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# Intertheory: Disability, Accommodation, and the Writing of Composition

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INTERTHEORY: DISABILITY, ACCOMMODATION, AND THE WRITING OF  
COMPOSITION

by

Adam Pacton

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT  
INTERTHEORY: DISABILITY, ACCOMMODATION, AND THE WRITING OF  
COMPOSITION

by

Adam Pacton

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015  
Under the Supervision of Anne F. Wysocki

Combining approaches from composition studies, legal studies, and disability studies, this project theorizes a new model of accommodation in composition (and beyond): “complex accommodation.” Complex accommodation frames disability as critical *kairos*; in other words, I argue that the encounter of disability and attendant necessity for accommodation creates a moment of practical and theoretical dissonance in composition that may reveal under-critiqued norms in individual classrooms, writing programs, and the field as a whole. This project provides the theoretical grounding and articulation of complex accommodation while also creating practical accommodational heuristics for instructors and writing programs.

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## Introduction

The origins of this project are difficult to trace, and like any origin narrative of myself, it has become necessarily fabular and fictive even to me (Butler 39). That said, all fables worth remembering start with a good story.

While still in coursework as a Rhetoric and Composition PhD student, I participated in a writing workshop in which I was asked to develop a previous seminar paper into an elaborated, publishable article. I chose a paper written on Bakhtin and on Nancy Welch's idea of sideshadowing and got to work.<sup>1</sup> In short order, I was as restless as Bakhtin shows all texts and writers really are. The target journal, the peer- and professor-reviews, and the general structures of acceptability encoded in the field of Composition Studies were quietly squeezing the text at the same time I was trying to open it up to new possibilities. I felt that in both form and content the piece was merely another minor variation in a series of similar papers and articles. So, I turned to my teacher.

I expressed my concern and uneasiness for my work along with my confusion regarding the actual contours of Composition Studies, a sometimes protean field. In response, my professor issued me an invitation and a challenge. In general terms, she asked me to table the piece and address a number of related yet more fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> In "One Student's Many Voices: Reading, Writing, and Responding with Bakhtin" and "Sideshadowing Teacher Response," Nancy Welch describes the possibilities of approaching student texts—and response to student texts—in a way that recognizes the inherent instabilities and uncertainties in such texts and capitalizes upon such indeterminacy by creating new opportunities for dialogue in texts: "In contrast with the much more common narrative device of foreshadowing, which fixes our attention on a predetermined future, sideshadowing redirects our attention to the present moment, its multiple conflicts, its multiple possibilities." (376-77).



questions, questions which might help me to work out some of the frustrations and anxieties I was feeling. She asked: What are you doing when you teach composition, what's at stake for students in the composition classroom, and what really is "Composition?" I was allowed and challenged to eschew formal requirements and instead to work through these questions in whatever ways I saw fit. I accepted and what followed was the beginning of a personal and professional process of destabilization.

Over the course of a few weeks, I hammered at my computer and at my sense of Composition Studies' purposes, articulations, and interpellations. The resultant text reflected my sense of the conflicts within the field and within myself as a teacher and scholar of composition. In its genre-bending construction, it probed what the field permits, forbids, foregrounds, and elides. More importantly, it presented students, language, and the text itself as irreducibly complex and only partially accessible. With this realization—with this unstable, confusing, eclectic, and (I thought) beautiful text—I stood in front of the composition classes I was teaching that semester and felt like the doctor from Peter Shaffer's *Equus*:

In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place—yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do—yet I do essential things.

Irreversible, terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads! I need—more desperately than my children need me—a way of seeing in the dark. (108-09)

In one sense, invoking Dr. Dysart's struggles with his methods and ends as a corollary of my own as a compositionist smacks of hyperbole, but in another sense the association rings true. If compositionists take seriously the imbrications of identity, language, and

rhetoric (as I think they do), then the process, product, and even play of composition becomes (as I say in my exploratory piece) “very fucking serious” (Pacton 77). My exploratory/experimental text and the process of composing it led me to a skeptical, conflicted place thrumming with dissonances. The text both describes such dissonances but also enacts them formally in the ways it plays with various multimodal elements and polyvocality. The reaction in workshop was, perhaps, unsurprising.

My peers approached my text in much the same way that I did: with confusion and some degree of discomfort. While they were undoubtedly generous readers, their comments and recommendations pulled the text centripetally towards something that more closely resembled an academic article in structure, form, and epistemological and rhetorical moves. While I discussed how our teacher had offered me an alternative textual invitation, our group still had difficulty moving outside of our frames of reference for how a “Composition text” ought to appear and function. Even so, I continued to experiment and see where the text could take me and the work of Composition Studies rather than focusing overmuch on aligning the piece with my notions of what the field expected as acceptable. When I brought the new text to my teacher, she praised the experimental effort, stretching, and flexing that the text afforded me, and she told me to take what I had learned in constructing the text and rewrite it as a conventional academic essay. Upon hearing this, I was conflicted.

I understood that we were participating in a writing workshop dedicated to crafting a text for academic publication, but I also knew that the text I composed was an organic whole. I believed that the proposed revision was a fundamental remediation and that such remediation would essentially change what was important about the piece. I was

conflicted insofar as I understood my teacher's motivations and concern that such writing was heuristically valuable but might lack professional capital. So, I decided to see what scholars and writers in other contexts might think of what I had written—"Composing: *An Ars Logica*"—and I submitted the piece for publication at *Writing on the Edge*, a journal broadly dedicated to writing and the teaching of writing. The piece was accepted and was published as "imaginative nonfiction." Although it was not published as an academic text, it still received a modicum of notice and even approval within the Composition Studies community, with Andrea Lunsford calling it "seriously delightful, demonstrating the need for an 'ars logica' while all the time providing the outline for one" ("Do You Read WOE?"). This left me wondering whether I had created a serious piece or just a "seriously delightful" curiosity to be discussed in multimodal composition courses.

Composition Studies has shown great tolerance for and acceptance of texts that push the boundaries of conventional academic forms. Richard Miller's influential piece "The Nervous System"—which we read in the course of the writing workshop—combines poetry, narrative, memoir, and more "academic" discourse. Even more famously, Kathleen Blake Yancey once admonished the field to rethink the shape of composition and academic texts, arguing that postmodernity and the proliferation of different types of writing call for evolving conceptions of writing, writers, and their attendant interrelationships ("Made").

Even though the field seemed amenable to "non-standard" writing and the implications that such writing could entail—a blurring of the lines between academic and creative writing, a destabilization of Composition Studies' articulations with various

epistemological stances, the situating of composition courses within schools and the academy as a whole—I wondered whether Composition Studies was an open door or a shut window. Although the field calls for more capacious understandings of the writer and his/her writing, there are still traces in the literature and within writing programs of an implicit subscription to a Cartesian subject, a subject whose mental processes—including, paramountly, his or her choices—are transparent to him or herself. In other words, I was concerned that certain commitments in Composition Studies to a “well-formed” text and its attendant “well-formed” composer (there is a mutually-constitutive dialectic between the two, after all) lead to critical tensions and perhaps intransigencies within the field.

The relationship between normed textuality and identity bothered me because of the ways certain sorts of linguistic performances might function as broader measures of competency. As a nontraditional student, I had long bucked against the idea that producing particular texts transparently indexed my ability in anything other than writing those particular, contextually-bounded texts. I had felt that any textual production, any linguistic act, was a snarled negotiation and that drawing conclusions about a writer’s identity and/or abilities based upon their writing could be an inverted species of *ad hominem* fallacy. At the time of the workshop, I had trouble disentangling these issues. *Ars Logica* made sense. It was not purely self-reflexive, it impacted audiences in clear ways, and it was accepted as valuable by notable voices in the community; however, it was not clear—even to me—how this piece indexed my identity, my skill, or even my voice. This confusion and its attendant anxiety about the interrelationships between my

voice, performance, and identity were intensified by the complexities surrounding these same interrelationships as enacted in my son's experience of language and identity.

Shortly before I began the writing workshop, my oldest son was diagnosed as autistic ("severely autistic" to use the clinician's precise term). At the time of diagnosis, he was almost 3 years old, and what words he had possessed before his second birthday had retreated into silence. According to the diagnostician and what I found in my own research, those words and any new ones were likely to remain in that silence. The seemingly-best-case scenario was that he would learn ostensive and instrumentalist communication such as pointing and hand-over-hand manipulation/indication, and such communication would be behavioral and not necessarily indicative of higher cognitive functioning. The seemingly-worst-case scenario was that he would withdraw completely without even the simulacrum of communication. In either case, the story went, his intentionality and rhetoricality would be limited if not completely absent given his particular neurological makeup. This understanding of autism, communicative disorders, and disability (as I will be arguing) is reductionist, normative, and shows a particular medicalized understanding of disability; this understanding of autism, communicative disorders, and disability is also echoed in a number of quarters in Composition Studies, as I hope to show in the coming pages.

As most any person with regular contact with autistic people will tell you, these people are rhetorical, intentional, and communicative. Their modes of communication might not closely match "normal" or "typical" types of communication, but communication nonetheless occurs in various ways. In Composition Studies, however, some scholars have approached disability—mental and psychosocial disability, in

particular—as my son’s diagnostician did: as deficiency and lack. These scholars seemingly locate rhetorical deficiency in the individual, and they identify inability with that individual’s ignorance, sloppiness, willfulness, or native incapacity. In a sense, the localization of rhetoric and communicative responsibility/success in the individual rhetor is a core element of Current-Traditional rhetoric, which in assuming stable objective scales of valuation for stable objective texts attempts to construct a limp transitivity from writer to text to audience:

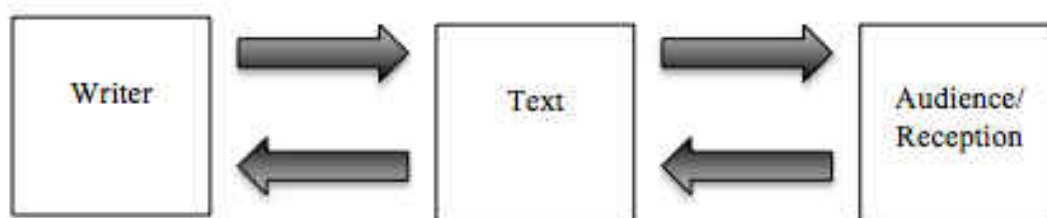


Figure 1. Current Traditional Rhetoric’s Textual Production/Reception

The transitivity is bi-directional in the sense that the creation and reception of a text flows from the writer, and the breakdown of the text and/or its reception flows back to the writer. In short, following Current-Traditional rhetoric, “problems” associated with a text are traceable to the writer’s lack of ability in execution and are not attributable to problems or complications in other quarters. As Berlin puts it, “The emphasis in this rhetoric is on adapting what has been discovered outside the rhetorical enterprise to the minds of the hearers. The study of rhetoric thus focuses on developing skill in arrangement and style” (770). Following post-structuralism, social-constructionism, and the broader imbrications and associations of postmodern theories with Composition Studies, this model became deeply problematic: the Cartesian subject ceased to resemble

an exploded diagram and, instead, simply exploded: big-A “Authors” died and plural, protean authors took their place; texts became polysemous and underdetermined; selves became multiple, performative, and social; the rhetorical situation and the relationships between its elements became much, much more complex. If this was the state of the field, I wondered why some compositionists still subscribed—in whole or in part—to the ideologies associated with Current Traditional Rhetoric; specifically, why did some compositionists still locate “disability” associated with writing within a static writer and his or her texts rather than within the discourses and relationships constructing writer, text, context, and audience?

My work on *Ars Logica* and my research into my son’s linguistic and rhetorical abilities led me to begin researching how compositionists approached the relationships among cognitive and psycho-social disabilities and the construction/reception of texts. In some cases, I was delighted by what I saw, particularly with reference to autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and their rhetoricity. Paul Heilker and Melanie Yergeau, for example, write about autism as “a rhetoric,” a way of “being in the world through language, through invention, structure, and style” (487). This framing makes visible and destabilizes normed rhetorics associated with more positivistic or Current Traditional approaches to communication. In such a way, what might *a priori* be cast as deficiency may instead be presented as difference. As Yergeau puts it, “Coming to autism rhetorically recasts items such as ‘difficulty smiling’—from pitiful disease symptom into autistic discourse convention, from a neurological screwup into an autistic confluence of structure and style” (489). This more theoretical characterization of autism as a rhetoric (in the way Heilker and Yergeau mean) is also echoed in pedagogical treatments of ASD

like those represented in Gerstle and Walsh's collection, *Autism Spectrum Disorders in the College Composition Classroom: Making Writing Instruction More Accessible for All Students*. While the chapters in the book present ways to productively accommodate ASD in the composition classroom, they do so with the understanding that such accommodation can make composition more accessible for all students (as the title of the book implies). While I found this collection, Heilker and Yergeau's rhetoricizing of ASD, and other works on the intersections between disability and Composition Studies heartening, I was also troubled by what I found in some composition scholarship and in my institutional experiences with accommodation.

In her article, "Neurodiversity," Anne Jurecic characterizes ASD in terms of rhetorical limitations rather than potentials. In her article, Jurecic relates her diagnosis of "Gregory" (a student) as having Asperger's Syndrome (a form of "high-functioning" autism). Jurecic's "diagnosis" is problematic and troubling as "Gregory" had not previously been diagnosed as having Asperger's Syndrome and "...as far as I know, he remains undiagnosed and is perhaps still unaware of his Asperger's" (428). In other words, Jurecic performed the diagnosis. Leaving aside the ethical and colonial issues associated with arm-chair diagnosis, Jurecic's article is ultimately more worrisome for her conclusions regarding the rhetorical potentials of writers on the autism spectrum, particularly that "for the student with Asperger's, a pedagogical practice focused on rhetorical strategies and shifting audiences may have little chance of succeeding" (433). Asperger's, in other words, precludes full rhetoricity because of purportedly inherent deficits in interpersonal communication. To her credit, Jurecic does go on to discuss how individualizing Gregory's instruction allowed her to find negotiative approaches to



writing and rhetoric instruction and that Gregory was able to finish the semester “performing solidly in the middle of the class” (435). Jurecic ends her article, ultimately, calling for renewed attention to what medical, scientific, and psychological experts have to say about difference and disability with the hope of finding a “middle ground between a constructionist rejection of scientific positivism and the extreme of biological determinism” (439). She believes that learning about “innate” neurological differences that autistic individuals have can help us “expand our sense of the depth and reach of difference—not so that we can exclude, but so that we can teach” (439). This seems, at first blush, like a positive approach to the differences that autistic students bring to the composition classroom, but a number of scholars strongly reacted against Jurecic’s article.

In “Two Comments on ‘Neurodiversity,’” Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Jay Dolmage, and Paul Heilker critically respond to Jurecic’s article. Although the authors are pleased to see Jurecic arguing for an individualized approach to working with students on the autism spectrum, they argue that her position strongly aligns with the “normate stance” which leaves the normate (the unmarked norm) under-criticized along with the “monolithic” academic text that autistic writers are seemingly unable to produce (314). The authors argue that Jurecic’s article takes part in a discourse of disability medicalization (particularly the medicalization of autism) that obscures the socially-constructed nature of disability (315-16). Most pointedly, the authors frame Jurecic’s search for diagnosis as reflective of her abelist position:

A teacher, faced with a student who doesn’t quite “fit” assumptions about “normality” and doesn’t thrive on “teaching-as-usual” practices, seeks to explain

or diagnose the student's "deficiency" or "deviation" rather than or before reflecting on and perhaps revising his or her own assumptions and teaching practices. (316)

A critical, informed, and more ethical approach, the authors argue, should not rely on medicalizations that reinforce a narrow and hegemonic understanding of "the norm"; instead, the concept of neurodiversity should help to challenge and disrupt normalization (317-18). In responding to these authors, Jurecic defends the use of medical approaches to help understand ASD, arguing that such approaches can be useful to compositionists if "handled with sensitivity and intelligence" (324); however, she takes no issue with her own "diagnosis" of Gregory, even praising the "valuable information" that such a label gave her about Gregory and how to best teach him (324).

Jurecic's silence on her construction of Gregory's diagnosis concerned me insofar as such labels and labeling can quickly, quietly, and insidiously shape the horizons of possibility in interactions and evaluations as they tend to implicate a consequent epistemological and ideological approach (approaching autism as a medical concern rather than a social one, as Jurecic's critics point out). More telling and troubling, though, is that Jurecic is not a clinician, and so her diagnosis carries with it an epistemological and ideological approach that she does not adequately understand and must, of necessity, merely approach in an asymmetrically authoritative manner: the extension, possibilities, and limitations of "autism" and "autistic writers" is taken on faith and, perhaps, it is a bad faith understanding of disability, as disability studies scholars would argue.

While I found Jurecic's approach to autism disquieting in the ways it approached autism and writerly ability, I was happy to find that many scholars—scholars like

Lewiecki-Wilson, Dolmage, Heilker and others—approached autism and disability more complexly, drawing from post-modern constructions of identity, textuality, and even disability. But scholarship is only one indicator of the state of the art. I began to look not just to theory and pedagogy, but also to administration to try and understand the relationships between composition and disability, and I came to realize that many instructors I knew—myself included—often relied uncritically on institutional channels to dictate how to work with disabled students.

Many compositionists—indeed, many college instructors in various fields of study—rely on accessibility or accommodation statements to frame how they will work with disabled students. An accommodation statement is a university-mandated syllabus addendum that addresses how an instructor is willing to provide accommodations in his or her class in association with a campus accommodation or accessibility service. While these statements often provide invaluable means for making classrooms more accessible to some disabled students, they can also discursively construct “disability” in ways that can bureaucratize accommodation, as the following memo from the Provost and Vice Chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee shows:

In the spirit of providing equal access to students with disabilities and in compliance with state and federal laws, the University is required to provide accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is expected that a statement be placed on your syllabus informing students to contact you to arrange needed accommodations. Students are to provide a copy of their Verified Individual Services and Accommodations (VISA) to you to indicate the accommodations they may need in your class. If a student requests

accommodations, but does not have a VISA, please direct him/her to the Student Accessibility Center (SAC.) (Britz)

The memo above positions accommodation as a requirement to be fulfilled (“in compliance with,” “the University is required to,” “documented,” “it is expected that,” “students are to provide”) rather than as a mechanism to create new classroom possibilities and affordances. Perhaps more interesting, though, is the fact that the machinery of accommodation is approached as uniform across the university. Of course, if a student were to go the accessibility center, he or she would undoubtedly receive accommodations designed for his or her particular classes, but this locates accommodation outside of the curriculum; accommodation becomes, like the accessibility statement in syllabi, an addendum. Furthermore, at least in the above example, students need to present a “Verified Individual Services and Accommodations,” or “VISA,” to receive an accommodation. The verification of disabilities is fraught from not only theoretical standpoints<sup>2</sup> but also economic ones: economically disadvantaged students who cannot afford third-party diagnoses cannot usually receive disability accommodations. What do administrative accommodation practices like those above signify for Composition Studies?

A number of compositionists have written on the problems of accessibility statements and the ways such statements might position disability (see Wood and Madden), but I wondered and continue to wonder what it means in broader terms for Composition Studies that disabled students need to be accommodated at all in

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<sup>2</sup> This includes, but is not limited, to the fact that the ill-chosen “V.I.S.A.” acronym constructs a disabled student as an outsider or resident alien, thus reinscribing the medicalized “us vs. them” dynamic between the disabled and the non-disabled.

composition classrooms and within the theories that underwrite those classrooms. If accommodation needs to occur in a composition classroom, then there must be normalizations and stabilities within that classroom; in other words, if someone's particular way of being-in-the world necessitates adaptation and/or accommodation in the composition classroom, then there must be some set of normalized practices or ideologies that favor *other* groups of students' ways of being in the world. Depending upon one's theoretical perspective, these normalizations themselves may create the disabilities in their construction of a norm or set of norms.<sup>3</sup> But where do these normalizations—whether pedagogical, theoretical, or administrative—come from? Are they endemic to composition? How do we identify them? What do we do when (if) we uncover them? In Composition Studies who accommodates whom/what, and what are the implications of this relationship?

The above questions generated by my increasing personal and professional research in the intersections of Disability Studies and Composition Studies dovetailed with the questions generated by my experience in my writing workshop. This dissertation springs from the confluence of these questions. It is an extended inquiry into accommodation in Composition Studies, inquiry that I argue leads back to the heuristic questions my teacher posed for me to help channel my confusion: what are you doing when you teach composition, what's at stake for students in the composition classroom, and what really is "Composition?" In the course of this project I try to address these questions in a reasoned and detailed fashion, but as becomes clear in the final chapters,

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<sup>3</sup> This perspective can be identified with the "social model" of disability, which I explore at length in Chapter 2.

there are no authoritative or easy answers. Or, to put it simultaneously more cryptically and more accurately: there is no “Answer”; there are only “answers.”

By considering accommodation from legal perspectives and through a Disability Studies lens, I argue that current approaches to accommodation in composition can be simplistic, limiting, and reliant upon other fields’ and agencies’ constructions of identity and disability. This limited approach frames accommodation within a rhetoric of requirement. By “rhetoric of requirement,” I refer to a discursive approach that centers accommodation as a process essentially concerned with the fulfillment of institutional requirements that insure minimally-mandated “fit” between a disabled individual and the environment wherein his or her disabilities become salient. In short, a rhetoric of requirement constructs disability as something that must be fit into an extant system, according to prescribed procedures, and with minimal impact to extant conditions within the system. Following a rhetoric of requirement, one might ask “What must I do with a disabled individual?” or “How am I obligated to fit this disabled person into this classroom, workplace, or public environment?” In contrast to a rhetoric of requirement, I forward the idea that accommodation can instead be approached through a “rhetoric of affordance.” A “rhetoric of affordance” constructs disability as a critical encounter wherein “fit” might be explored and reconfigured: I argue that the encounter of disability indicates normalization and privileging within systems which gives rise to disability, and such indication affords possibilities to critique normalization and privileging within the system wherein disability is encountered. Such critique can lead to deeper, more nuanced understanding of disablement within particular milieus, and it can also lead to a more robust understanding of the milieus themselves. This can, in turn, create possibilities to

better fit institutions to individuals and not the other way around and, in so doing, disrupt the very nature of the “disability.” Following a rhetoric of affordance, one might ask “What does this disability reveal about the conditions that lead to its emergence?” or “What opportunities for critique and transformation does the emergence of this disability create?”

Within this project, I concretize a rhetoric of affordance by developing a notion of “complex accommodation,” an approach that locates disability at the intersections of embodied difference in particular classrooms, constructions of disability and the field of Composition Studies, and programmatic histories/theories/institutional commitments. Complex accommodation recognizes the complexity in these interrelationships and approaches the encounter of disability as *kairos*: it is a moment of normative unmasking wherein instructors can begin to explore and possibly transform the unmarked pedagogical, theoretical, environmental, and administrative practices that disable certain students and normalize or even privilege others. Such an approach, I argue, may result in more ethical and theoretically-sound treatments of disability in the composition classroom, but it also creates a critically-reflective stance which productively foregrounds how “composition” and the doing of composition is situated. By working through a set of simple heuristics, composition instructors can enact a complex dialectic that helps them to better understand these relationships, the ways in which they shape a composition classroom, and the ways in which the relationships may be adjusted to better accommodate all students.

This dissertation is divided into five additive chapters. Chapter 1 traces the legislative history of accommodation in higher education from Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 through the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008. I show how academic programs are only required to accommodate students with disabilities when such accommodation does not present an undue operational or ideological burden to those programs. Whether such a burden exists is tied to each program's ability to articulate and undergo a "deliberative procedure" (*Guckenberger v. Boston*) wherein the program can show whether or not a proposed accommodation is reasonable given the requirements of that program for a particular course (and/or program of study). I argue that the laws on accommodation and those that frame the deliberative procedure "test" (*Wynne v. Tufts*) create a legal impetus for writing programs to consider how "essential" their practices and procedures are within their particular programs and larger institutions. However, I argue that this impetus conceals a danger: framing disability in composition solely in legal terms neglects the ethical and theoretical dimensions of accommodation, and I take up such aspects in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 moves beyond legal approaches to disability and instead utilizes the theoretical apparatus of Disability Studies to complicate what it means to have a disability and, by extension, what it means to accommodate a disability. Drawing on these complications, I argue that a nuanced approach to disability recognizes both the embodied and socially-constructed aspects of disability. I forward the idea that rhetorics of requirement—such as legalistic approaches—can elide the socially-constructed nature of disability and miss the critical opportunities for systemic theoretical and practical revision that "complex accommodation" can afford.

Chapter 3 builds upon the work of Chapters 1 and 2 by fleshing out "complex accommodation" as it might occur within a Composition Studies framework. I show how



compositionists face a minimum of legal compulsion when it comes to accommodation, but I argue that complex accommodation invites compositionists to engage in a special sort of recursive and reflective ethical, pedagogical, theoretical, and administrative deliberative procedure and that such a procedure can shift accommodation from a rhetoric of requirement to a rhetoric of affordance. In other words, I argue that complex accommodation can help compositionists fundamentally and productively think through their work not just with disabled students but with all students. To this end, Chapter 3 includes heuristics to help instructors work through complex accommodation in their individual classrooms, writing programs, and larger institutions.

Chapter 4 concretizes the work of Chapter 3 by providing and elaborating two cases of complex accommodation. In one case, I describe how complexly accommodating a student who was having severe seizures in class led to a new set of classroom accommodations, programmatic revisions of attendance policies, and an uncovering of commitments to physical presence within composition studies. In another case, I show how complex accommodation can work prior to particular encounters of disability, arguing that such thought experiments can reveal fault lines within individual classrooms or programs. Using the student-teacher conference as my starting point, I trace the situatedness of the conference in my own pedagogy and in the identity of my writing program, and I trouble the continuance of the practice as a result of theoretical and practical inconsistencies in the goals of conferencing. Ultimately, I present a conflicted position wherein my own theorizations of the conference might entail its abandonment, but its programmatic position requires its continuation in my classroom. Of critical importance, I argue, is the fact that this is not a failure of complex

accommodation but is instead a foregrounding of how possibilities of individual accommodations are constructed along multiple vectors: an individual student's embodied disability, an instructor's particular pedagogy, an instructor's theoretical commitments, a writing program's requirements, and the larger institution's requirements. Complex accommodation uncovers how the limits and affordances of accommodations can track and work with and through such vectors.

Chapter 5 addresses the potential objections, pitfalls, and areas for further inquiry with regards to complex accommodation in Composition Studies. In particular, I argue that there are three main objections that might be associated with complex accommodation: fears that complex accommodation might lower standards, concerns that the ways in which it models disability might obscure what a disability actually is, and worries that complex accommodation might not be equally feasible across institutions. While I argue that these sorts of objections can be productively answered, Chapter 5 issues a call for further inquiry insofar as the current project is largely critical and theoretical. While complex accommodation is intuitively appealing and potentially transformative for all stakeholders, it remains a mere abstraction until it is put into practice at different colleges and universities. Ethnographic research is needed to see how instructors (and programs) might implement such an approach, how students might respond to it, and how the field as a whole might react to it.

I end the project with the same questions that started it, but this time they are an invitation to other compositionists: What are you doing when you teach composition, what's at stake for students in the composition classroom, and what really is "Composition?" I don't pretend to have answered the questions in the course of this

project, and indeed, I think I raise more questions than I answer. However, I think I show why these questions—especially in the context of working with students with disabilities—are worth asking.

## **Chapter 1: The Americans with Disabilities Act, “Reasonable Accommodation,” and Legislated Essentialism**

### Introduction

From 2011-12, 6.4 million children received special education services in public K-12 schools, with a full 13 percent of the total number of children in public schools receiving disability services (“Children and Youth with Disabilities”). For post-secondary educators, this figure may or may not be startling; however, the fact that 11 percent of undergraduate students and 7 percent of post baccalaureate students report having a disability (“Number and Percentage”) should give any educator pause.<sup>4</sup>

The passage of legislation affecting students with disabilities in primary, secondary and post-secondary contexts has helped students navigate K-12 schools more successfully, resulting in higher enrollments in post-secondary institutions. This increase has begun to draw the attention of educators, administrators, and scholars: literature on the accommodation of disabilities has begun to proliferate, and Disability Studies programs are moving beyond specialized certifications to become full-fledged undergraduate and graduate programs (Taylor). Some scholars have even speculated that we find ourselves in the midst of a paradigm shift from postmodernism to “dismodernism,” the theoretical position that the only commonality shared among people is difference and interdependence (Davis 311). Against this backdrop, scholars and teachers of Composition Studies find themselves in a position where they must not only acknowledge the disabled students in their classrooms, but they must also confront

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<sup>4</sup> These figures are based on self-reported disability. Given that many students choose not to report their disability (or “pass”), these figures are likely higher.

disability and working with students with disabilities as fundamental material conditions of the teaching and doing of composition.

