University of Rochester Disability Studies Cluster  
Founded: 2011

Background

Defining Disability
The 2011 World Report on Disability produced jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, estimates that there are over one billion people with disabilities in the world today, of whom nearly 200 million experience significant difficulties. A common conceptual model for “disability” has been described by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) by the WHO whereby disability is “an umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions.” An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a barrier experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations (WHO, www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en).

Disability as a Common Experience
The ICF proposes a paradigm which views disability not as a state that separates a person from being healthy, or as a condition that only impacts specific individuals, but as a common experience across age, gender, and culture/ethnicity.

Discrimination & Disparities
Despite numerous agencies, legislation, and policies focused on disability-related issues, people with disabilities in the US continue to experience discrimination in and barriers to employment and social opportunities, unequal access to educational resources, disparities in health outcomes, and higher levels of poverty than do other minority groups (USDHHS, 2005; Fremstad, 2009). The conscious and unconscious attitudes of “ableism” in the US are entrenched in our environments, unspoken expectations, and institutionalized systems, (e.g., the deficit-based medical model) such that those who are not “normally or typically developing” are at a significant disadvantage. Thus, the experience of disability is one that isolates and denies people access to the places, services, relationships, and benefits experienced by people who are (temporarily) able-bodied.

Next Steps
1. Start the conversation. Through opportunities for awareness, education, and shared experiences, we will gain an understanding of the barriers to full-inclusion in society for people with disabilities.
2. Become an ally. Notice who is included, and who is not. Notice, when things are done the way they’ve always been done. Question kindly and thoughtfully.

Mission
The mission of the Disabilities Studies Cluster (DiSC) is to inform, educate, and connect employees and students across the University of Rochester in order to provide a welcoming, comfortable, and inclusive environment for all people, with a particular emphasis on individuals with disabilities, who are traditionally marginalized in academic and other communities. DiSC is composed of staff, faculty, and students from all areas of the University. DiSC welcomes and encourages members from community agencies and partners that represent people with disabilities, or that have an interest in contributing to the mission of this group.

Updated: 9/8/16
Goals

The University of Rochester seeks to define, establish, and maintain an inclusive and productive environment for all people: students, staff, faculty, volunteers, contractors, and vendors. Toward this end, the UR has several goals, one of which is to create an inclusive community. Members of the University’s community come from different geographical areas, represent differences in ethnicities, religious beliefs, values, and points of view; they may be physically different, have different intellectual interests, or have different abilities.

Thus, DiSC will support the University of Rochester’s goals by:
- fostering and supporting collaborative and interdisciplinary research efforts among staff, students, and faculty related to disability and diversity,
- providing opportunities for increased awareness of the challenges faced by people with disabilities,
- dispelling myths while highlighting the achievements of people with disabilities,
- affording members of the University community ways to be allies to people with disabilities, and
- designing the infrastructure necessary to create and sustain a university-based, interdisciplinary Center for Disability Studies.

DiSC Activities

- Research promotion and mentoring opportunities
  - DiSC Journal Club
  - DiSC Book Club
  - Poster session at Annual Conference
- Seminars, workshops, and conferences
  - Monthly Virtual Grand Rounds
  - Annual Conference
- Guest speakers on disability-related topics of interest to the community, employees and students
  - Annual Conference
  - Film Series collaborations with student groups
- Increased awareness of the importance of including people with disabilities in all aspects of the medical, educational, and local communities
  - Sub-committees to tackle specific issues, e.g. Disability Awareness Campaign (Sept 2016), Campus Accessibility Map (2015)
  - Co-sponsorship of community and campus events on the topic of disability

Contact

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