brief Genre History

The syllabi, as a genre related to enacting, planning and/or designing a course, can be traced back to 1889. In its earliest iterations, syllabi content was often limited to "an outline of lectures" and/or a description of the course content (Parkes and Harris 55). Since then, the purposes of the syllabus can be "almost as varied as possible contents" (Parkes and Harris 55). The syllabus is typically the first instructor-authored document that students will encounter in a course and, at their most basic, syllabi outline the overarching structure of a course, a place where educators "describe what content they will cover, what books and articles their students will read, the assignments they complete, dates when things are due, and all the policies and rules" that govern the course (Palmer et al. 37; Yarosh 173). I contend that, in its most practical sense, a syllabus is simultaneously [1] an

agreement between student, educator, and institution that also serves as a repository of answers to frequently-asked-questions (Parkes and Harris); [2] an "operational roadmap" for curricular wayfinding (Fornaciari and Dean 703); and [3] most central to this project, a mediator of access (Hitt). The following sections explore how this genre materially and conceptually constructs a course, explores the syllabus as contract, learning tool, and mediator of access, and discusses related implications for student access.

Conceptually Constructing a Course

The syllabus makes certain actions within a classroom (or digital learning space) possible, including and, most important to this project, actions related to access, inclusion, identity, ability, and disability. The typical FYC course syllabus dictates how and when the course will occur, including but not limited to [1]the places and times the course will meet and policies governing related details; [2] the expectations for submitting coursework and descriptions of the nature of the work; [3] the ways that coursework will be assessed; and [4] the options available for students to perform or demonstrate mastery of the course's learning-outcomes.

An educator's pedagogical philosophies, at their most basic levels, are enacted through (among other related genres) the course syllabus. Many seemingly rote decisions are made in the composing of this document about how students will engage with the course content, the professor, classmates, readings, assignments, and digital tools. These decisions in turn affect opportunities a student has for material and conceptual access to the space, the content, the knowledge, and/or processes for successfully performing or demonstrating mastery of a course's learning outcomes. These decisions also dictate how this access can be negotiated.

The syllabus genre can be composed and operationalized in wildly divergent ways, across not just academia or institution, but within departments, and between educators who construct courses with the same course number, who teach in rooms next door to each other, who share research

interests and pedagogical beliefs and yet, their syllabi often have little in common, save legally and institutionally required language, policies, and directives (Parkes and Harris). This diversity of content and design reflects the dialogic nature of writing, wherein even solitary writers are influenced by social and cultural realities. Syllabi, like all other genres of writing, are dynamic artifacts, and are shaped by not just authorial-intent or pedagogical beliefs, but by sociocultural forces. Authors, then, can be positioned as embedded in a complex web of meaning-making that they cannot separate themselves from. Thus, the syllabus is always a collaborative text, reflecting not just the author's beliefs and philosophies, but also other, countless external influences inherent in the act of writing (Prior 58). That said, the genre's rhetorical purposes are essentially the same. Specifically, the syllabus can be conceptualized as not just allowing for the day-to-day actions of a classroom to happen, but also as responsible for orienting all related actors—namely, students, educators, and administration—to the eventual and becoming space that is constructed and reconstructed throughout the course of the semester.

Several studies demonstrate that the design and focus of the text, including the language used, the ordering of the content, and the overall document design, can impact student perceptions of not just the document, but also the instructor and the course (Jones; Palmer et al.; Sunds et al.). Natasha Jones's research, which focuses on FYC students, highlights the significance of document design choices, such as formatting and font, which were shown to influence the perceived effectiveness of the syllabus as a student resource. Michael S. Palmer and colleagues found that syllabus design, specifically related to its focus (on course content versus a learning/student resource), impacted student perceptions of not just the syllabus, but also the course and instructor. Similarly, Jessica Sunds and her colleagues' study of the effects of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives on course syllabi showed that changes in syllabus design and content influenced student perceptions of instructor inclusivity and approachability. As I discuss in further detail later in

this chapter, this is particularly salient to students with disabilities: Neil Simpkins found that disabled students with access concerns commonly use the course syllabus to gauge instructor-knowledge related to disability and accommodations and use this knowledge to inform how they will communicate access needs to instructors (674). Thus, the syllabus serves as a crucial gauge for students concerned with issues of access to assess the instructor's related awareness, shaping the dynamics of the classroom and further illustrating that students rely on the syllabus to inform their perceptions of a course, whether they are explicitly aware of this or not.

While the syllabus holds significant rhetorical power, instructors often overlook the importance of critically examining and carefully considering how to ethically and effectively utilize that power. Content has "tended to be passed down, either institutionally or through generations of instructors, rather than revised and redesigned to meet the needs of students in a changing world" (Chen et al. 1). Institutional websites—often called "Best Practices" for syllabus design—offer guidance to instructors composing these texts. These sites of approved (and oftentimes, mandated) institutional language play important roles in "defining the policies" that are included in course syllabi—with language related to policies and expectations "often copied and pasted into the syllabus" (Chen et al. 12). But teaching, as Ada Hubrig and sarah madoka currie remind us, is "an of-the-moment and culturally responsive activity" and as our culture (and related issues of access, inclusion, and who is being invited—or even tolerated—in the academy) changes, advances, and responds to change, "so must our ethos and pedagogies" (143). I argue that the syllabus, as an integral part of teaching—especially considering the acts of designing and then enacting a course—demands regular, careful, culturally-responsive, and ethically-focused attention and contemplation.

Materially Constructing a Course

Rhetoric scholars have theorized about the materiality of rhetoric, which is closely related to this project's focus on syllabi and its related mechanics that work towards the material construction

of an FYC course. Scholar Amy Propen offers us a material-rhetorical perspective, which considers how space and place are constructed and how this affects the bodies that enter these material sites. She explains that "rhetoric functions in the material world—of the lived experience, and as such, it acts on the body and has a varied capacity for consequence" (44). The syllabus as a rhetorical text, then, not only conceptually constructs a course, but also shapes and constructs a course in tangible ways, having material implications on real bodies in material spaces.

It is often the first and the most explicit opportunity an instructor has to record and communicate their policies, schedules, descriptions, learning outcomes, and other related plans to students. These seemingly mundane decisions contain critical implications for real bodies. For instance, examining the schedule included in syllabi highlights how it dictates the timing and format of class meetings, exerting material control over students—whether they occur in-person or digitally, in real-time or asynchronously. This materiality is vital to consider, as it influences real, lived experiences and because the "physical spaces we inhabit affect our actions within those spaces" and "in turn, our actions and social practices affect those spaces" (Hitt 75).

Relatedly, what is written down, regardless of genre, intent, or audience, "takes place in real time, in real bodies, reflective of and shaping for the experiential realities the texts punctuate" (Sparby and Cox 4). Derek Sparby and Courtney Cox, against the backdrop of a global pandemic and related institutional communications, remind us that this materiality also relates to power, writing that "any study of embodiment must necessarily also attend to the power—and sometimes lack thereof—that bodies have in certain spaces such as university campuses" (4). This issue of power is particularly important, as Chen and colleagues explain, because "classroom spaces are racialized, gendered, [abled] and classed landscapes of power where privilege operates in multiple and intersecting forms" (Chen et al. 11).

As Contract

This notion of power is particularly relevant when considering the course syllabus as contract, which not only delineates the structure of the course, but also works to establish power relations within an educational space. Course syllabi are most often conceptualized as contract for a variety of reasons, including the "increasingly common regulatory efforts in higher education, including Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) restrictions" and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and issues related to institutional priorities of reducing potential liabilities and litigation exposure (Fornaciari and Dean 705). When a syllabus acts as contract, it becomes a location where "course policies are codified" and where power relations are cemented (Birdwell and Bayley 220). When conceptualized as a contract, a syllabus functions primarily as an outline of the course rules and objectives. Instructors can benefit from this model, especially when navigating student grievances and complaints. In these cases, the syllabus serves as evidence that policies were fairly followed or enforced, and syllabi have historically been utilized as evidence in cases litigated between both students and educators (Parkes and Harris 56).

