Academic Ableism and Universal Design: Pivoting Towards Accessibility
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In this workshop, we will discuss Universal Design as an alternative to traditionally inaccessible teaching spaces and approaches, with a focus on the changes we can make during Covid-19 that will prepare us to build more inclusive and effective classrooms for the future.

To begin with, I want to talk about how we have traditionally framed disability in higher education and to do that I will use the metaphor and the reality of the steep steps.

Bunce Hall – describe slide.

Reflecting Pond – describe slide.

Your campus has a lot of stairs. So does my own campus, the University of Waterloo. Many of you, probably most of you, have specific associations with steps like these on campus, having traveled up them many times, or having avoided them. Bunce Hall seems like the best example I could find, but you can likely think of many others. Regardless, students and faculty alike recognize that these steps have something to say. At U of Toronto, students even participate in an annual Great Barrier Hunt. The event aims to raise awareness of accessibility issues on campus. Using the format of a scavenger hunt, participants perform an accessibility audit of U of T buildings. Such activities highlight the ways that traditional campuses are designed only for a certain range of bodies, and this is certainly the case at U of T or on my own campus at Waterloo. But even new features, like the "hang-out stairs" by the reflecting pond, they exclude students with disabilities from the key aesthetic, cultural, artistic, and intellectual centers and messages of university life.

Not only have people with disabilities been traditionally seen as objects of study in higher education, rather than as teachers or students; not only has disability been a rhetorically-produced stigma which could be applied to other marginalized groups to keep them out of the university, but the University is seen as performing the societal and cultural function of pulling some people slowly up the stairs, and it arranges others at the bottom of this steep incline. I want you to think about how this "steep steps" mentality has shaped your own education. Who and what has helped you up the stairs? Where were they steepest, most difficult, for you? What pushed you back? Where did you start on the stairs, based on your own privilege or lack of privilege?

Of course, the reality is that disability is always present—there is no perfect body or mind. There is no normal body or mind. More literally, the US is a country within which, the

CDC tells us, 25% of the population is affected by disability. We live in an age when, despite physical/medical efforts to avoid it and psychological/medical efforts to disavow and pathologize it, we will all become disabled at some point in our lives. Therefore, we all need to care about disability, now. In the United States, according to the most recent data, 19.5% of students have a disability (NCES 2019). For 40% of these students, the disability is mental illness or depression. For 26.4% of these students the disability (or one of the disabilities) is ADD/ADHD. We might also assume that many students with invisible disabilities 'pass', hiding their disability or attempting to overcome it (see: Brueggeman).

The university sorts the population by a medicalized and legalistic definition of "ability" as effectively now as it ever has. Universities continue to function to keep certain groups of individuals out of the work force and away from status positions, and away from knowledge and dialogue and power, and not just through admissions. Thirteen percent of U.S. citizens 25 and older with a disability have a bachelor's degree or higher. This compares with 31 percent for those with no disability (Census). While, recently, more students with disabilities are enrolling than in previous eras in the United States, "nearly two thirds are unable to complete their degrees within six years" (Smith, n.p.). Just 41 percent of students with learning disabilities complete their postsecondary education, compared to 52 percent of the U.S. general population (Cortiella and Horowitz; Walpole and Chaskes). Disabled students are likely to have up to 60 percent more student debt by the time they graduate. These statistics are skewed because they only account for the students who receive accommodations. In the United States, some studies show that two-thirds of disabled college students "don't receive accommodations simply because their colleges don't know about their disabilities" (Grasgreen, n.p.). Those who do seek accommodations are likely to do so only in their third or fourth year of school. We have a generation of students who are much more likely to experience higher education as disabling, and much less likely to seek help (NCHA 2018). In the United States, while 94 percent of learning-disabled high school students get assistance, only 17 percent of college students with learning disabilities do (Krupnick, n.p.). What is telling these students not to seek the simple resources that helped them before? It is very common for students to experience greater barriers in university than they experienced in high school. Still, thousands and thousands of students don't seek help. We have a crisis of help-seeking around disability.

But something is happening when students confront the metaphorical "steep steps" of higher education. The message that they get is that it is not OK to ask for help. At least your disability services office is not hidden away in some basement and, as we will discuss further today, your campus is definitely more physically accessible than many. And I know that

disability services professionals are trying hard to get help to students, but I think we can expect to continue to see this trend, in part because the culture of higher education works against the ethic of help-seeking.

