Review
Disability in Higher Education: How Ableism Affects Disclosure, Accommodation, and Inclusion

Patricia A. Dunn


All three of these important books solidly document the many inequities and injustices regarding disability in institutions of higher education. Using a combination of carefully detailed history, complex and insightful theoretical approaches, personal narrative, and occasional well-placed humor, all three books show how colleges and universities have a long way to go in order to provide the welcoming institutional access for disabled students and faculty that they purport to do. It’s clear that some institutions are sorely lacking in providing even the minimal access required by law. The reasons behind this discrimination are many and complex, and all three books establish in vivid and convincing ways how, why, and when people with disabilities face multiple obstacles in higher education, even thirty years after federal legislation that prohibited such barriers. These books should be read by all university...

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students, faculty, and administrators interested not only in promoting an inclusive experience for people with disabilities, but in learning how a centering of disability can transform and improve higher education for everyone. These are all powerful, courageous texts.

Inspired by the bold critiques of the status quo demonstrated in these excellent books, I begin this review essay with the one minor issue I have with them. My critique, ironically, is that they are primarily critiques, albeit necessary ones. Their authors’ already powerful arguments might effect more change outside disability studies circles if they had foregrounded more approaches to addressing in a practical way the multiple problems they foreground so vividly. Practical suggestions, however, because they are by their nature limited by context, can be problematized more easily than can theoretical statements or analyses. Further, some members of the academy fail to understand that all actions (or inactions) in a classroom or institution are the physical manifestations of theory and of sometimes invisible assumptions. I speak not of these authors, but of potential readers, which may be why specific suggestions are not foregrounded. Several essays do have good suggestions, and Jay Dolmage especially provides a copious list of inclusive strategies. However, the list is not in the print book itself but at the publisher’s website. So I will start a list of actions here at the beginning of this review in order to give Freire’s notion of praxis—"reflection and action"—(emphasis in original, p. 120) the attention it deserves. Pedagogical concerns are typically not a part of the review essay genre, and many academic articles, if they include teaching strategies at all, usually tack them on at the very end of the piece, accompanied by regrets that there is not more space to devote to them. But emboldened by the refreshing angles taken in these three books and their willingness to tackle business-as-usual academic assumptions, I am placing just a fraction of practical, access-building suggestions first, aware that this is a woefully inadequate sampling of what can be done to make our classes and our institutions as inclusive as possible regarding disability. I hope this modest list puts readers in an inclusive-teaching, program-reforming, and curriculum-changing frame of mind—all of which support the aims of these books. I encourage readers to add to this list, starting with Dolmage’s comprehensive list of “places to start” at his publisher’s website. Due to limited space (alas), I cannot here provide instructions or justifications for these suggestions, but they are easily searchable.

• Always add alt text to the images and photographs you include in documents or other media. (It’s easy to do.) Instruct your students to do the same for their projects.
• Make sure the documents you create or use can be read by a screen reader, the technology used by people who read texts auditorily.
• Learn to close caption the videos you create or arrange for it.
• Provide a transcript for podcasts or other recordings.
• Turn on the easy-to-use automatic live captioning available in slideshow software.
• Turn on closed captioning, where available, when showing videos in your class.
• Order books that are also available in audio- or screen-readable formats.
• Use timed tests and assessments only when necessary.
• Have reasonable flexibility regarding attendance and due dates for student projects.
• Use a microphone when speaking in a large room, and have students use a mic during class discussions—or repeat their questions/comments for all.
• Allow all students to use their laptops or other personal devices in your classes, except for rare occasions when that’s not possible.
• Ask students what they need in order to learn better.

That nondisabled people create many of the barriers people with impairments face in their lives is well-known in disability studies, an interdisciplinary field that includes, among others: composition/rhetoric, English, cultural studies, sociology, women’s and gender studies, art, history, and some science and health fields. Although there have been important and positive changes since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990, mandating things like curb cuts, elevators, and accessible books, films, and TV shows, the world in general remains ableist—designed for those without disabilities. Therefore, society’s institutions, including its colleges and universities, are also ableist, slow to remove both physical and pedagogical barriers, with new obstacles emerging every day as many of its instructors and administrators continue to design their coursework and programs for nondisabled people, even though about one-fifth of their students have a disability. Whether by maliciousness or obliviousness, disability is an afterthought. Having to ask for and prove that one needs an accommodation to access higher education remains highly stigmatizing, which greatly affects disclosure decisions. (In this vein: I am currently nondisabled but have been researching disability-related scholarship and pedagogy since the late 1980s.)