One feature common in syllabi language is the use of "you" and "we" to "position students as the subjects" of the text, implicitly binding students to agreements, authored by educators and administration, that they might hardly be aware of entering, and without any explicit opportunities to opt-out (Bawarshi 123). As if to say, as Bawarshi explains, "w*e* as a class will encounter, be exposed to, and learn the following things, but *you* as a student are responsible for whether or not you succeed. *You* will do the work and be responsible for it, but *we* all agree what the work will be" (123). This perspective reinforces the idea that some practices within a classroom are interdependent-by-design (i.e. co-creating a space of learning as a pluralized "we") but that the rest are determined by individual bootstrapping and other solitary action (i.e., you are singularly responsible for your successes and/or failures). With this perspective, a student's fate is an individually determined

enterprise, even while students commonly lack agency in composing and constructing the policies that govern their actions. Student and teacher, then, become conditioned by this contractual language and perspective, which works to transform students "into the sum of their actions, so that they can be described, quantified, and evaluated" and teachers as enforcers and arbiters of a legal agreement (Bawarshi 125). This positioning of student-as-subject is problematic not only because it overlooks the complexities of individual access needs but also because it perpetuates a narrow understanding of education as a solitary, transactional exchange, rather than a collaborative process. This can work to reinforce the notion that accessibility concerns are the sole responsibility of the individual student, rather than shared responsibilities of the instructor and the institution.

Faculty-directed advice offered at my home institution, Illinois State University (ISU), is in keeping with this common point of view, and the language on ISU's *Teaching Resources* web page includes explicit advice that syllabi *do* operate as contracts, in their view, by documenting "course learning outcomes, content, and assessment" ("Create"). This web page links to an excerpt of the University Policies and Procedures that governs syllabi and outlines faculty obligations, a document that could likewise be conceptualized as a legally binding contract, one that users are implicitly opted into, and that also lacks options for opting out or contesting or negotiating the terms. This advisory notice reads, in part:

> Faculty should provide students access to a written syllabus (printed or electronic) in a timely fashion, normally on the first day of class, for each course that they teach. The syllabus should include specific course information, office hours and location (or other means of faculty availability appropriate to the teaching assignment), objectives of the course, tentative assignment and examination schedule, attendance and other course policies. Faculty members should clearly explain to their students methods of evaluation for the final grade.

> Faculty should reasonably adhere to the course syllabus and should announce and explain to the class all changes to the syllabus as far in advance as possible. ("Syllabus Structure")

This excerpt can be found within the "Faculties Responsibilities to Students" section in the University Policies and Procedures ("3.3.12 A. Faculty"), the implications of which I will explore later in this chapter.

Serious concerns have been raised with the syllabus-as-contract model, including that contractual syllabi are "often long, defensive, and designed to close policy loopholes… [and] often serve to demotivate students by constraining any excitement that may generate" (Fornaciari and Dean 703). Additionally, a contract largely implies a negotiation between parties; however, "with a unilaterally authored syllabus, students have little input" (Womack 502). This calls into question issues related to power and agency: what are the implications for students entering into a contract when their agency is limited, negotiation is rarely expected or offered, and where the contract is predominantly focused on expectations for student performance? Their options, if they take exception to anything within a course syllabus, are most often [1]to stay silent and effectively agree to the terms (which may be in direct conflict with access needs); or [2] drop the course, which often has wide-reaching ramifications for students, including impacts on financial aid and plan-of-study. Additionally, this type of syllabus design can work towards establishing an adversarial relationship between student and instructor and constructs a situation where students must either "agree or not proceed, a one-size-fits-all scenario that flies in the face of inclusive learning" (Womack 502).

The syllabus as contract model presents significant challenges for disabled students. With an adversarial nature and intense focus on expectations for student performance rather than student needs, the syllabus as contract may foster an environment of distrust and tension between student and instructor and further marginalize this already vulnerable student population.

As Teaching and Learning Tool

The syllabus has also been conceptualized as a teaching and learning tool, described as a "highly effective facilitator of student learning … [providing] information that assists students to become more effective learners in areas that go beyond the scope" of a course (Parkes and Harris 58). A syllabus constructed in this way can provide vital information related to: [1] an overview of the course, its main focus, and related learning outcomes; [2] general information related to being a student at a university; [3] an overview of the architecture and design of the course, including the ways that concepts are organized and connected; [4] resources for the course, such as required texts, related readings, or related and relevant sources of information; [5] assessment criteria, including how often and by what criteria student work will be assessed. This type of syllabus may contain "contractual and documentary material" as well (Parkes and Harris 58).

Additional text that might be included in a teaching-and-learning-focused syllabus includes instructive content related to performing as a student, i.e. how to manage time or how to prioritize school-related and/or professional tasks; best practices for contacting professors and/or student-colleagues; and/or suggestions and support for navigating common college issues. This type of general information can "help students develop self-management skills that are valuable" beyond the boundaries of a singular course and are most commonly found in undergraduate and/or general education course syllabi (Parkes and Harris 58). Most often, a syllabus is a hybrid document, which can serve multiple purposes and be designed toward meeting multiple and varied instructor and institutional goals (Parkes and Harris).

A learning-centered syllabus communicates to students "what is required to achieve course objectives, …what processes will support their academic success," and what students can expect to know at the successful conclusion of the course (Grunert O'Brien et al. 5). It can also communicate to students what an instructor prioritizes, related to learning, and prepares students for the

classroom and college experience, generally (Grunert Obrien et al. 11). The syllabus as course and learning tool model opens up a space for imagining improved student access within the classroom. This model illustrates that when crafted with a focus on the student, the syllabus can serve as a catalyst for fostering student agency, autonomy, and academic achievement.

As Mediator of Access

My discussion of the syllabus as contract and teaching-learning tool provides a foundation for understanding the potential of syllabi as mediators of access, a conceptualization that I contend offers significant potential for constructing a radically inclusive FYC course. I define a mediator of access—generically—as a tool that controls and makes decisions about access to a particular resource, space, or opportunity. In the context of a college course, the syllabus can be conceptualized in this way because it defines and controls the conditions through which material and conceptual access to a course and course materials are granted, supported, or assisted—but also, troubled, blocked, or impaired—to students enrolled in a course. For example, a student who experiences a disability related to executive function might struggle to produce or engage in coursework consistently throughout the semester, instead tending to get work done in bursts of productivity followed by bouts of inactivity. The syllabus can work as a mediator of access in this situation by offering flexible deadlines and additional options for attending class and engaging with course materials (e.g., in-person, via Zoom, or asynchronously accessing materials via the class learning management system). While there are related genres integral to the construction of a course (e.g., course schedule, assignments, reading materials, discussion prompts) that we can likewise understand as mediators of access, for the purposes of this project I maintain a focus on the syllabus as the foundational mediator of access, exploring and imagining ways that doing so can work towards constructing a radically inclusive FYC course.

Institutional Policies: Access, Ableism, and Syllabi

In the following sections, I examine a sampling of syllabi language, including ISU's institutionally required syllabi language as well as relevant examples of suggested syllabi language. By examining this language through a rhetorical lens informed by CDS and accessible pedagogy, my goal is to uncover implicit messages about identity, disability, and access.

Institutional Instruction on Syllabus Language and Design: A Case Study

The Illinois State University Center for Integrated Professional Development (CIPD) offers a multitude of teaching tools on their "Teaching Resources" website and welcomes instructors to get started with their teaching preparations, writing, "The most successful teaching experiences begin well before the start of class" ("Get Started"). Reflective of a broad, and I am sure well-meaning, institutional focus on accessibility, the second section on the "Get Started Teaching" page is titled "Accessibility," and includes three links: [1] a handout/how-to for creating accessible course content, detailing things like how-to format more accessible heading and list styles, best practices for text styling, and the importance of closed captioning; [2] a link to a "Web and Digital Accessibility Guide," which reads in part, "Accessibility means everyone can use a product or service, regardless of how they encounter it."; and [3] a link to a faculty page maintained by the people at Student Access and Accommodations Services (SAAS).