Within Composition Studies, a number of prominent scholars have already focused on disability and how it comes to bear on the practice of, and thinking about, composition. As a broad indicator, the Conference on College Composition now has a Committee on Disability Issues devoted to making the annual conference more accessible, promoting inclusive practices, and researching disabilities issues as they come to bear on the teaching and doing of writing (“Committee on Disability Issues”). Some scholars explore the intersections of Composition Studies and disability issues by parsing the rhetoric of disability and representations of disability and disabled persons (Dolmage; Heilker and Yergeau). Others use discourse analysis to trouble how disabled identities function within the milieus related to Composition Studies (Kerschbaum, “Avoiding”). Still others try to create and compile pedagogical approaches to working with particular disabilities within the composition classroom (Gerstle and Walsh). Some of these disability-oriented compositionists have even begun to gain broad attention and recognition within the field, such as when Margaret Price’s book *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* was selected as a winner of the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s Outstanding Book Award in 2013 (“CCCC Outstanding Book Award”) and hailed by some as a book that “will radically transform the terrain of academic life for the better, for everyone” (Kerschbaum, “Rev. of Mad”). There are indications, however, that such disciplinary shifts may be missing critical opportunities to fundamentally rethink the relationships among disability, identity, composition pedagogy, and composition theory.

The slow shift towards a focus on disability within the discipline is laudable and exciting, particularly because the act of accommodation might create new pedagogical, theoretical, and ideological possibilities for Composition Studies and for the ways in which compositionists approach disability and disabled students. In the pages that follow, I argue that a careful theorization of accommodation might disrupt what it means to teach or “do” composition, but before compositionists can really inquire into how they might best accommodate students with disabilities in the composition classroom, teachers of composition must ask what ramifications the concept—not merely the activity—of accommodation produces for Composition Studies.

This project focuses on what it means to “accommodate” a student within a composition course and what such accommodation signifies for the broader field of Composition Studies. This is not to say that the current project is a descriptive state of the art in terms of accommodation or even a prescriptive approach to the teaching of composition, though there are elements of both here. This inquiry does not begin by asking how a composition class can “fit” a disability or disabilities into its workings or how Composition Studies’ theories can make sense of disability. Instead, I begin by parsing accommodation and disability on legal and conceptual levels, exploring how “disability” and “accommodation” may be troubled and destabilized before turning to how Composition Studies works with—and might work with—disability. In such a manner, I will show that reasoned critiques of the mechanisms of accommodation and the models of disability lead to certain kinds of critique of Composition Studies and that such critiques result in an approach to Composition Studies wherein accommodation both allows and calls for a rethinking of the theoretical and practical contours of the field.

Accordingly, I begin this critique not within the context of Composition Studies, per se, but with the broader legislation that pertains to accommodation.

I begin with legislation on accommodation because disability and the accommodation thereof are usually approached legalistically; in other words, various institutions and their individual agents tend to approach the accommodation of disability through legal requirement and alignment. So, this project initially frames the accommodation of disability not as an ethical need for compositionists to consider but as a pressing legal requirement. There are, of course, ethical and disciplinary imperatives to consider in relation to accommodating students in the composition classroom<sup>5</sup>, and inquiry into such imperatives can help the field orient itself within social and institutional networks and relations of power.<sup>6</sup> Starting this project's inquiry instead from the legal-requirement standpoint results in two critical consequences. First, such a starting point mirrors many extant approaches to accommodation (What are we required to do? For whom are we required to do it?), but it also destabilizes the legal-appeal approach by tracing how the spirit of the laws are not followed in their execution, which calls into question the justness of mere *prima facie* appeals to the law. Second, carefully tracking accommodation legislation results in a very particular type of inquiry that leads to a

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<sup>5</sup> One might even argue that CCCC's affirmation of the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (SRTOL) contains such imperatives within it (at least for those students whose disabilities lead to "nonstandard" textual productions): "We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style... We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language" ("Student's Rights").

<sup>6</sup> For example, the ways in which composition classrooms are accessible or inaccessible for students with disabilities may position Composition Studies as a gate-keeping or norming field even as it seemingly welcomes and praises diversity and individuality (LeCourt 26-28).

consequence of paramount concern for compositionists: writing programs may be required to engage in “deliberative procedures” to determine what is essential or fundamental to the teaching and doing of composition within their own programs. Eventually I will show that such a deliberative procedure can reinscribe a rhetoric of requirement when it comes to disability, or it can create a rhetoric of affordance that might help compositionists move beyond thinking of disability in terms of the legal requirements of accommodation en route to creating a more engaging and productive composition classroom for all students.

This chapter begins with background on disability legislation and how it articulates accommodation practices as they relate to post-secondary education.<sup>7</sup> The evolution of this legislation, I argue, has resulted in potentially stronger requirements for accommodation, including the possible necessity for universities and programs to articulate what the essential or fundamental aspects of composition are and what would constitute an “undue burden” in a composition course.

#### A Brief Sketch of Recent Accommodation Legislation<sup>8</sup>

In one sense, a legislative history of disability accommodation in the United States begins with the first section of the *Fourteenth Amendment* of the *Constitution of the United States*. The text reads: “No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any

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<sup>7</sup> Legislation that does not directly affect post-secondary education will not be addressed in this chapter (e.g., *The Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA)).

<sup>8</sup> A full legislative history of accommodation, or even accommodation as it relates to higher education is unnecessary for the present project. Central legislation—especially that legislation that seems to have guided judicial decisions—will be reviewed in brief instead.



person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (Amend. XIV, Sec. 1).<sup>9</sup> In other words, one might argue that the *Fourteenth Amendment* protects persons with disabilities from discrimination by laws or the social structures underwritten by discriminatory laws. However, for the purposes of brevity and specificity, a legislative history of disability accommodation as it comes to bear on educational accommodation should start with section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (“§504” from this point forward).

A number of portions of §504 relate to the accommodation of disabilities in educational contexts. The “Promulgation of rules and regulations,” states in part:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 705 (20) of this title, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service. (“Section 504”)

In classifying a relevant “program or activity,” §504 only applies to institutions that receive federal funding; §504 does not apply to private universities or colleges that do not receive federal funds (though that group is vanishingly small). In addition to this limitation, §504 also has a number of qualifiers attached which have had significant judicial consequences for disabled individuals seeking accommodations; in particular, subsection (c) of §794 (“Significant structural alterations by small providers”) holds that

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<sup>9</sup> Though the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment does not apply to the federal government, certain types of discrimination perpetrated by the federal government can violate the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment’s due process clause (“Equal Protection”).

“Small providers are not required by subsection (a) of this section to make significant structural alterations to their existing facilities for the purpose of assuring program accessibility, if alternative means of providing the services are available.” Providing alternative pathways to accessibility instead of accommodations within extant ones is echoed in other parts of §504. For example, §794a(1) (“Remedies and attorney fees”) allows courts to “take into account the reasonableness of the cost of any necessary work place accommodation, and the availability of alternatives therefor or other appropriate relief in order to achieve an equitable and appropriate remedy.” The “reasonableness” condition and the “availability of alternatives” mirror the language used in subsection (c) of §794, and they throw into relief how disability discrimination and suits brought regarding it can be framed as a function of the defendants’ and courts’ own sense of “reasonableness” rather than the plaintiff’s own sense of injury or discrimination, a fact borne out by case law relating to §504.

In *Southeastern Community College v. Davis*, a hearing-impaired student brought suit against Southeastern Community College, alleging the college discriminated against her because of her hearing impairment. According to an audiologist at Duke University Medical Center, even with the assistance of a hearing aid, Davis would only be able to hear gross environmental sounds while working in medical contexts and would depend on lip-reading for interpersonal communication. Southeastern Community College consulted Mary McRee, the executive Director of the North Carolina Board of Nursing, and McRee recommended that Davis be denied admission into the nursing program, arguing that her hearing condition would make it “impossible for respondent [sic] to participate safely in the normal clinical training program, and those modifications that

would be necessary to enable safe participation would prevent her from realizing the benefits of the program” (401-02). The Supreme Court found that advances in assistive technology might one day allow individuals like Davis to meet the requirements for particular programs like Southeastern’s nursing program and that, “such advances also may enable attainment of these goals without imposing undue financial and administrative burdens upon a State. Thus, situations may arise where a refusal to modify an existing program might become unreasonable and discriminatory” (412-13). However, the Court found that it was “undisputed that respondent could not participate in Southeastern's nursing program unless the standards were substantially lowered. §504 imposes no requirement upon an educational institution to lower or to effect substantial modifications of standards to accommodate a handicapped person” (413). The Court went on to argue:

Nothing in the language or history of §504 reflects an intention to limit the freedom of an educational institution to require reasonable physical qualifications for admission to a clinical training program. Nor has there been any showing in this case that any action short of a substantial change in Southeastern's program would render unreasonable the qualifications it imposed. (414)

Three elements deserve particular note in the Court’s decision and reasoning: reference to substantially lowering program standards, to the “unreasonableness” of the program’s qualifications, and to the “undue financial and administrative burdens.” On the face of it, these conditions of discrimination determination seem equitable by virtue of their negotiative nature; in other words, if a program can make the argument that these conditions (reasonableness, maintaining program standards, avoiding undue burden) are

being met and the court defers to such contextualized argument, then such deliberation ought to serve as a valid discrimination inquiry. However, such reasoning ignores important systemic discriminatory potentials.

If a program is accused of discrimination, and that program is called upon to show how accommodation in a particular instance would be unreasonable and/or burdensome, then the standards for determining reasonableness and burden rest within the disciplinary agency that stands accused of discrimination. By “disciplinary agency,” I refer not to either the “discipline” of nursing or of jurisprudence but instead deploy the term in a broader, Foucauldean sense to capture the workings of the nursing program/field and the Supreme Court as overlapping and mutually constitutive technologies of power. As Foucault says,

‘Discipline’ may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology. (*Discipline and Punish* 215)

In the present case, one might argue that the discipline (construed here to indicate the relations of power constituted by the interaction of the nursing program and the Supreme Court) interpellates Davis through its own anatomy of power and makes her a “docile body” to be regularized by the discipline (fit into the discipline’s regularizations and its “anatomy of power”).<sup>10</sup> If Davis cannot be slotted into the discipline, then such incapacity resides in her body rather than in the normalized discipline, and discrimination

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<sup>10</sup> In his chapter, “Docile Bodies,” Foucault traces how disciplines place individuals within anatomies of power that regularize the ways such disciplines structure space, time, activity, and other ways of moving and being in the world for the individuals who exist within a discipline’s gaze.

ceases to be discrimination as her body becomes “unreasonable” by virtue of the normalizing power of the discipline. In other words, if disability resides in the body then it is the body that is unreasonable and intractable, and “discrimination” becomes incoherent: the discipline cannot discriminate because to do so would be to denaturalize its own power relations and admit of other ways of moving, doing, and being within the discipline. “Discrimination” becomes instead an evaluative judgment and course of action in favor of the “reasonable” institution’s sense of its own classifications and requirements; discrimination thus becomes impossible as a person ceases to be “disabled” (where an agency or context is dis-abling the person) and instead becomes simply incapable or unqualified.

The tension between locating disability in individual bodies rather than in social relations will be explored in depth in Chapter 2, but for now it is worth noting that §504 and cases like *Southeastern Community College v. Davis* made determinations of disability problematic as they relied upon disciplinary legitimation, and such legitimation could easily deny protected-class membership according to institutional logics. The laws created a situation where disability could be argued away and incapacity could be inscribed on a body. In short, a person becomes “naturally” unqualified, and discriminating against such a person becomes acceptable insofar as it is not “solely by reason of his or her disability” (“Section 504”): it is discrimination by reason of “reasonableness” or “undue hardship.” While some would come to hail the subsequent Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a piece of revolutionary anti-discrimination legislation—and in some ways it was—the same accommodation issues that flowed from §504 remained in the ADA, with subsequent court decisions more strongly locating the

power of disability determination (and, by extension, interpellation) in disciplinary agencies.

The ADA was landmark legislation. It had (and has in its amended form) far-reaching implications for workplace discrimination, private and public accessibility, and the very definition of disability itself. Much broader in scope than §504, the ADA seemed to offer more meaningful and effective protections to individuals with disabilities. Contrary to the original intentions behind the ADA, however, the Act became an engine of more systematic and permissible discrimination, with judicial decisions restricting class membership and, by extension, class protection for individuals who would commonsensically be considered “disabled” (Hensel 641).

Within the context of accommodation (especially post-secondary accommodation), the crucial elements of the ADA include the definitions of “disability” (Sec. 12102), the Title III definitions of “public accommodation” (Sec. 12181), and the definitions of “discrimination” (Sec. 12182). The general definition of “disability” reads as follows:

The term "disability" means, with respect to an individual (i) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (ii) a record of such an impairment; or (iii) being regarded as having such an impairment.” (Sec. 12102)

A number of the terms in this definition—“substantially limits,” “major life activities,” “record of such an impairment,” “being regarded as having”—are ambiguous, and subsequent case law circled around these ambiguities. Before turning to case law,

however, it's first necessary to turn to other central elements in the ADA as they come to bear on education.

Title III contains definitions and provisions that directly affect education and accommodations in education. First, Section 12181 classifies a number of private enterprises/organizations as “public accommodations,” including “a nursery, elementary, secondary, undergraduate, or postgraduate private school, or other place of education.” The inclusion of these private institutions extends discrimination protections for individuals with disabilities to both public institutions that receive federal funding (§504 & Title II) and to private educational institutions that may or may not receive federal funding. This seems like a straightforward extension of protections, and the “General rule” of the “Prohibition of discrimination by public accommodations” likewise seems unambiguous:

No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation. (Sec. 12182)

In short, then, these “public accommodations” must not discriminate against individuals with disabilities on the basis of those disabilities. However, Title III’s byzantine qualifications of “discrimination” make it difficult to determine if public accommodations have actually discriminated against an individual.

Title III includes a number of discrimination categories under its “General prohibition” including, “Activities,” “Integrated Settings,” “Opportunity to Participate,” “Administrative Methods,” and “Association.” “Association” prohibits discrimination

based on one's association with a disabled individual. "Administrative Methods" prohibits the use of "standards or criteria or methods of administration" that discriminate or perpetuate the discrimination of persons on the basis of a disability. "Opportunity to Participate" and "Integrated Settings" essentially prohibit the sequestering of individuals with disabilities in separate programs and calls for the "most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of the individual." The "Activities" section contains the prohibitions that, together, can be associated with the "leveling the playing field" metaphor that abounds in discussions on accommodation.

The "Activities" section is divided into four subsections: "Denial of participation," "Participation in unequal benefit," "Separate benefit," and "Individual or class of individuals." "Denial of participation" defines an action as discriminatory when an individual (or group of individuals) is denied participation in or benefit from a public accommodation—the commonsense understanding of "discrimination." "Participation in unequal benefit," on the other hand, addresses the idea of an unfair advantage:

It shall be discriminatory to afford an individual or class of individuals, on the basis of a disability or disabilities of such individual or class, directly, or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with the opportunity to participate in or benefit from a good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation that is not equal to that afforded to other individuals. (Sec. 12182)

The "Separate benefit" section dovetails with "unequal benefit" in its prohibition against separate services, goods, accommodation, etc. unless such arrangements are necessary to provide a person or group with equally effective/beneficial/etc. goods, services, etc. Taken together, these various "Activities" work towards equality between individuals



with disabilities and those without disabilities, with provisions meant to ensure that neither class of individuals receives undue benefits. It's interesting to note this discourse on unfair advantage present in legislation meant to protect a historically-discriminated-against class. In other words, the "leveling the playing field" metaphor is not unidirectional, and there may be some anxiety in the ADA centering on over-accommodation or unfairness to the non-disabled. The further specifications of "discrimination" in the "Specific prohibitions" section lend credence to this through explicit considerations of competing interests and how these interests can shape (and even preempt) accommodation.

The "Specific prohibitions" section of Section 12182 operationalizes discrimination and—as will come to be shown—is perhaps the most critical portion of the ADA as it comes to be interpreted/enforced in particular judicial decisions. Due to the importance of these definitions and due to their structural parallels, I offer them in full. Under "Specific prohibitions," "Discrimination," the ADA includes the following types of discrimination in the context of public accommodations:

- (i) the imposition or application of eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out an individual with a disability or any class of individuals with disabilities from fully and equally enjoying any goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations, unless such criteria can be shown to be necessary for the provision of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations being offered;
- (ii) a failure to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such modifications are necessary to afford such goods, services,

facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless the entity can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations;

(iii) a failure to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, unless the entity can demonstrate that taking such steps would

fundamentally alter the nature of the good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation being offered or would result in an undue burden;

(iv) a failure to remove architectural barriers, and communication barriers that are structural in nature, in existing facilities, and transportation barriers in existing vehicles and rail passenger cars used by an establishment for transporting individuals (not including barriers that can only be removed through the retrofitting of vehicles or rail passenger cars by the installation of a hydraulic or other lift), where such removal is readily achievable; and

(v) where an entity can demonstrate that the removal of a barrier under clause (iv) is not readily achievable, a failure to make such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations available through alternative methods if such methods are readily achievable. (Sec. 12182)

In the broadest strokes possible, these definitions prohibit public accommodations from using differential selection criteria for individuals with disabilities or leaving facilities/programs inaccessible (i.e., refusing to make accommodations in structures,

programs, or both) unless such criteria or accessibility omissions are necessary according to the public accommodation. Turning to the central terms of these definitions will help elucidate how this actually works.

In each of the definitions, there is a caveat that traces how a particular act of discrimination becomes non-discriminatory given certain conditions of internal (to the public accommodation) necessity. So, following definition (i), a public accommodation which uses eligibility criteria that select and eliminate individuals based on a disability is not discriminatory if that accommodation can “show” that such selection/elimination is necessary for the continued operation of the accommodation. This is clearly problematic as it elides the fact that discrimination is often built into the very structure of systems and agencies and, thus, such discrimination can be self-legitimizing by the logic of those systems and agencies (“necessity” can become fluid and relative). Interestingly, this structural issue is foregrounded in (ii) insofar as it requires accommodations unless such accommodations “fundamentally alter” the nature of a public accommodation. So, following (i) and (ii), a public accommodation may deny access and/or accommodation provided such denial is necessary to the continuation of that public accommodation’s identity as the public accommodation conceives of it (i.e., the accommodation must “show” or “demonstrate” that this is the case). This issue of altering the identity of the public accommodation also appears in (iii) and echoes the language of (ii) (“fundamentally alter the nature of”), but (iii), (iv), and (v) also move beyond issues of identification and focus on viability.

Just as the “specific prohibitions” tie necessity and identity to nondiscrimination as presented by a public accommodation, they also link viability and difficulty to

discrimination. In other words, the “specific prohibitions” make discrimination a function of expedience. According to (iii), a public accommodation need not “take steps” to ensure equal access in the absence of “auxiliary aids and services” if it would cause an “undue burden” or “fundamentally alter” the nature of the public accommodation. Just as in (i) and (ii), the public accommodation must somehow “demonstrate” that taking additional steps to ensure equal access would cause an undue burden for the public accommodation and such demonstration is, presumably, a function of the logic of the public accommodation. Definitions (iv) and (v) move beyond viability (“undue burden”) and link discrimination with expedience or plenitude.

According to definitions (iv) and (v), public accommodations must remove architectural barriers to access and/or offer alternative goods, services, etc. in cases where such actions are “readily achievable,” which echoes the language of §504’s “availability of alternatives.” To sum these definitions and their consequences in plain language: a public accommodation is required to make their goods, services, etc. accessible to individuals with disabilities if such action is consistent with the identity of the public accommodation and if such accommodation is not onerous to the public accommodation according to the public accommodation’s own reasoning. One might go further and argue that the “specific prohibitions” ultimately only require public accommodations to take actions that they would otherwise have no reason—by their own processes of reasoning—not to take.

The “specific prohibitions” locate a public accommodation’s discriminatory practices in its inability to rationalize those practices; i.e., practices only become discriminatory if the public accommodation is unable to rationalize them. Such

rationalization is a function of the internal logic of a particular public accommodation, and if courts give deference to such logics, it seems likely that discrimination (as it is pretheoretically or commonsensically understood) would proliferate rather than diminish as a result of the ADA, and one might conclude that discriminating agencies would still retain their rights, privileges, and abilities to self-legitimate while individuals with disabilities might be further marginalized and discriminated against. I believe that case law seems to bear this out, but before turning to post-ADA case law, it's first necessary to look at a number of pre-ADA cases that impacted post-ADA procedures and decisions.

Before the passage of the ADA, *Pushkin v. The Regents of the University of Colorado* set a precedent regarding a public accommodation's due deliberation and ability to justify exclusion. Pushkin filed suit against the Regents of the University of Colorado, claiming that he had been discriminated against in his denial to be admitted to a psychiatric residency program. Although Pushkin had multiple sclerosis, his work history and the testimony of experts showed that the disability did not affect his work when some basic accommodations were made, and previous residents in the program had received accommodations for disability, including an individual with multiple sclerosis. The court found that Pushkin had been subject to discrimination following §504 (his record and abilities demonstrated that he was an "otherwise qualified individual") because an interview committee denied Pushkin admission based solely on a subjective agreement that his disability—by its *a priori* nature—would preclude success in a residency program. While the court recognized the value (and even necessity) of subjective judgments in determining a candidate's ability to participate in a program of study, the court found that such subjective judgments need shared criteria:

In the instant case, however, there is no established criteria upon which subjective assessment can be based. From the testimony I glean that there is some sort of inchoate criteria which the interviewers believe they share, but it certainly has not been formulated or articulated. (*Pushkin v. Regents*)

The court found that Pushkin had been discriminated against solely on the basis of his disability and ruled against the defendant. However, it is important to note that the court found in favor of Pushkin because of a failure in the defendant's deliberative procedures:

In truth, I am most favorably impressed by the effort and dedication which the defendants demonstrate. I am not even critical of the psychiatric resident selection process as it is generally applied... Nevertheless, in this instance, I am convinced that the established processes failed. Testimony establishes that Dr. Pushkin is indeed qualified by defendants' standards. I believe that defendants failed to reach this conclusion because they did not apply their established standards. (*Pushkin v. Regents*)

In short, the court deferred to the logic of the institution in selecting candidates to admit, and discrimination occurred with Pushkin because of an explicit failure of that logic within the institution. In other words, the case frames discrimination rigidly by sticking to the "otherwise qualified" criterion in §504. If the defendant had been able to justify a denial of admission through evenly-applied criteria, then the court seems to affirm that *Pushkin v. Regents* would have had a different outcome. A consistent "deliberative procedure" took center stage in a number of court decisions after the ADA, especially as such procedures related to alterations in the essence or programs of public

accommodations. Before turning to that, though, it is worthwhile to look at a formative case that occurred almost at the same time as the ADA was being passed.

Although *Wynne v. Tufts* was tried under §504, it had far-reaching consequences for post-ADA cases. In brief, Wynne had previously failed a number of medical school courses, and after retaking these courses with the assistance of a number of supplementary aids provided by Tufts, Wynne was still unable to pass biochemistry and was dismissed from the program. Wynne brought suit against Tufts, arguing that Tufts' refusal to allow him to take exams in formats other than multiple-choice (a condition, Wynne argued, was necessary to his success given certain learning disabilities) precluded his success and thus was discriminatory based on his "otherwise qualified" nature (he succeeded in other non-multiple choice assessments). The First Circuit Court of Appeals found in favor of the defendant because Tufts argued that dispensing with multiple-choice tests would "require substantial program alterations, result in lowering academic standards, and devalue Tufts' end product—highly trained physicians carrying the prized credential of a Tufts degree" (*Wynne v. Tufts*). It is notable that the court recognized that another medical school offered oral versions of multiple choice tests for dyslexic students but argued that such evidence does not point to a "right" or "wrong" programmatic decision; instead, the court affirmed the relevant program's deliberative procedure and findings:

The point is that Tufts, after undertaking a diligent assessment of the available options, felt itself obliged to make "a professional, academic judgment that [a] reasonable accommodation [was] simply not available'... Phrased another way, Tufts decided, rationally if not inevitably, that no further accommodation could be

made without imposing an undue (and injurious) hardship on the academic program. (*Wynne v. Tufts*).

In ruling in this fashion, the court implicitly—and in another place, explicitly—upheld the “reasonableness” of an accommodation as a result of the internal logic of the institution: “Reasonableness is not a constant. To the contrary, what is reasonable in a particular situation may not be reasonable in a different situation—even if the situational differences are relatively slight” (*Wynne v. Tufts*). The court also explicitly created a “test” for deciding whether an academic institution “adequately explored the availability of reasonable accommodations”:

If the institution submits undisputed facts demonstrating that the relevant officials within the institution considered alternative means, their feasibility, cost and effect on the academic program, and came to a rationally justifiable conclusion that the available alternatives would result either in lowering academic standards or requiring substantial program alteration, the court could rule as a matter of law that the institution had met its duty of seeking reasonable accommodation.

This “test” at first seems merely to formalize the definitions of “discrimination” found in the “Specific prohibitions” of the ADA. However, the “Specific prohibitions” remain agnostic as to who judges whether the public accommodation is compliant. For example, the third prohibition states that discrimination occurs when a public accommodation fails to provide equitable services or is exclusionary unless that public accommodation can “demonstrate that taking such steps would fundamentally alter...”; but the ADA does not indicate how this “demonstration” works, who judges its adequacy, and so forth. The other critical terms—“readily achievable” and “undue burden”—are likewise



underdetermined as far as who makes the final determination. *Wynne*'s formalized test thus created precedent for future cases wherein the "reasonableness" of an accommodation as a function of its lowering of standards or requiring substantial programmatic change rested firmly with the public accommodation (academic institution).

A number of court decisions after *Wynne v. Tufts* (and after the passage of the ADA) followed similar reasoning as the *Wynne* court with some even citing the *Wynne* "test" as a precedential procedure to be followed in determining whether an academic institution demonstrated due diligence in seeking to accommodate a student. In *Guckenberger v. Boston University*, for example, the court directly cited both the "test" from *Wynne v. Tufts* and the First Circuit Court's affirmation that the "point is not whether a [university] is 'right' or 'wrong' in making program-related decisions. Such absolutes rarely apply in the context of subjective decision making, particularly in a scholastic setting" (*Wynne v. Tufts* qtd. in *Guckenberger v. Boston University*). In brief, *Guckenberger v. Boston University* was a class-action lawsuit brought by a group of learning-disabled students against Boston University because of Boston University's refusal to allow course substitutions for its liberal arts foreign language requirement. In the course of the case, the court found that Boston University had not undergone a "deliberative procedure" to determine whether or how the foreign language requirement was essential to liberal arts programs at Boston University (how a substitution would "fundamentally alter" the program), and it ordered the university to conduct such an inquiry. After Boston University completed the inquiry and submitted its findings, the court ruled in favor of the university.

The court's decision was based on Boston University's testimony that the proposed course substitution would "fundamentally alter the nature" of the liberal arts education at Boston University and that reasonable accommodations had otherwise been made. While there was some dissent on the committee who prepared the report, the committee as a whole found that "[n]o content course taught in English can substitute fully for the insider access to other cultures—with its attendant invitation to thoroughgoing critical self-awareness—that is the hallmark of foreign language study" (qtd. in *Guckenberger v. Boston University*). Boston University offered a number of accommodations including spelling accommodations, student tutors, and others. In determining whether the refusal to substitute courses was reasonable, the court was clear in its belief that academic institutions—provided they enact a "deliberative process"—should be shown great deference in the validity of the process and resultant decisions. Citing *Regents of the University of Michigan v. Ewing*, the court affirmed that:

In the unique context of academic curricular decision-making, the courts may not override a faculty's professional judgment "unless it is such a substantial departure from accepted academic norms as to demonstrate that the person or committee responsible did not actually exercise professional judgment."

