

# CIDR Teaching and Learning Bulletin

Information for People who Teach at the University of Washington

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## Including Disability as Diversity in Teaching

*“But here, in the blind leading the blind, lies a powerful enabling metaphor. Disability can create knowledge, open doors wider, build ramps to awareness that we all essentially have in us anyway. This happens when any body leads anybody”* (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 800).

While the idea of the blind leading the blind is often equated with futility, in the quote above, Brenda Brueggemann argues that the insight of disability can lead us to rethink our classrooms in ways that benefit all students and instructors. Disability is already in our lives and in our classrooms, and including disability as diversity in teaching means creating an accessible teaching environment where all students can succeed.

### Rethinking Disability

Including disability as diversity begins by reconsidering what disability is:

- Disability has social, political, and historical features, and in this sense is like racial and gendered identities. Disability is *not* simply a medical trait or something that needs “fixing.”
- Disability is about how bodies interact with existing environments. Some people with disabilities consider their major obstacles to be discrimination and being regarded as objects of pity and charity.
- Disability brings attention to the bodies we all live in. With 49.7 million people living with disabilities in the U.S., nearly everyone has some “connection” to disability. It’s a minority group that anyone might join at any time.
- The National Council on Education notes that nearly 10% of college freshmen have a disability. Many such students have “invisible” disabilities, such as learning disabilities.

### Why Rethink Disability in the Classroom?

The relationship of disability and the classroom has often been about what’s “required” – and it is true that if a student enters your class with a letter from Disability Resource Services, you are required to accommodate the student. However, thinking ahead about all the different sorts of bodies and abilities that will be in your class leads to an *inclusive pedagogy that enables all students*.

### Enabling Your Pedagogy for All Students

- **Plan ahead to make your course accessible.** Work to have syllabi and course readers ready before class begins. Also, make sure course websites are accessible. See <http://www.washington.edu/computing/accessible/>
- **Set the tone on the first day and in your syllabus** by communicating that all students are welcome in the course and taken seriously as learners.

- **Plan assignments so that students can work toward the same goal in different ways.** All students don’t need to do the same activity in order to reach a particular learning goal. Having students approach the material or assignment in different ways can lead to productive class discussions where students can teach each other.
- **Use multiple formats for instruction.** Students learn in different ways, and utilizing oral, verbal, textual, and kinesthetic means is key for stimulating and including all students. Try to overlap approaches; for example, make outlines available for lectures, provide opportunities for electronic interaction, and orally explain all printed assignments. All students will appreciate it.
- **Speak at a moderate pace for interpreters.** A moderate pace can benefit all students’ comprehension.
- **Include disability studies in your curriculum.** Bringing disability studies into the curriculum is a great way to make disability a natural part of your classroom. See the website (below) for more details!

### Disability Resources (a short list)

- Additional resources and implications for teaching: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/DisabilityStudies.htm>
- Disability Studies Minor at the UW: <http://depts.washington.edu/disstud/>
- Self-guided web tutorials for instructors: <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Faculty/>
- *Beyond Compliance* (Information on the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education): [http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/bccc\\_package.html](http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/bccc_package.html)

## CIDR

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## Including Disability as Diversity in Teaching

This issue of the *Bulletin* was developed by Amy Vidali, doctoral candidate in English at UW.

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The *CIDR Bulletin* provides people who teach at the University of Washington with brief descriptions of current topics related to teaching and learning in higher education. Previous issues of the *Bulletin* include:

- Developing a Teaching Portfolio
- Classroom Assessment of Teaching and Learning
- Preparing for the First Day of Class
- Classroom Observation
- Designing a Course
- TA Preparation Reconsidered
- Teaching through Discussion
- Transforming a Course
- Helping Student Writers Succeed
- Teaching a Service Learning Course
- Teaching Freshman Interest Groups
- Information Literacy: The Library Connection
- More and Better Class Participation
- Teaching, Learning, and Technology in a UW Classroom
- Helping Students Read Well
- Mentoring
- What Helps Students Learn?
- Inclusive Teaching
- Talking with Colleagues about Teaching
- How Do We Change the Way We Teach?
- Problem Solving in Groups
- Engaging Students in Discussion Online
- Developing a Professional Portfolio
- Pieces of the Writing Puzzle
- Teaching and Learning in Sections and Labs
- Writing a Teaching Statement
- Problem-Based Learning
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Learning from Student Feedback

Issues of the *Bulletin* are available at: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/TeachingLearningBulletin.html>

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### Questions for CIDR?

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to [info@cidr.washington.edu](mailto:info@cidr.washington.edu), or visit our web site: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/>



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- Do you have questions about teaching that you would like to see addressed in a future *Bulletin*?
- Has this issue of the *Bulletin* been helpful for you?



Please let us know by sending a message to [info@cidr.washington.edu](mailto:info@cidr.washington.edu)