The linked SAAS page offers additional resources for navigating the accommodation process and for "facilitating access" in courses. SAAS also offers "Accessibility Tutorials," whose primary focus is closely related to concepts of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)[2] and document

[2] As previously mentioned in Chapter I, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework used in education to design accessible learning environments and curriculum that can more broadly accommodate the diverse needs of students. An offshoot of Universal Design (UD) which offers a more broad approach to design, UDL specifically focuses on educational practices and has likewise been criticized as offering a check-list approach that implies that educators can focus on ticking items off of a list rather than positioning themselves and their practices towards broad accessibility and inclusion. See Dolmage, "Disability Studies Pedagogy."

preparation. Across all of these related web sites, there is no information related to how a course could be designed with access in mind beyond the ways documents are formatted, or considering whether captions are available. This reflects a very limited conceptualization of accessibility and broadly disregards the diversity of corporeal- and neurodivergent ways of being that are undoubtedly present.

This perspective—or, lack-thereof—is important because, as Hubrig reminds us, the ways we (educators) "talk about disabled students both shape and are shaped by institutional orientations toward disabilities" (120). If accessibility is framed for educators as primarily—and perhaps, singularly—concerned with the ways that we format our student-facing documents, or how our PowerPoints are designed and delivered, there are serious implications for disabled and relatedly marginalized and vulnerable students. As Barbi Smyser-Fauble explains,

> By not developing processes that proactively work to construct inclusive environments (physical classroom space or course materials), the institution contributes to the exclusion of certain users from the course because of their difference. Ultimately, by placing the burden solely on the students to seek out accommodations (even those that have already been approved), institutions can appear to perpetuate the idea that these differently abled students are not anticipated users. (80)

Relatedly, the only mention of disability on the CIPD "Create Your Syllabus" page is related to the required "Student Accommodation Statement," which reads in full,

> Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

I will discuss the accommodation statement in much more detail later in this chapter. I mention it here to emphasize how CIPD communicates to instructors that accessibility, from an institutional perspective, needn't be a priority. Indeed, the absence of any other mention of disability—and no mention of accessibility—suggests a lack of focus on the needs of disabled students beyond legal requirements for accommodation. It is important to remember that while accommodations are essential for ensuring access in many cases, they are just one aspect of creating an inclusive learning environment.

SYLLABUS STRUCTURE

The CIPD "Create Your Syllabus" page also provides a link to an online guide from the University Curriculum Committee, who "manages all undergraduate related curriculum proposals and is an external committee of the Academic Senate" ("Syllabus Structure"). This webpage provides the University Policy that governs syllabi:

> Faculty should provide students access to a written syllabus (printed or electronic) in a timely fashion, normally on the first day of class, for each course that they teach. The syllabus should include specific course information, office hours and location (or other means of faculty availability appropriate to the teaching assignment), objectives of the course, tentative assignment and examination schedule, attendance and other course policies. Faculty members should clearly explain to their students methods of evaluation for the final grade. Faculty should reasonably adhere to the course syllabus and should announce and explain to the class all changes to the syllabus as far in advance as possible.

This page also offers a recommended "Standard Format" that is "consonant with the Illinois Articulation Initiative submission format and Illinois State Policy" and reads as follows:

- Department/School prefix, course number, course title, semester hours credit
- Contact hours, including any laboratory or studio hours

- Office hours and location
- Prerequisites and other notations such as Materials Fees
- Catalog description
- Course overview
- Specific student outcomes as a result of course participation (including General Education outcomes when appropriate and IDEAS learning outcomes when appropriate)
- Topical outline and tentative schedule
- Required and optional texts
- Required student tasks/assignments, such as papers, projects, or community experiences
- Student performance evaluation methods, including grading scale
- Attendance and other course policies

There are two things of note in this text: [1] The required accommodations statement is nested under the "Attendance and other course policies" in the sample syllabus provided on this page, which appears last on the document; and [2] There is no mention of accessibility or accommodations elsewhere on the syllabus, but there is also no mention of any of the course policies that are included on the CIPD pages (e.g. university-sanctioned absences policy, classroom behavior expectations, and academic integrity). Based on these findings, several conclusions can be drawn: [1] The organization of sections and treatment of information related to access suggests, as we encountered before, that issues related to student access are not an institutional priority; [2] There exists a need for greater attention to accessibility in course design, as well as improved communication and support for instructors in implementing inclusive teaching practices; and [3]

This sort of focus on design and content, rather than language choice or intent, reflects a higher value on institutional policy over the actual experience that is constructed and created from the tone, words, and eventual effects of the syllabus.

The clause governing course syllabi, as mentioned earlier, is found in the section, "Faculty Responsibility to Students." The title implies that the section will outline obligations of faculty members to support students' academic success and well-being. However, there is again a marked absence of any mention of access or accommodation across the entire section, suggesting a gap in addressing the needs of students with disabilities, which undermines the inclusive educational environment that universities should be striving towards. Additionally, universities have legal obligations under disability rights laws, such as the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, to provide accommodations to students with disabilities. Faculty members play a critical role in implementing these accommodations and ensuring equal access to educational opportunities—and so this omission is curious as well as troubling. Additionally, there is an inconsistency between the title of the section, which implies a commitment to supporting students, and the absence of any mention of disability, access, or accommodation, which are fundamental aspects of fulfilling a commitment to supporting all students.

Institutionally Required Statements

ISU mandates that instructors include two statements on their syllabi, one of which is the Student Accommodation Statement[3]. It reads in full:

> Student Access and Accommodation Services: Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should

[3]The other institutionally required syllabi statement relates to General Education Courses. Due to its lack of direct relevance to accessibility and accommodations, this statement is excluded from this analysis. To review required language according to course, please visit gened.illinoisstate.edu/faculty-info/.

> contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

As reflected in this example, the current accommodation model in use at most public universities relies heavily on the medical model of disability to evaluate and fulfill accommodation requests. Ella R. Browning explains, "The medical model of disability understands disability as something wrong with the body, something abnormal, something tragic, something that needs to be fixed" (98). In this framework, the focus remains on diagnosis and pathology, and accommodations as retrofits, rather than addressing the broader social and systemic realities that contribute towards erecting barriers to access. The accommodation process typically involves students with disabilities providing documentation from healthcare professionals to verify their disability and need for accommodation.

Smyser-Fauble notes that while the more recent move to require this language in ISU syllabi might have signaled a step towards accessibility, when considering the content and form of the statement, it becomes clear that its inclusion is more likely a premeditated move meant to be protective of the institution against litigation. She explains,

> [T]he language used within the construction of this statement makes it apparent that this is mandated to cover a legal obligation rather than enact what the ADA legislation intended: the inclusion of all individuals regardless of perceived differences in abilities. (77)

The required statement reveals an understanding of access as something that can only be offered after the fact and positions accessibility needs as an individual and pathologized problem.

Related to accessibility, the institutionally required accommodation statement "shapes the identities of students with and without categorized disabilities" (Smyser-Fauble 76). Simpkins demonstrates that the language used in a course syllabus, specifically as it relates to issues of access, accommodations, and disability, has material effects on students. Students consider the language

used as reflecting both an instructor's approach to and understanding of these complex issues—and often base their decisions about disclosing access needs on the course syllabus. He explains,

> The syllabus is a starting point for how many students with disabilities determine how to communicate with instructors about their access needs. Rhetorical choices made in syllabi, such as disability accommodation statements and classroom policies that tend to impact students with disabilities, shaped how—and even if—students with disabilities would even ask for accommodations. (674)

Tanya Titchkosky explains that discussions about access and accommodation work toward revealing implicit societal attitudes toward access and inclusion and suggests that the ways people talk about and engage with these topics reflects broader societal values that operate to reveal underlying conclusions about who belongs, who is considered 'normal,' and ultimately, as related to this project, who is allowed to access the academy. She explains,

> How people talk about matters of access or accommodation has something to teach us regarding who we are, and this is not just because such talk reveals a bureaucratic milieu, an economic rationale, or a legalistic mindset. Matters of access and accommodation rely on, and constitute, conceptions of who belongs, and this remains true whether coat trees are moved or not—or whether classrooms are redesigned or not… A sense of the normal participant, not to mention normalcy itself, is achieved by imagining, discussing, and perhaps even describing the type who is outside normalcy while maintaining an illusory sense that exclusion is an act of nature and not a social act. Inasmuch as a "naturally excluded" type is secured, more specific lines of exclusion can be drawn. Thus, any answer to the question, "Who, who exactly is the classroom for?" is as much a depiction of who might be excluded as it is of who might be included. (37)

The required accommodations statement, then, offers an opportunity to explore what underlying beliefs might be at work here. First, there is a clear reliance on the medical model of disability in this accommodations model, where the accommodations process directly relies on a "documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition." As well, the statement directs students to contact SAAS, moving the onus of accommodation to a bureaucratic process, distanced from a course instructor or even from within the department where the course is being taught. Additionally, the statement contains an implicit assumption of normalcy, particularly the phrase "reasonable accommodation," which assumes a standard from which an accommodation can be designed, implying an assumption of what is considered "normal" in academic settings, and thereby creating the abnormal or other.