(*Guckenberger v. Boston University* quoting *Regents of the University of Michigan v. Ewing*)

In *Regents of the University of Michigan v. Ewing*, the Supreme Court repeatedly underscored the importance of academic freedom, even going so far as to affirm the Court's "responsibility to safeguard their [educational institutions'] academic freedom, 'a special concern of the First Amendment'" (quoting from *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*).

The court in *Guckenberger v. Boston University* seemed to embrace this general perspective, even in the face of the plaintiff's attack on Boston University's deliberative procedure.

Following the language of *Regents of the University of Michigan v. Ewing*, the plaintiffs argued that the refusal to allow the requested course substitutions was "a substantial departure from accepted academic norms" (*Guckenberger v. Boston University* quoting *Regents of the University of Michigan v. Ewing*) insofar as most colleges and universities either lacked a foreign language requirement or allowed course substitutions. The court rejected the plaintiffs' argument, asserting the following:

The evidence that BU is only among a handful of schools of higher education in its decision to deny course substitutions in language requirements is relevant to an evaluation of its decision to deny a reasonable accommodation. However, a court should not determine that an academic decision is a "substantial departure from accepted academic norms" simply by conducting a head-count of other universities. This approach is particularly inappropriate in the protean area of a liberal arts education. The liberal arts curriculum cannot be fit into a cookie cutter mold, unlike the medical school curriculum in *Wynne*, where no one disputed that mastery of biochemistry was necessary. (*Guckenberger v. Boston University*)

Accordingly, the court argued, the precedent set by *Wynne* shows that what is at stake is "whether BU's decision is 'rationally justifiable' rather than the only possible conclusion it could have reached or other universities have reached." In other words, if Boston University, in a deliberative procedure of its own design, can justify—according to its own values and theories of confirmation—the refusal to accommodate on the basis that

there would be an “undue burden” or that such accommodation would “fundamentally alter the nature of the program,” then there is no discrimination in the court’s eyes. This case thus further located the authority of the deliberative procedure and its ruling in the local university’s context, even going so far—in its rejection of the plaintiff’s argument based on *Regents of the University of Michigan v. Ewing*—as to equate common practices at analogous institutions as mere “head count” evidence.

*Guckenberger v. Boston University* and *Wynne v. Tufts* created troubling precedent for postsecondary students with disabilities. In the broadest sense, the “test” from *Wynne v. Tufts* and the court’s affirmation of the necessity of academic freedom (broadly construed) created a very particular discursive horizon wherein an institution need only legitimate its own practices—and this is the crucial part—according to its own standards of reasonableness and rationality and not even the standards of reasonableness and rationality (or common practices) of analogous institutions and programs.<sup>11</sup> The end result: “reasonable accommodation” becomes a function of disciplinary discourses enacted in local contexts, and if accommodations are provided, they are ipso facto “reasonable accommodations” provided there was due deliberation by the relevant individuals; if accommodations are not provided, the university or college is ipso facto justified provided there was a deliberation by the relevant individuals and available accommodations posed either an undue burden (as defined by the college or university) or such accommodations would fundamentally alter the nature of the relevant program (as determined by the relevant individuals). In such a climate, one might begin to wonder

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to *Guckenberger v. Boston University*, see *Ohio Civil Rights Commission v. Case Western Reserve University* for an example of how cross-institutional precedent does not trump (or even strongly influence) individual institutional inquiry.

“what is a disability?” and some courts, in debating reasonable accommodation, debated this very question<sup>12</sup> in addition to closely scrutinizing the “otherwise qualified” clause of the ADA. What occurred in this milieu was directly contrary to the intent of the ADA: the ADA and related court cases provided postsecondary institutions with legally-justified means of disciplinarily-couched discrimination. While amendments to the ADA correct for some of this, many essential features of the ADA as it comes to bear on postsecondary education remain intact.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 2008 (ADAAA) was signed into law in September of 2008 by President George W. Bush. Arguably, the primary purpose of the ADAAA was to reverse a judicial trend which narrowed the definition of “disability” and, in so doing, discriminated against individuals who would be commonsensically considered disabled (Hensel 641-42). According to the ADAAA:

...in enacting the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), Congress intended that the Act “provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities” and provide broad coverage... While Congress expected that the definition of disability under the ADA would be interpreted consistently with how courts had applied the definition of a handicapped individual under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, that expectation has not been fulfilled.

In order to reverse or correct for this trend, one of the explicit purposes of the ADAAA is to “to carry out the ADA’s objectives of providing ‘a clear and comprehensive national

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<sup>12</sup> See *Price v. National Board of Medical Examiners* and *Bartlett v. New York State Board of Law Examiners* for two examples of how disability was defined relative to general populations or more discrete populations.

mandate for the elimination of discrimination’ and ‘clear, strong, consistent, enforceable standards addressing discrimination’ by reinstating a broad scope of protection to be available under the ADA.” The ADAAA affirms that: “it is the intent of Congress that the primary object of attention in cases brought under the ADA should be whether entities covered under the ADA have complied with their obligations, and to convey that the question of whether an individual’s impairment is a disability under the ADA should not demand extensive analysis.” Such clarifications do, indeed, seem to mandate a broader protective stance towards individuals with disabilities and towards the protected class as a whole. Additionally, there exists at least the potential for improved working conditions and greater legal recourse for disabled individuals across various sectors. It is not, however, so clear how this legislation will affect students with disabilities as they seek accommodations in post-secondary institutions.

Although the ADAAA is a powerful piece of antidiscrimination legislation, it remains unclear how much protection it offers postsecondary students in the face of disciplinary control/reasonableness. None of the crucial sections (“crucial” for the purposes of this chapter) of the ADA were revised by the amendments—there were no alterations of the “specific prohibitions” for public accommodations (i.e., there was no revision of the “undue burden,” “fundamental alteration,” or “readily achievable” clauses). Likewise, although the ADAAA calls out previous employment discrimination cases and its intent to reject their decisions as precedential,<sup>13</sup> it omits mention of central decisions in postsecondary cases (for example, whether the “test” from *Wynne v. Tufts*

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<sup>13</sup> For example: *Sutton v. United Air Lines*; *School Board of Nassau County v. Arline*; and *Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky, Inc. v. Williams*.

should be rejected or even altered). In a new addition under “Subchapter IV—Miscellaneous Provisions,” the ADAAA explicitly reaffirms the following:

Nothing in this chapter alters the provision of section 12182(b)(2)(A)(ii), specifying that reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures shall be required, unless an entity can demonstrate that making such modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, including academic requirements in postsecondary education, would fundamentally alter the nature of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations involved.

On the face of it, this provision merely contextualizes the “fundamental alteration” specific prohibition for Subchapter IV; however, the addition of this clause combined with the fact that the “specific prohibitions” were not revised indicates an (at least tacit) approval of the specific prohibitions and the resultant/related judicial decisions (*Wynne v. Tufts*, *Guckenberger v. Boston University*, etc.). A Report of the House Committee on Education and Labor underscores this by maintaining that the ADAAA does not change the “fundamental alteration” prohibitions and that, for example, “a university would not be expected to eliminate academic requirements essential to the instruction being pursued by a student, although it may be required to make modifications in order to enable students with disabilities to meet those academic requirements” (Miller 11). Thus, there appears to be a tension in accommodation legislation as it relates to postsecondary institutions.

On one hand, the ADAAA is clearly an attempt to rectify the failings of the ADA and resultant decisions based upon it. On the other hand, it’s not at all clear how courts will weigh individual students’ needs for accommodation against competing interests,

values, and disciplinarity in higher education (Hensel 684). Returning to the particular case of Composition Studies, however, it seems reasonable to argue that compositionists and the programs, departments, and universities in which they are housed may be called upon—perhaps soon—to articulate what is essential or fundamental to a course of study in composition and how one might accommodate a disabled person in a composition course.

### Composition Studies, Disability, and Reasonable Accommodation

As composition is one of the only (quasi-) universally-required college requirements<sup>14</sup>, it is not unreasonable (or improbable) that students with disabilities may at some point bring suit against a writing program for failing to reasonably accommodate a disability. One can easily imagine a student seeking a course substitution, an alternate project format, or even attendance considerations. One can also easily imagine that student being denied because the “fundamental” or essential nature of the class or program would be altered, or because such accommodations would create an “undue burden” for the department or program. Of course, this begs the question: what is “fundamental” or essential to the teaching and doing of composition?

Inquiring into the fundamental or essential nature of composition is fraught. Maintaining that there is an essence—that there are definable characteristics, methodologies, or theories that obtain across contexts/schools—is fiercely debated by scholars in the field. In the context of the present project, however, one might argue that this question is—in part—a non-starter; after all, a number of court decisions tie the

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<sup>14</sup> Moghtader, Cotch, and Hague’s 2001 survey indicates that percentages of schools with a curricular writing requirement range from 90-100% (by type of school) (457).



question of what is fundamental to a course of study to local contexts such as a college, department, or program. Put another way, in any given discrimination case, the defending writing program or department would likely need to show only that a deliberative procedure occurred within that program or department and that as a result of said deliberative procedure, the disabling practice or policy was found to be essential to the program of study. Citing policies or practices from other schools would be irrelevant per *Ohio Civil Rights Commission v. Case Western Reserve University* and *Guckenberger v. Boston University*. One might rejoin, however, that such precedent may be called into question given the ADA's purpose in "reinstating a broad scope of protection." In any event, no simple answer tells us what the fundamental-nature of composition might be. This question—and how its answers might interact with relevant law—are dealt with at length in Chapter 3, but before addressing that question, there is perhaps an even more practical question that compositionists may need to address: what is a "disability" for Composition Studies?

The ADA, ADA, and related legislation debate at length what counts as a "disability"; in fact, one of the primary purposes of the ADA is to reject "courts' narrow approach to eligibility under the statute and restore Congress' original intent to provide broad legal protection from disability discrimination in society" (Hensel 697). Interrogating the minutia of these qualifications as they relate to Composition Studies is not the purpose of this project and, in fact, such exploration can obscure broader considerations. For example, most colleges and universities require that a student possess disability documentation to grant that student accommodation. While the definitions of "disability" may vary according to different criteria, this standard of external

authorization and authentication frames disability—theoretically—as residing within particular hegemonic power relations. In other words, extant channels of authorization locate disability in the body of the disabled individual rather than in networks of power relations, and the location of the authorizing agent remains unmarked and apolitical.

Focusing overmuch on the distinctions, qualifications, and classifications such networks employ can miss the forest from the trees and leave fundamental, underwriting theoretical models intact. In short, then, the important question for compositionists becomes what model of disability do (and/or should) compositionists embrace, and what consequences derive from such subscription? This question is explored at length in Chapters 2 and 3. In addition to the questions of “essence,” and “disability,” there is a third interconnecting question that affects the answers to these other questions: what does it mean for Composition Studies to even consider what an “accommodation” might be?

In an abstract sense, the need for accommodation implicates an asymmetrical relationship (construed as broadly as possible to include a relationship among agents, among agents and environments, among agents and ideas, and so forth) wherein one party does not in some sense match up or “fit” with another. For example, there is an asymmetrical relationship between a person who uses a wheelchair and a building that lacks ramps and/or elevators. Accommodation, in this example, would mean that one party—or both—would require some sort of alteration to effect congruity in the relationship: the person using the wheelchair would need some device or tool to circumvent the inaccessible aspects of the environment, or some responsible party would need to alter the building’s architecture via ramps, lifts, or some other modification to make it more accessible. With this in mind, what does it mean for composition to

accommodate someone with a disability? What is the nature of the asymmetry? Where does the fit occur/need to occur? What are the implications? These are not idle questions. If composition—what it does, what it teaches, how it is operationalized in the classroom—is inaccessible, if accommodations need to be made for certain students, this has implications for composition’s technologies. By “technologies,” I of course refer to such things as the production of writing, curricula, and classroom materials, but I also use the term to indicate how composition both creates technologies of power and epistemology and exists itself within particular networks of power as a potentially-hegemonic technology.

As critical, philosophical, and even scientific theories have shown us, there is no “view from nowhere” (Nagel). Any perspective will seek to legitimate itself through its own relative logics, and any descriptions will be bound by taxonomies which articulate with such logics. Accordingly, beginning an inquiry into accommodation as it occurs or may occur within Composition Studies from a Composition Studies perspective might be doomed to employing a metatheory derived from the theories and taxonomies of Composition Studies itself. At best, this might influence possible inquiry. At worst, this might make certain sorts of inquiry impossible. Legal considerations—as this first chapter has shown—provide a particular kind of impetus and set of considerations for an exploration of accommodation within Composition Studies. But this exploration—from legal and Composition Studies perspectives—is imbricated with Disability Studies and the models of disability that Disability Studies’ theories provide. These models, in turn, can reframe understandings of how disability is situated within the law and within Composition Studies.

## **Chapter 2: Crippling Complexity: Medical, Social, and Complex Models of Disability**

### Introduction

As Chapter 1 shows, legislation and legal precedent can complicate—and have complicated—“disability,” its accounting, its accommodations, its borders, its class membership. However, legal analyses of disability only provide one historico-cultural/theoretical lens through which to explore “disability” and related issues. As I argue below, beginning and ending with such a singular perspective leaves “disability” undertheorized and oversimplified. Additionally, as Chapter 1 argues, some legislation and case law functions disciplinarily and epistemologically, legitimizing particular apparatuses of classification, elision, omission, and so forth. While exploring such legal treatments of disability provides a valuable perspective for Composition Studies, it remains insufficient as a theoretical engine. A more nuanced approach to disability can both uncover the theoretical assumptions and baggage built into legal approaches to disability and simultaneously create a more recognizable theoretical bridge with Composition Studies. By “theoretical bridge,” I simply mean that one area of inquiry and its attendant theorizations may form an intermediary or transitive linkage between seemingly disparate areas of inquiry. Disability Studies can be framed as such a theoretical bridge between legislation on disability/accommodation and Composition Studies.<sup>15</sup>

“Disability Studies” refers to a broad interdisciplinary field of study drawing scholars from history, philosophy, literature, sociology, and Composition Studies, just to

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, this by no means equates the mission or even intention of Disability Studies. This relationship is merely heuristic.

name a few. It began to coalesce as a field in the 1990s, according to James Wilson, “amid the interest in identity issues growing out of postmodern inquiries into subjectivity” (60). According to the Society for Disability Studies,<sup>16</sup> “Disability Studies recognizes that disability is a key aspect of human experience, and that the study of disability has important political, social, and economic implications for society as a whole, including both disabled and nondisabled people” (“Mission and History”). As it is a “key aspect of human experience,” many Disability Studies scholars work at troubling the extension of “disability,” uncovering how disability is constructed and represented in various media, and exploring how disability can limn unmarked political categories and their valorizations of ableism. According to Simi Linton, a prominent voice in Disability Studies,

It has been particularly important to bring to light language that reinforces the dominant culture’s view of disability. A useful step in that process has been the construction of the terms *ablelist* and *ableism*, which can be used to organize ideas about the centering and domination of the nondisabled experience and point of view. (224)

The sort of critical work Linton references lays no claim to neutrality. Like Critical Discourse Analysis—an analytic method employed by a number of Disability Studies scholars (Kerschbaum, “Avoiding”; Price)—Disability Studies often embraces an activist

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<sup>16</sup> The Society for Disability Studies, or “SDS,” is a non-profit professional organization of scholars, researchers, activists, and artists that “promotes the study of disability in social, cultural, and political contexts... Through research, artistic production, teaching and activism, the Society for Disability Studies seeks to augment understanding of disability in all cultures and historical periods, to promote greater awareness of the experiences of disabled people, and to advocate for social change” (“Mission and History”). The organization hosts yearly conferences and is responsible for the peer-reviewed journal, *Disability Studies Quarterly*.

role, working for equality and access for all. Clearly, this description indicates a rather expansive and often heterogeneous grouping of scholars and activists. However, this does not indicate an utter lack of cohesion; indeed, it is possible to point clearly at what Disability Studies is not: “It is not medicine, rehabilitation, special education, physical or occupational therapy, and professions oriented toward the cure, prevention, or treatment of disabilities” (“What is Disability Studies”). In other words, Disability Studies does not embrace “medicalized” approaches to disability; in fact, much of the work of Disability Studies scholars aims directly at disrupting the medicalization of disability in culture and politics.

Many scholars in Disability Studies locate a broad constellation of approaches to disability within the “medical” and “social” models of disability and their interrelationships. Understanding each of these theoretical models, their limitations, and the potential expansion afforded by troubling the binary sheds important light on the theories undergirding Composition Studies’ approaches to disability. Further, close scrutiny of these models uncovers the need for a more complex notion of disability and accommodation than what currently obtains in Composition Studies.

### The Medical Model of Disability

The “medical model of disability” (or, more simply, the “medical model”) is an approach to disability that explicitly or implicitly defines disability as “a deficiency that restricts one’s ability to perform normal life activities” (Donoghue 204). Please note two elements in this definition: disability is “deficiency” and it is defined relative to the “normal.” The deviance—the deficiency—results from damage, deformity, and/or disease to a normal

body, and such deviance should be “cured” to bring—as much as is possible—the deviant body into alignment with the healthy norm, a perspective that aligns with medical approaches to disease (Llewellyn and Hogan 158). This model is not merely associated with medicine; instead, it refers to a broader, clinical approach to disability that approaches deviation etiologically, with an aim towards therapeutic intervention (159). Accordingly, the fields of medicine and psychology/psychiatry—and their approaches to disability—are generally both included when scholars refer to the medical model. Such approaches, with their focus on deficiency and deviance, fundamentally depend upon constructions of a “norm.”

The “norm” did not develop into the concept with which it is most commonly associated until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even so, there is ample evidence that persons with disabilities were normatively judged throughout history on the basis of their differences. These individuals tended to be categorized as belonging to a deviant group with respect to either an ideal or at least common prescriptive category, and such categorization sometimes carried moral and/or political consequences. Plato, for example, associated disability with an imbalance in the proper harmony of the person and even recommended euthanasia for disabled persons (Kiefer). Aristotle likewise recommended euthanasia for disabled individuals (Kiefer), identifying them as morally flawed and ranking among barbarians and non-citizens (“Making Disability Visible” 153). However, the response to disabled persons and their relation to some sort of human baseline tended to become

more uneven in the course of Western history.<sup>17</sup>

Western representations and treatments of disabled persons have varied greatly since the ancient Greeks. For example, while early Christians framed disability as a path to grace (Munyi), others were more ambivalent. Augustine, in his musings on the “monstrous races,” seems to grant individuals with disabilities a modicum of commonality with non-disabled individuals as a result of shared lineage. However, this affiliation seems to apply only to physical impairments:

...so all the races which are reported to have diverged in bodily appearance from the usual course which nature generally or almost universally preserves, if they are embraced in that definition of man as rational and mortal animals, unquestionably, trace their pedigree to that one first father of all. (118)

Augustine leaves the relationship to those with mental disabilities ambiguous at best (“if they are embraced in that definition of man as *rational*...” [italics added]), while later Christian figures such as Calvin and Luther accused some disabled persons of possession and sought to cleanse such individuals through painful exorcisms (Munyi). Of course, this is only a tiny sliver of Western attitudes, and it is by no means a detailed representation of the historical development of the normal v. disabled binary. That said, it does begin to point at an important discursive othering of the disabled by the nondisabled in Western ideologies: the disabled were not only set apart in public discourses but their

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<sup>17</sup> It should be clear that the historical background offered here is cursory. The reasons for this are twofold. First, deep historical analysis is not absolutely integral to the present project, though it is informative. Second, as Chomba Wa Munyi argues, disability history is still a developing field of inquiry, with only sparse scholarship available. Protracted research into disability history, particularly non-Western disability history and cross-cultural disability history, will undoubtedly provide even greater insight into the socio-historical formation of disabilities and norms.



discourse was considered alien if it was not negated. Foucault describes this phenomenon:

From the depths of the Middle Ages, a man was mad if his speech could not be said to form part of the common discourse of men. His words were considered null [*sic*] and void, without truth or significance, worthless as evidence, inadmissible in the authentication of acts or contracts, incapable even of bringing about transubstantiation... And yet, in contrast to all others, his words were credited with strange powers, of revealing some hidden truth, of predicting the future, of revealing, in all their naivete [*sic*], what the wise were unable to perceive... At all events, whether excluded or secretly invested with reason, the madman's speech did not strictly exist... Whatever a madman said, it was taken for mere noise; he was credited with words only in a symbolic sense, in the theatre, in which he stepped forward, unarmed and reconciled, playing his role: that of masked truth. ("The Discourse on Language" 217)

In Foucault's characterization, then, the madman—s/he with a mental disability—becomes othered either through dehumanization or through mystification (as a "divine idiot"). In such a way, s/he lies outside of the common mass of humanity; s/he is an outlier from some center. This center and its resultant outliers—this norm-deviant relationship—became formalized in the nineteenth century with the interrelated rise of statistics and eugenics.

In his essay, "Constructing Normalcy," Lennard Davis argues that normalcy and "the norm" as we understand them today developed in the nineteenth century as a result of both the work of statisticians and eugenicists. Davis argues that prior to the nineteenth

century, many societies and cultures believed in a human ideal, and this ideal was an ideal precisely because it did not occur in the world (at least, the non-mythological world); all people were non-ideal in one way or another. With the advent of more fine-grained systems of classification (including statistics), people could be grouped according to their similarity to a majority or deviance therefrom. However, in plotting people along a bell curve, the majority of people should lump in the center—the norm—with outliers (including the “disabled” and the “superlative”) grouping to either side of the curve (4-7). While this mode of representation created the norm through its relation to deviance, eugenicists like Francis Galton developed the means to further specify differences along the overall curve in normative ways.

Central to eugenic thinking in the nineteenth century was belief in the perfectibility—or at least possible continual improvement—of humanity. As Davis points out, this creates a catch-22 with regard to the bell curve. For almost any given trait, one outlying area of the bell-curve represents superlative examples (highly-intelligent, tall, etc.) while the other outlying area of the curve represents the deficient. The bell curve by itself does not evaluatively distinguish between either set of outliers, and they are made similar by their deviance from the norm. Dalton “solved” this conundrum by dividing the bell curve into ranked quartiles. In such a way, the norm becomes the imperative, and one set of outliers becomes “ideal” while the other becomes “deviant” or “deficient.” As Davis puts it:

This statistical ideal is unlike the classical ideal. The new ideal of ranked order is powered by the imperative of the norm, and then is supplemented by the notion of

progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance, to create a dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be. (8-9)

In his chapter, Davis shows that this norming extended beyond the physical to include the psychological, resulting in a “eugenics of the mind,” “creating the concepts of normal sexuality, normal function, and then contrasting them with the perverse, abnormal, pathological, and even criminal” (11-12). Ultimately Davis shows that the creation of “the norm” is socio-historical and tied to a middle-class, industrialized, Enlightened belief in progress and perfectibility. Davis sees one task of Disability Studies as “the attempt, then, to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal” (17). Following Davis, then, one may reapproach “normal” as an instrument of dominant, hegemonic forces: a legitimizing, centripetal concept<sup>18</sup> that unmarks or obscures its own historico-political nature.

A number of recent scholars have tried to disrupt the pseudo-transparency of the “norm.” For example, Garland-Thomson coined “normate” to mark the political nature of “normal.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Scott Lunsford argues that using “dis/ability” marks “ability” and

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<sup>18</sup> I am using “centripetal” in a Bakhtinian fashion here to refer to an ideologically-saturated language’s tendency towards semantic and political consolidation, what Bakhtin calls “verbal-ideological centralization and unification” (“The Dialogic Imagination” 272).

<sup>19</sup> “This neologism names the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries. The term *normate* usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definite human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8).

opens both “ability” and “disability” to critique.<sup>20</sup> Many Disability Studies scholars have worked—and continue to work—at marking both “normal” and “ability” as these terms ground the medical model and its continued “tyranny of the norm.”

With the above historical context in mind, returning to definitions of the medical model can be quite telling. As indicated earlier, we can understand the medical model’s medicalization as an approach to disability that defines “disability” as “a deficiency that restricts one’s ability to perform normal life activities” (Donoghue 204). In this definition, “normal” is twice referenced. First, it refers—at least implicitly (via “deficiency”)—to an embodied, ranked deviation.<sup>21</sup> Second, it refers to life activities that are somehow “normal.” The definition thus centers normal configurations—physical or psychological—and normal ways of acting or moving through the world. While this second, activity-based normalization seems to indicate a socially-constructed normality, behavior still connects inextricably with the individual as flowing outward from the individual rather than as a networked emergence. In other words, the individual becomes an embodied, functionalist locus of normalities: the system (individual) is either normal or deficient, and its outputs are either normal or deficient (with one normality or

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<sup>20</sup> “I use the form *dis/abilities* to emphasize the importance of its inclusion as an issue of difference which we approach as critically as we do race, class, and gender: just as we cannot discuss race without arguing how ‘whiteness’—at least in this country—performs hegemonic control over other racial identities, we cannot ignore how ‘ability’ realizes its constituent disability” (330).

<sup>21</sup> One could read “deficiency” as coextensive with the restriction of “one’s ability to perform normal life activities,” but the addition of “that” in the definition may indicate difference.

abnormality often implying the other).<sup>22</sup> This embodiment, perhaps, and its clinicalization of the norm defines the medical model.

The most salient, inimical, and entrenched aspect of the medical model may lie in its localization of disabilities within particular human bodies. For many people, seemingly pretheoretical understandings of disability associate particular disabilities with particular people and their embodied deficiency or deviance. That this seems pretheoretical or commonsensical indicates the unmarked norm of the autonomous, unified self that sustains over time and in ways definable beyond (or prior to) networked relations (much like the myth of the autonomous writer). In any case, the medical model quantifies disability/deviance, marks its borders, and develops the instruments through which classification (diagnosis) can be effected. Medical (and psychological) practitioners encapsulate the disabled person in the “medical gaze” and, in the process, turn “person” into “patient.” Unpacking this process clarifies how such medicalization operates.

When individuals are medically/psychologically diagnosed, they enter into the disciplinary machinery of the medical and/or psychological fields; they become subject to the medical gaze. Phrased another way, the medical gaze interpellates the subject as patient and identifies the patient with the disability. Linton describes the ideological implications of such enpatienting:

The homonymic *patient/patient*, is, I think, not coincidental or irrelevant. The noun *patient* is a role designation that is always relational. A patient is understood

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<sup>22</sup> For example, a deviant behavior implies a deviant system while a deviant system implies that a given behavior may be normal only be accident rather than design or natural consequent.

to belong to a doctor or other health care professional, or more generally to an institution... The adjective *patient* moves beyond the noun's neutral designation to describe a person who is capable of 'bearing or enduring pain, difficulty, provocation, or annoyance with calmness' as well as 'tolerant ... persevering ... constant ... not hasty' (*American Heritage Dictionary* 1992). The 'good' patient is one who does not challenge the authority of the practitioner or institution and who complies with the regimen set out by the expert, in other words a patient.

(234)

The clinician—as expert or authority in the identification of disease or disorder—is s/he who names the subject as “X” or “Y” (where “X” or “Y” refer to a disability), and should the subject reject such naming or diagnosis, that subject becomes impatient; that is, s/he becomes hasty, intolerant, and perhaps even anxious, which are all potential indicators of further pathology (and further legitimation of the medical gaze). This process shackles disabled individuals who may depend on auxiliary services and care provided through clinical channels: if an individual rejects or repudiates part of a clinician's assessment and/or treatment, s/he may become ineligible for other treatments or services that s/he may need. In such a context, disabled persons have often found little recourse beyond subjecting themselves to the medical model's clinical and ideological apparatuses and, in so doing, have sometimes found themselves unwilling patients.

While the medical model and the self-legitimizing technologies associated with it still hold sway in many quarters, its hegemonic power has increasingly been troubled. In particular, at the end of the Twentieth Century and the beginning of the Twenty-First, the

social model began to systematically challenge the medical model and the theories/perspectives underwriting it.

### The Social Model of Disability

Mike Oliver first referred to the “social model of disability” in 1983 (“The Social Model of Disability” 267), and it has since become the dominant Disability Studies approach in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Davidson 136). In contrast to the medical model’s location of disability in individual deficient bodies, the social model recognizes the constructed, hegemonic nature of disability. Proponents of this model maintain that understanding the socially-constructed nature of disability leads to understanding that disability is difference—deviation from the norm—that is identified as deficiency in order to buttress the norm and delineate its boundaries.

