

# Universal Design on the Educational Landscape:

**Going “Beyond Compliance”**

Justin Freedman

Syracuse University

# Accessibility

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

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

- that you agree and disagree with what I say about universal design and disability related accommodations in postsecondary education
- that you consider what we can gain from listening to students' voices and developing the structures to make their voices heard
- 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

# My journey in professional identities

**Middle School  
Social Studies  
Teacher in  
Philadelphia, PA**

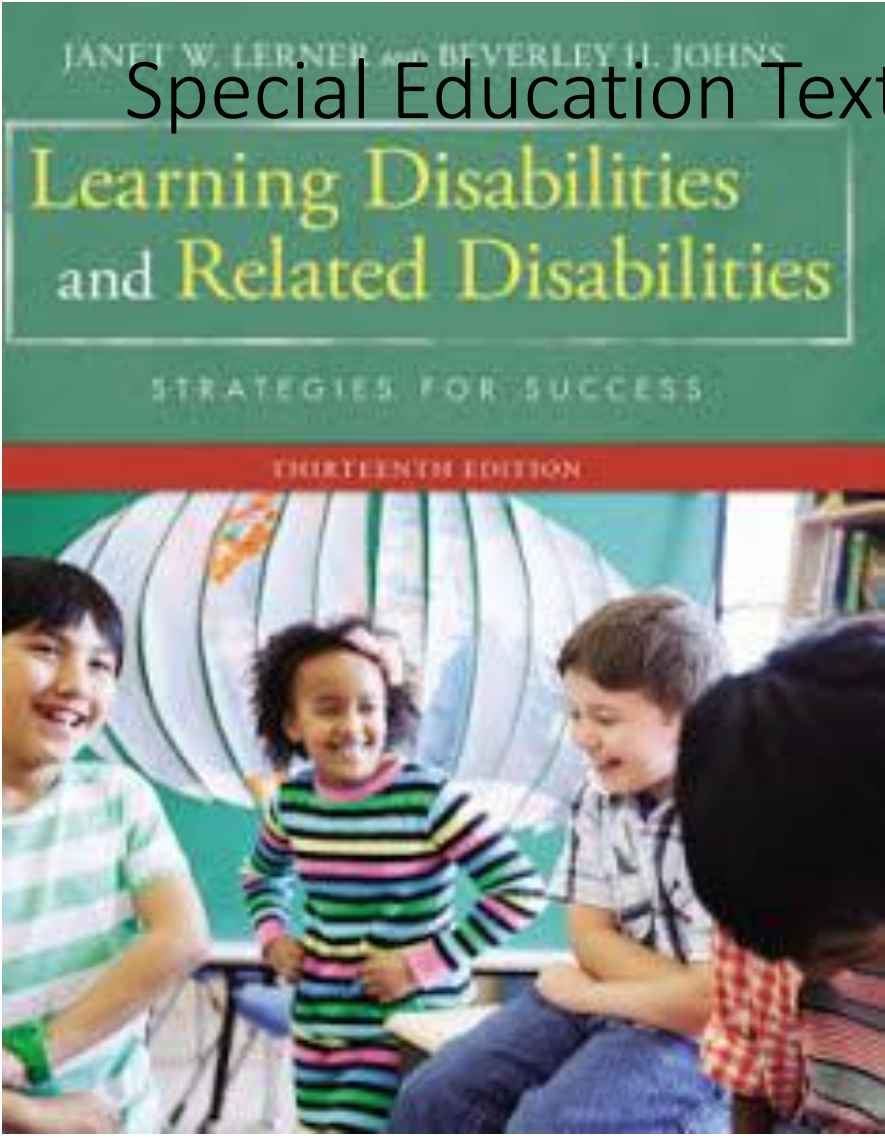
**High School Special  
Education Teacher  
in Amherst, MA**

**Currently: Ph.D.  
Candidate at  
Syracuse University**

**Beginning this fall:  
Assistant Professor of  
Inclusive Education at  
Rowan University**



# Special Education Textbooks



WILLIAM L. HEWARD

# EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

AN INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL EDUCATION



# Justin's IEP

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
 2565 Princeton Pike  
 Lawrenceville, New Jersey 08648  
 (609) 530-8609, ext. 3483

## INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

CONFERENCE TYPE:	Annual	ELIGIBILITY	Eligible for Special Educat
PUPIL NAME:	Justin Freedman	ID NUMBER:	
DOB:	11-22-88	CHRONOLOGICAL AGE:	11
SEX:	Male	HOME PHONE:	609-219-1480
PARENT GUARDIAN:	Nancy Freedman	MOTHER WORK PHONE:	
ADDRESS:	4 Easton Court	FATHER WORK PHONE:	
CITY STATE / ZIP:	Lawrenceville, NJ 08648	GRADE:	5
NATIVE LANGUAGE:	English	CASE MANAGER:	Ellen Kirsch
SCHOOL:	LIS	CATEGORY:	Specific Learning Disabilit
PROGRAM:	Supported Regular Education	PLACEMENT:	Mainstream/Monitoring
OTHER:		GUIDANCE COUNSELOR:	Dennis Stahl

EVAL PLAN MEETING DATE	PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT DATE	CURRENT ELIGIBILITY CONFERENCE DATE	LAST IEP CONFERENCE DATE	CURRENT IEP CONFERENCE DATE	PROGRAM TO BE IMPLEMENTED DATE
		10-08-97	5-12-99	4-3-00	

Please sign in the appropriate space. A signature in this section of the IEP documents participation in the meeting and does not mean agreement with the IEP.