In 2012 the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) conducted a national survey of college students living with mental health conditions to learn about their experiences in school. NAMI designed the survey to hear directly from students about whether schools are meeting their needs and what improvements are needed to support their academic experience (2012). More than 45 percent of those who stopped attending college because of mental health related reasons did not receive accommodations. Additionally, 50 percent of them did not access mental health services and supports. Students living with mental health conditions can request accommodations that allow them to participate equally in their education. When asked if they know how to access accommodations for their mental health condition, most survey respondents said "yes." But 57 percent of survey respondents did not request accommodations from their school. And an increasing number of students with mental health conditions attend colleges across the country, so colleges need to take these issues seriously. We see that students are reticent to seek help in high school, then even more reticent to seek help in an undergrad degree, even if they got help in high school. Finally, they are even less likely to seek help in a post-graduate program, again even if they got help in undergrad.

Of course, there are many reasons students won't seek help. The economics of accommodation might tell us that universities get the outcomes they pay for. The most recent Association of Higher Education and Disability (2008) survey of U.S. disability services offices revealed that "the average annual DS office budget was $257,289 (SD=$306,471)" (Harbour, 41). That's the *entire office budget*. That is about what a Division I assistant football coach at a large American university makes. So the kicking coach makes as much in a year as the average school spends on *all students with disabilities*. Football coaches are also seeing their salaries climb. The same can't be said for these office budgets. The ratio at these offices in the US was one staff member per 80 students with disabilities (Harbour, 52). Offices of disability services are thus clearly overworked and underfunded. Thus we shouldn't really be surprised that the number of college and university students identified as having disabilities is drastically below the average within the general population. These offices are already working above capacity, and may have implicit incentives or restraints, or both, that minimize the supports they can offer and the ways that students might be able to access assistance. This underfunding also tells the rest of the university that disability doesn't matter. Despite the fact that, for most faculty, their engagement with disability begins and ends with the statement in their syllabus referring

students to this office. The result, then, is that the steps are particularly steep for students with disabilities.

Looking at these steep steps, in a world in which COVID has changed how we think about buzzwords like community is jarring. Further, in a world in which the prevalence of overt and systemic racism needs to be foregrounded in all that we do, we must understand that these steep steps disproportionately impact students of color. Many of us have been working hard to address racism on campus, and I know that this has been a widespread issue at schools across North America. There have been specific incidents, but there are also systemic issues. For example, we know that "African American males are disproportionately placed into categories of special education that are associated with extremely poor outcomes" at the K-12 level (Losen and Gillespie). Yet education researcher Joy Banks has shown that "African American students with disabilities experience difficulty accessing disability support services and appropriate accommodations" at colleges and universities (28). So how can it be that for the same group of students, a disability diagnosis at the K-12 level can be hastily applied, and will speed them into the school-to-prison pipeline, and at the postsecondary level is so much more difficult to get, and then there are such large barriers to getting help?

Further, in interpreting the extra time and space and "hoops" and "barriers" that minority students may need to navigate, and thus that teachers need to anticipate and build into their course and curriculum design, William Sedlacek suggests that minority students have to develop specific skills and expend considerable energy coping with racism, looking for allies and forming their own community, and protecting their identities (202). It might be argued that these are tasks that might require strategic silence or reticence, cunning, code-switching, self-care, and a wide range of abstract and contextually varying skills. These skills do not always sync with traditional pedagogy and assessment. At the same time, students in "majority" groups can concentrate on interpreting and categorizing information in ways that sync with test-taking, reasoning, and other more straightforward academic arenas (Sedlacek, 202). The result is that multiple studies have shown that minority students, specifically African American and Hispanic students, exert more effort and are more engaged than white peers, but get lower grades (access Greene et al., for instance, on two-year college students and this acknowledged "effort-outcome gap"). Teachers absolutely have to understand that these differences change the social and the educational geography on campus.

