

Insensible Paradise, Invisible Nightmare: Complicating Embodiment in the 21st Century Classroom

A Workshop by Emily K. Michael and Michele Boyette

"I am not one of those who neglect the body in order to make of it a sacrificial offering for the soul, since my soul would thoroughly dislike being served in such a fashion. All the soarings of my mind begin in my blood, for which reason I precede my work, through a pure and simple way of life that is free from irritants and stimulants, as with an introductory prelude, so that I cannot be deceived over the true spiritual joy that consists in a concord, happy and as if transfigured, with the whole of Nature."

-Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Life*

Disability Outside the Academy

Some Texts From Everyday Life

How do these signs, slogans, and headlines frame, divide, and question the body?

- “If I had one wish, I wish that my Deaf parents could hear me sing.”
-American Idol contestant
- “Starbucks Welcomes Service Animals”
- “Deaf & Hard of Hearing People Fight to be Heard”
- “Don’t let your sight impair your vision.”
- “Learn to cook with blind chef Holly Smith. Holly doesn’t let blindness get in the way of deliciousness.”

Making and Identifying Disabled Characters — Does Disability Have a Rhetorical, Moral, or Emotional Function in the Text?

Disability Studies often discusses disability using three models:

1. **Symbolic:** Disability as divine curse or divine blessing.
Characters are tragic or inspirational.
2. **Medical:** Disability as individual error, as objective deficit.
Characters are defined by their medical difference.
3. **Social:** Disability as negotiation between a person’s impairment and society’s response.

Common Trajectories for Disabled Characters

- Medical cure or rehabilitation
- Spiritual awakening or healing
- Death or suicide

Disability Inside the Academy

Accessibility Statements for Course Syllabi — What Message Does Your Statement Send?

Consider that disabled and nondisabled students may use the placement and language of your accessibility statement to predict your attitudes towards disability in the classroom.

Examples of Accessibility Statements

Accessibility Statement #1:

What Accommodations Does This Course Provide for Students?

This class seeks ways to become a working and evolving model of inclusion and universal design for all participants. Individuals with disabilities of any kind (including learning disabilities, ADHD, depression, and health conditions), who require instructional, curricular, or test accommodations are responsible for making such needs known to the instructor as early as possible. I encourage students to do so in order to allow me to accommodate them in a timely and confidential manner.

However, I assume that ***all of us*** learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course should accommodate every student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts and/or verbal instructions may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs so I can best meet them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including the Writing Center, the Learning Resources Center, the Counseling Center, and the Academic Resource Center are available to all students.

Accessibility Statement #2:

Accessibility: Florida State College at Jacksonville recognizes the importance of assisting and encouraging all students to reach their full potential. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended in 2008, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the College ensures that its admission requirements are uniformly applied, and that its services, activities, facilities and academic programs are accessible to and usable by all qualified students. The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services to promote full participation of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of life. Please visit www.fscj.edu/admissions-aid/services-for-students-with-disabilities for more information.

Accessibility Statement #3 (as it appears on Emily K. Michael's course syllabi):

Accessibility: Students with disabilities who seek reasonable accommodations in the classroom or other aspects of performing their coursework must first register with the UNF Disability Resource Center (DRC) located in Bldg. 57/1500. For further information, contact the DRC by phone (904) 620-2769, email (drcevals@unf.edu), or online (<http://www.unf.edu/drc/>). Once registered, students with disabilities should contact me within the first two weeks of the course to discuss accommodations.

Our course is an inclusive environment, organized in the spirit of Universal Design. I am committed to helping all students engage with every aspect of this course. Please talk with me early in the semester so that we can resolve any access needs and design accommodations to help you succeed.

A Note on Service Animals and Personal Technology: Disabled students, faculty, and staff often employ assistance in the form of wheelchairs, canes, technology, and service animals. Please recognize that these technologies are an extension of the disabled person, and do not interact with these technologies without the disabled person's permission. In particular, please refrain from petting, distracting, or talking to service animals unless the handler has given you permission.

Disclosure, Dialogue, and Negotiation

Problems of Disclosure

Medical Bias: The legal language of accommodation that governs the handling of disability in universities still emphasizes a medical model—where disability is a person's individual responsibility. Thus, disclosure also becomes a person's responsibility. Confidentiality, which is supposed to protect disabled people from discrimination, can make the disability seem like a shameful secret—something a professor cannot ask about.

"Invisible" Disabilities: Many disabilities cannot be identified at first glance, so it can be difficult to open a dialogue about accommodations.

Overestimating the Medical Label: Knowing the label does not mean that you know or understand an individual student's needs. However, many students have been taught that their label is enough and are not forthcoming with more information.

The Need for Dialogue and Negotiation

- Accommodation = afterthought. Accessibility = forethought.
- Expect disabled people to show up.
- You can't anticipate every need, but can be welcoming and willing to collaborate.

For Further Reading

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**Want to Continue the Discussion?
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