All three of these books critique assumptions surrounding disability in institutions of higher learning and the way people with disabilities are treated there. Although the structure of each book is different, as is the style, tone, register, and methodology, they all discuss—in fact, firmly establish—the prejudice against disability in higher education. All three explain how this ableism is compounded by issues of race, gender identity, national origin, or type of disability. Because these negative assumptions are so pervasive in society and in the academy, they greatly influence a person’s decision regarding the disclosure and documentation needed if they are to receive accommodations. Such accommodations, however,
which tend to be generic and minimal, are often not worth the hassle of arranging for them, given the personal information that must be disclosed and the time and expense involved in securing documentation, as well as whatever stigma will no doubt accompany their disclosure. Using a range of approaches—histories, personal narratives, research studies, and testimonies—all three books expose the widespread, systematic, harmful views of disability rampant in academia, both past and present.

Jay Timothy Dolmage’s *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education* (University of Michigan Press, 2017), is a comprehensive and detailed critique of ableism in higher education. Through a scholarly yet readable overview and history of the academy, he shows how the founding of many institutions of higher education were influenced by different types of ableism. One important question raised in this book is how “the accessibility we create for one person can also lead us to broaden and expand accessibility for all” (10). Refreshingly, Dolmage is honest about the sometimes-exclusionary nature of academic language as well as the inaccessibility of print texts and the prohibitive cost of many of them. To that end, he explains how he will make the language in this text as accessible as possible, restating as needed some of the more difficult passages. In addition, this text (I read the print version) is also available in a screen-readable digital format and as an open-access (free) text (32–3). In the appendix for the ebook, available online at his publisher’s website, Dolmage also demonstrates how these theories and analyses could play out in real pedagogy. I focus here on three of his main chapters, which foreground the real-life and metaphorical concepts of “steep steps,” “the retrofit,” and “universal design.” Dolmage shows how “academia powerfully mandates able-bodiness and able-mindedness” (7). This focus on the nondisabled results in disabled users having to ask for accommodations in order to have equal access to these spaces, and they must prove they have an impairment that requires those accommodations.

The accessible nature of Dolmage’s text stands in stark contrast to many materials in academia, including online materials. As he points out, even something as simple as alternative text—the description of images in a document for, say, people who are blind or have low-vision and use screen-reading technology to read the text aloud to them—is still not something that many writers think to include. He cites one study that showed that in the United States, less than 50 percent of public websites use alt text (Thompson et al. qtd in Dolmage, 34). Although that was a 2007 study, and one would hope things have improved since then, I would encourage readers of this review to ask their students or colleagues how many of them routinely insert alt text or image descriptions in their Word or Google documents, their slides and blogs, their websites, or in their social media. When I pose this question to upper-level undergraduates
or to graduate students, only one or two hands go up, and many students have never heard of alt text or image description. This situation exists in spite of the passage of the ADA in 1990, in spite of some version of alt text being available for decades, in spite of academic and other articles promoting the use of alt text since at least the late 1990s, and in spite of the ease with which alt text can be added to documents today. The fact that so many otherwise socially alert and educated people do not include alt text in their documents supports Dolmage’s argument that the ADA, while providing legal access for many people, especially if they have a documented disability, may be actually supporting a systematic attitude of only selected access. In other words, if a student with a print disability has the hard-won required paperwork saying they need screen-readable documents, the disability support office will make sure they get them. However, this system allows faculty and students not involved in these individual cases to proceed with business as usual, merrily inserting photographs and images into their documents without a thought of users who might be reading with their ears via screen readers. Dolmage traces the link throughout history between colleges and mental institutions and the eugenics movement, arguing that higher education has always been about ranking and sorting people. He details some of the horrors of mental institutions, which were very often built near colleges and universities, and he shows how the eugenics movement in North America influenced higher education (13).

Using statistics from both the United States and Canada, Dolmage shows how many college students with disabilities do not disclose them or arrange for accommodations. In the United States, for example, as many as two-thirds of students with disabilities do not report them (22). This lack of reporting is related to and supports arguments and narratives in the two other books reviewed here regarding disclosure issues and the problems people encounter with the accommodating process at many institutions. There are many reasons students do not disclose: the bureaucratic paperwork, sometimes requiring substantial financial investment on the student’s part; the often uselessness of typically recommended accommodations (more time on tests, note-takers, quiet space for testing, etc.); and, not least of all, the stigma of disclosing a disability, especially an intellectual or mental disability. He points to numerous studies that show the added difficulties students of color and international students have in accessing accommodations (25–6). What’s more, the “equal opportunity” discussions at many institutions, Dolmage argues, are really about the legal minimum colleges must provide in order to avoid being sued (27). Dolmage ends the introduction with extended examples of “ableist apologia,” his phrase for statements people make “that distance the speaker from responsibility” for the ableist structures and practices built into academia (35). These statements can be expressions of
helplessness in the face of perceived requirements, of frustrations that they are being asked to do too much, or that they don’t know what to do. Dolmage points out that excusing an inaccessible building because it is old is a form of “ableist apologia” (36). But Dolmage counters this excuse with a powerful statement: “If it is an inaccessible building, it is alive and working to physically filter students out of the university every single day” (36).

