# Universal Design on the Educational Landscape:

# **Going “Beyond Compliance”** Justin Freedman Syracuse University

## Slide 2:

## Accessibility

1. Come and go as you need to accommodate your comfort and schedule
2. Captioned video clips with visual description
3. Images with visual descriptions
4. Structure:
   1. 45-minute interactive presentation, 15 minutes for discussion
5. Summary to be sent after presentation as a word document
6. My access needs:
   1. Fidgeting with fidgets

## Slide 3:

## By the end of this presentation, I hope…

1. that you agree and disagree with what I say about universal design and disability related accommodations in postsecondary education
2. that you consider what we can gain from listening to students’ voices and developing the structures to make their voices heard
3. we share ideas for resolving tensions and obstacles so that we can support increasingly meaningful participation for postsecondary students who are identified as having disabilities

## Slide 4:

## My journey in professional identities

## Middle School Social Studies Teacher in Philadelphia, PA

1. High School Special Education Teacher in Amherst, MA
2. Currently: Ph.D. Candidate at
3. Syracuse University
4. Beginning this fall: Assistant Professor of Inclusive Education at Rowan University

## Slide 5:

Two pictures of books, one titled, “Learning Disabilities and Related Disabilities; Strategies for Success, 13th edition” by Janet W. Lerner and Beverley H. Johns. The other titled, “Exceptional Children; An Introduction to Special Education, 10th Edition” by Willam L. Heward.

## Slide 6:

Image of the front page of Justin's Individualized Education Program, from fifth grade

## Slide 7:

Image of Justin's letter of accommodations from The College of New Jersey Disability Support Services office

## Slide 8:

### A Social Model of Disability

Disability results in part from barriers that ‘disable,’ and deny access, or meaningful participation

### Beyond Compliance

Recognizing that meaningful participation does not always come through legal compliance and accommodations

### Universal Design

## Slide 9:

## Universal Design Definition and Example

“Universal design involves designing products, buildings, or environments so they can be used readily by the widest possible range of users.” – Rose and colleagues (2006)

Image of sidewalk with a curb cut-which includes tactile paving, also referred to as sidewalk bumps.

## Slide 10:

### A Social Model of Disability

Disability results in part from barriers that ‘disable,’ and deny access, or meaningful participation

### Beyond Compliance

Recognizing that meaningful participation does not always come through legal compliance and accommodations

### Universal Design

## Slide 11:

## Research study: how do students talk to professors about accommodations?

1. Clinical Simulation model
2. University students met individually with Professor Williams – portrayed by professional actors
3. Student-initiated meeting at Professor Williams’ office to discuss their letter of accommodations
4. Actors’ character and verbal cues were developed through a focus group with current students

Image of a medical student, testing the pulse of a woman in an examination room. Taken from the University of Massachusetts medical school website

## Slide 12:

## What do students say when they start a conversation with a professor?

1. **Theme: Introducing Accommodations**
   1. **Arlene**: So, I just want to discuss accommodations that I get through the disability office.
   2. **Scott**: I just wanted to talk to you about my accommodations.
2. **Theme: Specific Accommodations**
   1. **Elissa**: So, is it possible to get the slides ahead of time? It doesn’t have to be until the minute of class.
   2. **Marissa**: So, basically I have extended time, which means, I have time and a half when I am taking tests.

## Slide 13:

1. **Theme: Asking permission about using accommodations**
   1. **Kimberly**: So, DSO has granted me a reduced-distraction environment testing. So, I take all my exams there. Is that okay with you?
   2. **Scott**: I use my computer in class, if that’s ok with you.
2. **Theme: Qualifying their need/use of accommodations**
   1. **Sam**: I’m gonna do my best to make sure that I can complete everything without having to ask for modifications.

## Slide 14:

1. **Theme: Sharing how accommodations support their success**
   1. **Allison:** I would like to just discuss with you kind of how it affects me in the classroom as well as what I kind of need to be the most successful in the class.
2. **Theme: Discussing a specific aspect of their disability**
   1. **Kimberly:** I just want to let you know that I have a hearing impairment.

## Slide 15:

**Professor Williams asks: So what does your disability mean for you as a student in my class?**

1. **Theme: Sharing aspects of their disability and related challenges**
   1. **Caroline**: Going through slides, for example, my processing isn’t necessarily as fast as, I guess, as the average student. My disability isn’t as clear cut. I don’t have a very severe ADHD or something like that. So, when I was tested, there was no name for what I have. Basically the general idea is that my processing is very slow in comparison to, just like, my working memory.

## Slide 16:

1. **Theme: Explaining accommodation(s) and their purpose and/or benefits**
   1. **Nick**: So I get extended time and I feel like calm and composed and I can get what I need to get done and know I can get it right and double check it.
2. **Theme: Downplaying the impact of their disability**
   1. **Scott**: Not much. I have learned to deal with it over the years. So you should expect me to be hardworking like every other student.

