Reducing Barriers for Students with Disabilities
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Ground Rules for Conversations
• Create a safe and open environment to grapple with and mull over concepts
• Recognize differing opinions come from different backgrounds, but all are with good intentions
• A willingness to examine what it is we think we know, and challenge ourselves to see where we can think differently

Social Construct
• Definition: Any phenomenon “invented” or “constructed” by participants in a particular culture or society, existing because people agree to behave as if it exists or follow certain conventional rules (Wikipedia)
• Acting/thinking without challenging or questioning why the construct is shaped as is

Historically, The Disability Social Construct Reflects The Medical Model
• Disability is a deficiency or abnormality
• Being disabled is negative or less than
• Disability resides in the individual
• The remedy for disability-related problems is cure or normalization of the individual
• The agent of remedy is the professional who affects the arrangements between the individual and society with a focus on the person

A Media Presentation of Disability

The Medical Model gives us the: Social Welfare Approach to Services
• Sort, label, and determine need (eligibility)
• Retrofit activities to fit needs (accommodations)
• Offer segregated or parallel services
• Disabled students are needy clients
• Disabled students have to ask (self-advocate) to be included in a system (a classroom) or society that does not fit the individual otherwise
Jerry Lewis speaks about the disabled and “Jerry’s Orphans”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tM4tTUMwGE

By Reframing the Concept of Disability, We Are Called to See That:

- Disability is a difference
- Disability, in itself is neutral
- “Disability” is derived from the interaction between the individual and society
- The environment is the focus of remedy and the agent of intervention can be anyone who can affect the design of an environment

Social Justice Concept

- Based on the concepts of human rights and equality
- Demands that people have equal rights and opportunities
- Full inclusion and participation
- Freedom from discrimination

Social-Political Model of Disability

- Human variation is natural and vital in the development of dynamic communities
- Disability is a social/political category that includes people with a variety of conditions who are bound together by common experiences (oppression and marginalization)
- Inclusion and full participation are a matter of social justice

Social-Political Model of Disability, Continued:

- Design is powerful and profoundly influences our daily lives
- Good design is essential for achieving inclusion and full participation
- Creating usable, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive environments is a shared responsibility

The Faculty-Student Interface

- Faculty and TAs are the “Designers” of the classroom experience
- Students sign up for classes without a lot of information about the design and delivery of the course content
- Students rely on what other students have said about our classes - How reliable is that?
- At this stage, NIU relies on accommodations that are developed with DRC staff and students and result in a Letter of Accommodation
Study: Student Feedback Regarding Barriers to Using Disability Services Office

• Identity Issues
  – Desire to shed stigma of high school identity
  – Desire to not integrate the presence of disability into their identity
  – Desire for self-sufficiency
• Insufficient Knowledge
  – Question fairness of receiving accommodations
  – Confusion about accessibility and ODS services
  – Lack of training in how to explain their disability to others

Study: Student Feedback Regarding Barriers to Using Disability Services Office, continued

• Desire to avoid negative social reactions
  – Fear of resentment of other students for special treatment
  – Not wanting to be singled out

Study: Student Feedback Regarding Barriers to Using Disability Services Office, continued

• Perceived quality and usefulness of services
  – Expediency of service delivery
  – Lack of compatibility with accommodations
• Negative experiences with professors

Where does this take us?

• We work on multiple planes
• Faculty and staff are key partners
• Students come to us influenced by their K-12 experiences
• The DRC is responsible for student accommodations, and approach this recognizing design and delivery of course content is crucial
• The 3 parties need to dialogue with each other in an effort to design a more accessible educational environment
• We can think in terms of Universal Design