This book’s central chapters are organized into three metaphors: steep steps, the retrofit, and universal design. Using the steep steps analogy, Dolmage argues that space plays a central role in ableism and that steep steps are not only a physical barrier in academia and elsewhere, but act as a metaphor representing other inaccessible features of higher education. He sees ableism not as something accidental, something innocently overlooked or forgotten, but as a more ominous undercurrent in society and in universities. He argues that “[ableism] requires agents. It requires actions and intentional inaction” (46). The steep steps present in many grand entrances to older buildings on university grounds send a message that only the most fit, the most privileged, belong in higher education. People in general can understand the concept of stairs and steps being a barrier to people with some forms of physical impairment and that the 1990 ADA legislation requires physical access via ramps, curb cuts, elevators, and other such accommodations. However, Dolmage points out that as a result of a backlash to this law, many people see the situation not as an issue of civil rights, but “as a matter of compliance” because it is required and mandates “reasonable accommodation” (61) for those who need it. This refusal to accept access as a generally desirable feature Dolmage sees as the distancing from and fear of disability present in much of society, even though few people live their complete lives without developing a disability (62).

Along with some of the essays in the Kerschbaum and colleagues collection, Dolmage also focuses on accommodation issues. Using another spatial metaphor, the retrofit, he demonstrates how making slight changes to an inaccessible situation, changes designed to provide access for specific individuals who need them, does not actually alter an inaccessible system. These retrofits or accommodations can simply be “cover your ass” tweaks (75) that, in fact, can halt larger, more important systemic design changes. Further, he argues that the ADA “ensures that only very little gets done” (68). He points out that this disability law has been received much like legislation regarding racial equality: “There is progress, then there is backlash, laws are diluted or not enforced, and exclusions are maintained” (68). Trying to accommodate the individual to fit into an ableist world rather than changing the larger society to be more inclusive can result in expensive, absurd, and even dangerous retrofits, such as the climbing wheelchair, a wheelchair that climbs steps but may not be an effective way to get
around on level surfaces. The climbing wheelchair, Dolmage argues, is an accommodation that reflects the ableist assumption “that disability is... something located within a single and singular body” (72) instead of a part of everyone’s life, now or eventually, and something that should be designed for broad access from the beginning, so that more people would be included without the expense and stigma of limited-use retrofits. His point here is that accommodation and retrofits can be reactionary and limited, that accommodation is not access, and that design and systems must change for true inclusion to happen.

Universal Design (UD), the author’s third major metaphor, started out as an architectural philosophy that had as its central concept that products and spaces should be designed from the beginning to be accessible and inclusive. With its insistence on equitable, flexible, and intuitive use, tolerance for error, and other important factors regarding access, Dolmage would like to see UD as “a worldview” (116) and as “a way to move” (118). Also in this chapter, Dolmage reviews how UD was adapted for teaching as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an approach that builds into teaching multiple ways for students to be engaged in their learning, to obtain course content, and to express themselves and be assessed on what they learned. He also traces the intersecting histories of UD, UDL, and usability studies, the latter being linked, importantly, to “the priority of feedback from users” (127). Arguing for the combined purposes and practices of both UD and usability, Dolmage hopes that teaching will become more appropriate for every student, and that students can play a bigger role in designing that pedagogy (129).

While Dolmage applauds the productive role UDL can play in making teaching more equitable, flexible, and inclusive, he also points out some potential problems with UDL, the main one explained via a concept from critical race theory, “interest convergence—the idea that conditions for the minority group improve only once the effort can be justified as helping the majority as well” (135). In other words, the needs of people with disabilities can be de-emphasized in favor of the benefits UDL can offer to the nondisabled population (135). This danger is compounded for students of color. Citing the concerns of Vershawn Young and Frankie Condon that even those who wish to be as anti-racist as possible may overlook curricular or language-related practices that reinforce racism, Dolmage encourages us to examine how our use of UD might perpetuate racist practices (138). Because ableism is so pervasive, if sometimes hidden, in the academic world, Dolmage worries that UD may become a “defeat device,” that is, something that only pretends to solve an accommodation problem but actually hides a larger problem (144). So while Dolmage seems to still think of UD as an approach holding much potential for making higher education more accessible for all, he also warns that it can be used to stifle meaningful systemic
change in pervasive academic ableism. He recommends readers visit his publishers page for practical suggestions regarding “places to start” bringing out the most useful changes to pedagogy (151).