There was a recent opinion piece published in *Inside Higher Ed* by psychologist and psychometrician Robert J. Sternberg, who argued that "COVID-19 has taught us something important about intelligence," which he goes on to define as "the ability to adapt to the

environment." In this calculus, we have to see disabled students, students of color, and other students from a wide range of under-represented backgrounds as in fact highly intelligent. The labour and expertise they exert just to survive in higher education is remarkable. But we don't reward these things in any way shape, or form. We ask them to remain invisible, and we go ahead and reward traditional students for doing the traditional things that come as second nature to them. That's how the steep steps work. Some people actually have an escalator.

This also signals a transition point in this talk, moving away from talking about disability and access before COVID, to what has happened since COVID. So, I'd like us to take time to think about and to identify some of the barriers that exist in the online environment we are currently working in. How has our pivot to online created a "higher barrier" education?

The truth is that steep steps have been a huge part of back-to-campus planning around Covid-19 as well: all of a sudden, administrators have to look at their buildings entirely differently, in 6-foot increments that don't easily fit in crowded stairwells and don't fit at all in elevators. And the steps of going back to school have forever changed: who will have a choice about teaching or learning in person on-campus? Who will get to choose to work and learn from home? What social and student-centered spaces will replace physical ones like these steps, and who will be included? How has teaching changed right now just by moving the steep steps online, with the same demands of student time and productivity, but without the overhead costs of buildings and classrooms?

For example, I give you this screen shot from one of the 4 dense, small-fonted pages of rules given to students taking a midterm at Laurier University, just down the street from me in Waterloo, a few months ago. I apologize for the poor quality of this scan, but it says that students must not use touch pads or touch screens, have to use only an external mouse, keep their upper body in view for the entire exam, keep all work surfaces visible by arranging a web cam to view them, and if they need to go to the washroom they must "shout "I need to go to the washroom and I will come back quickly"" into their camera. All of this just so that the instructor can give a test that has not been properly adapted to online learning. The attitude towards students situates them all as potential cheaters, not all as potential learners, community members, or co-constructors of knowledge. These four pages of instructions, all of which must be followed or else the test result will be invalidated, they are a perfect distillation of the ways we have adapted our steep steps to COVID, maintaining, retaining, and adding to them, rather

than trying to remove them. As a recent article on students with disabilities and Covid-19 concluded, barriers have not been removed since we pivoted online: "barriers have *changed.*"

I would like us to have a look at this handout of "institutional barriers," created by students at the University of Iowa. This shows an iceberg and, at the top of the iceberg, we see the words "student disability services located in dorm basement." This is the visible part of the iceberg, above the water. Below the water, we see dozens of other unseen factors, from "mental health stigma" to "courses seldom inclusively designed" to "exclusion from diversity programs and initiatives" to "minimal administrative advocacy." This calls to mind the idea that, as Disabled In Higher Ed, has stated, higher ed is often not "better" ed, but is "higher barrier" education. Another way of looking at this is to access the #whydisabledpeopledropout hashtag on Twitter, a conversation begun in April 2019 by Kate West of Oxford Brookes University.

Could you label barriers like this on your own campus, or in your own curriculum?

Next, I am going to introduce the concept of the retrofit.

To **retrofit** is to add a component or accessory to something that has been already manufactured or built. This **retrofit** does not necessarily *make* the product function, does not necessarily fix a faulty product, but it acts as a sort of correction—it adds a modernized part in place of, or in addition to, an older part. Often, the retrofit allows a product to measure up to new regulations. Automobiles or factories are consistently retrofitted with new parts so that they can pass new emissions guidelines.

We are all becoming much more aware of retro-fitting in the Covid-19 era. Our restaurants and businesses have plexiglass walls built, tables and chairs are now a measured distance apart. There are new laws and regulations designed to both make spaces safer, but also to allow them to remain open. Perhaps rightly so, these retrofits have been criticized. Some are wise and well-thought-out, others seem simply performative, like a mask over one's mouth, but not over one's nose. On University campuses, retrofits can include ramps that are placed around the back of a building, or buildings in which the only elevator is also a freight elevator. On the syllabus and within the curriculum, we similarly create access, but only in minimal ways, and often in ways that can actually further stigmatize students.

