

Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Demanding Excellence in Pedagogical Practices with Universal Design

Jay Dolmage argues in *Academic Ableism* that institutions of higher education are inherently ableist and gatekeep students with their “steep steps” to admission and continued access (44). This inaccessibility is particularly insidious when one considers how intersectional experiences of discrimination work along lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability. Indeed, Erin Whitney finds in her study of four Black middle school girls identified as having learning disabilities that a “curriculum embedded with multiple modes for representing knowledge can create pathways to culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy, and contribute to the construction of powerful writing identities” (vi). This panel proposes a series of pedagogical approaches in the classroom that center students’ forms of knowledge-making and invite a universal design approach that emphasizes a multiplicity of representation, expression, and engagement to support student success. Speaker 1 will offer an extended exploration of the theories of universal design for learning and provide some hands-on context for questions instructors might ask themselves to create flexible and adaptable instruction. Speaker 2 will explore how adopting digital humanities techniques in the classroom can address larger issues related to accessibility and the digital divide in the classroom. Adopting digital tools can help to bridge the digital divide among students, while preserving the core principles of MEI including critical thinking, empathy, and inclusion. Speaker 3 will draw on sample prompts and revision suggestions to argue that college writing assignments with multimodal composing options offer students more agency, flexibility, and access, which ultimately makes for a more inclusive pedagogy. This presentation directly relates to MEI’s core principles of diversity, inclusion, equity, and equity-mindedness in that the presentation asks attendees to consider pedagogical best practices that support students’ multiple forms of meaning making and support student needs.