Dolmage also discusses representations of disability on campus as depicted in popular films such as Animal House, School Daze, Old School, Revenge of the Nerds, and others. Dolmage’s illuminating analysis of these films would provide a useful avenue into discussions of academic ableism with students both new to disability studies theory and to those already familiar with it. Finally, Dolmage raises the question of what we as faculty members, administrators, or writers can do to lessen academic ableism and promote more equal access. He refers readers again to the online appendix to this book, available at the University of Michigan Press website. He points to a number of other resources as well: articles, websites, and guidelines that list a number of concrete actions and practices toward those ends (189–190).

I learned much from Melanie Yergeau’s Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness, which won the 2018 CCCC Lavender Award for Excellence in Queer Scholarship. I learned that autistic people have been misunderstood, mistreated, and underestimated since before autism had a name. It’s made me question “treatments,” especially Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), a widely accepted treatment for autism that Yergeau strongly condemns. She is justifiably angry at how autistic people have been and are treated:

. . . when autistic people enter rhetorical situations, we are often silenced, ignored, berated, infantilized, corrected, scolded, behavior-planned, extinguished, institutionalized, electroshocked, retrained, hog-tied, faux-praised, tasered, secluded, shamed, raped, shaken, hit, teased, studied, molested, laughed at, or murdered. (83)

For too long, others have constructed the narrative of autistic people’s lives. By contrast, she tells her own and others’ stories along with the clinical history of autism, showing how autistic people have been denied their rhetoricity, even their humanity. She has channeled this passion into a book that establishes strong parallels between society’s views of autism and queerness. Authoring Autism is wide-ranging, well-researched, and sprinkled with wicked sarcasm and humor. It is an effective mix of autism histories, rhetorical theories, and personal narrative, with a sudden, welcome irreverence and humor, as when noting, “A chaise lounge named John Horgan once famously quipped that ‘autistics often seem to make no fundamental distinction between humans and inanimate objects, such as tables and chairs.’” (64). For me, that sentence had more bite because it wasn’t until its last word that I understood where it was going.

Much of this book successfully demonstrates that autistic people do communicate and do have rhetoricity. For example, “. . . the flap of a hand or
the fluttering of a wrist becomes a rhetorical act." (24). However, as Yergeau explains and reiterates throughout the book, she faces a conundrum: if society holds that autistics are not rhetorical, then Yergeau, who identifies as autistic, may find either that her arguments are not taken seriously, or if they are taken seriously, she may be viewed, therefore, as not autistic: “Anything I claim here is held suspect on the basis of my very being—because I am autistic, I lack a theory of mind [ToM]” (31), Baron-Cohen’s theory, which she strongly critiques (70). Yergeau also challenges the notion that autistic people lack intentionality. She argues that autistics create many instances, many “unrecorded moments, rhetorical situations that are dismissed as arhetorical” (39), but that do communicate quite dramatically. While her “Intention” chapter mostly critiques a system in which autistics are denied their rhetoricity and therefore their humanity, Yergeau also builds “toward an autistic rhetoricty that queers what we’ve come to understand as rhetoric” (40). Using the concept of “demi-rhetoricty” (50), a kind of partial or halved rhetoricity, Yergeau argues that clinicians can claim one of two opposites, that “. . . all autistics are both too high-functioning and too low-functioning” (51):

1. They can argue that autistic people are not autistic enough to make claims about autism.
2. They can likewise argue that autistic people are too autistic to make claims about autism. (50)

She also makes both arguments: first, “that autistic people are rhetorical and capable of symbolic action,” and second, that “even if the reverse were true (e.g., autistic people lack or have impaired capacity for symbolic exchange, autistic people are still, nonetheless, rhetorical” (59). She speaks of a broader, different notion of intention than allistic rhetorics hold—that of an “embodied intentionality” (65). Her style, her selection of deeply personal evidence, her unexpected (by this reader, anyway) word choice—all illustrate the argument she is making. Drawing on queer theory, she also points out that social models of disability align somewhat with queer theory and might be more “neuroqueerly framed as antisocial models of disability.” Both oppose “medical and rehabilitative models of disability” (67). Yergeau critiques definitions and treatments of autism, as well as rhetoric, or, at least, widespread assumptions made about what rhetoric is and where it is present. She provides much evidence for rhetoricity in people, places, and actions where it is not traditionally expected by allistics or recognized by allistics (allistics being a term for nonautistic people, but with an emphasis on the unacknowledged privilege they hold in society) (169).