Overall, the statement reveals biases towards disabled students by perpetuating a framework that prioritizes formal diagnosis, emphasizes individual deficits, relies on and entangles students in bureaucratic processes, and assumes a normative standard of experience. These biases contribute to and substantiate systemic barriers that hinder the full inclusion and participation of disabled and likewise marginalized and vulnerable students in academic settings.

ATTENDANCE

The language provided for attendance is merely suggested, which reflects an area of flexibility and agency for instructors when designing their classroom policies. The CIPD "Create Your Syllabus" page includes several options of suggested text for the attendance section. For brevity's sake and because the suggested language of all the statements is similar, I will consider only the first statement listed, which reads:

> You are responsible for attending class and completing all academic work. Be familiar with which absences are excused under university policy and which are not. You are responsible for making arrangements with me to complete missed coursework after an excused absence.

> Follow the instructions in this syllabus about any additional absences I excuse for this class. If you need advice on how to manage an extended absence or want notification of your absence sent to your instructors, contact the Dean of Students Office.

This text is written using contractual language that works to assign roles and responsibilities to the student (e.g., "You are responsible…"), and with an authoritative and off-putting tone that makes no mention of systemic barriers or challenges student might face in attending class. It is also ambiguous about any limitations or allowances for student absence—something that may be anxiety-inducing for students who have disabling chronic or mental illnesses or otherwise experience difficulties attending class regularly.

Likewise, the policy makes a distinction between excused and unexcused absences, which implies room for instructor-negotiated judgements of legitimacy and illegitimacy. M.L.N. Birdwell and Keaton Bayley explain this might be problematic because "professors and authors frequently make assumptions about their students' reasons for missing class that are implicitly ableist," inferring that if a student misses a class, it is a clear and strong indication that they lack either interest, motivation, or both (229). Additionally, as described in the accommodation section, students are directed outside of the classroom to a procedural and bureaucratic approach for addressing individual needs, rather than this being handled within the classroom community, which carries implicit judgements about particular student-needs being too specialized or burdensome for individual instructors to address. For a student with a disability, who is already forced into the institutional maze that is the process of institutionally approved accommodations, this additional going-outside-the-classroom, and to a completely different administrative process, can work towards additional othering of students with disabilities.

Adopting an Ethics of Access: Imagining Potential Strategies

In the following section, I begin by positioning the syllabus as a mediator of access, highlighting how it can offer students modes for access through its conceptual design. Next, I consider ways that the concepts of UDL can be utilized while avoiding the checklist approach, advocating for an ethics of access grounded in engagement and a dialogic approach. Finally, I explore practical strategies for syllabus design, considering several common syllabi-sections through a CDS and accessible pedagogy lens. Through this approach, I work towards imagining strategies for constructing a radically inclusive FYC course that prioritizes student agency, fosters diverse modes of learning, and challenges normative pedagogical practices.

In 2001, Brenda Brueggemann and colleagues called for scholars to consider the language—and implications—of their own syllabi. They wrote, "Analyzing the rhetoric of language and learning used in public debate (or perhaps in our own syllabus) can help us to learn about—and challenge—harmful metaphors, false dichotomies, and stifling cultural assumptions about writers and writing." I contend that this call to action is just as relevant—and necessary as well as undertheorized—almost 25 years later. Being a body in a classroom space, especially a disabled body, is broadly consequential. Jess Dorrance and colleagues remind us that the ways that "a classroom is structured functions as (dis)invitations for certain bodyminds and, thus, is important to attend to if we want our classrooms to be as accessible as possible" (59).

As I have sought to demonstrate, considering the syllabus as a mediator of access is an opportunity to explicitly demonstrate accessibility, enacted through the shape and design of policies, procedures, and directives. Jianfen Chen and colleagues demonstrate that syllabi can and do communicate accessibility in two ways: "The first is by providing multiple means for students to reach out to and interact with their instructors; the second is by providing multiple ways to access course-related resources and evaluating learning and engagement across multiple criteria" (11). currie

and Hubrig have further positioned the syllabus as a text that can be designed to carry the burdens of resilience for disabled and marginalized students, which is directly related to access, especially when considering intersectionality. Resilience, as conceptualized by currie and Hubrig, refers to the ability of students to adapt to hardship, adversity, stress, or significant challenges they might encounter in academia. An expectation of resilience disproportionally affects BIPOC, disabled, and other marginalized students. They write,

> We see our work in creating resilient course materials as an act of creating community, sustaining connectivity, and promoting student well-being in accordance with dynamic community needs to defy the 'bureaucratic calculus' that pushes disabled and marginalized students out of academic space. (133)

They explain that they identified "spaces of tension, where students expressed anxieties around certain aspects of the course," modeling what Smyser-Fauble suggests—"soliciting feedback from the users of our course syllabus"—as signaling that we don't "just talk about audience needs, rather we actually value them." (currie and Hubrig 138; Smyser-Fauble 88). A resilient course policy regarding course participation, then, would involve a variety of engagement options, with a goal of improving access for all students and shifting the burden of resilience off of students to perform participation in one specific way. This also suggests the importance of engaging students in the co-construction of course policies, and in creating a dialogic text that not just provides information but seeks out input from students as a foundational component of its creation, "centering students' needs and the lived experiences of marginalized students before considering institutional expectations, curriculum outcomes, and on-campus mandates" (currie and Hubrig 132).

Browning questions how a DS perspective can be brought into a writing classroom "without altering the curriculum itself and without devoting a full course to a disability theme, as many instructors do not have the opportunities to make these kinds of changes" (97). She adds, "[C]an

this kind of integration of a DS perspective be done meaningfully, avoiding the add-and-stir approach?" (Browning 97). I offer my conceptualization of the syllabus-as-mediator-of-access as one potential answer to this query. I posit that focusing on, positioning towards, designing for, and then articulating that access is one of an instructor's highest priorities is one way to integrate into a course a CDS perspective in a meaningful way, especially important when instructors don't have agency over other curricular decisions. This includes a potential for all of the decisions an instructor makes when composing a syllabus, including considering how access is mediated as related to the ways policies and procedures are designed and communicated. I contend that a course can be enacted that both aligns with the values of a CDS and accessible pedagogy and works toward actively increasing and maintaining access and removing barriers.

Sparby and Cox further remind us that "documents that acknowledge and speak to their diverse audiences are overall more effective than ones that flatten contexts and identities." (3) This is cogent to this issue of syllabi design because, as noted before, the syllabus is the foundational text that students use to access this educational space being constructed. Likewise, Birdwell and Bayley stress that while specific, common activities prescribed for in a course syllabus could be considered ableist or especially inaccessible for certain mindbodies, it's rarely the specific activity that is the problem. They explain, "How activities are handled determines whether something is harmful or beneficial" and that assessment should focus on "demonstration of learning outcomes, not social performance" which can be especially problematic and inaccessible for neurodivergent students (225). This position further illuminates the pitfalls associated with frameworks such as Universal Design, which I will delve further into later in this section.

This idea of student and teacher collaboration is likewise important because, as Tara Wood and colleagues explain, "teachers who foreground the relationship with their students as collaborative can not only make the course accessible to and flexible to the needs of all students but

can also help students claim agency and feel empowered by their learning experiences." This relates to the ideas of interdependence explored earlier: The relationship between teacher and student is innately reciprocal, with both parties contributing to the co-construction of knowledge and meaning—no one is learning alone. Explicitly acknowledging this truth fosters an environment of mutual respect and productivity. As Wood and colleagues explain, "Teachers who openly admit their willingness and desire to learn from their students and to construct a productive learning atmosphere together with their students will help all students, not only those with so-called disabilities, to maximize their learning potentials."