## Slide 17:

**Prof. Williams: Some students have preferred to take the exams with me, so they don’t miss any questions other students ask during the test.**

1. **Theme: Non-committal responses**
   1. **Jared**: Yeah, I haven’t really thought about that.
2. **Theme: Reiterating their original preference**
   1. **Marissa**: Yeah. No, I think that’s a good, I mean, the thing about that though is that, I kind of prefer the quiet of DSO because…I’ve come to learn that I get easily distracted.
   2. **Karen**: The professor will usually call DSO and make the students taking the exam there aware of the change or any points of interest that were brought up in the test…. That can sometimes, I understand that’s sometimes kind of a tricky situation.

## Slide 18:

1. **Theme: Expressing agreement with the professor**
   1. **Elissa**: I think it’s helpful to be in the same place.
2. **Theme: Changing their original preference**
   1. **Chris**: If I do that, do I get the extra time?
   2. **Nick**: Maybe I’ll come to a class, take an exam and see which one works better.
   3. **Kimberly**: That sounds better. Yeah, because I know sometimes especially with economics…if I did have questions, it would be nice to ask.

## Slide 19:

**Prof. Williams expresses a concern about an accommodation**

1. **Prof. Williams’ concern about the accommodation for advance access to PowerPoint slides:**

In the past, when I send out slides ahead of time, students tend to not show up to class.

1. **Prof. Williams expresses a concern about an accommodation for using a laptop/recording device:**

Laptops can be distracting. I read a study that handwriting is better for learning…

I just don’t want my intellectual property to end up on YouTube.

## Slide 20:

1. **Theme: Expressing understanding and/or agreement with the professor’s concern**
   1. **Kimberly**: I know that feeling. My chemistry professor, he did the exact same thing and half the class didn’t come. I know what you mean.
   2. **Marissa**: Yeah, a lot of the professors have said that to me.
2. **Theme: Explaining the accommodation and its purpose:**
   1. **Marissa**: If I have the PowerPoints, I have that to go off of, but then, now I can focus more on what you are saying in class about the notes.

## Slide 21:

1. **Theme: Assuring the professor that the accommodation won’t lead to a problem**
   1. **Scott**: I’ll make sure it’s not a distraction.
   2. **Caroline**: I went to a super small high school and that didn’t exist, not going to a class. I’ve now become, it gives me almost anxiety to not go to class. So, I’m not one of those students.
2. **Theme: Downplaying the use of accommodation(s)**
   1. **Brian**: And it’s when I’m not having a good day too. Hopefully I won’t even need it [to record the lectures].

## Slide 22:

1. **Theme: Compromising and/or suggesting alternative uses of the accommodation**
2. **Allison**: Honestly just the evening before would be totally fine or just a few hours before class…really just whenever before class. Or even, I was talking to DSO about receiving it after too…and then just have a copy of the notes…

## Slide 23:

## Reflecting on participating in the simulated meeting

## Slide 24:

## Theme: Power Dynamic

**Professor**: I read a study…students tend to retain information better by handwriting notes instead of typing.

**Scott**: I appreciate it. I’ll do both throughout the semester.

**Student’s Reflection**:

That way he thinks I’m listening and that I value his opinion.

You have to keep the relationship with your teacher in mind. You have to pick your battles.

## Slide 25:

## Theme: Power Dynamic

**Professor**: When there is someone on a laptop in class, I find that it’s a bit of a distraction to other students.

**Elissa:** Yeah, for me I usually don’t [use a computer] if it’s under a paragraph. My notes are usually handwritten.

**Student’s Reflection:** In reality, I would prefer to type all the time. But because he was so strongly…that he didn’t want someone to use a computer, I was afraid to ask for myself, even though it’s on the letter…I kind of agreed because I didn’t want to fight with a professor.

## Slide 26:

**Participants explaining why they did not assert their need and preferences**

**Arlene**: There is an inherent power difference there. I mean, they are the professor. They are an authority figure. So even though I consider DSO accommodations to be things that are granted to you, you know, they are rights, essentially, it’s an awkward situation where you are coming to a position who is an authority figure and saying that these are rights that you have to give me.

## Slide 27:

**Participants explaining why they did not assert their need and preferences**

**Elissa**: I felt like I couldn’t ask for it [using her computer in class]. I kind of agreed because I didn’t want to fight with a professor. So, I figured I might as well try it the way he wants it and then go forward. But I feel like because it’s on my accommodations letter, he is supposed to be like ‘well if you need it, go ahead and use it’ and really support my needs, based on my letter, because he legally has to. But he was still so distant on it that I was like, I need to compromise, because I felt scared.