Social model theorists argue that physical architectures and hegemonic ideologies both construct and legitimize the physical and psychological configurations of either the norm or its superlative variants. For example, nothing inherently makes stairs the only—or best—way of moving from one level to another in a public space. However, that stairs have been normalized makes the inability to traverse them seem deficient even though a “normal” person might have difficulty navigating stairs in any number of circumstances. Similarly, there is nothing natural in the requirement that individuals be able to sit still for long periods of time in order to be educated. However, considerations of efficiency in many educational institutions normalize and naturalize the ability to sit through long lectures and activities, and the inability (or unwillingness) to do so becomes individual deficiency. In order to legitimate the superiority of the “norm” and its preferred practices

and ideologies, it is not enough to admit the coexistence of difference in abilities insofar as such an admission carries ethical consequences that may be at odds with normative preference. Instead, the norm (and its physical and social articulations) must become a descriptive and prescriptive category if it is to continually consolidate and legitimate its power. As Donoghue argues,

The more desirable arrangement to the non-disabled majority is one that maintains the superiority of people with ‘normal’ abilities. As a result, the disabled are typically described as dysfunctional and are often perceived to be incapable of understanding the world in the same way that ‘normal’ people do.  
(205)

To critique the norm, in other words, is to risk admitting one’s own inability to understand the norm; difference in body, mind, and even opinion becomes deficiency. The equation of difference with deficiency has been especially prevalent and often intransigent in discourses on mental disabilities.

According to a social model perspective, mental disabilities tend to be cognitive or psychosocial variations of, or departures from, the norm. This has visibly been the case in the autism community, where many self-advocates have passionately argued that so-called autistic deficits are alternative, valued behavioral and cognitive ways of being in the world. For example, in the preface to *Aquamarine Blue 5: Personal Stories of College Students with Autism*, Dawn Prince-Hughes argues for the inherent value of autists’ writing and writers:

It is true that the word choices and sentence structures of autistic writers often make it difficult to follow their thought processes. I believe that this is because



most people are used to following one ‘logical’ train of thought to what amounts to foregone conclusions. Autism spectrum people do not think this way. Rather, we constantly see divergent possibilities (and at a staggeringly fast pace) and our word selection and sentence structures often reflect this. Also, we tend to punctuate our thinking processes rather than the actual sentences we write. (xii)

While similar perspectives on disabled behaviors or expressions can be valuably counter-hegemonic, they can also be risky insofar as they keep the locus of value within extant socio-political power relations. For example, even in Prince-Hughes’ valuation of autistic writers, she falls back on the terms and comparisons that underwrite the medical model: she distinguishes “autistic writers” and their abilities from “most people” and implies that a ranked-quartile bell curve is operative, with autistic people possibly residing in the superlative quartile rather than the below-normal.<sup>23</sup> This “us” vs. “them” perspective both elides the broad heterogeneity across writers (and people, in general), but it also subtly reaffirms the myth of the supercrip.

The “supercrip” figure seemingly valorizes the accomplishments and personhood of disabled persons and may lead some to believe it is a counterhegemonic construct; however, the supercrip figure actually reinscribes medical model ideology. In brief, a “supercrip” is an individual with a disability who has “overcome” his or her disability through the achievement of something remarkable either for disabled people, “normal” people, or both. The supercrip is praised by “normal” people not only for his/her

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<sup>23</sup> I.e., implicit in the “foregone conclusion” description of “normal writing” is a tautological criticism of “normal writing” and writers. While Prince-Hughes may be right, such a comparison potentially trades on an evaluative scale that places autistic writing in the superlative quartile by virtue of its implicit space for the unexpected.

seemingly super-human abilities (for a disabled person), but also for his/her cheerful disposition in the face of a burdensome existence:

Supercrip is the Good Cripple taken to dizzying, perhaps nauseating heights, and chances are, if you've had any exposure to media depictions of disability at all, you have been exposed to this trope. Supercrip has been, in his and her various iterations, sunny, kind, overachieving, possesses a "can-do" attitude, and does AMAZING! and INSPIRING! things and can thus "overcome" his or her disability...Supercrip's main function is to serve as inspiring to the majority while reinforcing the things that make this majority feel awesome about itself. In short: Supercrip provides a way for non-disabled folks to be "inspired" by persons with disabilities *without* actually questioning—or making changes to—how persons with disabilities are treated in society. (annaham).

Wrapped up in the superlative nature of the supercrip, then, is an expectation that the supercrip will overcome his or her disability in both functional and emotional terms. The figure of the supercrip carries paternalistic and colonial freight: accomplishments are praiseworthy *for a disabled person* and because they are accomplishments that the normate values as constitutive of the normate or the superlative version of the normate. Perhaps worse is that the normate's endorsement of the supercrip potentially endangers non-supercrips.

As Linton points out, the supercrip and his/her overcoming narrative indicts “the other members of the group from which the individual has supposedly moved beyond” (228): these other “disabled” individuals, by implication, are not “as brave, strong, or extraordinary as the person who has *overcome* that designation” (228). The disabled

person who is not superlative by the norm's standards becomes especially disabled, lazy, or willful in light of supercrip narratives. Worse, if such a person refuses to be grateful to society and clinicians, they may provoke indignant responses (Marks 621). Approaching supercrip narratives from a social model perspective reveals that such narratives are not ultimately about valuing disabled persons but are instead about reinforcing the medical model of disability: the supercrip reasserts the values of the norm and the values of ableism.

In general, the social model provides a useful analytical lens for understanding how disability is socially constructed and how it functions within networks of power, but there are significant limitations to the model. In order to move beyond a general—and perhaps overly abstract—social constructionist approach to disability, it's necessary to look more closely at the shortcomings of the social model.

While the social model has provided a much-needed theoretical corrective to the medical model, it has its problems. In the broadest sense, the social model has limited theoretical and practical utility because it can simplify and essentialize disability as a unitary category. In other words, a potential, implicit slippery slope in the social model can lead to a *reductio ad absurdum* within the concept of disability itself.

If the social model frames disability as a physical or psychological configuration that deviates from a hegemonic norm, then “disability” becomes conceptually ambiguous. For example, given that the median household income in the United States is approximately \$50,000 (Noss 3), and given that access to higher education and social mobility is generally predicated upon financial stability, does it make sense—following the social model—to argue that lower-income people are disabled? While it might be a

stretch to make such a claim, it is not a far jump to conflate the social model with other models of political oppression and elide conditions that one might intuitively associate with disability (Shakespeare, “Developed Countries’ Responses” 130). Even when this collapse does not occur, the social model still has a tendency to approach disability as a homogenous category.

“Disability”—no matter how one might approach it—is a heterogeneous concept. From a medical model perspective, this is clearly the case as the myriads of diagnostic possibilities attest. The social model, in framing disability as a normate-driven oppression of difference, tends to lump all disabilities together, collapsing mental and physical disabilities (and the various forms of each) together into the broad category of “disability.” This is problematic, of course, as even at the sociocultural level, a person who has, for example, lung cancer is regarded very differently from a person who has autism. However, there is also a finer-grained homogenization that occurs through the social model. In short, the social model tends to ignore the intersectional nature of disability and the fact that “unlike other forms of marginalization, disability *always* intersects with race, class, sexuality, and gender” (Krefting 110). Put another way, one is never simply a “disabled person,” a “person with schizophrenia,” or a “person with chronic fatigue syndrome”; rather, a person might be an affluent-trans-Latino/a with multiple sclerosis. While there may be some utility in thinking about how these different categories function within social milieus, any understanding gained will be limited and will likely not reflect the intersectional nature of these categories (let alone their fluidity). Accordingly, intersectionality makes the move from larger identity-category positioning

to individual positioning extremely problematic for the social model, but not nearly as problematic as the social model's explicit or implicit omission of impairment.

Some social model theorists may avoid accounting for impairment or may attempt to subsume impairment under the social understanding of disability by claiming that impairment too is socially-constructed. "Impairment" is the deviant (from the norm) characteristic that leads to disability. For example, a person with paraplegia has an impairment in functioning in his/her lower extremities, and that person is disabled by a building which only uses stairs as access points (and the normalizing ideologies that underwrite such construction choices). The social model risks—in a way—disabling these individuals further by erasing impairments that can have significant (and sometimes negative) impacts on peoples' lives (Mulvany 583; Terzi 150). As Tom Shakespeare puts it:

The social model so strongly disowns individual and medical approaches, that it risks implying that impairment is not a problem...For individuals with static impairments, which do not degenerate or cause medical complications, it may be possible to regard disability as entirely socially created. For those who have degenerative conditions which may cause premature death, or any condition which involves pain and discomfort, it is harder to ignore the negative aspects of impairment. ("The Social Model of Disability" 269-70)

Simply put, many people with impairments require medical interventions to maintain quality of life and even continuance of life (270); accordingly, approaches to impairment and disability need to recognize the often-necessary medical aspects of living with a disability while simultaneously critiquing the medical imbrication of impairment and

disability (Mulvany 593-94). This limitation does not mean that the social model is not useful or even necessary<sup>24</sup>; however, it does mean that the social model qua reductive, everything-is-socially-constructed model needs to evolve to account for the medical dimensions of impairment—it needs to become more productively complex.

Both the medical model and the social model obscure the complexity of being disabled. The medical model fails to recognize its own limited, constructed, and hegemonic apparatuses—it is blind to its own gaze—but the social model fails to recognize that it too focuses a limiting gaze upon the individual. In the case of the social model, the gaze slides off the individual and instead apprehends a broad social blur. Under either model, the individual is continually retreating, becoming a placeholder, and fading into coextension with his or her own disability. This assertion is doubtlessly contentious, and some explanation is in order.

The claim that the medical model can essentialize disability and identify the individual with his or her disability is fairly unproblematic, but the social model of disability can perform analogous essentialization and identification. When one speaks of social configurations disabling a person and creating his or her disability, it is by virtue of a configurational difference that is tied to a social or environmental structure. For example, people who have certain sensory disorders or sensitivities may be disabled by the use of fluorescent lights. They become disabled by their relation to this architectural feature and its naturalization in many institutional settings, and an analysis of their

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<sup>24</sup> Oliver argues that the social model needs to be reformulated or replaced with something that allows for powerful social critique (and resultant action), or political pressures may force disabled persons to eventually succumb to pressures of accepting medicalized models of disability to ensure continued medical interventions for their impairments (1026).

disablement centers on this difference. Foregrounding this difference both elides the experience of the impairment—in this case, potential sensory dissonance, anxiety, or any number of resultant physiological and/or cognitive responses—and also collapses the identity of the individual into a single point: the disability. What is the individual's gender identification, and how does that identification color social expectations of responses to sensory disorders or resultant/comorbid conditions like panic attacks? What of the individual's culture? How might different cultures—and the experience of occupying a position or class affiliation within a particular culture—affect the experience of being disabled? The social model does not imply such questions (at least not usually and not in such an interrelated way), and so its likening to the medical model makes more sense: each model condenses and compresses the individual's relation to a disability. The models may come at it from different directions, and may create identification in different ways, but they both nonetheless miss the intersectionality of identities.

One way in which the social model might move away from the medical model while retaining its critical social power is through closer attention to the intersectionality of identities and/or identity categories. Intersectional analyses, some scholars have shown, can more concretely show how disability is socially-constructed than some social model approaches. For example, Mark Sherry has argued that when depression is recontextualized within particular cultures, its social construction qua disability may be foregrounded in concrete ways. Drawing from T.D. O'Neil's study of depression in a Flathead Indian community, Sherry argues that a medical model approach to depression elides depression's cultural situatedness and that such decontextualization obscures not just the location of depression—within a body, cultural matrix, and so forth—but also its

broader extension. According to O’Neill’s study, between 70% and 80% of the Flathead Indians in a particular community reported experiencing depression (102). Such figures approached through a medical model lens might indicate an epidemic. However, as Sherry describes, these figures cannot be interpreted without understanding how depression functions within the Flathead Indians’ culture:

The incidence of depression was not generally connected to accounts of illness. Instead, a sense of suffering was regarded as a marker of maturity and Indian identity. For many people living on the Flathead Reservation, depression is the natural and esteemed condition of ‘real Indians,’ those who have used their sadness as a source of compassionate responsibility for others...O’Neill interprets the loneliness and depression as part of the political process of individual and collective demoralization and ‘remoralization’ of the Flathead Indian people. (102)

As Sherry goes on to argue, such an analysis is impossible from a medical model perspective: “depression” would be approached as ahistorical, apolitical, and generally decontextualized (102). Of course, a broad and/or overly-abstract social model might yield the same results by collapsing the Flathead Indians into a general social category and placing the larger category in relation to broader social structures and groups (i.e., a social model might zoom out to larger milieus and miss the local social role of “depression” for the Flathead Indians). In short, it is not enough to say that a particular disability is created by social conditions, for such an affirmation borders on uselessness in its generality; instead, disability must be locally-contextualized within physical, cultural, and intersecting environments.



Intersectional analyses also help us see that the social model may run the risk of self-naturalization. Chris Bell, for example, argues that Disability Studies (and the social model by implication) should be referred to as “White Disability Studies” because of its unmarked “White” nature:

I contend that it is disingenuous to keep up the pretense that the field is an inclusive one when it is not. On that score, I would like to concede the failure of Disability Studies to engage issues of race and ethnicity in a substantive capacity, thereby entrenching whiteness as its constitutive underpinning...In contradistinction to Disability Studies, White Disability Studies recognizes its tendency to whitewash disability history, ontology and phenomenology. (374)

Bell’s contention does not seem far off-base; indeed, a number of other scholars have argued that Disability Studies needs to actively reorient its models and methods of inquiry as more explicitly intersectional. Robert McRuer has written about the critical benefits of a “queer/disability studies” which could

continuously invoke...the inadequate resolutions that compulsory able-bodiedness offer us. And in contrast to an able-bodied culture that holds out the promise of a substantive (but paradoxically always elusive) ideal, a queer/disabled perspective would resist delimiting the kinds of bodies and abilities that are acceptable or that will bring about change. (389)

Other writers outside the academy have written at length about how sexuality, gender, and class can intersect with disability and how such intersections and accounts of them are not only illuminating but also necessary in understanding disability and moving beyond an academic, overly-abstract “White Disability Studies.”

An increasing number of writers offer narratives of their own disabilities which foreground the fundamental intersectionality of disability with other identity categories and how this intersectionality cannot be exhausted by social models alone. Amy Wilensky's book, *Passing for Normal: A Memoir of Compulsion*, recounts how Wilensky's experiences with Tourette Syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder, and trying to "pass"—to give the appearance of being nondisabled— permeated every aspect of her life. Nancy Mairs' famous and moving essay about living with multiple sclerosis, "On Being a Cripple," even more explicitly tracks how her disability intersects with her identities as teacher, daughter, wife. Mairs rejects the easy categorization and compartmentalization that so often attends disability, declaring, "What I hate is not me but a disease. I am not a disease. And a disease is not—at least not single-handedly—going to determine who I am, though at first it seemed it was going to." In his book, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, Eli Clare explores the complicated intersectionality of disability and other contested identity categories, not only showing that these categories are mutually-constitutive and transformative, but also showing that such intersectionality can transform and reframe context as well. Scholarly critiques and popular accounts of intersectionality like the above are undoubtedly useful in marking disability (and Disability Studies) and contextualizing/complicating disability categories, but categorization still obscures the complex, embodied, and—quite simply—lived experience of having a disability.

While intersectional approaches to disability can begin to complicate the essentializing/decontextualizing aspects of the medical and social models, these approaches still have limited utility and applicability. In the most general sense, thinking

in terms of identity categories, even intersecting and interpenetrating ones, still risks a collapse of the individual into such categories; in other words, a “person” becomes the locus of intersecting, contextualized identity categories that—hypothetically—could be externally parsed and placed in relation to one another (a dubious proposition).<sup>25</sup>

Relatedly, there is an implicit assumption in categorical approaches to identity that the various operative identity categories can be teased apart, weighted, and/or tracked within a particular context either by external agencies (such as a critic describing how a particular environment disables a particular person or a discourse analyst tracking how a particular category is performed or attended to in context) or by an individual person. In short, utilizing categories is a sometimes-useful heuristic for critiquing social configurations, but even when categorical approaches become more nuanced through intersectional analyses, they still miss the complexity of living with a disability: categorical (and more broadly, medical and social) approaches to disability lack an affective, phenomenological element. There is a problem of access.

Access to both other minds and to one’s own mind has been a perennial problem in Western Philosophy since Descartes built his cathedral of consciousness upon his cornerstone *cogito*. Some recent philosophers and scientists have even gone so far to assert the fundamental unknowability of consciousness because of brain structures.<sup>26</sup> In terms of our own minds, Judith Butler has argued that we always remain opaque to ourselves:

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<sup>25</sup> I say “hypothetically” here to indicate the lack of a logical absurdity in the idea, not to indicate any practicable possibility.

<sup>26</sup> Colin McGinn, for example, argues that our brains are wired in certain ways that preclude our ability to grasp or think through certain things. For McGinn, human brains are “cognitively closed” with respect to consciousness—it’s just something we can’t fully understand.

If I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognizable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life. But this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or not mine alone. And I will, to some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable. The narrative authority of the ‘I’ must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contests the singularity of my story... my narrative begins *in media res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story possible in language. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, and I am left to fictionalize and fabulate origins I cannot know. (37-39)

What Butler is getting at above is a relationship between one’s identity for oneself and one’s identity for others. One’s identity—as a broad, delimitable concept or unit—functions socially and has a history not totally accessible to the individual. But one’s access to one’s identity is also circumscribed by the tendency towards coherent narrativization of one’s life and/or sense of “I” (64). Because of such closure or inaccessibility, some scholars have advocated an approach to disability (and identity more broadly) that relies upon emergence and performance, arguing that such an approach bridges the personal experience of disability with the social construction of it.

In “Avoiding the Difference Fixation: Identity Categories, Markers of Difference, and the Teaching of Writing,” Stephanie Kerschbaum approaches identity—and, more specifically, differences therein—as something dynamic that emerges in interactions. Kerschbaum argues that many writing scholars try to get at more complicated and nuanced approaches to identity through ever-more precise categorical taxonomies of roles/intersections of roles that writers may play or complications of extant categories of

identity (619-20). Unfortunately, these approaches can ignore aspects of an individual that may not be evident in a particular interaction or performance but that may nonetheless affect that interaction or performance (like internal states, affective dimensions, etc.); in addition, such approaches tend to fix or reify categories (619-20). Kerschbaum offers a solution by arguing that identity should be approached not as a series or even confluence of stable categories but instead as “dynamic, relational, and emergent” (623). This emergent approach to identity and difference follows (in spirit if not in letter) discourse-analytic approaches to identity as emergent-in-interaction, but it also captures the access issues raised above:

To presume to know me is to close off interactional possibilities rather than to hold them open... Indeed, this uniqueness is such that people are never even coincident with themselves: I am always yet-to-be, I am always coming to know who I am. I cannot know every aspect of even my own identity and self...it is only through interaction with others that people are able to apprehend themselves. This awareness, subsequently, shapes their consciousness of the markers to which others are orienting and how they take on meaning. (626-27)

This continual “coming-to-be” in interaction occurs through the deployment of—and attending to—markers of difference, which, in turn, points to the rhetoricality of identity/identity performance (626-28) and also underscores the importance of context (and how it is attended to/interacted with) to identity (634-35). This finer-grained approach to identity seems to destabilize the fixation of identity categories that can happen with medical or social approaches to disability, but it is still fraught, particularly in the case of invisible disabilities.

Individuals with “invisible disabilities” challenge models of identity that equate identity with its emergence/performance. According to the Invisible Disabilities Association, the term “invisible disabilities” refers to “symptoms such as debilitating pain, fatigue, dizziness, cognitive dysfunctions, brain injuries, learning differences and mental health disorders, as well as hearing and vision impairments” (“What Is an Invisible Disability”). Many of these disabilities may not emerge in interaction, or they may not emerge in such a way that they are observable by other individuals in a particular context. They may even be interpreted as something else entirely. Within a composition classroom, for example, chronic fatigue may be parsed as laziness or as the result of undergraduate shenanigans. Similarly, seeming disengagement during a teacher-student conference—roving eyes, the inability to follow the thread of the teacher’s words, continual shifting in the seat—may be read as disengagement or boredom rather than, say, a sensory processing disorder. In either case (and myriads of similar examples) the emergence of performed identities is made problematic by both the potential nature of particular disabilities and by the asymmetric power relations between the student and teacher (i.e., the teacher’s interpretive response to such interactions can have concrete evaluative consequences for the student that are not mirrored by the student’s available interpretive reactions). Pushing harder on this issue of participation and emergence reveals more fundamental problems for those individuals who cannot communicate in contextually-normed ways.

Individuals with certain cognitive and/or communicative disabilities<sup>27</sup> are at risk for essentialization and colonization within interactions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Foucault has argued that, historically, the speech of the “madman” (a person with a cognitive or, possibly, communicative disorder) has had special, symbolic signifying properties but, technically, such speech does not signify (“The Discourse on Language” 217). In contexts where one is known to have a cognitive disability, or one “outs” him or herself as having such a disability, there is a very real chance that merely attending to features of the interaction will lead to an appraisal of discursive inaccessibility. In an often-quoted passage, Catherine Prendergast eloquently describes this danger: “To be disabled mentally is to be disabled rhetorically... That the mentally ill are treated as devoid of rhetoric would seem to me to be an obvious point: If people think you’re crazy, they don’t listen to you”(57). In other words, as a person with a cognitive or communicative disorder emerges through discursive interactions, s/he may be categorized as non-functional or deficient by his or her *apparent* inability to attend to interactions in contextually-appropriate ways. This is often the case with non-verbal autistic individuals. Some scholars in a variety of fields have found ways to obviate such presumptions: some have pointed out how microfeatures of discourse provide evidence of some rhetorical understanding (Kremer-Sadlik),<sup>28</sup> while others have offered ways to presume rhetoricity

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<sup>27</sup> The seeming conflation of cognitive and communicative disorder here is intentional. I write with Autism Spectrum Disorders in mind, and the agnosticism re: cognitive vs. communicative disorder resists diagnostic essentialization of ASDs as primarily cognitive disorders.

<sup>28</sup> Tamar Kremer-Sadlik, in “How Children with Autism and Asperger Syndrome Respond to Questions: A ‘Naturalistic’ Theory of Mind Task,” tracks how children with Asperger’s Syndrome approach “adjacency pairs” and finds that—at least in a local, familial context—children with Asperger Syndrome are able to “read” social situations appropriately (195).

and differential discourse conventions (Heilker and Yergeau 489-90). Even emergent models that presume competency and rhetoricity can still miss the embodied, lived dimensions of disability. Accordingly, a theoretically-nuanced approach to disability must somehow account for how context and interactions in context define a disability for both the disabled person and for other people attending to that disability in context, but such an approach must also take into consideration the disabled person's experience of such interactions and how this experience in turn affects the construction of that disability in context.

#### Complicating Embodiment, Complexifying Accommodation, and Making a Conundrum of Composition

In his book, *Disability Theory*, Tobin Siebers uses “complex embodiment” to describe the relationship between the social construction of disability and the lived, phenomenological reality of living with a disability. As Siebers describes it, complex embodiment, “theorizes the body and its representations as mutually transformative. Social representations obviously affect the experience of the body...but the body possesses the ability to determine its social representation as well” (25-26). Siebers believes that social construction only tells part of the story and that there are elements of experience that are irreducible to abstract categories or instances of representation (such as the affective of phenomenological dimensions of having a disability). Accordingly, much of Siebers' book is dedicated to destabilizing the vague nature of the term “socially constructed,” and his “complex embodiment” points to the need for further elaborations and specifications of disability models.



Extending the complexity in “complex embodiment” can redirect theories of disability into more nuanced and productive directions, particularly in terms of how environments construct disability and how individuals interact with such constructions and the representations they create. Some analyses of built environments will begin and end by merely picking out general features or relations that “construct” the normate and disable the different. While this sort of analysis is undoubtedly helpful in marking the unmarked norm, it seems as if it oversimplifies the environment’s role in constructing the disability. As Siebers contends:

What if we were to embrace the metaphor implied by social construction, if we required that the ‘construction’ in social construction be understood as a building...and that its blueprint be made available? Not only would this requirement stipulate that we elaborate claims about social construction in concrete terms, it would insist that we locate the construction in time and place as a form of complex embodiment. (32)

Siebers is calling for a more detailed use of the term “social construction,” maintaining that whenever we use this concept with relation to disability we need to “map as many details about the construction as possible and to track its political, epistemological, and real effects in the world of human beings” (32-33). Among these “real effects,” we must track both the apparent or emergent effects but also—as much as is possible—the individually-experienced effects. To accomplish this means a potentially radical reconfiguration of “accommodation.”

As it is pretheoretically understood, “accommodation” implies a “fitting in” to an extant structure: one is accommodated to or within something else. The law underscores

this with its fundamental alteration clauses; i.e., a “reasonable accommodation” is one that does not result in or necessitate fundamental alterations of goods, services, etc. (*ADAAA* Sec. 12182). This model of accommodation implies a unidirectional, asymmetrical relationship wherein the disabled person should not seriously affect the broader ecology: there is either space for the person-to-be-accommodated, in which the person fits into an extant location, or there is no space and the person is not fit (in either case, the accommodating locus remains fundamentally unchanged). Following Siebers and focusing on what accommodations do or can do may both uncover and promote a more complex and transformative model of accommodation based in a more complex model of disability. But before concretizing, it’s first necessary to abstract a bit further.

If an accommodation must be made for an individual, then this means that there is an element or framework within a given ecology<sup>29</sup> that is dissonant, inimical, or inaccessible to the individual. When such an individual experiences this disjunction, unmarked aspects of the ecology become marked and available for scrutiny and critique.

As Siebers points out:

When a disabled body enters any construction, social or physical, a deconstruction occurs, a deconstruction that reveals the lines of force, the blueprint, of the social rendering of the building as surely as its physical rendering. Constructions are built with certain social bodies in mind, and when a different body appears, the lack of fit reveals the ideology of ability controlling the space. (124)

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<sup>29</sup> I am using the term “ecology” here because it allows for greater flexibility in terms of treating physical, environmental, and ideological/social aspects of an environment. It also underscores the interrelationships between these elements, interrelationships that will be explicated and explained in further depth throughout this project.

So, the lack of fit upon which accommodation is predicated highlights those areas taken for granted and/or normed within the ecology. These areas then become available for critique and even theorization.<sup>30</sup> In one pragmatic respect, this is built into the legal requirements of reasonable accommodation: “unreasonable accommodations” foreground what those in power understand as essential or fundamental to an ecology and frame the conditions of diminishing returns (“undue burden”) or disequilibrium within that ecology. Of course, even a granted (and therefore “reasonable”) accommodation could result in rethinking and retheorizing.

Denying an accommodation clarifies certain theoretical commitments and exercises or establishes certain relationships of power within a particular ecology, but granting an accommodation may also result in concrete changes to the broader ecology. To put it simply, an accommodation is not a slotting or a fitting; it is transforming. The individuals involved, the rules that govern their interactions, and the context wherein all of this occurs are reconstituted. Of course, this description borders on useless given its generality, so greater specification is necessary to understand the nuances of this process and how exactly such a dialectic may operate.

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<sup>30</sup> While a number of practices in composition courses will be critiqued with this dialectic in mind in later chapters, it’s worth mentioning a concrete example here to explicate this point. Regular classroom attendance is thought to be critical to the learning of “composition.” Beyond adherence to college or university guidelines, one might argue that this belief is underwritten by Composition Studies’ subscription to processural models of both writing and writing pedagogy. Within a given writing program, then, a disabled student’s need for additional absences—due to treatments or temporary increases in severity of certain conditions—could meet with a blank administrative response, or they could serve as an opportunity to discover where the particular writing program derived the policy from, with either direction (university policy vs. processural commitment) revealing theoretical and/or bureaucratic consequences that could further be queried with the essential criterion (“is this practice essential to composition?”).