Relatedly, when reflecting on physical realities that exist in the classrooms that we teach in, it becomes apparent how little we can control in these material spaces we move through. We often cannot control: the kinds of desks which are in the space or whether their design accommodates every iteration of human mind and body that might come into the space; the ways that the desks are arranged; where the projector and screen are in relation to where students sit; the number of and location of whiteboards and their relative positions; and/or the type of technology available in the space. These are examples of realities that are a result of institutional decisions, and while lack of access is frustrating, the truth is that no space will ever be perfect for every body. Nevertheless, these physical realities mediate the ways that we compose in this space, making careful consideration of the things that are in our control all-the-more vital.

In the following sections, I revisit the syllabi categories analyzed in the previous section, including a few additional categories based on my own syllabus content, and begin to imagine ways to construct a radically inclusive FYC course through the designs of these common sections. Additionally, I investigate the broader implications related to these design and policy decisions, imagining and suggesting places where an ethics of access could be enacted in the design of a FYC course. But first, a discussion of the potential pitfalls of Universal Design.

Universal Design vs. An Ethics of Access: Avoiding the Checklist

As previously described, the concept of Universal Design, which offers a framework for crafting accessible texts and spaces, rests upon the premise that by paying attention to specific characteristics during the design phase, these can be crafted at their inception as broadly accessible. Danielle Nielsen explains the rationale of bringing UD into a FYC classroom. She explains:

> Presenting the same information, multiple times, in different ways benefits not just students with cognitive disabilities, but also helps any student whose comprehension improves when they hear or read something multiple times. These distribution methods also give the students more agency and responsibility; they choose how to access the information, with the knowledge of how they best understand it. (13).

Some of the most common critique of UD focuses on it as a neo-liberal industry within academia, advertised on college brochures as-if the destination of *Accessibility* has been reached, the struggle is over, that thoughtfully-designed texts and spaces were all that were needed to reach broad accessibility. (Dolmage "We Need to Talk;" Hitt). Because disability is "dynamic and access must always be negotiated," it is at best, problematic, and at worst, dangerous, to envision that a checklist-approach could answer to all the concerns related to accessibility in a classroom (Hitt 30). This is not to say that UD is not valuable as a tool to have in the accessibility toolbox—because it is. But there is so much more to consider, which cannot be captured by this model. An ethics of access is a position and a way to approach course design, in conversation and community with the students that are the subject of the design. This positionality towards access is an ongoing process in spaces and places that are always in flux, always becoming. Anne-Marie Womack reminds us that this work that we do to position ourselves towards access is at the heart of what we do as educators. She explains, "Time spent on inclusion is worth it educationally and ethically because learning depends

on access" (521). Universal design, then, is part of a larger and more broad approach towards radically accessible course design.

Rather than conceptualizing accessibility concerns as things that can be ticked off of a list, Browning offers questions at the conclusion of her inquiry into the introduction of disability studies into the composition classroom aimed at instructors. These, in addition to questions posed throughout this project, can be utilized to assume a position towards access while both avoiding the checklist-approach and working towards a deeper investigation of classroom practices, policies, and procedures that might be at odd with an accessible, CDS approach:

- Is my classroom space physically accessible? Who is excluded? How might it be made more physically accessible for more students?
- Do the technologies I ask students to use exclude any students? Do these technologies make assumptions about students' abilities? How might these be improved?
- When I conceptualize the openness of my course and my awareness of important issues of identity, are there identities I leave out? How might I change this?
- Does my language inadvertently further ableist ideology? What about the language of my course materials?
- How heavily do I rely on culturally accepted "rules of normalcy" in the ways I interact with my students, in person and online?
- Do my classroom activities and pedagogical strategies privilege able-bodiedness?
- Do I allow for various modes of embodiment, various ways of learning, various ways of composing, various ways of making meaning?
- How might my pedagogy be more inclusive? (112)

These questions can serve as a powerful framework for critically examining and reevaluating the ways that courses are designed, guiding a process of reflection and inquiry that is aimed at identifying and addressing potential barriers to access and inclusivity. Beyond identifying barriers, there are also opportunities for imagining space for agential access, where students and instructors can work in unison to design accessible and productive educational and meaning-making experiences in a FYC course.

Required Accommodation Statement

Because the language regarding accommodations is a requirement for all syllabi, it might feel like this is not an area where instructors have agency. But this might not be the case. Adding additional language, in an effort to further explain your own positionality towards radical accessibility, can work towards signaling to students that you hold a commitment to challenging ableist norms and that your approach to accessibility is one based on collaboration.

Simpkins found that students analyze the language of accommodations in syllabi to "gauge their instructor's knowledge of disability in two key areas: knowledge of disability accommodation at the institution and knowledge of disability vocabulary" (681). He further finds that students "wanted to see that their instructor, at the bare minimum, knew about the systems at their institution in place to accommodate students… [and] if their instructor was aware of the ways that disabled people describe disability" (681). All of this, he explains, impacts whether a student discloses disability as well as how students navigate access in the classroom, broadly.

The questions to ask then when composing this section of the syllabi and conceptualizing this as a potential mode for access might include: What can students discern from my syllabi language about: [1] My knowledge of disability and my disability-related languaging practices? [2] My approach to access and accommodations? [3] My explicit commitment to addressing diverse student

needs, including the importance of accommodating various modes of embodiment, learning, and meaning-making?

Adding language to the syllabus that further describes your pedagogical commitment to access and inclusion in addition to the institutionally required accommodations statement signals to students that broad and thoughtful access is a priority, beyond boilerplate language that checks an institutional box. Including language that describes issues of access as dialogic invites students into the conversation, which pushes back on the syllabus-as-contract model and creates space for students to be included in on this conversation about access. Simpkins theorizes this process of students basing their communications strategies according to the signals of a syllabus and further explains the ways that we can operationalize our language in ways that work towards inviting these conversations about access. He explains:

> When students with disabilities use the syllabus tactically to communicate, they put pressure on a rhetorical system of accommodations where ableism both requires and determines accommodations. As teachers, we can use syllabi to invite conversations with students about disability and critically consider how our syllabi fit into the rhetorical landscape of accommodations at our institutions to better support students with disabilities in our classrooms. (675).

In practice, instructors can use this section of the syllabus to articulate their pedagogical beliefs towards access and inclusion, provide information about available accommodations, but also invite students to engage in a dialogue about their specific access needs, broadly understood. In the following section, I consider how access can best be conceptualized and enacted when starting with learning outcomes, which grounds this theoretical conversation in practice.

Learning Outcomes and Course Work

Learning outcomes are statements that describe goals for the specific knowledges, skills, or abilities that students will (hopefully) be able to demonstrate by the end of a course. I posit that their inclusion in a syllabus allows for an opportunity to explore how course materials and work can be designed with an ethic of access. These outcomes hold the potential for opening up places for students to claim agency in the classroom. Researchers have theorized that describing learning outcomes as explicitly removed from the means of achieving them creates multiple options for every learner and thus, instead of prescribing the avenues and modes that students must use to complete assignments and activities within a course, students should be able to make their own choices for how they'll complete such work in conversation with the ultimate goals for the course (Waitoller and Thorius).

Oftentimes, though, instructors conceptualize learning outcomes as being tied to one specific way of student performance, i.e. the peer review process is successful only when performed in this one specific way; otherwise, the activity loses all academic value. This is in sharp contrast to the more accessible positioning that there are diverse ways of knowing and learning that also increase knowledge and/or have the potential for demonstrating mastery of a learning outcome. currie and Hubrig remind us that "grading students on their ability to adhere to a particular set of strategies is disabling" and conclude that "all students benefit from learning multiple strategies and finding the best one for them" (135).

Relatedly, the intellectual work students are asked to complete for a course, including the types of assignments students are asked to do, work to illustrate the types of skills and knowledges that the instructor values. The question to ask here, then, is how can learning outcomes be tied to accessible practices and how can these practices be communicated in a syllabus in ways that create multiple modes for access? There is an opportunity in this part of course design where instructors

can "interrogate which parts of an assignment are necessary competencies and which represent normalized views for how students should display those competencies" (Womack 520).