## Slide 28:

**Karen**:

I feel that sometimes professors might subconsciously sort of have these underlying thoughts about students with disabilities or that have DSO accommodations, and that can affect how well that student does in their course. And again, I don’t think it’s a purposeful discrimination. I think that it might just be like underlying, preexisting notions, that come into play later on.

## Slide 29:

**Theme : The importance of Gender**

**Elisa:** I feel that if it had been a woman, I just would have connected better from the beginning…he was just so set in his ways…he wouldn’t just listen.

**Nora:** I feel as though I can connect better with women and am able to speak more confidently with someone of the same gender as me. I don't feel as intimated by women and am more willing to express how I truly feel to someone who is a woman rather than a man.

## Slide 30:

## What are your thoughts or reactions to what students said during or after the simulated meeting?

## Slide 31:

## **What is self-advocacy for these students?**

**“Textbook” examples of self-advocacy:**

**Karen**: Knowing and explaining that professors can communicate directly with Disability Services during an exam.

**Marissa**: Explaining why a separate testing environment is beneficial.

**Not so “textbook” examples:**

**Scott**: Not asserting how he wants to take notes because he wants to maintain a positive relationship with the professor.

**Arlene**: Knowing her rights, but leaving decisions about her accommodations up in the air.

**Sam and Scott**: Foregoing accommodations in certain classes.

## Slide 32:

**Social Model of Disability:** What are the barriers to access that create the need to self-advocate in the first place?

**Beyond Compliance:** Access to education that is meaningful and dignifying

## Slide 33:

**Beyond Compliance:   
Putting ideas into practice**

Universal Design and Accommodations in Postsecondary Education

## Slide 34:

## Example of flexible course policies

**Extensions on assignments**

* All students are expected to request extended deadlines for one or more assignments as needed. Students are asked to communicate with the professor before the deadline for the assignment.

**Extended time to complete tests**

* All students may use extended time to complete the exam, as needed.

**Separate testing environment and computer**

* Conference rooms are reserved for students who prefer to take exams in a smaller setting.
* Any student who would like, will be provided a computer to complete the exam in a conference room.

## Slide 35:

**Example of flexible course policies**

**Use of laptop for notetaking**

* All students may use a laptop during class.
* All handouts are also posted electronically.

**Notetaker**

* As part of each student’s participation grade, each student will sign up to take notes for one class session. The instructor will review the notes and post them online for all students to access.

## Slide 36:

There is a table with three columns, and ten rows. The heading columns indicate the following three columns: Assignment, # of students, #of students who used extended deadline

There is a total of twenty-one students for each assignment.

For Paper 1 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 1

For Paper 2 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 2

For Paper 3 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 3

For Paper 4 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 2

For Paper 5 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 3

For Paper 6 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 4

For Paper 7 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 3

For Paper 8 the # of students who used extended deadline was: 4

Final Exam Paper the # of students who used extended deadline: 5

There was an average of three extensions per assignment

## Slide 37:

There is a table with two columns, and 4 rows. The heading row is Accommodation and Number of Students.

The Accommodation: Extended time; has 5 Number of students

The Accommodation: Separate testing environment; has 4 Number of students

The Accommodation: Use of computer; has 4 Number of students

## Slide 38:

**What do students who do and do not have accommodations say about being in a class with universally designed course policies?**

## Slide 39:

**Tensions between universal design course policies and legal compliance**

How do we ensure that universal design policies do not take away from the intent of accommodations to ‘level the playing field’?

**Example**:

All students can have extended time to complete the mid-term exam, as needed.

What is the problem from the perspective of legal compliance?

## Slide 40:

**How can we resolve other tensions?**

**Extensions on assignments**

All students are expected to request extended deadlines of one or more assignments as needed. Students are asked to communicate with the professor before the deadline for the assignment.

**Separate testing environment and computer**

* Conference rooms are reserved for students who prefer to take exams in a smaller setting.
* Any student who would like, will be provided a computer to complete the exam in a conference room.

## Slide 41:

## How can we resolve other tensions?

**Use of laptop for notetaking**

* All students may use a laptop during class.
* All handouts are also posted electronically.

**Notetaker**

* As part of each student’s participation grade, each student will take notes for one class session. The instructor will review the notes and post them online.

## Slide 42:

**Final thoughts: Universal Design is about…**

1.Addressing the barriers that create the need for students to self-advocate to begin with

1. Creating policies that reduce the distinction between disability and ability
2. Creating policies that reflect the expectation that all students have needs that vary, and that these needs are not ‘special’
3. Providing students with real choices in the process

## Slide 43:

## Final thoughts: Putting ideas into practice

**Positive collaboration with faculty members**

1. Promote student voices to advocate for beyond compliance and universal design.
2. Create a concrete list of universal design course policies that correspond to versions of common accommodations.
3. Anticipate and resolve concerns about tensions between universal design policies and legal compliance.