I have included an image of the back of Bunce Hall here to illustrate how this works. I understand that, despite the very grand appearance of the Hall, what most students see of it, most of the time, is the back. The front was designed to face a train station I believe, back when that was the major mode of transportation. But the back of an old building like this is a

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familiar sight for people with disabilities, because the way you make an old building accessible, and the way you keep steep stairs in place, is to have a ramp or an accessible entrance around the back.

Retrofits like this are never value-neutral: with steps so steeped in tradition, so connotative of the North American upward climb of elitism (especially on campus), ramps and elevators threaten the very idea of higher education. Also, despite the fact that equal access could be achieved relatively simply, the expense and labour of access marks accessibility out as difficult, elaborate and costly when it needn't be. This reinforces the idea that access for most people is free, and somehow the access needs of disabled people are extensive and expensive.

And accessible entrances are often hidden around the backs of buildings, leading into freight entrances and they are just the first step of a complicated dance through physical spaces to find the hidden but accessible ways to get into them and move through them, while the stairs are central to the architecture, the sociality, and the flow through a space and its most important areas. The funny thing about ramps is that they rarely ever replace stairs. We have ramps, most usually in academic architecture, *so that we can keep the stairs.* And I think that is actually a powerful metaphor about accessibility and higher education. So much of the access we create doesn't replace the old, inaccessible way of doing things. It just creates a longer path alongside the old one. The retrofitted ramp allows the old, exclusive space – or practice – to continue to be dominant and central.

Too often, we *react* to diversity instead of planning for it. We acknowledge that our students come from different places, and that they are headed in different directions, yet this does little to alter the vectors of our own pedagogy. Most often, the only time disability is spoken or written about in class is in the final line of the syllabus, when students are referred to the Office of Disability Services should they desire assistance. The message to students is that disability is a supplementary concern—and then that it is not the teachers' concern, not really a part of the course; it's at the back door of the syllabus. Having that statement there allows us to *not* change the dominant way of doing things, regardless how inaccessible that dominant way is.

This calls up the "unexpected" status of disabled students. As Stone and Crooks have argued, disabled academics "are unexpected workers in an able-bodied work environment" (2013). Altogether too many schools and programs have no expectation of disabled students enrolling, and thus no plans for how to adapt the curriculum when they arrive, let alone before they arrive. But this adds up to thousands of "unexpected" students, and we cannot ethically have these same expectations anymore. We cannot act surprised when, a year from now, we

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are reading articles in major news outlets about how many more young people have been disabled by COVID, whether as long-haulers, or because of the impact on mental health. What will we do now to plan for a University that is going to be very different, and one in which we will most certainly have more disabled students? What will we do so that these students aren't themselves blamed, so that they don't have to carry this added weight?

I am going to suggest that, right now, new cognitive and emotional demands are ensuring that we will face an epidemic of student retention that mirrors the disproportionate and discriminatory impact that the COVID epidemic is having on our population. What will the long-term impact be of failing to consider equity in any of the decision-making around our shift to online teaching, or our shift back to face-to-face teaching? It is not OK to think about this "later."

Many times, retrofits are rhetorically and concretely constructed in ways that actually enhance and *rationalize* exclusion. To begin with there are such a limited range of accommodations offered. More than three quarters of the accommodations offered are the same exact accommodation: extended time on tests and exams (NEADS). Testing in higher education is a significant creator of barriers, in particular for people with learning disabilities and mental-health related disabilities. And it doesn't make sense to think that these students will experience anything like these barriers in the environment outside of school, where high stakes testing-like experiences are extremely rare. There will be other barriers. But nothing like the barrier imposed by a test. Likewise, the accommodations that these students will need in a professional capacity are unlikely to look anything like the accommodations they get in testing-heavy classrooms. And that is a huge problem, and a huge wasted opportunity.

Many teachers don't offer tests or exams very often or at all, and never in a timed way – and that is good. But if these teachers keep working with disability services and they keep offering this accommodation, then they are short-fusing the process. This ramp leads students nowhere. We need a much broader repertoire of accommodations. In writing classrooms, like the one I work in, where I rarely give tests and I rarely lecture, I know I must work to expand the range of accommodations that can be offered to students. Many other teachers argue for innovative teaching methods that move beyond lecturing, testing and rote learning. I bet a lot of you do. But continuing to work with a very narrow range of accommodations, while at the same time advocating for a broader range of learning experiences, that's really problematic. The accommodations stay stuck in a Fordist educational regime, where rigidity and uniformity – and above all else – timing reigns supreme. That brings us closer to what we might call malicious compliance, where following the letter of the accommodation law will hurt the student in an innovative classroom. Or it is like a defeat device, where we can make our classroom look like it

is up to specifications, but only because we are fooling the system. Our nose is clearly poking out over our mask.