For example, instructors who consistently design types of assignments that emphasize quick thinking and extroverted communication—and especially when these specific skills are not in any way related to explicit learning outcomes—disadvantage students who excel in other modes of expression and could impede access. This bias unintentionally favors one way of knowing and being over others, hindering an accessible, inclusive learning environment. But what if we started at the learning outcome and worked with students towards collectively designing ways they could perform mastery instead of prescribing actions for them? In so many classrooms, mindbodies that look and perform knowledge in very specific ways, or words on a digital page organized in very specific ways, reflect narrow conceptions of the acceptable ways to perform as a student and demonstrate knowledge, but when these ways are not accessible, it is vital to ask what diverse ways can be invented and accepted that provide more modes for students to access success in a classroom. Imagining these novel and inventive ways should be sought in conversation with students, who should always be positioned as subject-matter experts when it comes to their own learning needs.

Relatedly, there are many associated biases against accommodations related to access, namely that academic rigor is at stake. Womack addresses this, explaining that "even though learning requires that material be accessible to students, educators often assume that making material accessible to disabled students threatens academic rigor" (497). But, if learning *requires* access, what are the remaining options besides making our materials and the student ability to perform knowledge accessible?

Incorporating flexibility and choice into assignments and in-class activities, instead of prescribing a single type of genre for classroom work, offers students a menu of options to choose from and emphasizes the value of multiple modes of expression. This is something that has already

been widely theorized related to multimodal pedagogy, but here I suggest that this be extended to the course syllabus where it can be made explicit. We have the opportunity to create less discriminatory classrooms when our practices are grounded in non-normative practices, but the only way that students will understand and perceive this potential for empowerment through agency is if they are explicitly informed that these opportunities exist (Nicolas 19).

Again, this is not an approach that prescribes for assignments to look a certain way, but rather suggests that instructors approach how they design, describe, and enact assignments and other related course activities in ways that consider learning outcomes first and then determine other details related to access and related student agency, that teachers "should question the structures that make it difficult for marginalized students to move easily through classroom space" (currie and Hubrig 135). And that these areas which are opened up for students to exercise agency are communicated, explicitly, to students.

The truth is that there will never be *one* completely accessible space, reading, environment, or activity. The variety of human embodied identity guarantees that conversations about access will always be in progress and actively negotiated. What works for one student might be completely inaccessible for another, even and including being physically present in a classroom, because "school environments, with their fluorescent lights, computer hums, and migraine-inducing scents, actively pain many people. Some do all their actual generative or analytical work at home, because sitting in a chair at a desk stymies them" (Birdwell and Bayley 230). Ultimately, through embedding in our syllabus language an appreciation for the myriad ways in which students learn, we can foster an environment where students feel empowered to initiate and/or become involved in conversations about how best to negotiate the constraints over which we have no control.

ATTENDANCE

Related to this conversation about the design of classroom activities are issues of attendance and attendance policies. Simply put, studies that correlate higher grades with a lower number of absences don't necessarily or clearly support mandatory attendance policies—there are often confounding factors that are not accounted for. For example, if a student's grades are being penalized because they miss class, then it tracks that they will have lower grades. But is it the grade penalization from missing class that is harming grades or are the absences harming course material uptake and student performance in assignments? This continues to be debated, but what is clear is that attendance policies that cause students to fail courses only because of attendance are ableist and problematic.

Additionally, when instructors are required to make value-judgements about the reasons students provide for missing class, this risk positioning the instructor as adversary. Is a student who can't get out of bed and come to class experiencing an undiagnosed major depressive order or are they lazy and unmotivated—and is that our job as teachers to make those judgments? And does this matter when considering our broader pedagogical goals of making space for all mindbodies in an FYC classroom? Price reminds us that judgements about what bodies *should* be able to do are at their core ableist, and this is inclusive of judgements about bodies attending class according to institutional directive. She explains, "The idea that being in class is the 'correct' way to learn falls back on ableist notions about what a 'normal' body should be able to do i.e. be a body in a chair on a regular basis with no interruption or mitigating circumstances" (Price 73).

Additionally, it is imperative to remember that just because a student is physically present, this is no guarantee that learning will occur. Price explains this:

> First, simply sitting in class does not mean that the attendee is "experiencing" the class. Students with difficulty concentrating, who are falling asleep due to anxiety- or depression-

> induced insomnia, or who struggle to follow the "logical" structure or typical speed of most lectures are indeed experiencing something… Second, this view presumes that all learners learn in the same way: among people…A student with social anxiety, or one on the autism spectrum, for example, might get a great deal more out of a learning process that does not involve close contact or interaction with others. (65)

I contend that this space for considering the ways that mindbodies attend classroom spaces opens up another mode for student access, asking us to consider attendance more broadly and inventively, including all of the imaginable ways that students can access course spaces and materials, and withholding judgements about the "best" ways to do this, i.e. a person sitting in a classroom, engaging in community building activities, silent and still, listening attentively to lectures, taking notes, performing student in a very narrowly defined way.

Like in the previous section related to coursework design, I suggest that instructors consider the learning outcomes as the starting place for this work of invention, imagining from there what ways are available for students to attend to classroom activities and knowledge-making. Instead of making value judgements about the best ways that students *should be able to* achieve the goals of the class, an ethics of access asks us to consider the ways that this can be achieved that are accessible to students who cannot—or, simply don't want to—access it in more traditional ways. Requiring students to be present in class in prescribed ways places a higher value on the potential of other students to benefit from their presence than the challenges the student might face. Effectively, this positions this importance for other students before the importance for a student to be able to access the course in the ways that are most beneficial and appropriate for them.

PARTICIPATION

Closely related to this idea of attendance is class participation, which often appears as its own category on both the course syllabus and semester grade and can likewise prove to be

problematic for some students. Like these previous categories, I conceptualize this as another potential mode for access within the FYC classroom. When considering learning outcomes, rarely do they (or should they) include: *Students will be meeting these learning outcomes while making direct eye contact with professor, with lots of nodding and the raising of the hand whenever a question is posed in discussion.* Except, of course, this is probably what most instructors envision when thinking about what "good" participation looks like. Price explains why this narrow conception of participation is problematic:

> Although the notion of a classroom "discussion" implies that it is open to all perspectives, this setting is in fact controlled by rigid expectations: students taking part in a "discussion" are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of the topic at hand, raise relevant questions, and establish themselves as significant, but not overly dominant, voices in a crowd of at least fifteen—and usually many more—other persons. Further complicating the transaction is the fact that different teachers have different expectations for the "script" of a classroom discussion. One teacher might want straightforward paraphrasing of the reading; another might want provocative questions; yet another might want connections drawn between today's material and last week's. These expectations may or may not be communicated directly. (59-60)

Like conversations related to attendance and classroom activities, when conceptualizing participation in a broadly accessible way, what avenues for students open up? What ways other than being a body in a seat inside the four walls of a classroom are practical and possible?

Price further describes how she approaches participation, with an explicit, dialogic method. She explains,

> Be as direct as possible. What behaviors indicate to you that students are participating? What are your pet peeves? What alternative modes of communication would you like to try, and how can your students help you implement them? What are your own abilities and

> limitations in kairotic spaces? The more often I have these conversations with students, the more I learn about myself: for example, I tend to place high value on questions students ask of each other; I prefer not to speak much during oral/aural discussions, instead offering a "wrap-up" comment to recap main points and guide students toward the next reading or activity; and (again because of my own aural-processing difficulties) "side conversations" distract me a great deal. I have found that when I provide clear goals for a discussion (about which more below), and acknowledge my own limitations, the conversation progresses much more easily than when I simply open up the floor and assume students already know what I expect. (92)

When the ways that students are asked to participate are narrowly prescribed, accessibility is compromised for some. By engaging in dialogues with students and acknowledging individual abilities and limitations, educators can create a more inclusive and accessible learning environment where all students have the opportunity to participate meaningfully. This approach challenges rigid expectations and creates avenues for students to engage in ways that best suit their learning styles and needs, ultimately fostering a more equitable educational experience for everyone involved.

Deadlines and Course Schedule

The ways that instructors construct time for an FYC course, which might feel like a rote decision over which instructors have little control, can likewise be conceptualized as a mode for access. This includes prioritizing flexibility, communication, and accommodation to meet the diverse needs of students. The reality, though, is that time stops for no one, as Wood explains:

> Strictures of time exist by definition in a classroom; every class has a first day and a last day. Every class has due dates, measures of time for when students should complete a task, and a stop-time for their work on that task. Timed writing is often used as a tool to generate

discussion, to do quick evaluations or comprehension checks, or for practices of invention. (260)

Extended time, though, is a common accommodation granted through the SAAS, presumably because "learners perform at different speeds, and college students juggle multiple commitments" (Womack 517). Because students with disabilities are already vulnerable, they might be at an additional disadvantage "when asked to compose within strict or normative boundaries of time" and "crip" time has been suggested as a novel way for constructing time in FYC courses (Wood 264).