To continue to move forward towards a robust theorization of accommodation, I must-locate my discussion within a more particular context. Towards this end, in the chapters that follow, I theorize a model of accommodation that complicates extant models of disability and the relationship of the disabled individual to the composition classroom. I use “local” and “local context” to refer at times to particular composition classrooms and at times to the writing programs that house them. As will be shown, it is not really possible to fully disentangle these contexts from one another, and there is sometimes slippage between the two.

Following the destabilization of identity categories and disability that occurs in this chapter, a robust theorization of accommodation must account for the emergent, rhetorical, and complex aspects of identity while simultaneously recognizing that many people, legal institutions, and Composition Studies itself may continue to approach identity and disability in a priori, categorical ways. In Chapter 3, I show how theorizing accommodation within Composition Studies results in an intertheorization: what is being accommodated must be theorized as it moves into the accommodating context—just as that context must be theorized in light of that-which-is-to-be accommodated—if the relationship between the two may be understood. I show that such intertheorization within the context of college composition reveals a sometimes-legalistic and medical theorization of disability within Composition Studies. This theorization, I argue, is dissonant with other commitments in the field, and a complex model of disability and accommodation theorized *within* a compositional context sheds light not only on disability/disabilities, but also on composition itself, implying transformative approaches to working with all student writers.

## **Chapter 3: Complicating Composition: First-Year Writing and Complex Accommodation**

### Introduction

As the name implies, “complex accommodation” is complex. This chapter tracks this complexity within a Composition Studies context, and I argue that complex accommodation helps Composition Studies avoid a rhetoric of requirement in relation to disability and instead embrace a rhetoric of affordance. Complex accommodation in composition can lead to pedagogical, theoretical, and administrative inquiries and critiques which may, in turn, lead to fundamental transformations of composition for the betterment of all students. Additionally, I argue that the “complexity” in “complex accommodation” need not preclude widespread adoption of this form of accommodation; instead, easy-to-follow heuristics can help individual instructors and writing programs work through particular accommodations, including the implications of such accommodations within classrooms and within writing programs. To best understand how complex accommodation might be fully articulated within Composition Studies, though, it’s first necessary to clarify which model of disability the field tends to accept.

### Composition and Models of Disability

While some composition scholars embrace complex approaches to disability (see esp. Heilker and Yergeau), the larger field seems to subscribe to a broadly social model of disability. For example, “A Policy on Disability in CCCC” not only indicates the CCCC’s commitment to access and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, but it also recognizes the overlap between Composition Studies and Disability Studies, and it

underscores a social-model understanding of disability. The position statement affirms, in part, that

CCCC acknowledges the important contributions disability studies makes to composition and rhetoric, to the promotion of access, to literacy studies, and to theories of difference, especially in its critique of “norms” and “normalcy.” The questions posed by disability studies ask us to rethink language, the body, the environment, identity, culture, power, and the nature of knowledge itself, enabling a meaningful engagement at multiple levels: bodily, personal, social, cultural, and political.

The above could be read as a general statement of Disability Studies’ importance as a field of inquiry, and the CCCC’s position statement goes on to underscore the advantages of centering Disability Studies approaches in composition. The statement even goes so far as to affirm that “disability studies enhances learning and teaching in college composition...Disability studies as it intersects with composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies has enlarged knowledge in our field.” In short, the CCCC statement positions the work of Disability Studies as complementary to, and even partially-constitutive of, Composition Studies (“enlarged knowledge in the field”). The position statement is somewhat less direct regarding its alignment with the social model, but such alignment is present:

We acknowledge the right of full inclusion for all members of society. Full inclusion for people with disabilities means moving beyond narrow conceptions of disability as a flaw, deficit, or a trait to be accommodated. At best, governmental legislation outlines minimum standards of accommodation for

people with disabilities; full inclusion, however, requires going beyond the minimum standards. Educators should ensure that alternatives for those with disabilities are built into physical and intellectual spaces, rather than "added on" in ways that segregate and stigmatize those with disabilities.

The above distances the CCCC from the medical model ("moving beyond narrow conceptions of disability as flaw, deficit, or a trait to be accommodated"), and the statement's recognition that disability requires transformation rather than fitting is consistent with social model understandings of the ways in which physical and intellectual spaces construct individuals. Additionally, the overall tenor of the position statement more closely approaches a rhetoric of affordance rather than one of requirement ("going beyond the minimum standards).” It's not clear, however, whether such a position statement is meant to be generally descriptive or prescriptive.

According to "The Process by which CCCC Position Statements are Created," CCCC position statements are institutionally or organizationally descriptive. In other words, "Characteristically, a position statement is a short summary of what is currently known about an issue and the organizational beliefs about that issue." These statements are crafted by CCCC Executive Committee-appointed taskforces that research "a proposed issue, drafts and revises a position statement, and presents the revised position statement to the Executive Committee for its approval in order to represent the organization at large." While the statements may "include implied suggestions for putting recommendations to practice," they are largely descriptive of the CCCC's knowledge and perspective on given issues; the statements do not function as field guidelines or standards. With this in mind, appealing to "A Policy on Disability in CCCC" in order to

suss out the field's operative model of disability may be misguided. In fact, trying to suss out the field's overall operative model of disability may overlook some fundamental characteristics of the field.

The model of disability a compositionist subscribes to will be a function of any number of features. While an individual instructor might be guided by the CCCC position statements, his or her alignment (in terms of disability models) will more likely be a result of his or her education, background, and—most immediately—current institutional conditions. The writing programs and departments in which compositionists find themselves can often determine the model of disability which one subscribes to. This is not to say that instructors uncritically accept their writing programs' explicit constructions of disability (though this might occur); however, the writing program and its institutional articulations can create conditions of intelligibility with respect to disability. For example, at my current institution, the “social model of disability” was largely unknown (or, at least, not discussed) within the writing program except by a small handful of individual instructors who work at the intersections of Disability Studies and Composition Studies. Teacher-training, professional development, and writing program curriculum did not address the social model or social constructionist approximations of the social model. Until the social model was recently presented at a professional development forum on disability and disability issues (the first of its kind in the writing program), the social model was conceptually unavailable for many of the compositionists in the writing program. Disability was constructed, instead, through other available institutional channels.



In the absence of a more foregrounded and nuanced description of disability, my writing program approached disability through other available institutional avenues; in the present case, these channels consisted of referral to the Student Accessibility Center and the bureaucratic machinery and attendant medicalization sometimes associated with it (see 12-14 in the “Introduction”). This is not to say that in the absence of explicit cultural alignment (i.e., a writing program’s cultural alignment) with the social model, the default model for compositionists or even writing programs will be the medical model; rather, my particular writing program and the individuals which constitute it had access to an uneven conceptual horizon: some instructors understood and worked in light of the social model of disability, while others did not have access to the social model qua concept and were thus left to other extant (within the program and institution) approaches to disability. My experience at other institutions bears out this unevenness. Some programs I have visited have thoroughgoing social (if not complex) approaches to disability, while many others approach disability in the ways my program used to. The point here is this: talking about model alignment at the field level elides the fact that writing programs across the country are often heterogeneous in their practices, structures, and theories; and within given programs, individual instructors will often show great variance in practices, administration, and theories as well. This variance has salient consequences for model alignment or acceptance, and it also more firmly locates potential deliberative procedures within individual writing programs.

The WPA OS and “Head Count Evidence”

As *Guckenberger v. Boston University* established, the reasonableness of an accommodation is a function of a situated deliberative procedure, and appeals to other institutions’ practices are unlikely to affect rulings (see Chapter 1, 41-44). Given this precedent and given the fact that writing programs can exhibit great variance across institutions, there doesn’t seem to be much danger that a plaintiff suing for accommodations in a writing program would be able to appeal to other programs; such an approach would likely constitute “head count evidence” and be “particularly inappropriate in the protean area of a liberal arts education” (*Guckenberger v. Boston University*). Though writing programs seem to be somewhat insulated with respect to accommodation requirements through legal precedent and programmatic heterogeneity, I wonder if there are any fundamental or essential components to composition curricula, because while precedent is against “head count evidence,” *Guckenberger v. Boston* is agnostic as to whether or not a “substantial departure from accepted academic norms” might reasonably be appealed to in some circumstances (even within the “protean area of a liberal arts education”).

In trying to suss out some sort of field-level essential or fundamental curricular requirements, it is hard to pin down commonalities that may exist between programs with any degree of specificity. As the *Wynne* and *Guckenberger* courts pointed out, there are indisputable requirements in a medical education like demonstrating proficiency in biochemistry, but it’s not as clear whether there are similar field-wide verities regarding composition curricula. Writing programs can differ radically on how writing is to be assessed, on what constitutes an appropriate pedagogical approach, and even on the

proper content of a composition class.<sup>31</sup> Drawing from another core field-level position statement—the “Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition” (WPA OS)—shows that perhaps this variance is itself fundamental and endemic to Composition Studies.

Unlike the CCCC position statements, the WPA OS may be framed as a central, field-wide document that both describes *and* prescribes first-year composition. The WPA OS describes

...attempts to both represent and regularize writing programs’ priorities for first-year composition... To this end it is not merely a compilation or summary of what currently takes place. Rather, this Statement articulates what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory. It intentionally defines only “outcomes,” or types of results, and not “standards,” or precise levels of achievement. The setting of standards to measure students’ achievement of these Outcomes has deliberately been left to local writing programs and their institutions. (para. 1)

There are a number of notable features here. First, the WPA OS clearly affirms some sort of core to composition. This is present (tacitly, at least) in the belief in some body of knowledge that “composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory,” which implies particular outcomes that may be prescribed across the field. Second, although these outcomes are cross-contextual, assessment of their achievement

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<sup>31</sup> A few authors have even argued that there is no actual “content” beyond an under-articulated self-referentiality in composition as it is currently formulated (Russell), with some scholars calling for a transformation of composition into a more clearly content-driven course (Downs and Wardle).

should be local and developed in both composition and in students' subsequent disciplinary curricula.

The structure of the WPA OS indicates a cross-curricular linkage within particular institutions, a linking up that may occur in any variety of locally-determined ways. The outcomes are divided into four broad categories: Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing; Processes; and, Knowledge of Conventions. Under each heading, there is a brief description of what that category refers to.<sup>32</sup> Under these descriptions, there are a number of outcomes headed by "*By the end of first-year composition, students should*" (italics in original), followed by another set of outcomes headed by "Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn." So, for example, the outcomes for "Rhetorical Knowledge" read:

*By the end of first-year composition, students should*

- Learn and use key rhetorical concepts through analyzing and composing a variety of texts
- Gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes
- Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure

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<sup>32</sup> For example, under "Processes," the WPA OS reads: "Writers use multiple strategies, composing processes, to conceptualize, develop, and finalize projects. Composing processes are seldom linear: a writer may research a topic before drafting, then conduct additional research while revising or after consulting a colleague. Composing processes are also flexible: successful writers can adapt their composing processes to different contexts and occasions."

- Understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences
- Match the capacities of different environments (e.g., print and electronic) to varying rhetorical situations

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- The expectations of readers in their fields
- The main features of genres in their fields
- The main purposes of composing in their fields

In this example, please note that the FYC outcomes are underspecified: they can be achieved in a variety of ways. This has two consequences. First, these outcomes show that writing programs can realize particular outcomes in quite different ways. For example, in “Gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers’ and writers’ practices and purposes,” genres can refer broadly to fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. “Genres” could also refer to science writing, business writing, or writing for advertising. Perhaps “genres” could refer to visual texts, audio texts, and multimedia texts. Whatever the case, it seems that there is a great degree of flexibility built into how these outcomes might be operationalized.

The second consequence of the underspecification is that there is an implicit and explicit implication that later work will capitalize on or flesh out the earlier, general work of composition in concrete and particular instances. In fact, one might make the case that these outcomes are structured in such a way in order to facilitate transfer from

composition to other disciplines. This seems to be confirmed by the way the second set of subgoals in each section focuses on the ways in which faculty in other fields or disciplines can “build on this preparation.”<sup>33</sup> Leaving aside the issue of transfer though, the broader underspecification of the WPA OS signifies a recognition that composition and its essential curricular elements/approaches are hashed out within local programs.

Curricular underspecification and local determination in composition might make it quite difficult for a plaintiff to show s/he had been discriminated against on the basis of his or her disability. If the essential or fundamental aspects of composition curricula are dependent upon local programs’ own sense of what is essential or fundamental to composition instruction, then appealing to a program’s “substantial departure from accepted academic norms” would likely not sway a court as those academic norms include local instantiations and determinations of what exactly is essential to a course of study in composition at a particular institution. Of course, a program would likely still be held to the standard of the “deliberative procedure,” but as previous case law seems to demonstrate, this requirement may be easily fulfilled. So, what is composition required to do? What must writing programs do with regard to disability?

#### A Rhetoric of Requirement vs. A Rhetoric of Affordance

In a very real sense, it seems that writing programs must be able to justify their own practices by their own lights when confronted with cases of disability via a deliberative

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<sup>33</sup> Perkins and Salomon might argue that the ways the WPA OS works with outcomes are predicated on “backward-reaching high-road transfer”: in their work in other disciplinary contexts, students should be able to consciously abstract from their particular contexts and reach backwards to their earlier experience in composition for insight on how to negotiate particular situations or problems (26).

procedure. As compositionists in general focus professionally on curricula, pedagogy, and argument, it seems likely that most programs would be able to justify most practices rather handily if faced with the deliberative procedure requirement. But this raises a crucial question: are writing programs structured according to rhetorics of requirement or rhetorics of affordance? In one sense, such a question is unanswerable given the programmatic heterogeneity discussed in the previous section. However, I believe that a rhetoric of affordance is more in line with many compositionists' sense of themselves and their work, as "A Policy on Disability in CCCC" seems to indicate. Ultimately, though, casting writing programs' approaches in terms of a rhetoric of requirement vs. a rhetoric of affordance may be overly-reductive.

Each writing program (and the writing instructors working within them) must negotiate coexisting and often conflicting rhetorics of requirement and affordance. Composition itself is usually a requirement for most students, and given its resultant enrollments, it is often subject to programmatic assessment and close institutional scrutiny. These institutional requirements may trickle down into programmatic requirements that may, in turn, trickle down into pedagogical and administrative requirements. Against this backdrop of requirement, though, every writing instructor I have met approaches their work in terms of dilating possibilities: What can we do for our students? What possibilities exist within a student draft? What possibilities does this or that pedagogical practice create? What new and exciting boundaries can my lesson, my course, my program push against and even cross for the enrichment of students, instructors, program, institution, and society? These questions and the rhetoric of affordance that underwrites them must square with the contextual requirements to which

writing programs and instructors find themselves subject to, but these requirements too can become affordances in the ways they create horizons of possibility, as I hope to show. The accommodation of disability, when handled complexly, can help to bridge the requirements and affordances not just in the area of disability accommodation but in composition in general. Before turning more directly to complex accommodation as a bridge between affordance and requirement, it will first be helpful to look at two extant models of accommodation, how they line up with rhetorics of requirement and affordance, and why these models are insufficient.

#### Ad Hoc Accommodation and Universal Design

Many approaches to accommodation take two broad directions: ad hoc accommodation or accommodation via Universal Design. These approaches are simplified here for the purposes of capturing them in broad strokes. In reality, these approaches can be interrelated and not cleanly separable, though sometimes they do occur in isolation. To be clear, what follows is not a dismissal of either form of accommodation; rather, I hope to show that either approach is by itself generally insufficient for a robust, situated, complex model of accommodation in Composition Studies.

By “ad hoc accommodation,” I refer to an accommodation of fit wherein an environment (broadly construed to include intellectual environments) is altered *in the moment* to fit a particular student’s configuration. I use the term “ad hoc” to indicate that this type of accommodation often occurs when a particular case of disability is encountered in a particular instance, but I also use this term to indicate that such accommodation does not immediately imply or result in systemic change. So, for



example, an office worker with photophobia or photo-oculodynia<sup>34</sup> may need to work in an office where s/he can avoid harsh fluorescent lights and control ambient light exposure. In this case, the environment may not be substantially altered (the worker may simply be moved into a private office), and the use of fluorescent lights as the default office lighting may go uninterrogated. Similarly, a student who is hard of hearing may request and receive a note-taker for his or her classes. In such a case, the student is helped to better fit within the extant environment, but the oral components of his or her classes go uninterrogated (i.e., the necessity for such elements to be within the course). In either case, there is an implicit alignment with medical model approaches to disability: the disability—the lack of fit—is asymmetric, and it is the deviant body and its articulations that must be transformed rather than the environment (the disabled individual must fit in the environment, not the other way around).

Ad hoc accommodations are necessary and often salutary. When a lack of fit is discovered between an environment and an individual, it often occurs *in medias res* (such as in the midst of a school semester), and some sort of immediate accommodation is necessary so that the environment may be more accessible for the individual. The necessity for accommodation indicates an environmental privileging (usually of an unmarked “norm”) and should, ideally, result in a redesign that better includes non-privileged configurations. However, such redesign is not always an option for various reasons, and so ad hoc accommodations can provide useful bootstrapped solutions, even if ad hoc accommodations have a number of limitations.

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<sup>34</sup> Digre and Brennan define photophobia as “a sensory state in which light causes discomfort in the eye or head; it may also cause an avoidance reaction without overt pain,” and photo-oculodynia as “light-induced eye pain from a normally non-painful source (e.g. ambient lighting)” (n.p.).

As I discuss above, the fact that accommodations become necessary indicates particular configurational privileging. Focusing on ad hoc accommodations without inquiring into the various ways environments privilege certain configurations can obscure other disabling aspects of the environment and miss how a disabling practice, policy, or structure is underwritten by monolithic conceptions of normality and/or ability. In addition, ad hoc accommodational approaches might presuppose the visibility of disability (where “visibility” means one can observe a disability directly or through administrative reporting such as the VISA at my own institution). As I indicated earlier in the Introduction (13-14), becoming visible in the sense of receiving a medical diagnosis can be problematized by a number of factors including the cost of diagnosis and fear of stigma. This does not mean that individuals so unmarked do not have disabilities, and it certainly does not mean that these individuals should be precluded from accommodations. However, given the ways in which university accommodation services are often structured, these individuals may have limited options in terms of ad hoc accommodations.<sup>35</sup> Such issues can be mitigated in cases where redesign is possible.

In those instances where redesign is possible or necessary, universal design may be the preferred accommodational approach. It is worth noting a few important variants of the term “universal design” here. Ron Mace—who is thought to have begun popularizing the term—argued that Universal Design is “not a new science, a style, or

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<sup>35</sup> AHEAD, the Association on Higher Education and Disability, has promulgated a conceptual framework for working with disability documentation: “Supporting Accommodation Requests: Guidance on Documentation Practices—April 2012.” While AHEAD recognizes that colleges and universities may “request a reasonable level of documentation” of disability, the organization also argues that “No legislation or regulations require that documentation be requested or obtained in order to demonstrate entitlement to legal protections because of disability ... entities can require documentation though they are not obligated to do so.”

unique in any way. It requires only an awareness of need and market and a commonsense approach to making everything we design and produce usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible” (“History of Universal Design”). Of course, universal design is conceptually predicated upon the idea that environments have *not* been produced to be “usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible”; rather, they have been produced to be usable by persons with normalized configurations. The Assistive Technology Act of 1998 appears to recognize this when it defines “universal design” as:

a concept or philosophy for designing and delivering products and services that are usable by people with the widest possible range of functional capabilities, which include products and services that are directly usable (without requiring assistive technologies) and products and devices that are made usable with assistive technologies.

This specification throws into light the variance in capabilities that universal design approaches need to account for, and this variance is made even more explicit in the Higher Education Opportunity Act’s definition of “Universal Design for learning”:

The term ‘universal design for learning’ means a scientifically-valid framework for guiding educational practice that (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.

At first blush, this formulation of universal design for learning (or UDL) is attractive: it recommends flexible and multimodal (in the broad sense of the term) pedagogy and assessment, it calls for necessary accommodations, and it upholds standards within an accommodational framework. These are, indeed, salutary and laudable goals, but they are more complicated than they initially appear.

In the most general sense, UDL (and universal design in general) will always be associated with particular socio-historical conceptions of “universality.” If a “disability” socially supervenes upon an impairment or non-normate individual configuration, then it is only recognizable and accountable (via design) if it can become visible within a particular milieu. To use the example above, if photophobia or photo-oculodynia is not recognized as a disability or a relevant variance of the norm within a given milieu, then it cannot figure into conceptions of “universality” in terms of design, so a “universally designed” space might not account for lighting in inclusive ways. Similarly, in terms of UDL, one can imagine cases where standards and standardization become conflated, and “high achievement expectations” themselves disable individuals and create a particular sort of universality. For example, in many composition classes, “class participation” is seemingly inextricably linked with achievement insofar as such participation is often imbricated with process approaches to writing (such as participating in writing workshops, class discussions, and so forth). However, “class participation” can be normalized as “oral participation,” and the demands for oral performance may disable individuals with anxiety and/or communication disorders. In either case, socio-historical understandings of disability are going to frame what counts as “universal.” In the case of

UDL, this universality will also be complicated by the ways in which achievement articulates with ability and disability.

Universal Design and UDL are, of course, not panaceas. This is written into the legal definition of UDL in the ways in which UDL “reduces barriers” rather than eliminating them. That said, note that UDL also specifies that accommodations, supports, and challenges be “appropriate.” Note too that there may be an ambivalence regarding how such accommodations impact standards of achievement (“maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient”).<sup>36</sup> What, precisely, does this mean? My impulse is to assume that practitioners determine the appropriateness of accommodations and the ways in which such accommodations impact achievement. While the Higher Education Opportunity Act specifies that UDL take place within a “scientifically-valid framework for guiding educational practice,” such a framework presumably resides within a discipline’s articulation of a “scientifically-valid framework,” which is then operationalized at programmatic levels. If this is the case, we find ourselves back in the familiar deliberative procedure quandary, and UDL’s utility becomes a bit more questionable.

The above criticisms of UD, UDL, and ad hoc accommodations are not meant as dismissals of these varieties of accommodation. As I say earlier, each of these approaches to accommodation is valuable and necessary. In the above, I mean to merely foreground the underspecification of these approaches to accommodation. This underspecification

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<sup>36</sup> The relationship between English proficiency and disability is certainly an interesting one, and some thoroughgoing social model theorists might make a case for limited English proficiency being a disability within some contexts in America. While interesting and requiring attention, such inquiry is beyond the immediate scope of this project.

gives UD and UDL some valuable conceptual flexibility, but this flexibility can lead to vagueness and potential difficulties in the operationalization of accommodation, especially in composition, where programs can show so much variance across contexts. Accordingly, I forward a model of accommodation that incorporates the best of ad hoc accommodations and UDL while foregrounding their underspecification in programmatically-valuable ways.

### *Kairos, Stasis, and Complex Accommodation in Composition*

The work of this project has been building up to this point. In working through the legislation on accommodation and various approaches to accommodation, it should be clear that writing programs have quite a bit of latitude in terms of how and whether a disability can or should be accommodated in the composition classroom. Additionally, through exploring the various models of disability in Disability Studies' literature, it has been shown that disability may be regarded as a complex, emergent interplay between individual configurations (including impairments) and the social-construction of those configurations as disabilities. The types of accommodations described above are at best limited, and at worst they are bureaucratic mechanisms which reinscribe disciplined and medicalized normalizations. Such is often the fate of idealized disability accommodation: instantiation and operationalization can militate against creating equitable, fair, and transformative relations for all stakeholders. Perhaps, then, such underspecified and idealized approaches to accommodation are not the answer. Perhaps the answer lies in something more specific, complex, but ultimately clear.

Enter "complex accommodation."

Complex accommodation, as I conceive of it, recognizes the myriad imbrications of disability, disciplinarity, and institutionality and works to confront and capitalize upon the Gordian knot that ensues. I see the encounter of disability as a *kairic* moment of disruption. The encounter—whether through a direct apprehension of disability or an indirect attending to hypothetical cases or conceptual categories<sup>37</sup>—reveals a lack of fit between the environment and a person’s individual configuration. On one hand, this realization can initiate a formal, reflexive, stasiastic response: the disability calls for an accommodation, and this implicates the relatively fixed legal and administrative procedures in place within an institution for an accommodative solution.<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, the encounter can lead to a *kairic* response, one that opens up practical, theoretical, and ethical possibilities through the encounter’s situatedness and through the initiation of complex accommodation.

*Kairos* has a long and complex conceptual history. Though many scholars take it up beginning with the Pre-Socratic philosophers (especially Gorgias), some have traced it all the way back to Homer’s *Illiad* (Sipiora 2). Some definitions of *kairos* include “propriety,” “due measure,” “decorum,” “proportion,” and “wise moderation” (Sipiora 1), and these have sometimes historically been collapsed into “the principle of right timing and the principle of proper measure” (Kinneavy 60). However, these simple synonymic substitutions and historic shorthands do not really capture the nuances of the term. *Kairos*

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<sup>37</sup> Treating hypothetical cases of disability and moving through complex accommodation is problematized by the fact that it potentially objectifies, decontextualizes, and medicalizes disability. However, the processes of inquiry that complex accommodation suggests may be employed in such cases with some utility provided the limitations of such thought experiments and such inquiry are duly noted and foregrounded.

<sup>38</sup> See Michael Carter’s “Stasis and Kairos: Principles of Social Construction in Classical Rhetoric” for a thorough description of *stasis* and *stasiastic* inquiry/procedure.

is essentially tied to time, but it is a special sort of time that differs from *chronos*, or time as we conventionally conceive of it:

In *chronos* we have the fundamental conception of time as measure, the quantity of *duration*, the length of periodicity, the age of an object or artifact...By contrast, the term *kairos* points to a *qualitative* character of time, to the special position an event or action occupies in a series, to a season when something appropriately happens that cannot happen just at “any time,” but only at *that* time, to a time that marks an opportunity which may not recur. (Smith 47)

So, there is a situatedness and an immediacy tied to *kairos*, but this situatedness and immediacy is itself more complicated than might initially appear.

Some scholars may link the notion of *kairos* and kairic time merely to the actions and orientations of rhetors and auditors, but others have pointed out how for some ancients, *kairos* had an ontological dimension as well. For Pythagoreans, *kairos* was a fundamental harmonizing force in the universe that, in its resolution of conflicts, became generative and was even responsible for the construction of the universe (Carter 101-02). In “Time and Qualitative Time,” John Smith wants to move understandings of *kairos* beyond the merely human sphere so that such emphasis “not be allowed to overshadow the ontological dimension of *kairos* as manifest in various orders of happening, such as constellations of historical events, natural processes, and developments which have their own temporal frames and opportune times quite apart from human action, especially the action of this or that individual” (48). Smith succinctly pulls together the ontological and rhetorical definitional strains of *kairos* in the following passage:



Turning now to the features of *kairos* time, it is important to note three distinct but related concepts. There is, first, the idea of the ‘right time’ for something to happen in contrast to ‘any time,’ a sense that is captured nicely in the word ‘timing’...Second, *kairos* means a time of tension and conflict, a time of crisis implying that the course of events poses a problem that calls for a decision at that time, which is to say that no generalized solution or response supposedly valid at any or every time will suffice. Third, *kairos* means that the problem or crisis has brought with it a time of opportunity (*kairos* is translated by the Latin *opportunitas*) for accomplishing some purpose which could not be carried out at some other time. Implicit in all three meanings embraced by *kairos* is the concept of an *individual* time having a critical ordinal position set apart from its predecessors and successors. (52)

Central to Smith’s above elaboration is the idea that *kairos* cannot be taught as a principle or procedure (“no generalized solution or response supposedly valid at any or every time will suffice”), which complicates how a rhetor might negotiate a kairic moment.<sup>39</sup> This is only problematic, however, if one assumes the arrival at *logos* as the end or *telos* of a kairic moment and rhetorical exchange between rhetor and auditor.