Imagine what accommodations might be offered to the student taking that ridiculous exam at Laurier University? The Disability Services office would have to take weeks to figure out a workaround. All just to support the practice of a hostile teacher trying to control a student's every movement with no concern for privacy. We have had an opportunity, over the last twelve or thirteen months, to redesign higher education in ways we never have before. Yet nobody was talking about accessibility as part of this process. We spent much more time investing in surveillant test-proctoring software than we spent developing alternatives to outdated teaching models that rely on testing.

Disability Services offices were rarely even consulted in the rollout of online classes, with no new parameters for accommodations in the new environment.

Just as disabled people were left out of COVID social support programs, and at the same time were being spoken about as disposable citizens, disabled people were not at the table when plans were made for "emergency online teaching." And I think we have lost a lot of them as a result.

There is some irony that the ableist demands for physical attendance and participation that teachers used to cling to so tightly have now been so easily left behind. Asking to have a grade converted to CR rather than a numerical grade, asking for an extended deadline, getting extra time on a research grant or a tenure deadline, having flexibility around physical attendance, all of a sudden anyone who wanted these things could have them. Disabled people can hardly count the number of times they were denied these things and stigmatized for even asking about them.

Most of these ableist demands will likely slide right back into place, while others may be gone for good. The advocacy of actual disabled people – unfortunately, based on the patterns we have seen – is unlikely to be what determines this future. But there also has been no thought about what new ableist demands might slide into the place of the demand for physical presence, for example. How have we built accessibility into our COVID pivot to online learning? How will we need to retrofit our teaching in ways that remove barriers as we return to campus?

Three, Universal Design.

As you can guess, I want us to transition to thinking about what accessible teaching might look like, some day, after COVID. Educational practices that seem like they have simply always existed, such as letter grades, started hardly more than a century ago; they paralleled a

system imposed on the American Meat Packers Association (Davidson). At first the meatpackers objected because, they argued, meat is too complex to be judged by letter grades. The factory assembly line provided inspiration for the standardized bubble test, which was adopted as a means of sorting students for admission to college. Such practices helped to make education seem efficient, measurable, and meritocratic, but they tended to screen out collaborative approaches to problem-solving. Somehow, we have held onto them for a long time, and held tight. This despite the fact that they have not always been around, and despite the fact the becoming a teacher, a scientist, a doctor, a lawyer, a poet, or an engineer is nothing like becoming a meat packer. The meat packers fought back, but we have not.

   I'm going to admit something here. For probably 15 years, I taught classes where I gave a participation grade that I didn't think very much about. It was really "Who spoke in class?" And to be honest, there's only so much space for people to speak in class, and when you're rewarding that with a grade, you actually reward the kind of students who will speak over other students. Or who maybe aren't even listening that carefully. They're just trying to look for their opportunity to talk and that was just not a good way to be teaching participation. It was creating a lot of barriers for students to be able to take part. When I began teaching online and I moved to message boards, what I realized was a lot of the students who weren't saying anything in class actually had a lot to say when I moved the conversation out of class. They just needed a little bit more time to think about it or they were not going to put their hand up in a classroom situation. But I was creating a barrier to them being able to show how much they knew and to them being able to shape the conversation in the classroom. The way that I do participation now is I give students a longer kind of laundry list of valuable ways to participate, and that can include taking notes for other people. That can include finding contemporary cultural examples that illustrate a concept in the class. That can be peer reviewing with other students. It can be emailing with another group of students who might have missed a part of the class. There are a variety of ways to do it, and the students write a reflection where they tell me the different ways they participated. They assess that themselves. Every semester I learn new ways that students can valuably participate in class. A lot of those ways of participating are forms of note taking or transcribing, and in this way we share in the commitment to accessibility. During COVID, I think we realized that it just isn't fair to grade participation based on quantity. Because we just don't know the context that students are learning in. Well, we never have known. We are unlikely to really know in the future.