Yergeau next provides the clinical history of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), strongly critiquing it. She explains ABA’s three components: environmentalism, recovery, surveillance, demonstrating how harmful it can be:
When neuroqueer people’s environments are strictly controlled, when neuro-queer people are forced into compliant behaviors in the name of recovery, when neuroqueer people are surveilled in every movement and moment—when these topoi become the lifeblood of neuroqueer being, such being becomes a way of unbeing. Such are the stakes of neuroqueer rhetoricity and ABA’s attempts to abolish and delimit it. (106).

She critiques what she sees as “the default assumption” of ABA: “. . . that it is better to be nonautistic than it is to be autistic. Always. And this assumption has done great damage to autistic and nonautistic people alike” (133). She points out that autistic people view ABA in a way similar to the way members of the Deaf community view cochlear implants, “as a kind of cultural annihilation” (98).

Yergeau later touches on a theme prominent in the Kerschbaum, Eisenman, and Jones collection: disclosure and the assumptions it reveals in people who hear it. She provides a telling anecdote about an autistic pride button she displays on her backpack and the numerous interactions she’s had with people who notice it and begin “unsolicited commentary” regarding it (135), weighing in as if they are experts: “When I declare that I am autistic, complete strangers feel compelled to challenge me, or console me, or talk to me very slowly” (172). Rather than regarding autism as a negative, however, Yergeau points out that many autistic people regard autism as a positive, using the gay pride and Deaf Gain (deafness as an advantage) movements as models (179–80). She also critiques her own field’s failure to fully consider its own assumptions about “gender, . . . whiteness, dialogue, ability, and power” (149). As with the other two books reviewed here, this one frequently mentions the inadequate attention paid in the academy to issues regarding race and privilege.

Throughout Authoring Autism, Yergeau discusses the frustrations of dealing with clinicians who “wield any number of rhetorical constructions to counter the knowledges and desires of autistic individuals” (140). Although autistic activists fight the use of ABA, this method continues to be widely used (147). Yergeau, and many other autistic people, stand in opposition to the organization Autism Speaks for its use of negative stereotypes about autism as a means of raising money (156). Her prose is particularly engaging when she narrates an incident, for example, filling out a form that asked if she was a “good diplomat” (149–50):

Diplomacy is deferential art, and autism is unfiltered neurological onslaught. Or, to put it more autisticky: we, the autistic, have easily accomplished all that the acronym TMI (too much information) has to offer. Diplomacy is trickery dressed as morality. (151)

She frequently grapples with rhetoric, challenging false assumptions about the rhetoricity of autistic people, at the same time she challenges traditional notions of rhetoric itself: “How might autism claim rhetoric as it dismantles it?” (173).
Yergeau’s clinical history and analyses regarding autism are interspersed with her own personal experiences. She includes a courageous description of the panic and distress that set in when her headphones broke in her hotel room during a major professional conference (175). She uses this honest and painful narrative to illustrate vividly that “[s]ituations that might only be mildly stressful for others can be overwhelmingly stressful for us simply because the stress is happening on top of the ongoing stress of sensory over-stimulation” (177). This, like many stories in this book, serve to illustrate her argument that autism is a rhetoric and that autistic people are intentional and rhetorical, though those terms need to be broadened and reshaped to include the intentionality and rhetoricity that autistic people possess. Like the other books reviewed here, Yergeau argues for more agency by people labeled “disabled,” that they should control their own narratives, and that rhetoric plays a central part not only in discrimination but in possible challenges to that discrimination. She posits the idea “that being autistic confers ways of being, thinking, moving, and making meaning that are not in and of themselves lesser—and may at times be advantageous” (205). Yergeau’s book is a welcome history of autism and critique of contemporary perceptions and “treatments” of it. It is an insightful, often refreshingly irreverent argument that should be read by professors, administrators, and students.

Some of the pieces in the Kerschbaum, Eisenman, and Jones collection *Negotiating Disability: Disclosure and Higher Education* began as papers or presentations at the Disability Disclosure in/and Higher Education Conference, which took place in 2013 at the University of Delaware. But as the editors point out in their introduction, this collection is meant to address “gaps, omissions, and absences that were part of the physical and conceptual spaces” created by that conference (3). The essays differ in organization and style. Some are more like personal narratives; others are analyses or a combination of approaches. What many of the essays in this book have in common is documenting the role stigma plays in decisions regarding disclosure, with power differentials, status, race, gender, and type of disability influencing each person’s decision. The stigma surrounding mental or cognitive disabilities is a particularly strong factor. The twenty essays are divided into four main sections: Identity, Intersectionality, Representation, and Institutional Change and Policy.