Pre-Socratic approaches to *kairos* seem relativistic: in any given situation an auditor will have antithetical positions and perspectives to choose from. *Kairos* will guide the rhetor in choosing which antithesis is most probable, and the rhetor will, in turn, help guide the auditor. In a relativistic universe, this relationship imparts an ethical dimension to *kairic* inquiry/exchange: “It was not simply saying what the audience wanted to hear,

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<sup>39</sup> As Benedikt (226-29), Sipiora (6), Poulakos (90), and others point out, any sort of theory of *kairos* would elide the situatedness and immediacy of a kairic moment.

as the connotations of sophistry suggest, but it was facing squarely the tragic notion that all *logos* is ‘deception’ and acting on the basis of what *at the crucial time* seemed to be the truest *logos*” (Carter 106). In other words, since all positions have some claim to truth or validity in a relativistic universe (102), it is the rhetor’s responsibility to understand the kairic aspect of a rhetorical situation to the best of his/her ability and help guide the auditor to the position which seems most likely in that given situation, hence the ethical aspect of *kairos* (105-06). Of course, the auditor does not play a passive role in a *kairic* exchange as he or she might in seemingly logocentric exchanges/inquiries; instead, the auditor’s likely response to the rhetor helps determine whether a moment actually is or becomes kairic. As Benedikt puts it:

Evaluations of timing also require evaluating the kairic sense of the readiness of others who form part of the situational context. As Gorgias explained, one cannot evaluate the kairic fit of an action to a particular moment without considering the response of others. Taking others into consideration can lead to the conclusion that one is taking action at a ‘bad time.’ The other person might be preoccupied or unreceptive. (231)

In short, the “right timing” of the kairic moment must encompass the potential or actual orientation of the auditor to the rhetor’s choice of competing *logoi*: the attunement of the rhetor and auditor to the kairic moment is a component in the moment *qua kairos*. This is not to fall back on the perspective wherein *kairos* lacks an ontological element independent of human interactions; rather, I mean to underscore that within discourse, the kairic moment may require both rhetor and auditor to attend to the moment *qua kairic* in order for it to actually be kairic in the richer sense of *kairos* described above. Drawing on

this deeper, nuanced, essentially complex understanding of *kairos* can help capture what I mean by complex accommodation.

I have already mentioned how accommodation can be approached in terms of rhetorics of requirement or rhetorics of affordance, and the above discussion of *kairos* can enrich what I mean, especially in regards to “rhetorics of affordance.” Following Smith’s elaboration of *kairos*, one can see how accommodation might be transformed into a kairic moment. As accommodation indicates a lack of fit, it is the “right time” to initiate inquiry into the lack of fit. The encounter also tracks with Smith’s characterization of *kairos* as situated crisis, requiring immediate and situated attention (ad hoc accommodation). Finally, the encounter provides an opportunity that otherwise might not be possible at other times: an opportunity to explore where the crisis actually comes from. Thinking about the encounter of the disability as *kairos* can thus allow/propel a teacher to ask the following questions:

- Why and how does this specific context disable this particular student?
- How can I immediately and reasonably ameliorate the situation or reconfigure the context to make it more accessible or equitable for the student?
- Where does the disability come from?<sup>40</sup>

These questions are not the end-point of complex accommodation as I conceive of it; they are the beginning. The initial kairic moment—the moment of the encounter—itsself may create another kairic moment through the process of complex accommodation. This is not to imply that *kairoi* succeed one another as the moments of *chronos* time do, nor is it

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<sup>40</sup> To be clear, by “disability,” I mean the system of relations—environmental, ideological, etc.—which disadvantage a person’s bodily and mental configurations in favor of a set of privileged configurations.

meant to be taken as a claim for systematized or proceduralized *kairos*; instead, as I will come to show, complex accommodation begins with a kairic moment that may lead to further kairic moments, but it may also lead to closures rather than openings.

The above bulleted questions can be taken as the beginning steps of complex accommodation. When an instructor encounters the lack of fit between the immediate environment and a student's particular configuration, his or her first step should be to assess how the environment is disabling the student, and then s/he should seek to immediately reasonably accommodate that student. I'm purposefully employing the "reasonable" language here to indicate that the instructor should work with the student and the available accommodative channels at his or her institution at the point of encounter to equitably meet the student's needs. Partially, this is based on how I am conceiving of the kairic nature of the encounter, but it is also a function of instructors' legal obligations and temporal constraints (students with disabilities will need accommodations in the moment).<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the inquiry pointed to in the third question may require significant time to unfold. Accordingly, as I indicate above, ad hoc accommodation is still very much a part of complex accommodation, but it occurs at the beginning of the complex accommodation process. To be clear: I am not advocating a mere reliance on administrative, ad hoc approaches to accommodation. Rather, these first steps should employ the instructor's extant available resources including (but not necessarily limited to) the accommodating agencies at the institution and the instructor's own sense of "reasonable accommodation" based upon his/her experience in the writing

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<sup>41</sup> "In the ethical domain *kairos* appears as *justice* or the proper measure according to merit or what is "due" to an individual in an order of equality" (Smith 56). This sense of what is due can change through complex accommodation, but there will be a proceduralized sense of "what is due" in place at the moment of encounter.

program and his/her experience in the discipline. This process will clearly differ for each instructor, but the following heuristic flowchart (Figure 2) suggests the sorts of questions an instructor might ask, how these questions may lead to other critical questions, and how s/he might proceed in the moment:

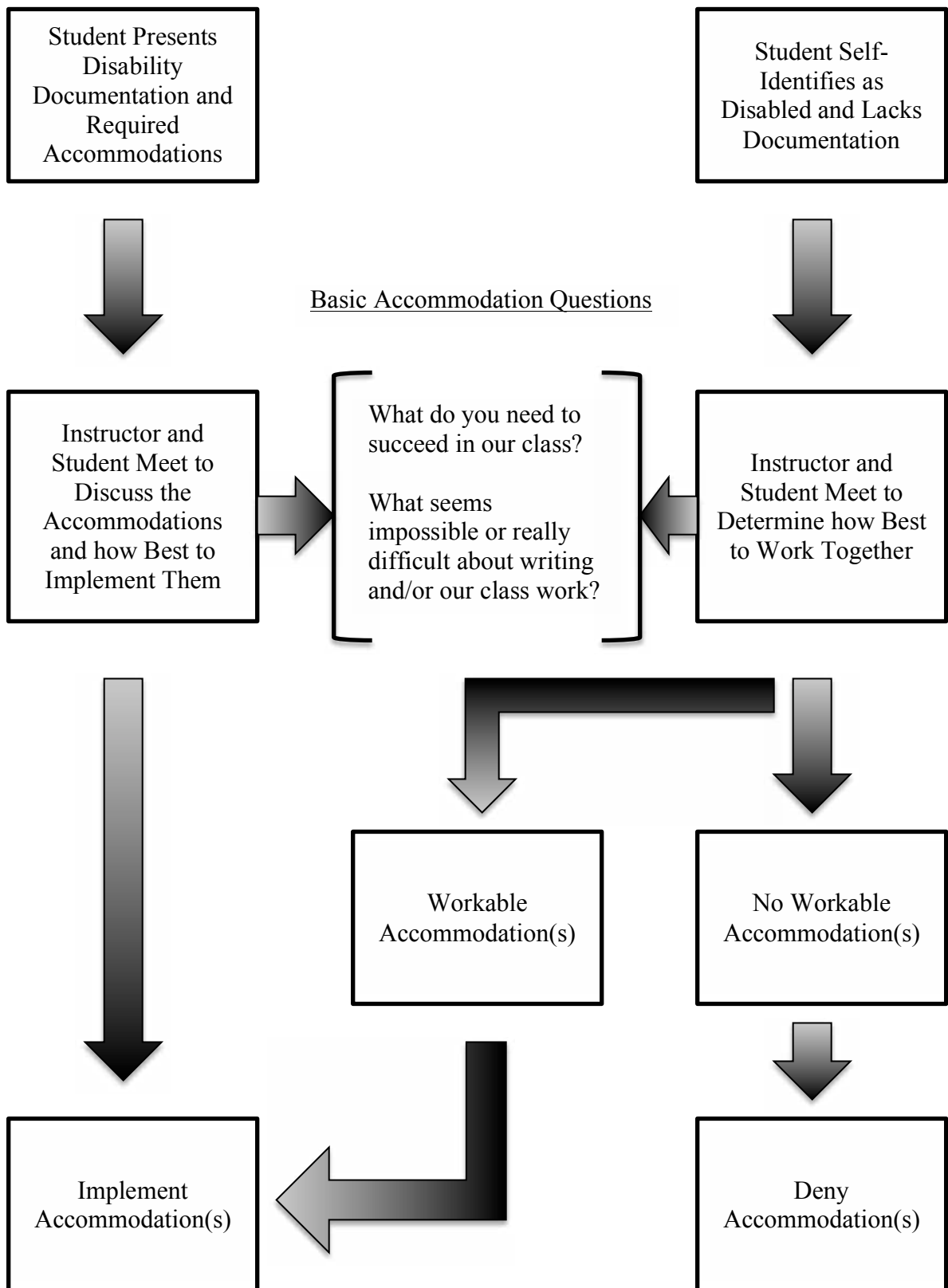


Figure 2. The Ad Hoc Heuristic

When an instructor encounters a student with a disability, then, there will be an initial binary situation where the student will either have disability documentation and attendant accommodation requirements, or the student will self identify without documentation.<sup>42</sup> If the student lacks documentation, a further binary situation ensues wherein the student either has not gone through the accommodative channels at the institution and received resultant accommodation recommendations, or the student is unable to receive accommodations through institutional channels.<sup>43</sup> If the student is eligible and willing, the instructor can refer him or her to the proper agencies on campus (at which point, the left-hand branch of the heuristic may be followed). If the student receives accommodation recommendations or requirements from the institution, s/he can then meet with the instructor to negotiate how those accommodations might best be implemented within the context of the specific class. Such a meeting can be profitably structured in a variety of ways, but the “Basic Accommodation Questions” capture the gist of the meeting: the instructor and student should strategize for the student’s success by identifying potentially-problematic elements of the course and how the required accommodations may profitably remediate those elements. It is absolutely essential to note that both the student and the teacher must be active participants in this process. The teacher will serve as the expert administrator of the course, curriculum, and pedagogy,

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<sup>42</sup> This binary is, ultimately, an oversimplification. Students’ disabilities may remain invisible, or the instructor’s “encounter” of a disability may take place outside of any particular interaction with a student (the “encounter” may be a conceptual one). These issues are not objections to the binary encapsulated in this heuristic; rather, they are situations and possibilities that are taken up in the process of complex accommodation, as I show later.

<sup>43</sup> Such inability may more broadly include unwillingness; i.e., some students may fear stigmatization through institutional labels, but may be willing to approach individual instructors if they feel those instructors may be sympathetic.

but the student will be the expert on him or herself, his or her personal configurations, and the ways in which the environment disables or may disable him or her. Once this process is worked through, the accommodations may then be implemented. In cases where a student self-identifies and cannot obtain documentation and resultant recommendations, there are a number of critical differences in how one might proceed, but there are also some valuable similarities as well.

Just like the case of the student who has obtained institutional accommodation requirements, the self-identifying student should meet with the instructor to determine how they might best work together given the student's own sense of his or her disability. Based on this meeting, the instructor and student may determine either (i) there are workable accommodations that may be put in place (remediation of particular practices, alternative formats of materials, and so forth), or (ii) there are no workable accommodations available for the student: the student is either requesting "unreasonable" accommodations<sup>44</sup>, or the instructor and student cannot think of ways to ameliorate what the student sees as a disability *in medias res*. When workable accommodations can be determined, then they may be implemented. In cases where no workable accommodations can be found, then the accommodations must be denied. Obviously, this procedure and the larger heuristic is somewhat simplistic and depends on a number of critical assumptions.

In broad strokes, the steps in this heuristic are kept purposefully general because this procedure is meant to represent an accommodation occurring in the moment, within

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<sup>44</sup> I'm using "unreasonable" here to include both accommodations that would pose an "undue burden" to the instructor or require a "fundamental alteration" of the course, but these legal corollaries need not exhaust the sense of the "reasonableness of the accommodation" as the student is identifying solely to the instructor.



an instructor's extant pedagogical, administrative, and theoretical frameworks. So, terms like "success," "best," and "workable" will all be defined/parsed with reference to an instructor's sense of the class's structure, *telois*, and so forth *in medias res*. This means that the instructor will need to draw upon his or her extant resources and work with the student to determine what possibilities are afforded by potential accommodations.

The Ad Hoc Heuristic is underwritten by what I have been calling a "rhetoric of affordance" that centers accommodation as a moment wherein critique and possible transformation are the goals rather than requirement-fulfillment. Even though I foreground how extant accommodative procedures should be followed in terms of requirements, I also indicate that instructors and students should meet to see how the student can best be accommodated and to see how teacher and student might best work together. Such a meeting assumes that the goal of accommodation is not mere requirement-fulfillment but is actually the generation of options, possibilities, and generative relationships. While I believe there is an ethical imperative tied to such a meeting, I also think that the affordances are not asymmetrical; in other words, such a meeting does not merely benefit the student, but also benefits the instructor as well by opening up new horizons of pedagogical and theoretical inquiry. I will return to this in the coming pages, but before doing so, I need to first suss out additional assumptions in the heuristic.

A major assumption here is that students can articulate their own conditions of success within a course, either by themselves or in consultation with an instructor. This may not be the case for many students, especially at the beginning of a semester: students may not understand exactly what a particular course is supposed to accomplish, let alone

how the daily work of the semester works towards the courses' outcomes, deliverables, and objectives. However, beginning a dialog and working together towards an understanding of what that relationship might look like creates the possibility that tenable, beneficial working conditions may be achieved. A related and critical assumption is that students who self-identify will do so to the instructor. In reality, many students will balk at approaching an instructor in such a situation, especially if the instructor's framing of disability within the classroom is limited to a syllabus addendum, a limitation which can locate disability within an administrative/bureaucratic rhetoric of requirement. So, an instructor must carefully frame disability itself if s/he wants to create the classroom environment wherein students without official documentation are encouraged to come to them with accommodative requests. While foregrounding disability within the curriculum may go some distance towards creating such an environment, one can also alter the way that disability and accommodation are encoded in course syllabi. For example, if one's institution has a required and/or uniform syllabus disability statement, an instructor can undercut a rhetoric of requirement by moving beyond the institutional statement. Margaret Price's excellent addition to Spelman College's required statement shows how this might work:

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that

other support services, including the Writing Center and the Learning Resources Center, are available to all students. (Wood and Madden)

In the above example, Price moves beyond a rhetoric of requirement as she foregrounds the learning differences of all of her students. By invoking the Writing Center and Learning Resources Center as support services for all students and by demonstrating openness to a more capacious sense of accommodation, she simultaneously centers differential learning as the norm and encourages her students to make use of all available avenues to success. Such a simple addition to a standard syllabus statement can powerfully alter student-teacher dynamics,<sup>45</sup> and perhaps such an addition would be a precursor or necessary initial condition for the Ad Hoc Heuristic.

At many institutions the broader procedures captured in the Ad Hoc Heuristic are already in place, but formalizing and implementing the heuristic creates a number of clear benefits. First, where procedures are not clearly articulated or easily shared, the Ad Hoc Heuristic can provide a common accommodative ground and set of steps for instructors. This can be particularly beneficial, for example, in cases where large numbers of graduate student instructors or contingent faculty enter into a writing program each year. Sometimes, in such cases, the nuances of disability accommodation training can be lost in the rush to acclimate these new instructors to the writing program's culture. The Ad Hoc Heuristic can help these instructors negotiate accommodation in a new writing program, and it can also structurally position disability as a complex and central element of human

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<sup>45</sup> Wood and Madden also point out how the placement of such a statement is important, and positioning such a statement near the beginning of the syllabus rather than towards the end “allows instructors to foreground their flexible approach to disability and demonstrate their interest in providing an inclusive and accessible classroom for all students.”

and pedagogical experience. Second, the Ad Hoc Heuristic links up with the next step in the process of complex accommodation, what I am calling the “Kairic Question,” or the third question in the sequence I describe above: “Where does the disability come from?”

### The Kairic Question

In keeping with the broader appeal to *kairos*, it is important to again note that *kairos* time is not *chronos* time; where *chronos* time is linear and successive, *kairos* time may be interrupted and fragmented. I make this caveat here because the “Kairic Question,” the second major step in complex accommodation as I am conceiving of it, may not stand in relation to the Ad Hoc Heuristic in a neat, successive, “chronic” way. An instructor may ask this question in the midst of working through the Ad Hoc Heuristic, after a semester in which s/he worked to accommodate a student, or it may even occur before an instructor works to accommodate a student. The ability to ask and the resultant asking of where a disability comes from is kairic in the sense that it is only possible at certain moments. The moment of an instructor’s initial encounter of a disabled student is kairic in the way it marks a confluent (administrative, pedagogical, environmental, etc.) privileging and carries with it the opportunity to potentially correct for that privileging through accommodation. In other words, asking where a disability comes from in the writing classroom is kairic in its opportunity to create an account of the disability: from the initial encounter and ad hoc accommodation of disability, conditions become “opportune” (Smith 47) to explore why some individuals are disabled in the writing class while others are not. In such a way, the instructor may uncover unmarked normalizations not only in his/her pedagogy, but also within his/her writing program, institution, and

larger field. Such a process can, in turn, make these normalizations available for critique and potential transformation in previously unavailable ways. Before turning to these ambitious ends, though, I think it important to carefully explore the multiple localizations of disability, the “where,” in “where does the disability come from?”

When an instructor first asks “where” a particular disability originates from, there are a number of initial directions such inquiry can take. One possibility is that the disability originates from a students’ interaction with the physical environment of the classroom. For example, certain kinds of lighting might disable photophobic individuals, as I note above. Likewise, only providing chairs with affixed desks may disable individuals who use wheelchairs, obese students, and so on. The pedagogical environment—the way that classroom practices are enacted to deliver content—is another location of disability generation. Student-teacher conferences, in-class group work, and monomodal lectures can disable students in a variety of ways. Finally, the genesis of disability can come from an administrative direction. For example, a face-to-face composition class may have a strict attendance policy because of writing-process requirements (e.g. workshopping requirements), as my university does. Such a policy, though, may disable those students who might have differential attendance abilities due to migraines, anxiety disorders, and other conditions. These divisions between physical environment, pedagogy, and administration are artificial, and there will often be cross-over between them in terms of how they may locate disability generation, as Figure 3 shows:

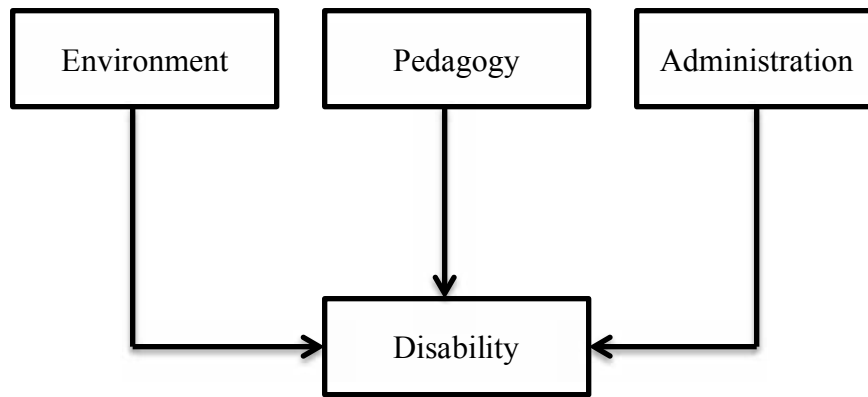


Figure 3. Locating Disability

In addition to locating the broader disabling vector or location, one must also ask: Where is the disabling practice/policy/environmental aspect located in relation to the rest of the course's structure?

In trying to further specify the disability's location within the course, an instructor should try to locate it relative to the other elements of the course insofar as all locations are relative and such relationships can themselves be illuminating. One way to achieve this is to try and suss out whether the disabling aspect is

- fundamental, essential, and/or nonsubstitutional (in an immediately apparent way); or
- accidental, nonessential, and/or substitutable (in an immediately apparent way).

I include the caveat "in an immediately apparent way" for two reasons. First, if the disabling cause is ancillary, nonessential and/or substitutable, then the instructor can immediately work at finding a valuable alternative/alternatives *in media res* while still engaging in the broader work of complex accommodation. So, for example, an instructor may find that grading based on oral participation is disabling and provide a particular student with a written participation option while simultaneously working towards a more

accessible, capacious definition of “participation” for an upcoming semester. Second, I include the “immediately apparent” caveat because the natures of these disabling aspects—whether they really are central, essential, etc.—is still very much up for grabs. This is important to note because at this stage in the process, it might be tempting to revise one’s overall practices based on the identification of a disabling element and consider the issue “solved.” For some basic accommodations, this may very well be possible and ought to be done (e.g., providing classroom materials in broadly accessible formats). However, ending inquiry with ad hoc accommodation (or even UDL accommodation)<sup>46</sup> and disability localization risks leaving the underpinning mechanisms of normalization and their causative theories intact and operative. And it is the opening up of these mechanisms of normalization that adds a deeper kairic aspect to complex accommodation. In what follows, I present an additional heuristic procedure to uncover such normalizations.

Opening up disabling elements of the composition classroom will often lead to inquiry and critique of the writing program that a classroom resides in. This inquiry is not, however, as simple as may appear (as the following flowchart indicates):

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<sup>46</sup> What I mean here is redesigning a disabling course element following UDL principles once that course element is recognized as disabling. This step may eventually occur, but without further movement in complex accommodation, this step may only relieve an immediate symptom without curing the ill.

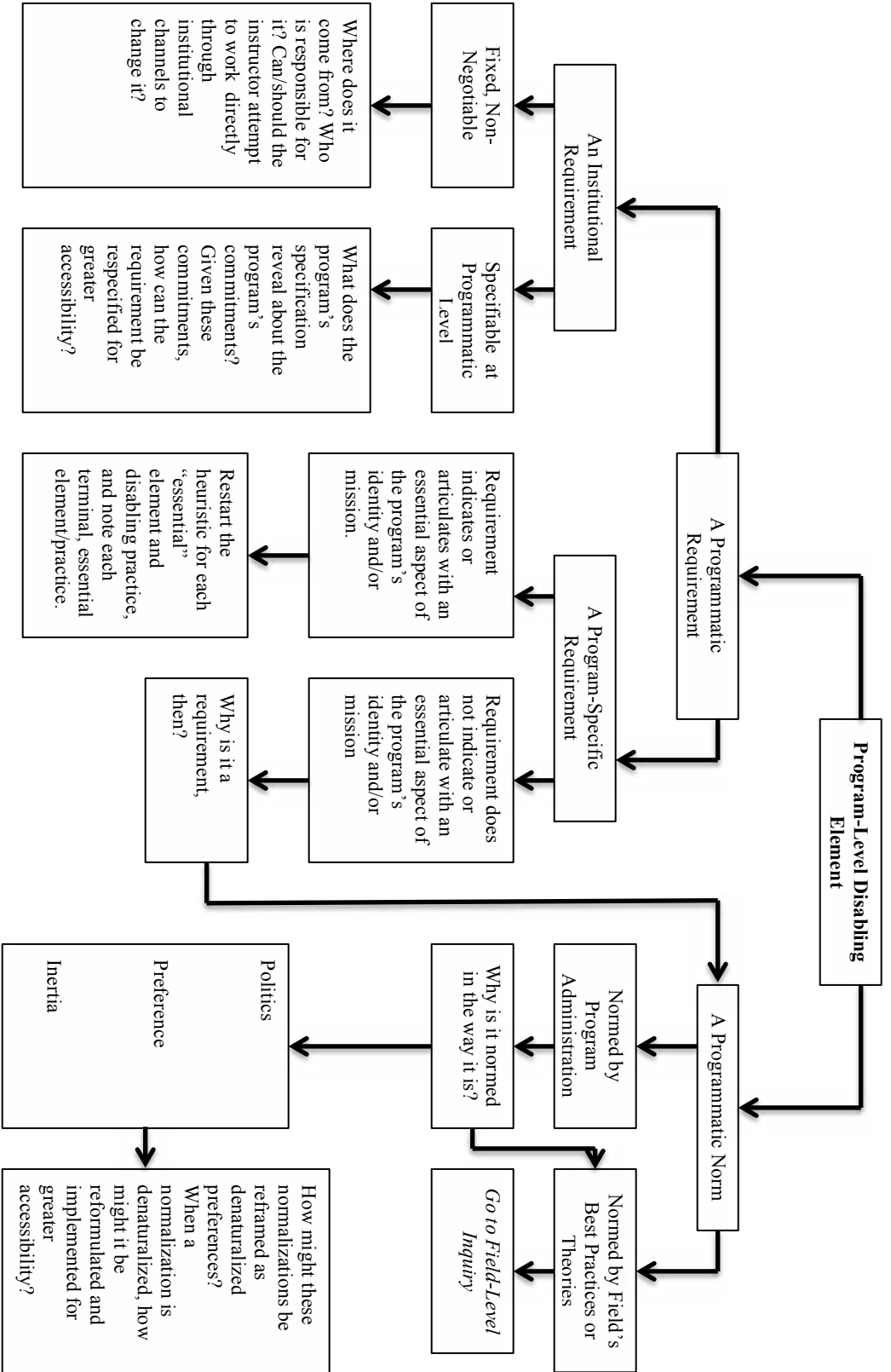


Figure 4. The Programmatic Heuristic



In broad strokes, the Programmatic Heuristic above offers a series of steps one may take in tracking where a disabling element of one's writing program comes from and, in so doing, create the possibility for systemic inquiry and potential reformation. The first step suggested by the heuristic is determining whether a disabling element is a programmatic requirement or a programmatic norm.

While the heuristic eventually shows that programmatic requirements may actually be norms in disguise, it is helpful and necessary for an instructor to figure out whether and how something is a requirement, as this will shape further inquiry and action. There are two initial possibilities for a required element: the element may be institutionally required or programmatically required. If a requirement is institutionally required, an instructor should ask whether it is fixed at the institutional level or whether it is adjustable/specifiable at the programmatic level. For example, in hybrid courses hours of student work associated per credit hour may be fixed at the institutional level, but physical contact hours may be programmatically specifiable. If a disabling element is fixed at the institutional level, an instructor may ask a number of questions to continue inquiry:

- Where does the required element come from? What is its institutional history?
- Who (persons, divisions, etc.) is responsible for it? Who guides associated policies and procedures?
- Can and should the instructor attempt to work directly through institutional channels to change it?

The first two sets of questions are geared towards identifying the responsible vectors of the requirement and also trying to understand how the element is situated within the

larger institution. Through answering these questions, one might find that the current practice/procedure/policy is less disabling than alternatives. Or they might not. In either case, the third question draws on what is discovered to determine whether action can and should be taken. Note the “should” included here. This is a kairic term: the wrong person at the wrong time simply will not be in a position to encourage the responsible individuals (or individuals in power positions) to attend to their inquiry as kairic. Conceivably, this might sabotage efforts to change disabling elements, or it could even lead to negative repercussions for the rhetor depending on his or her position. Accordingly, instructors must attend to institutional realities and limitations in addition to possibilities when exploring institutionally-fixed requirements, just as they must do so when exploring those requirements that are specifiable at programmatic levels.

One possibility in exploring requirements at the programmatic level is that these requirements will be institutional requirements that are capable of being specified or articulated at the programmatic level. As such, there may or may not be some flexibility in formulation, implementation, and so forth that may potentially be regearred for greater accessibility. For example, it may be an institutional requirement that disability statements appear in syllabi, and there may be certain sentences that must be included, but a program may specify further text, the placement of the statement in the syllabus, and so forth in an effort to make a course more accessible (see 115-17 above). In cases where an instructor discovers that certain institutional requirements are more specifiable at the program level, s/he may ask questions like:

- What does the program’s specification reveal about the program’s commitments?

- Given these commitments, how can the requirement be respecified for greater accessibility?

The first question obviously leads to interpretation and, like most of the questions in this and the other heuristics, should not be taken as algorithmic; in other words, answering this question and the others like it will not lead to necessary implications, even if it might create interesting, revealing, and potentially generative/equalizing opportunities. The point is to try to theorize these disabling elements in order to imagine other possibilities and see if these elements might yet exist in other more accessible forms. I say “theorize” here to underscore the fact that these heuristic procedures create hermeneutic systematization; in other words, to try to understand how and why these disabling elements occupy the places they do, an instructor attempts to interrelate the programmatic and institutional requirements in structured ways that make sense to him or her. This is especially important in terms of those disabling required elements that are program-specific rather than institutional requirements.