   Online, we have also come to understand things like "zoom fatigue." But I want to challenge us to expand this: do we really think that students are *only* fatigued and unexcited by

hours on-screen? There are other ways we need to reconceptualize the amount of attention we can ask for from students. How can we pull back on testing and increase teaching? How can we assess less and teach more? How can we prioritize engagement and connection over content, especially given the fact that students can have ready access to content any time?

In the Winter term of 2020, most Ontario universities allowed students to choose CR/NCR grades. Then, for some strange reason, even though Fall of 2020 was much more stressful and difficult than Winter, this offer was rescinded. What do grades actually do for us? Why did we let them back in our classrooms? There were also major changes in the assessment of teachers. We got extended tenure clocks, we got exempted from or we got adapted Annual Performance Reviews. We can look at the data and it shows that research output for (for example) female-identified faculty has taken a huge hit, one that will likely ripple into the next decade. This should help us understand that we were never on a level playing field to begin with. And that neither are students. We removed timed testing, and we altered our exams only for one term. Why only one term? And now Universities are spending millions of dollars on complicated test proctoring services just so that we can give the same old timed exams. Why should we ever go back to assessing one another the way we used to? Should any of the forms of Fordist assessment that hung around since the mid twentieth century be allowed to hang around any longer?

We know that there are accommodations that can really help students in the classroom, including help with note-taking and record-keeping, and technological solutions around communication and memory. And I also want to suggest that if we planned for more disabled students in our classrooms, we could really change the shape of higher education. This is an innocuous but a revolutionary question: what if we allocated all of the energy we spend on adapting to an old educational regime into building a new one, one in which disabled students don't always need to ask for accommodations but instead their needs are expected?

Like in the fairy tales of the Three Little Pigs or Goldilocks and the Three Bears, "universal design" becomes our third image or metaphor – instead of stairs that only some people can climb, and the message that sends, the center of the space and its central message is about accessibility for all bodies. That should matter at an institution of higher learning.

To do this I also have a third spatial metaphor to share, and that is the architectural concept of Universal Design. I am showing an example of a campus space outside of your disability resource centre on campus, a space in which the ramps are central to the statement made by the space, and an attractive path not just for students who have to use ramps, but for all students.

As Ronald Mace wrote, "universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design." The UD movement was first an architectural movement that worked against the exclusion of people with disabilities, and argued that instead of temporarily accommodating difference, physical structures should be designed with a wide range of citizens in mind, planning for the active involvement of all. To do so, disability and diversity needed to be central and not marginal in the design process.

As Mace and his team discovered, "many of the environmental changes needed to accommodate people with disabilities actually benefited everyone. Recognition that many such features could be commonly provided and thus less expensive, unlabeled, attractive, and even marketable, laid the foundation for the universal design movement."

Of course, changing physical structures was always also seen as a way to challenge ideological ones. Universal Design for Learning was then a philosophy of teaching adapted from these architectural roots—advocating the use of multiple and flexible strategies, to address the needs of all students. Universal Design for Learning calls for the redesign of ideological, social, cultural, as well as pedagogical practices. We are asked to develop teaching strategies that plan for students' multiple literacies, their valuable bodily and cultural differences, and the variety of discourse communities they are a part of, and that they will be asked to enter. UDL asks for:

- *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,
- *Multiple means of engagement,* to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation.

The belief has been that a critical re-inscription and re-mapping of social and educational space was necessary—that disability is in part socially and environmentally constructed. Another push behind this movement was the idea that ignoring the centrality of disability perpetuates an injustice against more than just a small group of people—it disallows the possibility of recognizing the complexity of everyone's needs and abilities and stunts the natural growth of diversity in the spaces in which we teach (and in each body within these spaces).

I want to point out that Universal Design, as a list, and as applied solely to the physical environment, as in this example, looks a lot like a set of specifications. Indeed, UD is often

interpreted in this way, and then can become just another administrative tool. But institutions like Ohio State University and the University of Washington have used these criteria to design pedagogy. They too provide lists, suggesting that teachers encourage collaboration and cooperative learning; that they fluctuate teaching methods and diversify media; that they allow students to show their knowledge in a variety of ways. UD, registered as action, is a way to move. In some ways, it is also a world-view. Universal Design is not a tailoring of the environment to marginal groups; it is a patterning of engagement and effort. The push towards 'the Universal' is a push towards seeing space as multiple and in-process. The emphasis on 'design' allows us to recognize that we are all involved in the continued production of space (and that students should be agents in this negotiation).