The collection sees disability as an important part of diversity. The editors, as well as the individual chapter authors, argue that disability should be much more central than it currently is in higher education policies and practices. They quote Jay Dolmage’s apt phrase from a 2008 essay regarding the need to “invite disability in the front door” (9). As the two other books reviewed here do, this one, too, shows that at too many colleges and universities, disability and access/inclusion for people with disabilities is almost an afterthought, an issue to be
addressed only on an as-needed basis, and then only in a manner that satisfies the letter of the law but not the spirit. The editors of this volume urge us instead to prioritize disability and thereby transform higher education. An important factor in this process, however, is that students, faculty, and staff with disabilities must weigh the substantial pros and cons of disclosing their disability, a decision also influenced by intersectional identities. Space prohibits coverage of all twenty chapters in this valuable collection, but a representative sample will be discussed.

The first essay in the Identity section began as the well-received ending keynote address at the at the 2013 Disability Disclosure in/and Higher Education Conference. In “Passing, Coming Out, and Other Magical Acts,” Ellen Samuels uses powerful personal stories at the beginning and end of her essay, as well as an eye-opening poem by Lynn Manning (“The Magic Wand”) to demonstrate that encounters people have with each other are rarely about disability alone; they always involve factors such as race, class, gender, sexuality and other “sites of embodied social power relationships” (16). She shows how disclosures always take place within a context that involves risk, not only regarding the person’s disability status but also other factors affecting their identity and how others in that context might view them. Samuels writes convincingly about who may or may not have enough safety or privilege to disclose a disability, using as vivid examples those advantages many in her audience might hold: the ability to attend a conference, to work in higher education, to afford (or have their institutions afford) their trip, as well as (for most) the privilege of being white. She also points out, as do others in this collection, the possible added stigma of disclosing a mental or cognitive disability (18–19).

The personal story that closes out her essay/speech demonstrates the power of a metaphor she used to make her dean understand her Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which is a connective tissue disease. After many frustrating meetings, medical explanations, and multiple doctors’ notes did not convince this dean to fulfill a promise of a required accommodation, Samuels called up an analogy of a push puppet, “a jointed human figure atop a round platform, its body held together with string. When you push the bottom of the platform, the string is loosened and the figure collapses at its joints” (21). Samuels reminded the dean of this toy, explaining that her body was like that of the push puppet: “That’s what my joints do. That’s why I need this” (22). When nothing else had convinced that administrator, this metaphor did. Samuels ends with her point that there must be “shared communication” when advocating for access, “and often, there has to be metaphor” (22). This need for stories, shared communication, and metaphor can be seen in other essays throughout this volume.

Amber Knight also stresses “the instructive power of sharing personal stories” (58) in her essay, “Feminism, Disability, and the Democratic Class-
room.” Drawing on bell hooks, Knight asserts that teaching is always political because choices instructors make ultimately either support the status quo or call for changes to it. Also like hooks, Knight supports instructors showing their vulnerability in the classroom, recognizing that when instructors disclose their disabilities to their students, there are always risks. Many students, however, said that personal stories about disability from their instructors and from other students helped them to better engage with course readings. Another important reason to disclose, argues Knight, is that by “passing,” by keeping their disability hidden from their students, instructors forfeit the opportunity to be role models for students with disabilities in their classes, who could benefit from seeing that their instructor, with a disability, made it through graduate school successfully and secured a position in the academy.

Tara Wood, in “Rhetorical Disclosures: The Stakes of Disability Identity in Higher Education,” also explores decisions regarding what, if anything, to disclose about their disability, to whom, and under what circumstances. Wood points out that although a student’s decision to disclose a disability might be stigmatizing, that decision might also be a form of resistance for that student as well as a demonstration of “rhetorical agency” (78). When students must disclose a disability in order to receive accommodations, for example, their instructor does not need to know the precise disability. If students have stigmatizing disabilities and they are not sure how their instructors will treat them after disclosure, they sometimes decide to employ what Wood calls “strategic genericism,” that is, identifying as disabled without disclosing the specific impairment. Wood makes a strong case that the variety of students’ decisions vis-à-vis disclosure, partial disclosure, or no disclosure not only reveals much about society’s harmful views of disability, but also reveals much about students’ rhetorical strategies and informed decision-making.