As I represent them in Figure 4, program-specific requirements may either articulate with essential aspects of the program’s identity and/or mission, or they may be more accidental. For example, a writing program’s commitment to ethical writing practices may connect with its commitments to social action. Alternatively, the same ethical commitment may connect with the program’s rhetorical approach to writing and its emphasis on *ethos*. In the case of a religious institution, the ethical commitment may be tied to the program’s (and/or department’s) religious inflections. Obviously, if and how these elements articulate with one another is going to be theoretically and practically revealing, and such articulations will sometimes constrain and sometimes open up

possibilities for policy revision. Some seemingly essential elements really will be essential or foundational, and it might not be possible or desirable to substitute them (like, for example, a writing program's commitment to teaching writing as both process and product and the production schedules this might necessitate). However, tracking how these commitments interrelate and submitting the centrality (or essentiality) of each element to examination and critique may reframe essential disabling practices as accidental ones.

In cases where a program requirement does not articulate with other essential or central elements of the writing program's identity and/or mission, then the instructor can begin to explore how and why such elements have been cast as requirements. In such a case, the "requirement" becomes a "norm" (as Figure 4 indicates), but such conceptual transformation may not diminish the force of requirement (after all, norms generally retain a great degree of power). However, the transformation—even if it is only in the mind of the inquirer at this point—does create further possibilities for productive inquiry. Before moving to that, though, it will be helpful to take a step back as this location moves the inquirer from the "Programmatic Requirement" prong of the heuristic to the "Programmatic Norm" prong.

In inquiring into the nature of a program-level disabling element in a composition course, an instructor may initially find that the element is a norm rather than a program requirement. In such a case, the norm may be traced to field-level theories or best practices. If an instructor in his/her inquiry reaches this point in their tracking of a programmatic disabling norm, s/he can then take his/her exploration to field-level inquiry (I will have more to say on this below.) On the other hand, an instructor may only be able

to determine that a norm is in place because of program administration.<sup>47</sup> In that case, the question to ask is “Why is it normed in the way it is?” The answer to this question will often be tied to the field’s theories and best practices (as Figure 4 indicates), but it might also be tied to politics, preference, and/or inertia. When it is, an instructor might ask the following questions:

- How might these normalizations be reframed as denaturalized preferences?
- When such normalizations are denaturalized, how might they be reformulated and implemented for greater accessibility?

Depending on program structure and instructor positioning, one’s options might be quite limited in this circumstance. The first question gets at this in asking how such normalizations “might” be reframed as preferences. Simply put, such a process might be a delicate one and undecidable outside of local contexts. When (if) these normalizations are denaturalized, then an instructor and writing program more broadly can begin to rethink such norms, their centrality, their utility, and the ways in which they may be reformulated for greater accessibility or even outright discarded if they are merely inertial. Such a process may lead to field-level inquiry, though it need not (hence the lack of connection in the diagram). When it does lead to field-level inquiry (as it may earlier in the diagram), heuristic diagramming loses its utility.

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<sup>47</sup> Please note: “program administration” is not coextensive with “writing program administrator” as some writing programs will not technically have a writing program administrator. Additionally, “program administration” is selected here to point to the multiple persons/positions that may be identified with it.

### Field Level Inquiry/Moving Beyond the Local

Before addressing field-level inquiry, I believe a few caveats are in order. First, while the program-level heuristic separates out norms and requirements, in practice there will be a good deal of slippage between the two. As I point to above, norms often seem to be requirements, even if they are not framed as such, and they tend to retain the force of requirement at various levels (among administrators, instructors, etc.). What I do not directly address is the fact that requirements are often understood as norms as well.

Required elements in a writing program norm instructors, and policy can normalize what it means to do composition in a particular time and place. In working through the heuristics, instructors can try to disentangle which elements of teaching composition at their particular institutions are unshakeable requirements (programmatic and/or institutional) and which are norms, but given the way that normalization can work, the visibility of such norms and requirements may remain muddled.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes the heuristics may not elucidate such differences, and how instructors understand and implement them is clearly something that requires additional research. This brings me to my second caveat.

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<sup>48</sup> One might even make the argument that composition is an even broader system of normalization. Beyond the ways that instructors' approaches to composition are normed by requirements and institutional cultures, students too are normed in a variety of ways. As an introductory college writing course, composition is positioned—sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly—as the foundational or fundamental writing course; in other words, the approaches to writing taught in particular composition classrooms may be normed (for students) as the ways to approach writing across multiple contexts. While composition's norming of student writing and its consequences could be explored through learning transfer, to my understanding *instructor* norming has not been explored in terms of learning transfer. In other words, how instructors generalize both from local requirements, norms, and interactions to future interactions in terms of learning transfer might provide a productive area of further research to extend and further complicate the work of the present project.

The heuristics in this chapter are not meant to be taken as algorithms. The flow-charts are meant to suggest the sorts of inquiries, questions, and processes one might invoke to make sense of the structurally-disabling practices that may frame, construct, and underwrite one's composition course and writing program. The sheer heterogeneity of programs, curricula, and individual instructors makes an algorithmic approach incoherent. To riff off of Dolmage's increasingly famous quote: if UD is a "way of moving" (26),<sup>49</sup> complex accommodation is a way of thinking about moving; it is a marking of the dance floor, a turning up of the lights, and a suggestion of the sorts of dance steps one might tentatively try, when they might be tried, and with whom they might be ventured. In some ways, it keeps to the metaphor of accommodation as a "fitting," but it seeks to reverse the direction of fit by trying to discover where and how the classroom and program may be more pliable than they currently are. Perhaps more importantly, it tries to uncover a more fundamental sense of why the configuration that causes the lack of fit has come to be as it is. In such a way, complex accommodation seeks to interrogate and transform the writing classroom and program systemically (in addition to the more direct types of accommodation outlined earlier in this chapter) and, in so doing, potentially critique and transform the field as well.

In Figure 4, I indicate that field-level inquiry may become necessary in the course of complex accommodation, yet I do not provide a heuristic for what this may look like.

This omission is intentional. In Chapter 5, I address this issue and provide a few ideas for

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<sup>49</sup> "We see ourselves as teaching in highly localized contexts. For this reason, our skepticism about the universe of UD is well founded. Whose universe will this be? Yet, UD does offer ways to move, theoretically, that have everything to do with the universal—not as a means of homogenization but as a way to complicate divisive notions of difference with new models of cooperation" (Dolmage 26).

pursuing field-level inquiry, but I believe that complex accommodation might lose its focus as a thoroughly-localized mode of inquiry and action if field-level inquiry is foregrounded within the process. Accordingly, the following chapter concretizes my own process of complex accommodation and, in so doing, demonstrates some of the possibilities and limitations of the heuristics outlined here.



## **Chapter 4: Considering and Concretizing Complex Accommodation**

### Introduction

From the previous chapters, it might seem as if complex accommodation is complicated, difficult, and confusing. On one hand, complex accommodation *is* complicated, difficult, and confusing. On the other hand, it is complicated, difficult, and confusing in all the right ways. It invites us to discover, parse, and utilize accommodation as *kairos* as we denaturalize our practices and theories in composition instruction and as we realize the opportunity to deliberately and reflectively theorize and revise those same practices and theories for the good of all students. This is well and good, one might rejoin, but there is still an abstract complexity unclarified by Chapter 3's heuristics, an underdetermination about complex accommodation, that necessitates something a bit more concrete.

While necessary to fully explicate the concept/method, using situated examples to demonstrate and elaborate complex accommodation is more problematic than it may initially appear. If complex accommodation is kairic, if it occurs in specific contexts among specific people, then providing instantiations of the dialectic risks decontextualizing complex accommodation and mistaking the sort of theoretical and practical work that might occur in one context for theory and/or practice that can apply in a number of different contexts. This is not to say that examples of complex accommodation would not be useful in an elaboration of the concept, but it is to say providing (and generalizing from) such examples requires both care and attention to how local contexts construct composition, teachers, students, disability, and the various possibilities for accommodation. Accordingly, the elaboration of complex accommodation that occurs in this chapter is situated within my own experience teaching

in a particular writing program. The experiences I relate are not meant to determine which accommodations should occur in other programs with other students and instructors; rather, my experiences provide a procedural analog to what *might* occur in other contexts. In such a way, I underscore that complex accommodation is essentially tied to the local, to particular classrooms, teachers, programs, and—above all—particular students with disabilities and their perspectives. That said, I also argue that we may still learn ways of moving and ways of thinking from the experiences of other instructors and scholars in the field. Complex accommodation can thus inform disciplinary-level discussions, resulting in a feedback loop between field-level inquiry and local theorizations of accommodation and composition. Such considerations are better left for after complex accommodation is instantiated, though. Accordingly, this would be an appropriate time for a turn to a local context. Before doing so, however, a caveat is necessary.

The complex accommodation that I describe in the coming pages does not exactly follow the procedures laid out in Chapter 3. Part of the reason for this is that these instances formed the experiential basis of complex accommodation's conceptual genesis, and I later theorized and worked on the basis of these experiences. Of course, I could retrospectively reformulate those experiences to better fit with the procedures from Chapter 3, but in addition to being unethical, such massaging might make it seem as if complex accommodation is a clear procedure or set of procedures. In creating heuristics for complex accommodation, I recognized (and noted) this danger, but I also recognized the need for something concrete, something that instructors and programs could follow. At this point, I reaffirm that the heuristics are heuristics and not procedures: complex

accommodation will always be local/situated, and it will always be tied to particular circumstances, people, and orientations—it will take place kairically not chronically.

### FYC, Midwest Style

As I prepared to write this chapter, I struggled with how to approach my local context. While I need to accurately construct the context within which my encounters with disability became kairic, I have to wonder: Which context or which parts of which context? Put another way, what is my “local?” If I approach the context too broadly, I risk constructing some artificially-general context wherein the particular accommodations I wish to describe occur. The way that I have framed accommodation thus far argues against such an approach to context, but given that complex accommodation is interactional, it is important that the interactional nature of context is also foregrounded as constituting and being constituted by particular composition courses (among other elements). That said, some features of the local context will interact more directly with the instances of complex accommodation as I describe them in this chapter, so some broad contextualization (with an increasingly finer-grained specification) can provide useful background and situation for the more robust and fluid context that I will describe within the specific instances of complex accommodation.

At the time of writing, I teach in a public Midwestern research institution with a sizable FYC writing program. The program is staffed by a large number of contingent faculty and a much larger number of MA and PhD graduate teaching assistants from the department of English. While some of these graduate students work in the Rhetoric and Composition MA and PhD programs of study, the majority are pursuing degrees in

the Literature and Cultural Theory, Creative Writing, Professional and Technical Writing, and Media, Cinema, and Digital Studies plans of study. A rhetoric scholar heads the Writing Program Administration team (WPA), and the broader WPA is composed of a mixture of contingent faculty and graduate students who supervise and mentor instructors, administer the writing program, organize professional development and continuing education opportunities in composition (such as forums, colloquia, and so forth), and craft writing program policy. The WPA is responsible for classes in English 095: Fundamentals of Composition; English 101: Introduction to College Writing; English 102: College Writing and Research; and ESL 118: Advanced College Writing in English as a Second Language. Receiving a grade of “C” or better in English 102 or testing out of English 102 is a requirement for graduation.<sup>50</sup> Instructors who teach these courses receive course-specific training and continued instructional development throughout the school year.

Each level of FYC is headed by either a contingent faculty- or graduate student-coordinator. These coordinators work with the Director of Composition and the Assistant Director of Composition to craft and revise “standard sequences” each year. These FYC assignment sequences are required for new instructors (new to each particular course) as a way to scaffold their teaching, but they are also meant to serve as gold standards for veteran instructors. While veteran instructors are encouraged to adopt or fold in the work of the standard sequences in their classes, they are not required to do so. The standard

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<sup>50</sup> Students may test into English 095, English 101, English 102, or out of the General Education Requirement. As the courses are sequenced, once students test into a particular course in the sequence, they must complete the remainder of the courses. So, for example, if a student tests into English 095, s/he must next take English 101 followed by English 102.

sequences are structured to provide formative, process-based assessment for students, leading to an end-of-term summative assessment.

Each level of FYC employs a portfolio system of assessment where students produce a number of rhetorical/analytic and reflective texts that are holistically assessed by an anonymous committee of 2-3 course-specific instructors (other than the instructor of record) according to a course-specific set of “Goals and Outcomes for Portfolio Assessment.” These instructors make a pass-fail decision based upon their holistic assessment, and the instructor of record assigns a grade within either the “pass” or “fail” spectrums based on quality of the portfolio, course work, and so forth.<sup>51</sup> These Goals and Outcomes are revised each year by the WPA as a whole based on input from the previous year’s instructors, students, and WPA members. Each of the sets of Goals and Outcomes are crafted to provide scaffolding for backward-reaching, near transfer (Perkins and Salomon 26; Brent 397)<sup>52</sup> by building upon the Goals and Outcomes of earlier-sequenced courses. So, for example, the “2014-15 Goals and Outcomes for Portfolio Assessment” for English 095, 101, and 102 each include goals which focus on a “controlling purpose.” English 095’s controlling purpose Goal reads:

- Maintain a controlling purpose that...
  - Reflects what matters to you and to others who are addressed in and affected by your interpretation.

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<sup>51</sup> If a student’s portfolio “passes” the instructor must assign a grade between “C” and “A.” If a student’s portfolio “fails,” the instructor must assign a grade between “F” and “C-.”

<sup>52</sup> “Near” and “far” transfer refer to the similarity/difference between two contexts in a given instance of transfer. “Near transfer” refers to transfer that happens between relatively similar contexts (such as between a rhetoric course and a cultural studies course), while “far transfer” refers to transfer that occurs between contexts that differ to a greater degree (such as between an academic course and a workplace) (Brendt 397).

- Creates coherence throughout the essay. (First-Year 5)

English 101's/118's controlling purpose Goal reads:

- Maintain a controlling purpose that...
  - reflects what matters to or is at stake for you in the interpretation.
  - responds to what matters to or is at stake for those you address and those you respond to in the writing.
  - creates and maintains coherence and clarity for readers by shaping patterns of arrangement and other writing choices. (First-Year 6)

English 102's controlling purpose Goal reads:

- Maintain a controlling purpose that...
  - emerges from a clearly defined central research question that reflects your concerns and interests.
  - responds ethically to what matters or is at stake for others who are addressed or affected by the research project.
  - creates and maintains coherence and clarity for the intended audience(s) through arrangement and design. (First-Year 7)

Obviously, each of these goals is parallelly-structured in the “Maintain a controlling purpose that...,” but each of the precisings and/or operationalizations of “maintaining a controlling purpose” varies among the different course levels. This variance can be read as tracking increasing complexity, backward-reaching near transfer, or both. So, for example, the “coherence and clarity” outcome moves from merely being created in English 095, to being directed to readers via “arrangement and other writing choices” in

English 101 to being directed to “intended audience(s)” via “arrangement and design” in English 102.

The above example is not meant to closely track structured transfer or scaffolded learning insofar as the two are difficult to disentangle from one another in this (or perhaps any) context. However the “controlling purpose” goals are offered here to show that and how the program conceives of its FYC courses as conceptually unified or motioning towards unification. While such unification and goals exert a methodological backward influence in each course<sup>53</sup>, the program’s unification also occurs in and through instructor training in the writing program, including overt “norming.”

Instructors of each course level in my school’s FYC program meet at the beginning, middle, and near the end of each semester to norm their responses to student portfolios. Such norming is meant to calibrate assessment while simultaneously sparking debates and discussions about the texts used as norming instruments, procedures in each course, and the goals and outcomes of each course. Leaving aside issues associated with portfolio norming<sup>54</sup>, I can say that these sessions are generally meant to construct and/or reinforce some degree of unification (or coherence) in the writing program’s vision and operation. As I mention above, the FYC program is staffed by both contingent faculty (who may have learned how to teach in programs with substantially-different priorities and visions) and graduate students who are often learning how to teach as they teach.

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<sup>53</sup> If portfolios in each individual class are evaluated by the same Goals and Outcomes for Portfolio Assessment, this will result in certain methodological commonalities by necessity, even if those commonalities are as seemingly simple as foregrounding the importance of coherence and clarity in academic writing.

<sup>54</sup> Elbow and Belanoff argue that even expert readers will disagree on holistic portfolio assessment (27-28), and O’Neil, Moore, and Huot go further, arguing that norming readers to read and assess consistently is often futile given variance between readers (see esp. Kindle Locations 1492-1497).

Such learning takes place both in the classroom but also within these programmatic spaces. But this learning also occurs in the direct teacher training that each graduate teaching assistant must complete if he or she is to teach in the FYC program.

Each graduate teaching assistant (GTA) in the FYC program must go through rigorous initial and continuing training in order to teach in the writing program. The first semester that the GTAs begin working, they must enroll in a graduate seminar that focuses on composition theory, pedagogy, and programmatic norms within English 101 (the course they all initially teach for 1 year). The seminar meets one night per week for three hours and is taught by the Director of Composition. In addition, GTAs must meet weekly with a mentor group composed of other new GTAs in the FYC program and headed by an English 101 mentor (a veteran instructor serving on the WPA in a mentoring capacity for new GTAs). Within mentor groups, the instructors tend to talk about their classes' work through the standard sequence (remember that they are working through a programmatically-designed standard sequence of assignments), in-class pedagogy, portfolio assessment, and any other questions or concerns that might arise from their work. Prior to embarking on teaching English 101, working with mentor groups, or attending their graduate teaching seminar, GTAs first attend a week-long orientation to the writing program, what some graduate students have affectionately dubbed "comp camp" for various similarities to "boot camp."

The new GTA orientation is a highly-structured series of talks and workshops which introduce the FYC program, English 101, and teaching composition in general to new GTAs in the English department. The orientation is organized and facilitated by the Director of Composition, Assistant Director, and English 101 Coordinator/mentors;



however, many of the “talks” and workshops are organized and run by veteran GTAs and contingent faculty within the writing program. While these talks may introduce programmatic concepts like the “controlling purpose” or might work through course readings, they also often introduce and (begin to) norm pedagogical practices like written commentary on student texts or student-teacher conferencing (I’ve spoken on both subjects at separate orientations). These talks code such pedagogical practices as “normal” or, at the very least, proceduralizations of programmatic norms and values. This normalization is extended in mentor groups and in the standard sequence which, for example, schedules the weeks student-teacher conferences should occur. Interestingly, there is an additional norming that occurs for the instructors delivering these talks and workshops in the sense that they are ostensibly teaching the new teachers how to teach, so they see and replicate what is meant to be central for those teachers and, by extension, all teachers in the program. Given such a programmatic structure, the ways in which certain practices and beliefs come to be naturalized and made to seem essential to the teaching of composition is understandable, and so it was likewise understandable that it took me a number of years before I was able to begin the process of complex accommodation with a particular practice, even though it was myself and not my students that I was accommodating.

#### Complex Accommodation Case I: Confounding the Conference

I had actually taught composition at two other schools before I arrived at my current institution, and each school normalized or even required student-teacher conferences as part of “the” writing process. At my current institution, the conference was even more

valued than at my previous institutions: it was introduced in orientation, read about in the composition instructor seminar, and commiserated over in mentor groups. The program's informal policy regarding the conference underscores its seeming centrality in the program's conception of composition: in order to spend enough time with each student, instructors were allowed and encouraged to cancel one week of class meetings in order to work with students in a one-on-one capacity. With such a high value placed upon the role of the conference in teaching FYC and with its multi-directional norming (orientation, mentor groups, implementation in all the FYC courses), beginning a critique of conferencing beyond any sort of "tweaking" is difficult to get off the ground. Indeed, it took me a number of years teaching at various levels in the FYC program and multiple years of PhD-level coursework in composition theory and practice before I was able to ask an almost unthinkable question, "Why do we really need student-teacher conferencing?" Before getting to that point, however, a bit more fine-grained contextualization is necessary.

I find close-quarters communication often difficult and anxiety-inducing with anyone other than my closest associates. The socially-constructed need for eye contact and physical proximity in discussion makes it difficult for me to concentrate, and I become easily distracted in such circumstances. While some of my peers praise the authentic, personal, and wall-breaking power of conferences, I find conferences to have ambiguous utility. In addition, they tend to make me appear confused or disengaged to my students, and I have often looked forward to them with dread. My position on conferences, given their normed centrality, has variously cast me as an inferior instructor, aloof, uncaring, and/or incapable of authentic communication with students. Even given

the ways the conference disabled me,<sup>55</sup> I continued to conference each semester, to sit with one student after another, to have a “chat” about one of their texts, their sense of the class, whatever. It wasn’t until I worked in the program and had studied composition pedagogy and theory a number of years that I began to think about how this practice might not be benefiting students in the program as much as I previously thought; it wasn’t until I reflected upon how this practice disabled me and extended that reflection to considerations of students with similar sensory configurations that I was able to ask: “Can I make this practice more accessible for students and for myself, or should I get rid of it?”

Given the naturalization of conferencing within the FYC program at my school, it is unsurprising that my first impulse was to turn to ad hoc and, eventually, Universal Design approaches to accommodation rather than to more broadly question the general utility or centrality of the practice. Since the conventional conference caused anxiety and decreased focus in me, I reasoned that other students who had heightened anxiety responses and/or attention disorders<sup>56</sup> might benefit from remediating the conference. As a result, I piloted asynchronous, e-mail based conferences based on Kathleen Blake Yancey’s idea of the “talk-to” (*Reflection* 31-37). The “talk-to” asks students to inhabit a

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<sup>55</sup> It is worth noting—in passing—that literature on classroom accommodation almost exclusively treats the accommodation of students and not instructors. Readers may already have noted that beginning a concretization of complex accommodation with my own disablement seemingly lies outside the scope of the heuristics provided in Chapter 3. As long as the heuristics are taken as heuristics (see the caveat that opens this chapter), beginning with an instructor’s need for accommodation is unproblematic.

<sup>56</sup> I use “attention disorders” here to refer to a spectrum of conditions that may result in alternative attentional configurations such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), sensory processing disorder, but also anxiety itself (e.g., if an individual is anxious about having a panic attack, he or she may be attending to triggers and/or phenomenological indicators of an impending attack and, by extension, find it difficult to attend to other stimuli such as the back-and-forth of a conference).

number of reactive positions in response to a text they compose: arguing it is the best and then worst paper they have ever composed, predicting how the instructor will respond to the text, and then answering the instructor's imagined prediction of the text (32). In my classes, I experimented with having students turn in their texts with meta-texts describing the above imaginative/analytic exercises. I could then draw on both sets of texts to gain some understanding about (i) a student's product, (ii) their sense of their product, and (iii) their sense of how I would respond to their product. This diagnostic measure could—in theory and sometimes in practice—help me identify disconnects between intention and execution along with a student's sense of audience (at least with myself as audience). Upon receiving the texts via e-mail, I would write back to the student with my reflections and a few additional questions. After the student responded to those questions, I would wrap up our “conference” with some further reflections and suggestions for future texts. While such exchanges produced a good deal of text—a seeming indicator of some sort of valuable exchange, I thought—and they significantly decreased my anxiety while increasing my attention to student responses, there were significant issues associated with asynchronous, text-based exchanges.

The production of so much text, while a seemingly positive indicator, also could potentially disable some students. For example, dyslexic students might find the abundance of text difficult to manage in terms of parsing and producing within a short time-frame. While dyslexic students could be accommodated through other ad hoc accommodations such as asynchronous audio commentary, this sort of accommodation could become enumeratively-problematic for the meaning of “conference”: if some students require text-based exchanges, others require asynchronous audio exchanges, and

still others require (or at least request) synchronous face-to-face exchanges, then where does the “conference” reside? Are all of these “conferences,” or is there something about one or another that makes it a conference while the others are merely commentary? Over the course of a few semesters, I started to work through these questions with some interesting results. But before I turn to this, a brief aside may prove helpful.

I began this chapter with a warning that the cases of complex accommodation described herein would not cling tightly to the heuristics outlined in Chapter 3, but I do think some general orientation may prove helpful in this case before I move further. Beginning with myself as the case to be accommodated and then working outwards to other analogous disabilities students may possess, I circumvented The Ad Hoc Heuristic altogether. I did, however, try to track the location of the disability (a la Figure 3), and as I predicted in Chapter 3, there was some overlap between environment, pedagogy, and administration. Recalling “The Programmatic Heuristic” (Figure 4), I can track my movement as follows:

1. The Institutional Requirement branch could be immediately eliminated, insofar as the teacher-student writing conference is often specific to writing programs.
2. Given the conference’s strongly naturalized presence in the writing program, I initially took it to be a program requirement and tried to accommodate *in media res*.
3. At that point, however, I could not determine whether or how the requirement indicated or articulated with other central elements of the writing program, and I moved to field-level inquiry.

While this movement does not follow the heuristic precisely, it does mirror the sort of movement captured in it, and the jump to field-level inquiry is understandable given that I was a Rhetoric and Composition PhD student at the time (the jump to field-level inquiry is never a far jump in such a context).

As I turned to scholarly treatments of conferencing<sup>57</sup>, I first tried to pin down what exactly the “conference” is. I started my search with the idea—held by many in my FYC program and in programs I had previously taught in—that the conference offers a liminal space where the power relations structuring student and teacher interactions can be disrupted and altered, where the student-teacher relationship can more closely approximate the mentor-mentee relationship. The word I heard bandied around the most was “chat”: the conference was a chance for the teacher and student to come together to have an informal chat and, in so doing, talk about the student’s work outside of evaluative and directive matrices. I found echoes of this in the literature. Murray, for example, waxes poetic over the deeply-interpersonal affordances of the writing conference: “I have been instructed in other lives, heard the voices of my students they had not heard before, shared their satisfaction in solving the problems of writing with clarity and grace” (13). Neal Lerner even goes so far as to maintain that it is the intimacy of the one-on-one conference that sustains many instructors in their teaching:

The desire for intimacy, for meaningful connection with student writers, is a powerful force, a veritable ‘Rosebud’ that keeps us going despite overwhelming

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<sup>57</sup> What follows should not be taken as an exhaustive exploration of the literature on conferencing; rather, it is closer to a narrative of the research and inquiry I conducted at the time and the working conclusions I developed as a result of that research and inquiry. As I note below, there are salient limitations to the thinking about conferences I describe here and to the research I employed at the time.

working conditions and precarious professional status. The writing conference, then, is a window into the structural impediments to effective teaching of writing, impediments long established in higher education generally and in composition in particular. (187)

While Lerner and others may take a good deal of satisfaction from such encounters, Lerner also points out that conferences—and talk about conferences—tend to wax popular as enrollments spike and diversify: conferences are seen as a vehicle for individualized instruction and as a way to meet the various needs of diverse students. Most of my past and present peers would agree with this sentiment, and some scholars have even proposed (and piloted) composition courses modeled after continuous individual writing conferences rather than large-group writing classes (Simmons). So, which is it? Is the conference a more “intimate” conversation between mentor/mentee, another form of direct instruction, both, or neither? Laurel Johnson Black’s extended discourse analytic treatment of the student-teacher writing conference sheds some light on this.

While many writing instructors conceive of the writing conference as conversational, Black argues that writing conferences tend to more closely approximate the roles and behaviors of the classroom than a conversation (11). As she says, “Simply put, the structure of conversation and the structure of traditional teaching are quite different: the purpose of communication is different, the speaker’s roles are different, and the status of speakers is different” (13-14). The writing conference does not take place (generally) in a bar or coffee shop, it does not take place among friends or occupational equals; the student-teacher writing conference occurs between an instructor and a student,

and it is the instructor who ultimately judges and evaluates the student's work (and the student through that work) along with other performative metrics (attendance, class participation, and—perhaps—conference performatives as well). In concrete terms, the power relations of the conference are *a priori* framed as asymmetric insofar as the instructor calls for the conference (40) and often determines where the conference is to occur. More importantly, though, Black shows (through analysis of transcripts) that instructors talk far more than students (41-42), continually claim and re-claim the conversational floor (42-46), and naturalize their own perspectives and positions as authoritative through certain discourse markers such as “you know” (47). Additionally, Black argues, the writing conference (and some genred responses in composition in general) can create conflicting and confusing codes as a result of a special breed of doublespeak. As Black says, “Many mainstream teachers hide their power; they do not display it openly but expect students to understand their ‘suggestions’ as orders because a suggestion from a person with power IS an order” (108-09). Lacking experience with the specialized codes of the writing conference (what Delpit has called access to the “culture of power”) can thus not only result in confusion, but could also result in negative evaluation such as when an instructor says “You might want to think about changing your thesis,” the student (reasonably) parses the hedges (“might” and “think about”) as suggestive, and the instructor irritatedly marks the student's eventual paper poorly because s/he did not change the thesis as “instructed.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Of course, this hypothetical example is an extreme example of how a writing conference could unfold negatively and does not reflect what is commonly approached as an exchange underwritten by feelings of good-will, the spirit of dialogue, and the goal of mutual growth. That said, this sort of reaction does sometimes occur, as it has occurred in each writing program I have taught within.