Crip time is a concept in disability studies that "refers to a flexible approach to normative time frames" (Price 62). Recognizing and following crip time means "recognizing that people will arrive at various intervals" and that people "are processing language at various rates and adjusting the pace of conversation" (Price 63). While time does march on, there is an opportunity for flexibility within the course schedule, especially when considering due dates, which may often be arbitrarily designed and enforced, and lacking a direct connection to stated learning outcomes, being more closely related to control than academic merit. When due dates *are* related to learning outcomes, e.g. the importance of utilizing feedback from one course project to guide completion of a successive project, this can be communicated to students at the beginning of a course to help illustrate why certain deadlines matter, while others might offer more flexibility.

Relatedly, Wood explains that introducing this concept into the FYC course "requires that teachers relax their hold on the boundaries of time that define writing inside and outside the classroom" and that this "requires some relinquishment of authority but it may also function to enhance access through allowing disabled students to compose in their own ways, rather than by normative standards of performance and production" (280). When considering due dates and the course schedule for an FYC course, then, it remains important to center accessibility, inclusivity, and collaborative planning. Cripping time can then become "a place to start thinking about how

normativity may be privileged in some of the most commonplace pedagogical practices of a given writing classroom" (Wood 281).

Conclusions

This chapter imagines the possibilities that emerge if the syllabus were not just a mediator of access but also an additional mode of access: an explicit opportunity for students to co-construct their learning experience with the instructor. What might happen if the gatekeeping, adversarial, protective positioning that is so common within the academy were to be abandoned and instead we operated with an assumption that students are in college because they want to learn, to gain knowledge, and to assume a defensive position as educators is not necessary? Are students consumers or are they co-creators of knowledge, agents of change, and experts-in-becoming? Are educators mind- and body-police or are we facilitators, mentors, catalysts for uptake and critical thinking, and advocates for equity and justice? And who do we want to be? Do we assume the roles of consumer and policy police because of the current model of modern education? What is stopping us from rejecting it? What could happen if we were to consider every facet of the modern college course from the position of *Anything can be a mode for access*?

CHAPTER III: IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND LOOKING AHEAD

In the preceding chapters of this project, I explore the role of the syllabus in the first-year composition (FYC) classroom, suggesting that the conceptualization of this genre as a mediator of access offers an avenue for exploring possibilities available to instructors in constructing a radically accessible course. This includes considerations of its potential to both empower and marginalize vulnerable students, and the related ways that course policies and pedagogical beliefs intersect with issues of equity, inclusion, and student identity. This final chapter serves as both a reflection of the work done for this project as well as a springboard for future inquiry. In this chapter, I explore my personal connections to disability and the academy, summarize key takeaways from this project, and consider related implications. Additionally, I identify possibilities for future/further research and imagine ways that accessibility might be further conceptualized in the FYC classroom.

Finding My Focus: Disability Studies and the Academy

Before beginning the Master's program at Illinois State University (ISU), I had never encountered disability studies (DS). It wasn't until I began an Introduction to Graduate Studies course that I stumbled upon my first DS-focused academic article. The first assignment for that course, aimed at exploring my area of specialization within English Studies, led me to this discovery of DS within Rhetoric and Composition. This subject matter resonated with me because of my own personal experiences with disability: parenting children with disabilities and also living with disability myself. My thesis research and imagining is built upon and informed by not just the important and compelling work of the many brilliant humans I cite and work alongside, but also upon my own experiences related to disability. During the completion of that first project, I saw my own experiences in academia being described and theorized, and began to understand the critical connections between disability, teaching, access, and equity. I also began to acknowledge my own internalized ableism: I carried so much shame about what I was not capable of because of my

disabilities, and constructed masks and work-arounds to appear "normal" to my instructors and classmates. I never asked for help in the form of accommodations. It wasn't until I began to understand the social model of disability that it quickly became evident to me how vital the work being done in DS is. I understood how imperative this work was and is to making academia more accessible to all mindbodies, while also recognizing the pervasive ableism embedded within the academy. Additionally, I now understand and believe that although my body and mind perform in ways that diverge from the common, culturally and socially developed expectations for the human species, I (and other folks with disabilities) deserve to have a place in the academy without shame.

Key Takeaways and a Caution

There are several key takeaways that are important to this project. Overall, this research underscores the importance of proactive, student-centered approaches that work to promote accessibility and inclusivity in the FYC classroom, and illustrates the need for flexibility, invention, and critical reflection when constructing a course. Conceptualizing the syllabus as a mediator of access allows us to consider areas where space can be opened up for students to claim agency—ultimately working towards radical accessibility. This perspective works to prioritize student agency, foster diverse modes of learning, and challenge normative pedagogical practices. As well, this conceptualization offers a way to consider the importance of the syllabus as a genre that controls and/or makes possible myriad actions to occur within a classroom, understanding the syllabus as one of many genres at work in a classroom that are responsible for allowing and/or limiting access.

Additionally, this work illustrates the value of critically examining traditional classroom policies, such as attendance policies, participation expectations, and assignment deadlines, through the lens of accessibility. This includes the concept of "crip time," which challenges normative notions of time and performance in the classroom, suggesting that by adopting a flexible approach to deadlines and schedules, instructors can create space for students to engage with course materials

at their own pace and in ways that align with their own abilities and needs. By questioning assumptions and interrogating biases inherent in everyday practices of a classroom, instructors can develop and foster inclusive environments that more broadly accommodate diverse learning needs.

Relatedly, the rhetorical analysis of the institutional language provided and/or required for instructor syllabi reveals implicit biases against disabled students, indicating that there is much more work to be done related to systemic and codified ableism. While it remains one small piece of a much larger puzzle, the syllabus offers rich possibilities for improving access in the FYC classroom.

This project also comes with a distinct and important caution, closely related to the earlier discussion about Universal Design for Learning (UDL): the approaches theorized on these pages should not be taken as a checklist or a directly-applicable how-to. This project serves as a way to think about and position oneself towards access, when considering the ways that a course becomes. It is essential to recognize that some, if not all, of the anecdotal suggestions might not be feasible for every instructor. There are many potential restrictions and limitations that instructors might face when constructing courses, spanning from institutional bureaucracy to labor constraints. But this doesn't mean that an instructor cannot still adopt and act with an ethics of access, and with an intent to create spaces for student agency at every opportunity. This means that, in many circumstances, we must get creative. Embracing an ethics of access requires us to seek opportunities for improved access even in seemingly entrenched practices, to consider what is actually within our power to change, to question why routine practices are routine, to push boundaries, and to interrogate the ways that we have always done things, all while positioned towards opening up access. I contend that it remains crucial to do what you are able to, with the resources available to you, with an overall intent of striving to create inclusive, accessible learning environments. I believe that this work can be done while working within the realities and constraints of the academy. Work towards access does not have to be perfect to have value.

Pedagogical and Institutional Policy Implications

This section explores two categories of implications of this research: pedagogical implications, which highlight the transformative potential of a student-centered approach; and institutional policy implications, which underscore the need for institutional reform to address systemic academic ableism as well as a need for training to equip educators with the tools and resources necessary for fostering accessible and inclusive learning environments.

Pedagogical Implications

Enacting a student-centered approach to FYC course design, as advocated by this project, necessitates a fundamental shift in how instructors conceptualize and construct their courses, from the most basic building blocks of course design. By reconceptualizing the syllabus as an inventive tool for promoting accessibility and inclusivity, instructors can create courses that prioritize access, flexibility, and collaboration. This approach empowers students to claim agency in their educational experience and encourages the exploration of diverse modes of learning and knowing that resonate with individual needs and abilities. This approach likewise challenges normative pedagogical practices and fosters a more accessible educational environment. Tanya Titchkosky reminds us that the ways that we talk about access reveal our implicit biases regarding who we believe belongs in a classroom. She writes,

> How people talk about matters of access or accommodation has something to teach us regarding who we are, and this is not just because such talk reveals a bureaucratic milieu, an economic rationale, or a legalistic mindset. Matters of access and accommodation rely on, and constitute, conceptions of who belongs, and this remains true whether coat trees are moved or not—or whether classrooms are redesigned or not. (37)

An explicit positioning towards access as described in this project, then, reflects an explicit belief that disabled students belong in academia and that the design of related course texts, policies, and procedures should explicitly reflect this belief.