The Intersectionality section explores how race, poverty, and gender issues can complicate issues already faced by people with disabilities. Ryan A. Miller, Richmond D. Wynn, and Kristine W. Webb interviewed many LGBTQ students with a disability in their study, “Complicating ‘Coming Out’: Disclosing Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in Higher Education.” They discovered that many students found it sometimes riskier to disclose disability than queerness (131). Katherine D. Seelman’s essay, “Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: Welfare, Stigma Management, and Disclosure,” points out that in higher education today, “the largest group of students with disabilities is those with mental and cognitive disabilities” (137), and for students on welfare, the stigma of disclosure can be multiplied. Taking up the intersections of disability, poverty, and race, Seelman argues cogently that society’s over-valuing of “independence” exacerbates the stigma surrounding both disability and poverty.
Wendy S. Harbour, Rosalie Boone, Elaine Bourne Heath, and Sislena G. Ledbetter provide a fascinating study of the word **overcoming** as it is used, with different historical connotations, in African American culture and in disability studies culture. Although the general public sometimes use **overcome** in what they think of as a positive way to describe people with disabilities who have somehow made themselves appear as if they do not have a disability, disability scholars (notably Simi Linton) have argued that the term **overcome** puts the onus on individuals to deal with their impairment, rather than on society as a whole to examine ableist conditions that exacerbate an impairment or are primarily responsible for the disability. “Overcoming” in the context of critical race theory, however, is associated with ways in which oppressed people have, to some extent, broken down racist barriers. They encourage readers to explore for themselves the different histories of that word. Their essay also includes a sentence that could well apply to the general arguments in all three books reviewed here: “Scholars, researchers, and administrators in higher education may view disability as an individual problem to be accommodated, rather than a campus diversity issue involving ableism” (151–2).

Kate Kaul’s “Risking Experience: Disability, Precarity, and Disclosure” is an excellent example of how theory illustrated with story can be rhetorically powerful. Her narratives about obtaining an accessible classroom contribute greatly to the “shared communication” Ellen Samuels calls for in the first essay in this volume. Kaul writes about the additional risks precarious contract faculty might face in disclosing an impairment. Her essay delves deeply into disclosure debates among scholars in disability studies and critical disability studies. She also outlines the risks in not disclosing and therefore being stuck in a classroom that is difficult to get to and has computer and projection equipment she cannot use because of how it is situated. She makes what should be the obvious point that this could be an avoidable choice: “In an accessible room, by which I mean, one where I can use all the things that I need in order to teach, I may not have to disclose my disability to my students” (178). She also points out that, while tenured professors can often request specific classrooms in the semester preceding when they’ll have to teach in them, precarious faculty often do not have that option. When given an inaccessible classroom, it may take months and a documented disability to obtain a room in which they can physically use all the needed teaching equipment. Kaul’s essay, with multiple examples and analyses, demonstrates that many problems with access in higher education stem from the way disability is framed in the academy—as a problem with “the unfortunate individual” (176) rather than with the way classrooms and policies are designed. Individuals are seen as “having” a disability in a neutral, “normal” society rather than the society or the culture contributing to or causing the
inaccessibility because of ableist design factors that need to be changed. In fact, one quote from Kaul’s essay also epitomizes arguments made in all three books in this review: “My point is that instructors with disabilities don’t make sense to the university because its conception of disability doesn’t make sense. . .” (179). In other words, many institutions still do not see the social construction of disability, the role inaccessible buildings, classrooms, or teaching materials play in disabling students, faculty, and staff. Kaul’s essay is an excellent point of departure for administrators, faculty, and students concerned with high quality teaching environments for everyone.

In his essay in the Representation section, “Postmodern Madness on Campus: Narrating and Navigating Mental Difference and Disability,” Bradley Lewis discusses mad studies versus the medical model of difference. He explains how college counseling centers shifted, in the 1980s, from student development “toward more medical models and psychiatric standards of care” (193), and he shows the influence of the 1980s trend of pharmaceutical companies’ “marketing blitz” of direct-to-consumer or direct-to-provider advertising of their drugs. Those trends, coupled with the influence of neoliberalism, which “creates a climate of distress,” changed campus counseling centers—and not for the better. Neoliberalism, he argues, “creates a treatment system that exploits and profits from this same distress” (198). Lewis praises the deconstruction work in the theoretical scholarship in mad studies, but he calls for more constructive work needed to make things better for students with mental difference in higher education today (201).