How do we design the future of the University so that we are led by decisions to create a more accessible future for everyone, rather than the types of decisions that are made to allow steep stairs to remain?

Imagine if we conceptualized all structures – even huge institutions like universities – from the beginning, for the broadest possible spectrum of users, and that thought of users as moving across embodiments throughout the course of their lives? Steve Jacobs, writing about the "Electronic Curb-Cut Effect", suggests that many of the things we now take for granted, technologies that improve everyone's quality of life, were originally designed for people with disabilities. If disability hadn't broadened our conception of access to technology, made it more Universal, we wouldn't have the typewriter, the stereo recorder, the transistor radio, the flat-bed scanner, the p.d.a, the pager, watch alarms, e-mail (Jacobs). Most notably, without accommodations for disabled people, your smart phone wouldn't do any of the things that make it smart. Universal Design has already changed our world.

Importantly, I think that Universal Design allows us to understand disability from a justice and cultural perspective, rather than a legal and medical one. This asks us to foreground intersectionality (Sins Invalid). This means we understand that disablement disproportionately impacts people of color – it means we never forget that. It also means we listen to disabled students, and allow them to shape their own education, rather than privileging only service professionals. It means that the goal is not a better university for disabled people. It means the goal is truly a better university of everyone.

For the last decade, I've been working on creating a long, long list of Universal Design ideas. I call this "Places To Start" because that's how I want fellow teachers to approach them – as things to try, to experiment with, in their own teaching. In this way, Universal Design can begin for all of us, as early as now.

And, as I near the end of the presentation, I want to offer two specific challenges. I think that our forced pivot to online delivery of higher education could allow us to redesign and rethink several key components of our teaching that, for whatever reason, our conservatism and orthodoxy previously made it impossible for people to touch. I think if we make some noise around these things right now, and take an active role in reshaping our post-COVID future, we can design a better university.

The first is help seeking. We need to acknowledge that students with disabilities are not seeking help. The vast majority of them are not seeking help. The majority of them have experienced very negative outcomes from COVID teaching. Student engagement and health surveys show us that this generation experiences poor mental health in general more than previous cohorts. The other notable characteristic of our current group of students? They seek help less. We know this impacts students of color even more than others. So we need to develop an entrance to help that is truly accessible rather than the steep steps currently in place. We need to develop this entrance online as well as on campus, and we need to be creative. We need our services for disabled students to foreground disability justice, not just minimum accommodations, and that means asking disabled students to co-design these systems, develop them in ways that understand systemic racism, and that are focused not on legal minimum accommodations, but rather on the flourishing and success of disabled students, and an understanding that we need permanent systemic changes .

The second thing I want us to build on segues directly from the first. Recall the article I cited by Sternberg, in which he tried to redefine intelligence as the ability to adapt. Micah Saviglio, also writing in *Inside Higher Ed*, responded to Sternberg's formulation of adaptive intelligence, and argued that rather than construing the new challenges of virtual learning as tests of adaptive intelligence, "why not center students and faculty with disabilities by inviting them (and paying them) to help envision and design flexible courses that will survive the pandemics and unforeseen challenges to come? Then we can measure how adaptive and flexible a learning environment is, rather than how "intelligent" students are when they succeed, or fail, to adapt to a new normal as rigid as what it replaced." Why not? It is important to remember the history of Universal Design as a process, a process that built in feedback from users, and centred the value of feedback from disabled people.

How can you invite disabled students, staff and faculty to audit your programs and processes? How can you authorize them to advocate for change? This would be the very opposite of the "unexpected" approach to disabled students that has existed for so long.

Thanks for your time today, and I hope we can talk more about how to continue to design an alternative future for higher education. I think we all agree that before COVID, our schools had too many unnecessary barriers in place for students. During COVID, we all viewed and experienced new barriers, or saw the old ones from new perspectives. Now we have a chance to build something different.