Institutional Policy Implications

The brief analysis of the institutionally required syllabus language included in Chapter II sheds light on a real-world example of the pervasive biases that exist and work against students with disabilities. This example illustrates the reality of academic ableism and additionally that this perspective is embedded within many institutional policies. This finding likewise underscores the importance of systemic and institutional reform to address ableism and to create more accessible and inclusive learning environments. Such efforts should include revisions to existing institutional policies that govern access in the classroom. For example, as discussed in Chapter II, the current student accommodation model relies on pathologizing corporeal- and neurodivergence, which equates to a reliance on the medicalized model of disability and after-the-fact fixes. A revision to existing institution policy might include an institutional requirement beyond the accessibility statement, that classes be designed with diverse mindbodies as a given. This change would represent a significant step towards fostering inclusivity and accessibility within the academy. Shifting away from pathologizing difference and toward embracing an institutional policy that prioritizes access-by-design would be a starting point for the dismantling of the barriers that perpetuate academic ableism.

Additionally, there is a clear need for robust personal development and career training aimed at equipping instructors with the knowledge, skills, and tools required to foster accessible learning environment. This type of training should be implemented on an on-going basis, which emphasizes that this work towards access is not a check-the-box activity but is always a work-in-progress. These might involve training programs, workshops, or online resources focused on disability and related

access awareness (beyond the information offered by Student Access and Accommodation, which, as previously described, focuses on a medical model of disability and makes use of a pathologized, deficit model related to disabilities). Fostering ongoing dialogue and collaboration among educators, administrators, students, and other related stakeholders is essential for driving systemic change and cultivating a culture of access within academia. Such initiatives can empower instructors to navigate institutional policies, implement inclusive and accessible pedagogical practices, and advocate for the diverse needs of their students.

Looking Ahead: Limitations as Areas of Possibility

There is much work to be done when it comes to access and inclusion in the FYC classroom. The syllabus offers rich possibilities for opening up access for students, but is one small piece of a much larger, complicated puzzle—even when focusing on genres we rely on to construct a course. In this final section of this project, instead of focusing on the limitations of this project (which would operate similar to the deficit model of disability), I will instead focus on areas of possibility that remain and/or are opened up with this project. First, I explore the importance and possibilities of research involving the lived experiences of students with disabilities in the FYC classroom, including understanding how the modern college student conceptualizes the syllabus, as well as investigating the effectiveness of the most commonly granted classroom accommodations. Then I imagine potential avenues of research related to ways that the syllabus is conceptualized by instructors and imagining other parts of the syllabus that could be reconceptualized with a positioning towards broad and radical accessibility.

Not About Us Without Us: Working With Students

Because of time constraints related to this project, I did not conduct research with student-subjects. But this kind of research, listening to the embodied and lived experiences of disabled students, is vital in working towards the elimination of inaccess and inequity. Some important

questions related to this conversation and fertile areas for future research include: How does the modern (disabled or not) college student conceptualize the syllabus? The design and focus of the text, including the language used, the ordering of the content, the content itself, and the overall document design, impact student perceptions of not just the document, but also the instructor and the course. We understood from Jones, Palmer et al., Simpkins, and Sunds et al. that students look at specific parts of a syllabus and make assumptions about the instructor, the course, and decisions about disclosing access needs based on syllabi content, but what else can we learn from disabled students in classrooms through first-hand experiences or case studies? This is an area of scholarship that remains undertheorized and related to this project.

Relatedly, there is limited research about the most commonly granted institutional accommodations, including research that explores the benefits that disabled students receive from various accommodations in the writing classroom (Lovett et al.). This is an additional area rich with possibilities for future research, especially research focused on whether the most common accommodations being offered are effective, calling into question the very basis for an accommodation-based access model. By focusing on the lived experience of disabled students related to their conceptualizations and usage of the syllabus as well as the effectiveness of specific, common accommodations, we can work towards uncovering insights that inform more inclusive and accessible practices in FYC course design.

Related to research rooted in the lived experience of students are the possibilities for research focused on the lived experiences of educators: how they conceptualize the purposes and actions of the syllabus in constructing a course and the ways that they enact (and/or feel empowered to enact) their *own* agency when composing course syllabi. This area of inquiry would likewise include a focus on the institutional realities related to the ways that a syllabus is conceptualized within academic systems—namely, by different universities' professional development and teaching

centers (at my home university, this unit is the Center for Integrated Professional Development [CIPD]) and writing programs. As demonstrated in Chapter II, the Illinois State University (ISU) CIPD does offer training and materials related to syllabi composition and matters of access, but it largely conceptualizes access as the ways that PowerPoints and handouts are designed (and especially related to the principles of Universal Design for Learning) and does not address the pervasiveness of academic ableism or related institutional realities that shape the educational experiences of students and educators alike. As well, writing program administrators (WPA) typically offer support and guidance for instructors teaching within their programs, which includes guidance regarding creating course syllabi. At my home institution, the WPA provides a syllabus template to all FYC instructors. This template includes sections of the syllabus that are required to be left, as-is—but it also leaves ample room for instructors to enact agency in many areas of the course design. Because FYC courses are commonly taught by graduate assistant and non-tenure track instructors, WPAs also work to assist this group of educators to negotiate common institutional power imbalances and precarious employment realities, which may affect their abilities to make choices about course structure, including the agency (or perceived agency) to make decisions about what to include—or not include—in a course syllabus. How, then, do the lived experiences and perspectives of professional development professionals, WPAs, and educators intersect and influence the construction and implementation of course syllabi, particularly in contexts where institutional power and employment precarity play significant roles? This is an important area for future research, and similar to research based on the lived experiences of students, this focus on the lived experience of instructors can provide valuable insights to make visible the complex factors at work as instructors conceptualize, plan, and enact course policies through the course syllabus.

As discussed in Chapter II, the syllabus commonly receives limited attention in pedagogical discussions, and likewise, limited innovation. One area of potential research includes understanding why this is the case. While discussing my research plans for this project with veteran faculty, assistant professors, and fellow graduate students, a common response was that the syllabus was not much more than a document instructors are required to have when designing a course, a document meant to provide cover in cases of problem-students or problem-admin. This is such an intense mis-match with how I understand the importance and weight of the syllabus, which offers a rich area of potential research. When I conceptualize the syllabus beyond a focus related to issues of access, I consider the syllabus as a text that outlines not just what I am asking students to commit to but also (and possibly more importantly) what I am committed to as the instructor. I put these commitments in writing, in effect, because I want to demonstrate that I am accountable to students. What social and cultural forces, then, are at play in the diverse ways that students and educators understand the importance (or unimportance) of the course syllabus?

Additionally, there are ample areas of possibility related to other parts of the syllabus that could be reconceptualized with a positioning towards broad and radical accessibility. These include assessment, reading lists, and project prompts—but this list is non exhaustive. What other areas related to the invention of a course could be included in the course syllabus and to what end? This area of inquiry holds promise for further understanding of how a syllabus and related course documents can be utilized towards radical accessibility.

In conclusion, this project underscores the critical need for proactive, student-centered approaches that promote radical accessibility and inclusivity in the FYC classroom. By reconceptualizing the syllabus as a mediator of access and challenging normative pedagogical practices, this project demonstrates one way that educators can empower students to claim agency in

the classroom. It remains essential to recognize that achieving radical accessibility requires systemic changes within institutions, including revisions to institutional policies and robust training and education for educators. I don't mean to imply that this sort of systemic change can happen easily or quickly. But the work being difficult or complex is not an excuse to not get started. It remains imperative to do the work we can do, using the tools we have, to continue to advocate for disabled students. We can begin by considering our own entrenched teaching practices, dusting off and revising our syllabi while embracing an ethics of access and prioritizing inclusivity. By embracing an ethics of access in our teaching practices, we contribute to a future that fosters the creation of more inclusive and accessible educational opportunities for all students.

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