In one of the most powerful essays in this collection, “Doing Disability with Others,” Rebecca Sanchez details some of the many issues surrounding identity disclosure, foregrounding the importance of agency and control of narrative. She uses as one example the resistance Helen Keller faced from her publishers and readers, who wanted to hear only about her deafblindness, not about her views on other subjects. Sanchez analyzes three artifacts: wheelchair lights, a button on a backpack that says “DeafBlind and Badass” and a shirt that says “Piss on Pity.” These artifacts, she argues, “move away from the emphasis on a singular, formal moment of revelation inherent in the idea of disclosure and toward an articulation of more flexible ways of doing disability in public space” (211). She quotes from the wearer of the “DeafBlind and Badass” button, “a kind of prosthetic disclosure” (221), how the button does important rhetorical and resistance work:

It provides information, but it also confuses people. How is this girl moving around independently if she can’t see or hear? I find that confusion useful. It means that people are less likely to approach me with the assumption that that
they already know all about deafblindness because they read a book on Helen Keller in first grade. (Anonymous qtd. in Kaul 221)

I plan to use Sanchez’s analysis in future rhetoric and disability studies classes I teach.

In his excellent essay “Science Fiction, Affect, and Crip Self-Invention,” Josh Lukin analyzes Philip K. Dick’s novels to argue for a “space for shame” in disclosure rhetorics, problematizing some “conversion narratives” that pressure individuals to always feel pride in being disabled. Lukin argues that Philip K. Dick’s characters show “brave, aesthetically sensitive, and witty disabled protagonists whose presence in the world is as valuable as anyone’s” (238). Lukin’s writing in this piece is impressive in the way he is able to critique widely accepted views in a prose that is both professional and good humored, critical yet supportive.

Theri A. Pickens, in “Satire, Scholarship, and Sanity; or How to Make Mad Professors,” does a literary and cultural analysis of Mat Johnson’s novel, *Pym* (2012), a satire of Poe’s novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Her analysis addresses the question of “who gets to be mad” (253) in academia. She argues that society’s tolerance for “the nutty professor” stops “when the mad, nutty professor in question holds a marginalized identity or even several” (245). Her analysis highlights persuasively the double standard that racism can create, as well as the narrative that a faculty member of color is “mad,” when they are simply not conforming to preconceived expectations that they will participate in the papering over of racism in their institution.

In their essay on “Intellectual Disability in the University,” in the last section of this collection, “Institutional Change and Policy,” Brian Freedman, Laura T. Eisenman, Meg Grigal, and Debra Hart first provide an overview of the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act, which outlined guidance for universities regarding students with intellectual disabilities (ID). The authors point out that because of stigma, “Pride in a disability label or identity is not at the forefront for people with ID as it might be for other disability groups” (295). Their essay concludes with a number of helpful suggestions for better college experiences for students with ID, including more training for faculty, staff, and student leaders regarding universal design practices and more support for these students.

In “Accommodations and Disclosure for Faculty Members with Mental Disability,” Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, Amber M. O’Shea, Margaret Price, and Mark S. Salzer begin with a discussion of the AAUP procedures outlined in the 2012 “Accommodating Faculty Members Who Have Disabilities.” They then report on an anonymous national survey the authors conducted with faculty members who identified as having a mental disability. They conclude that the procedures in the AAUP document are “difficult, if not impossible, to
implement in actual practice” (311). They point out that because of possible stigma, disclosures regarding mental disabilities are even more fraught than other disability-related disclosures and that it is risky sometimes for faculty to even inquire about which office to contact about accommodations because that inquiry “can be tantamount to disclosure” (313). These difficulties may explain why only 15.9 percent of the faculty members who answered their survey reported that they requested accommodations at their institutions (315). They include a chart listing possible modifications they had included in their survey, asking respondents about their view of things like more time on projects, availability of quiet spaces, options to attend meetings virtually when necessary, and other such accommodations (317). The most prevalent issues, they found, concerned “time and physical environments” (318, emphasis theirs). The authors’ recommendations, as well as their charted summary of possible modifications, are generative and useful and could act as a valuable resource for faculty and for institutions attempting to negotiate the needs related to mental disability. The authors argue that the current “system for accommodation in US higher education is itself a barrier to access” (322). Theirs is a chapter that should be read and used by faculty and staff, as well as by any institution serious about fair access and modifications regarding mental disability.

All three of these critical works can help make attention to access a transformative frame for changes in education. These changes will help both disabled and nondisabled students better prepare to take on leadership roles in the institutions, companies, organizations, and communities they enter, and they can make higher education, and the institutions it influences, more equitable and accessible spaces for faculty and staff as well.

Works Cited