TITLE	PRINT/TYPE NAME	SIGNATURE	DATE
STUDENT (if appropriate or required)			
PARENT/GUARDIAN	Nancy Freedman	<i>phone conference - 4/3/00</i>	
REGULAR EDUCATION TEACHER	Melissa Cattani	<i>Melissa Cattani</i>	

# Justin's letter of accommodations

Disability Support Services

PO Box 7718  
Ewing, NJ 08628-0718

P) 609.771.2571  
F) 609.637.5107  
W) www.tcnj.edu/~sa/disability

**\*\*CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION\*\***

**This letter is not valid without a current semester date.**

TO: Faculty Member of Student:  
Justin Freedman

FROM: Marc Celentana, PhD, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs  
Michelle Gervasi, Program Assistant

DATE: August 6, 2012

RE: Disability Accommodations

as listed below. The student will work with you in

class tests, quizzes, and exams

The following student, Justin Freedman, is officially registered with Disability Support Services. Due to the nature of the disability, the student is eligible to request the reasonable accommodations outlined below. The purpose of accommodations is to ensure an equal educational opportunity. However, **the provision of accommodations should not alter course guidelines or standards.**

PLEASE NOTE: It is the student's responsibility to meet with you, as soon as possible, to discuss their specific needs and the provision of accommodations in a manner appropriate to your classroom setting. The student should review their DSS disability accommodation letter with you to coordinate their accommodations for your course. The accommodations below become effective upon the review of this letter and the faculty/student discussion.

at least 1 week prior to exam.

(The student also assists with access to copier).

- Availability of lecture notes, power point presentations etc. electronically, when possible.
- Student has a chronic medical condition that will occasionally require extended time to complete assignments when symptoms are acute. Please allow student to make up work whenever possible. The student is responsible for timely contact with the instructor and when extensions are needed to make arrangements to complete the required materials.

Social model of disability  
and universal design  
**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**



# 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)



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Universal Design

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



- Clinical Simulation model
- 15 university students met individually with Professor Williams – portrayed by professional actors
- Student-initiated meeting at Professor Williams' office to discuss their letter of accommodations
- Actors' character and verbal cues were developed through a focus group with current students

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

## **Theme: Introducing Accommodations**

**Arlene:** So, I just want to discuss accommodations that I get through the disability office.

**Scott:** I just wanted to talk to you about my accommodations.

## **Theme: Specific Accommodations**

**Elissa:** So, is it possible to get the slides ahead of time? It doesn't have to be until the minute of class.

**Marissa:** So, basically I have extended time, which means, I have time and a half when I am taking tests.

## **Theme: Asking permission about using accommodations**

**Kimberly:** So, DSO has granted me a reduced-distraction environment testing. So, I take all my exams there. Is that okay with you?

**Scott:** I use my computer in class, if that's ok with you.

## **Theme: Qualifying their need/use of accommodations**

**Sam:** I'm gonna do my best to make sure that I can complete everything without having to ask for modifications.

**Theme: Sharing how accommodations support their success**

**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.

**Theme: Discussing a specific aspect of their disability**

**Kimberly:** I just want to let you know that I have a hearing impairment.

## **Theme: Sharing aspects of their disability and related challenges**

**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.

## **Theme: Explaining accommodation(s) and their purpose and/or benefits**

**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.

## **Theme: Downplaying the impact of their disability**

**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.



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.

**Theme: Non-committal responses**

**Jared:** Yeah, I haven't really thought about that.

**Theme: Reiterating their original preference**

**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.

**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.

**Theme: Expressing agreement with the professor**

**Elissa:** I think it's helpful to be in the same place.

**Theme: Changing their original preference**

**Chris:** If I do that, do I get the extra time?

**Nick:** Maybe I'll come to a class, take an exam and see which one works better.

**Kimberly:** That sounds better. Yeah, because I know sometimes especially with economics...if I did have questions, it would be nice to ask.

# Prof. Williams expresses a concern about an accommodation

## **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.

## **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.

**Theme: Expressing understanding and/or agreement with the professor's concern**

**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.

**Marissa:** Yeah, a lot of the professors have said that to me.

**Theme: Explaining the accommodation and its purpose:**

**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.

**Theme: Assuring the professor that the accommodation won't lead to a problem**

**Scott:** I'll make sure it's not a distraction.

**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.

**Theme: Downplaying the use of accommodation(s)**

**Brian:** And it's when I'm not having a good day too. Hopefully I won't even need it [to record the lectures].

**Theme: Compromising and/or suggesting alternative uses of the accommodation**

**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...

Reflecting on participating  
in the simulated meeting

# 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.



# 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.

# 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.

# 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.

**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.

# 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 intimidated by women and am more willing to express how I truly feel to someone who is a woman rather than a man.

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

# 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.

## **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



# Beyond Compliance: Putting ideas into practice

Universal Design and Accommodations  
in Postsecondary Education

# 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.

# 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.

Assignment	# of students	# of students who used extended deadline
Paper 1	21	1
Paper 2	21	2
Paper 3	21	3
Paper 4	21	2
Paper 5	21	3
Paper 6	21	4
Paper 7	21	3
Paper 8	21	4
Final Exam Paper	21	5

**Average of 3 extensions per assignment**

Accommodation	Number of students
Extended Time	5
Separate testing environment	4
Use of computer	4

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

# 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?

# 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**

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# Final thoughts: Universal Design is about...

- Addressing the barriers that create the need for students to self-advocate to begin with
- Creating policies that reduce the distinction between disability and ability
- Creating policies that reflect the expectation that all students have needs that vary, and that these needs are not 'special'
- Providing students with real choices in the process

# Final thoughts: Putting ideas into practice

## **Positive collaboration with faculty members**

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