As I worked through some research and my own experience, I came to see the conference as a highly-performative space wherein the student is expected to receive directive instruction and perform understanding/authority/acceptance of instructor authority (Newkirk 204), all while buying into the fiction that the exchange is a low-stakes “conversation” among interested writers. While the conference is clearly asymmetric in terms of power, confusion surrounding the conference seems to retain a sort of symmetry: some students and instructors do not seem to understand or at least clearly articulate the purposes and possibilities of conferences, with the confusion of purposes leading directly to a constriction of possibilities. In an attempt to disentangle some of these issues, I stepped further back, after a fashion, and posited that the purpose of the conference was to engage in more direct, individual dialog with a student about his or her work, that it was a way to respond to the student’s work and point out changes that needed to occur and/or additional directions that needed to be taken. This is not to say that this is the only purpose of the conference; rather, within my own program and pedagogical experience, this is the purpose that tended to emerge outside of ambiguous commitments to, or desires for, informal chats. All this brought me back to the questions I encountered when trying to accommodate via asynchronous exchanges: Where is the “conference,” and how does it differ from other response modalities?

If the conference is stripped of its ambiguities, if its interface is reconfigured for

transparency<sup>59</sup>, if its privileged orality is marked (Hewett xvi-xvii) and dispensed with, then it becomes difficult to separate it out from other species of response. Perhaps this is not a bad thing. The literature on response is rich with ways in which the power relations between teacher, student, and text have been profitably exposed, disrupted, and transformed. Brannon and Knoblauch spearheaded the process-movement's focus on bridging the gap between students' own intentions and executions rather than the gap between the students' text and instructors' perceived ideal texts (161-63). Sommers pushed compositionists and students to see comments not as edits or evaluations and revision not as micro-level editing, but commentary as invitation and impetus for revision and revision as re-visioning new texts ("Responding"; "Revision Strategies"). Building on such work, Welch retheorized revision and the commentary that leads to it, arguing that while such processes can lead to greater focus and coherence, they can also lead to a profitable uprooting:

I'm arguing that we should consider revision not only as a process of increasing orientation toward a particular thesis, position, or discourse community, but also as a process of increasing dis-orientation: an act of getting restless with received meanings, familiar relationships, and prefigured disciplinary boundaries, a

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<sup>59</sup> DePew and Lettner-Rust explore the conference qua interface and the ways in which different technologies can remediate the interface and disrupt the power relations that Black describes in her book. For example, while the conventional face-to-face writing conference subjects the student to the instructor's physical and disciplinary gaze, in a web-based video conference, students can avoid the gaze by shutting off their webcams, or they can disrupt the physical gaze and power relations by positioning the camera to the side or even angling the camera upward to project more power (184-86).

process of intervening in the meanings and identifications of one's texts and one's life. (*Getting Restless* 7)<sup>60</sup>

This progressive movement from red-penned directivity to something less determined and more student-driven seems closer to the desire for intimacy wrapped up in the idea of the conference as “conversation.” Indeed, there are even a number of scholars who have directly worked at creating response that is conversational, where “conversational” is not wishy-washy, non-directive, or “soft” (Straub 381) but instead is something that combines the best of clear direction and student autonomy (390-91). If there is a pedagogical practice that captures the intimacy of the one-on-one exchange so valued in the idea of the conference, if this practice both recognizes (or can recognize) and can profitably capitalize upon the power asymmetries between instructor and student, then why should we hold onto the conference? Why should we perpetuate a practice that not only potentially disables students with impairments like dyslexia, anxiety, and sensory disorders, but also potentially disables a wider group of students through conflicting and shifting codes? As Black puts it at the end of her book: “We have to examine what it is we want from conferencing and we have to explore the possibility that it often doesn't accomplish those things—it just doesn't work” (167). And it wasn't working, at least not for me within my particular writing program at that particular time. So now what?

Through the process of complex accommodation, I came to this “now what” point. I began from my own disabling by a particular practice to its place in my program

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<sup>60</sup> In “One Student's Many Voices: Reading, Writing, and Responding with Bakhtin,” and in “Sideshadowing Teacher Response” Welch uses Bakhtin's theories of language to show how response can move away from imposing univocity in student texts and can, instead, identify the various voices at play and the discourses animating them. In so doing, the instructor and student can identify texts that might yet come to be rather than positing and disciplining a singular voice within a singular text.

to some wider treatments in the discipline, and I ended with a rather surprising discovery: I conferenced, and many in my program conferenced, because of its programmatic and historic naturalization within our pedagogies. In terms of The Programmatic Heuristic, I discovered that conferencing was a programmatic norm and that both it and a number of scholars in the field may have normalized the practice due to a belief that conferencing somehow creates more intimate relationships between students, instructors, and texts. But conferencing doesn't always fulfill its promises, and other practices might do a better job doing what it is we want conferencing to do. I felt like I should simply dispense with the practice and focus, instead, on those other practices that might more profitably open up student texts and student work, those practices that might reconfigure power dynamics into something closer to the master-apprentice or coach-athlete roles. It is not so simple, however.

As I say above, norms often have the force of imperatives, and even though I may have come to the conclusion that conferencing is a disabling programmatic norm, it is unlikely that I will dispense with it altogether. Given that conferencing is built into the FYC standard sequences; given that conferencing is administratively naturalized (either through field-level considerations, politics, preference, or inertia)<sup>61</sup>; given that other administrators outside of the FYC program experienced the student-teacher writing conference as part of their education and identify it as a central part of composition, I cannot simply abandon the practice. To do so would risk negative impressions of my pedagogy and might even result in censure. What I can do, however, is attempt to

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<sup>61</sup> In the Programmatic Heuristic, administrator politics/preference/inertia form a distinct branch from field-level inquiry and considerations, but as with each part of the heuristic, there can be some blurring and overlap.

continue the complex accommodation dialectic by working at the programmatic level to change the position of conferencing within the program. In this manner, I can potentially weaken conferencing qua pedagogically essential at the programmatic level and thereby make room to dispense with it within my local classroom level. Until such a point, however, I can take what I have learned from locating the position of conferencing within the program and within the broader field and reposition/reformulate the conference to make it more accessible and more productive for my students and I. For example, while I currently hold conferences, I no longer approach them as “conversational,” underdetermined spaces; instead, students complete extensive pre-conference memos, part of which includes listing a number of questions the students may have for me about the text under discussion, the work of the course, and so forth. At the conference, I can address a student’s questions, indicate my own assessments of the text under discussion, and push the student towards revision as inquiry rather than editing. I can also give students options in terms of modality: face-to-face, online asynchronous, video chat, and so forth. I do not pretend that we are having a low-stakes “chat,” and students understand that our “conference” is individualized instruction. It’s not perfect accommodation and it’s not perfect pedagogy, but until I can change the programmatic framing of the conference as curricularly-essential to composition, it is a negotiated accommodation. In addition, such negotiation can direct me back to field-level inquiry.

The progressive complications of conferencing that I previously experienced point to additional inquiry to be pursued as complex accommodation continues to unfold. During my graduate program, my material circumstances largely dictated my ability to conduct certain sorts of inquiry: where I looked, how I looked, what counted as

confirmation all were tied to my particular circumstances and their functional limitations and affordances; conferencing emerged as a certain sort of dialectic for me within very particular circumstances. Black's work makes me wonder about what other discourse analysts and linguists have discovered about student-teacher conferences.<sup>62</sup> More importantly, it makes me wonder what, precisely, happens in the exchanges between myself and my students at the level of interaction within particular contexts. Indeed, parsing these interactions in detail, tracking how both students and myself attend to these exchanges in context, will provide a fecund and necessary continuation of the process of complex accommodation.

As this section has shown, complex accommodation is not clean or unidirectional. Like the writing that we hope for from our students, it is unpredictable, multi-directional, and constantly subject to foundational re-vision. That said, the case of conferencing here foregrounds the value of complex accommodation and how such an approach can result in local, programmatic, and disciplinary inquiry. Further, this case shows how such inquiry can result in re-visioning not just the specifics of a pedagogical practice and how it might be accommodated in individual cases, but also the theories and policies that underwrite that practice's existence and longevity. This process does not always result in a clean conclusion or clear direction, but the inquiry and potential for equitable accommodation that comes from complex accommodation is never useless.

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<sup>62</sup> Black's book is almost twenty years old and neither it nor myself account for decades of work in discourse and conversation analysis. As I mention above, I include here the process that I went through at the time, including the research that I accessed, and such work will necessarily be incomplete.

### Complex Accommodation Case II: When Practice, Theory, and Impairment Clash

The second case of complex accommodation I describe here centers on my experience working with a student who experienced regular seizures. Before I get to that, though, a bit more context is necessary as this case is a bit closer to “complex accommodation” as schematized in Chapter 3 insofar as it begins with a particular student’s need for accommodation within a particular course (English 102) rather than beginning with the instructor’s own person.

English 102 is a General Education Requirement course at my institution, and it is the terminus of FYC requirements. Each student needs to receive a “C” or better in English 102 (or pass out of the course via placement test) in order to graduate from the university. Additionally, if a student fails English 102 (receives a failing assessment at portfolio review) three times, that student is unable to graduate from the institution. Accordingly, it is easy to see how this course is a high-stakes one for students.

English 102 is a course focusing on academic research, writing, and “critical inquiry.” The 2014-15 Goals and Outcomes for Portfolio Assessment define “critical inquiry” thusly:

- Engage in critical inquiry in ways that support your purpose by...
  - making appropriate use of sources, including scholarly sources.
  - going beyond summary to position yourself and your ideas in relation to the ideas of others by engaging sources through interpretation, analysis, or critique.
  - developing knowledge, insight, or perspective about the matter being researched.

- using sources to frame or critically question other sources or issues.
- situating your sources relative to each other and the broader discourse—both academic and nonacademic—on the matter being researched. (7)

In rough summary, then, critical inquiry is a way of researching knowledge and issues within particular discourses with an eye towards entering into those discourses as a participant; it is both productive and critical in that it calls for critique of the student's methods and perspectives along with those in the discourse community the student is trying to enter. How this critical inquiry is enacted varies to some degree between sections insofar as some instructors theme their courses and, by extension, what sorts of discourse communities the students will be attempting to enter via their writing.

However, the majority of English 102 sections do not have a content theme, and students are allowed and directed to pursue their own interests in whatever field of study they would like provided those interests lend themselves to critical inquiry. In addition to completing a final research project in English 102, students must also create a reflective component for their final portfolios.

Each FYC level requires reflective writing in its final portfolios with the idea that such writing helps writers identify and learn about their own writing and thinking processes. The Goals and Outcomes for English 102's reflective writing are as follows:

- Present compelling REFLECTIVE WRITING that accounts for and evaluates...
  - the evolution of your controlling purpose, through successive revisions, in relation to the project's audience(s) stakeholders, and your own interests.
  - your composing and design strategies, developed through successive revisions, given your rhetorical situation.



- how and why sources were chosen and used in the project.
- your project in relation to your understanding of academic research and writing (7).

Understanding that the research writing to be included in the final portfolios will vary widely given different discourse communities, areas of inquiry, etc., these goals push students to explain how they made choices in relation to the discourses within which they find themselves. In a way, then, there is a fair degree of individualization built into the fabric of English 102, and this individualizing aspect has been crucial as I've worked with accommodating students in various English 102 classrooms.

A few years ago, while teaching a section of English 102, one of my students came to me outside of class to disclose that she suffered from seizures and that the seizures had been increasing in frequency and in intensity. While Rai (a pseudonym) provided me with paperwork from the Student Accessibility Center, the information had no functional utility other than to inform me that Rai had seizures. Early in the semester, Rai and I worked out what to do in case of an impending seizure—what signs to look for, what I could do, what the effects would be on her during and after, and so forth. Without going into too much detail, Rai's seizures increased in intensity and frequency, including having severe seizures in office hours with me and during a class meeting. In talking with me, Rai disclosed that school was currently a trigger for her seizures, and she was worried they would continue to happen in class. Given this information, I tried to figure out a way to accommodate Rai in our English 102 class.

At the time I was teaching Rai's English 102 course, I was also the Online Composition Coordinator, part of the larger Writing Program Administration team. My

position and experience working online led me to forward a proposal to the English 102 coordinator, Director of Composition, and Rai that we move her experience of the class online for the remainder of the semester. Rai was an excellent student, and we were at a point in the semester where much of the work could be done remotely, with workshops happening asynchronously for both her and other students in the class. Everyone agreed to the accommodation, and I began working with her online, providing workshop materials, conducting asynchronous conferences, and so forth. There were not many lectures to be had at this point in the course, so it was easy to provide brief summaries of anything discussed or covered in class. It seemed like a promising plan, and I was excited to have a chance to help a talented student succeed when in other circumstances she would fail the course. Unfortunately, while it began promisingly enough, it did not end well.

As the semester progressed with the new distance accommodation in place, Rai experienced a number of complications with treatment for her seizures, and she became progressively unable to complete any of the coursework. Eventually, it became clear that Rai would be unable to finish the course. Given the particular circumstances, she was able to obtain a medical withdrawal and, unfortunately, I have not heard from her since. At the time, I felt like this was somehow a failure of accommodation. Eventually, I situated this occurrence within a complex accommodation framework, and the question of whether the accommodation at the time was a failure or not became—and continues to become—much more complicated.

Rai's case not only led me to reflect on what it means for an accommodation to fail, but it also helped me to uncover the imbrication of "presence" with composition in

my own classes and beyond. Rai was unable to complete the course, so it seems natural to say that the accommodation somehow failed. Except it didn't. At that point in time, with the particular circumstances of Rai's impairment, the accommodation was by itself insufficient, but any accommodation would have been insufficient. However, as a systemic question, the failure is much harder to track. For example, within the FYC program, this particular case created a precedent wherein the inability to be physically present in a face-to-face class due to emergency does not automatically preclude course completion. This creates a new (ad hoc) accommodative horizon in the writing program's future; in other words, the online accommodation I offered showed that such accommodation was possible, thereby creating the possibility programmatically and/or in other individual classes. Additionally, this experience led me to begin inquiry (a la complex accommodation) into the place of presence in my own pedagogy, the writing program, and the field at large.

In my own pedagogy (and due, I think to my online work), physical presence was clearly not essential to composition: otherwise the accommodation that was forwarded would never have been suggested to begin with. The concept of "presence" was already complicated in my own thinking as it was embodied and enacted differently among face-to-face, online, and hybrid courses, all of which I have experience teaching. That said, I still conceived of presence as somehow essential to each course even if it was structured in different ways depending on the course's context. For example, I tended to associate "presence" in a face-to-face course with physical presence and perhaps participation; in an online course, I equated presence with the completion of assignments like discussion forums; in hybrid courses, presence might be a combination of my face-to-face and

online expectations. Within the broader writing program, however, “presence” is almost always equated with physical presence within a classroom. The very lack of physical presence is what led some instructors I worked with to believe that online composition instruction is necessarily inferior to face-to-face composition.<sup>63</sup> Online composition has to be tolerated for various institutional reasons, and hybrid composition can capitalize on the digital affordances of online courses, but the gold standard of composition education for some seems to be face-to-face instruction.

But why?

I began to wonder—as complex accommodation pushes one to do—where this privileging of presence comes from, and how essential is presence to composition? It isn’t much of a stretch to believe that face-to-face education is naturalized as the right or best way to learn at institutional and programmatic levels; after all, it’s the way the majority of education has always occurred, and almost all instructors across subjects/disciplines cut their instructional teeth on face-to-face classes. Additionally, there is the potential for multiple channels of communication in face-to-face exchanges, which may indicate that is a more information-rich exchange modality. Of course, these channels may be circumscribed by acquaintance with genred communicative codes (see the earlier section on conferencing in this chapter), neurotypical communicative orientations, and so forth. However, there seem to be ways to reproduce the multiple channels that might occur in face-to-face interactions in other modalities while more effectively working through them. In an online class one could, for example, write the

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<sup>63</sup> When I began working as the Online Composition Coordinator, some online composition instructors were still requiring their students to meet them face-to-face for conferences, contrary to university policies. For some of these instructors, this was their only opportunity to really do the “teaching” of composition.

script for a particular lecture and then create an accompanying video. In such a case, students would have access to the exact text and also be able to see how the audio-visual text intersects with the transcript via emphases, pauses, body language, and so forth. It is not difficult to see how this could be a significant improvement over a singular lecture where one text could drown out the other, where repetition is impossible or complicated, where students might be disabled by a purely textual approach or a purely audio-visual approach, and so forth. This is well and good, but surely the dialogical nature of exchange in the composition classroom is what is central and what is lost in online modalities?

Those who lament the dialogical limitations of online composition courses may misunderstand the nature of online composition instruction. At my institution, discussion forums provide a space and technology for back-and-forth discussion between all members of a composition class. These forums are usually guided by an initial prompt on which each student is asked to write in the discussion forum. After an initial posting, students will generally be required to respond to 2-3 other students' posts. In this way, every student (rather than a small handful of excited and enthusiastic students) is both required and allowed to participate. Students who might be too anxious to participate in face-to-face contexts might be able to participate at a distance with (perhaps) less anxiety. Additionally, every participant can choose points for response, weigh their words, and craft their responses to best capture what they are trying to convey/accomplish (an practical impossibility for both students and instructors in the back-and-forth, face-to-face class). While these exchanges are doubtlessly performative and mediated by surveillance/evaluation, it is naïve to think the same does not apply to face-to-face

courses. To appeal to the spontaneous, off-the-cuff advantages of face-to-face exchange fails to recognize that such spontaneity sacrifices the greater control and crafting that online (or other distance-mediated) approaches to presence can result in. Finally, one cannot easily appeal to the workings of the larger discipline or broader writerly exchanges as being mirrored in the classroom's dialogical format insofar as such exchanges (e.g., communications having to do with publication, revisions, etc.) almost always take place asynchronously via e-mail. In short, and at the very least, physical presence neither implies greater/better dialog nor indicates an absolutely central aspect of composition instruction.

As I worked from my classroom, through my writing program (and my place within it), up to field levels, I realized that multiply-mediated communication has disrupted our notions of presence/space and that the requirement for physical presence implies an equation between physical presence and participation/attention. This equation may be a panoptic holdover that does not actually hold; after all, students may be physically present but not engaged in the work of the class. Likewise, students can be remote while being thoughtfully and energetically engaged. As I brought my inquiry back to my context within the writing program and broader institution, though, I saw that any sort of shift in the physical presence requirements in my course—theoretically sound or not—would need to be mediated by programmatic and institutional realities. For example, while students might be asynchronously accommodated in face-to-face classes, these classes are structured and organized in accordance with the face-to-face modality in mind; in other words, other pedagogical practices and individual class planning will be couched in the face-to-face configuration. Any widespread remediation could result in

serious disruptions of the course's infrastructure and necessitate a fairly robust, concurrent online infrastructure if enough students exercised the online accommodation option (though limited accommodations need not result in such disruptions). Additionally, at my particular institution, students must pay an additional fee to take a class in an online format. If a significant number of students registered for face-to-face courses but ended up taking an online accommodation, it might become unfair for other students and lose the institution revenue from the online fees. Lastly, and perhaps most important, my case was exceptional. Not only was I an online instructor, but I also trained online instructors and developed online curricula. Accommodating students in the way Rai was accommodated might not be an undue hardship for instructors with different backgrounds, but accommodating a number of students in such a way at the same time presupposes a level of online instructional facility that many teachers will lack. Of course, this is not terribly problematic as complex accommodation doesn't immediately lead to programmatic transformations; rather, it should lead to individual explorations moving from the instance of accommodation to one's broader pedagogical/theoretical orientations to one's nested institutional context to field-level inquiry and back down again, with accommodations *perhaps* creating some programmatic precedent.

In Rai's case, I came to understand presence in a way that took account of individual, institutional, and field-level concerns. Presence, I learned, was indeed central to composition insofar as exchange is central to composition, but this presence can be negotiated and remediated. These remediations and negotiations are—as they tend to be—circumscribed by institutional policies and procedures, but like in the case of accommodating conferencing described above, these institutional policies and procedures

can be changed as a result of the complex accommodation dialectic. After working through Rai's case, not only did I have a new ad hoc accommodation at my disposal, but I also created (or perhaps strengthened) precedent within the writing program for other instructors to use a similar accommodation in extreme cases. Lastly, program policy on class cancellation changed.

Previously, when instructors could not make it to a scheduled class, they were required to find a face-to-face substitute teacher or cancel class if unable to find a substitute. After disrupting the place of physical presence in my own theorizing, I forwarded a proposal to the WPA wherein instructors could migrate an individual class period online in the event of unavoidable absence.<sup>64</sup> This new policy mitigated discontinuities that might occur with cancelled or substituted classes. Through this new policy and through the precedent created in Rai's case, the programmatic vector of "presence" in the writing program began to shift to a degree: presence, its imbrications with composition, and the ways it may disable students and teachers became more available for critique not only for me, but for other members of the writing program with whom I work. In fact, working with Rai and working through complex accommodation and conferencing led me to compose a book chapter on conferencing, presence, and complex accommodation. This work may result in field-level shifts, which may enter into a number of feedback loops within my own program including institutional/programmatic shifts, individual instructor shifts in individual classrooms based on their own research, and so forth. The point is that the very possibilities of critique and even the construction of composition change when accommodation is reconfigured to move past ad hoc fitting-

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<sup>64</sup> Instructors could only exercise this option provided their students were aware that such a migration might occur, notification channels were clear, and so forth.



in or *a priori* universal design and is instead understood as the complex, kairic moment that it can come to be.

### Complex Accommodation: Closing Remarks or Opening Salvos?

The model of complex accommodation concretized in this chapter is far from simple, and the heuristics that underwrite it do not guarantee or even identify any sort of successful accommodational conclusion. However what complex accommodation may yield makes the investment well worth it ethically, theoretically, and practically: complex accommodation helps us to move from asking “What do I have to do in this case” to “What can I do in this case, and what do these affordances tell me about myself, my work, my discipline and how I might make each of them better for all students?”

But is complex accommodation realistic? Is it “reasonable?” Colleges and universities are often organized according to efficiency and rhetorics of requirement rather than rhetorics of affordance. To put it colloquially, complex accommodation sounds nice in theory, but can it work in practice across institutions or even across sections within a given writing program? Chapter 5 takes up these issues and other worries about, objections to, and expansions of complex accommodation in college composition.

## **Chapter 5: Objections and Directions**

### Introduction

When new models, theories, procedures, and policies are forwarded in Composition Studies (really, in any field of inquiry), it has become a commonplace to predict and address potential objections, provisionally answer such objections, and point in the direction of further inquiry that may yet be done. I will attempt to reproduce this commonplace as much as I am able, but I will show how complex accommodation makes such a move more...complicated.

As I've tried to show in the preceding chapters, disability, accommodation, and especially complex accommodation occur or come-to-be in highly local conditions and contexts. Decontextualization often plagues work on disability and accommodation. In fact, one might argue that decontextualizing disability reinscribes medical model approaches; in other words, discussing "disability" without referring to particular people and how they are actively disabled through particular circumstances implies static disabilities that reside in individual bodies rather than in social relations. Similarly, decontextualizing accommodation may suggest that disability is not a function of concrete, individual experiences and, in so doing, may slide accommodation back towards an over-general social model of disability or even a medical model. Because of these issues, complex accommodation as I have presented it remains firmly entrenched in the local. It is a kind of inquiry that reverses the normal accommodative direction: it is a way of directing exploration, analysis, and critique en route to systemic accommodation and individual negotiation rather than minimally making room for an individual and the critiques that individual's lack of fit afford.

I think the above sounds nice in the abstract, and in the abstract it seems difficult to level criticism at a conceptual model that directs practitioners to inquire into their local circumstances as the locus of inquiry and action. But perhaps it is too “nice.” Surely, a model of accommodation like the one I forward, a model that casts disability as a kairic crisis for instructor/program/discipline might warrant some strong objections. Indeed, it does, and these objections dovetail with the underwriting essence of complex accommodation: they tend to be answerable only within local contexts. However, like complex accommodation, I do believe they can and should be discussed beyond the limits of one’s own program and classroom.

For the sake of simplicity, this chapter will address three broad sorts of objections to complex accommodation: objections concerning standards, the nature of disability, and the feasibility of complex accommodation as a regular practice. After describing and addressing these sorts of objections, I will then show how these objections point to the most glaring issue with complex accommodation: the need for further experimentation, research, and discussion within and outside the local contexts of Composition Studies.

#### Objection 1: Complex Accommodation Might Lead to Lower Standards

One knee-jerk fear that I have encountered in discussions on disability with instructors in various disciplines is the anxiety that accommodating students always lies on a razor’s edge between legal requirement and unfair advantage. The idea is that providing students with extra test time, a note-taker, or any number of other accommodations will somehow “unlevel” the playing field and result to uneven or lowered standards. Of course, this sort of hand-wringing abelism tends to ignore the systemic, hegemonic advantaging already in

place and the ways in which accommodations—like, say, affirmative action—can make “normal” practices, policies, and environments more equitable.<sup>65</sup> Pointing out the equalizing ability of accommodation is one sort of answer to this question of changing standards, but it is a general response to a general kind of accommodation rather than a specific response made in terms of complex accommodation.

Complex accommodation confounds the standards objection in a number of ways. While complex accommodation does call for ad hoc accommodation en route to inquiry, none of the heuristics mention lessening standards. In fact, one of the outcomes of the ad hoc heuristic is a situation wherein no workable accommodations can be found. This outcome is keeping with the broader idea that there *will* be fixed, non-negotiable aspects of particular classrooms, writing programs, and broader institutions, as the programmatic heuristic makes explicit. These fixed requirements or essential elements may differ radically between institutions and circumstances, but particular standards will often be included in their number. Of course, the inquiry that complex accommodation entails may lead to the interrogation, critique, and reformulation of those standards. Such inquiry may lead to a more robust articulation and clarification of programmatic standards and the theories, practices, and policies that underwrite them. This clarification may, in turn, create the possibility for greater consonance between programmatic standards and programmatic values or priorities. Rather than vitiate standards, then, complex accommodation could potentially lead to better, more valid standards. I am using “valid”

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<sup>65</sup> I am in no way equating race and disability beyond the ways in which both race and disability have been systemically marginalized and in the ways that systemic correctives are often met with fears that “normal” individuals will somehow be disadvantaged as a result of such correctives. I have more to say on this below.

in a rather broad sense here, which can be captured best in Edward White's assessment-centered formulation:

Validity in measurement means that you are measuring what you say you are measuring, not something else, and that you have really thought through the importance of your measurement in considerable detail... Validity is important as a concept because, by forcing us to ask what we are really measuring, it forces us to ask what we are really teaching, and why. (10-12)<sup>66</sup>

In other words, complex accommodation and the kinds of inquiry it suggests may lead to interrogation and critique of whether and how the standards that a writing program upholds are being met, how such standards articulate with pedagogy/policies, and whether such standards are consonant with the program's mission/identity/framing theories. Of course, this sort of inquiry would only be possible in local instances, as complex accommodation requires, and would implicate empirical research as well as theoretical work.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> As a brief aside, it is worth noting that some scholars advocate for moving away from psychometrics in assessment. Patricia Lynne, for example, argues that "reliability" and "validity" are naturalized positivist or objectivist psychometrics that are inappropriate in writing assessment. Lynne advocates for replacing these terms and their theoretic baggage with "meaningfulness" and "ethics": "'Meaningfulness' and 'ethics,' that is, bespeak social values: the terms suggest neither objectivity nor subjectivity, but social reality constructed by persons in concert and in specific settings" (121). Lynne argues that these terms—and what they represent—should be defined in local contexts through negotiation with relevant stakeholders.

<sup>67</sup> In some ways, complex accommodation nicely dovetails with what assessment scholars call "validity inquiry." In short, validity inquiry moves beyond tracking validity as a function of an assessment instrument and the output to be assessed and explores local contexts and how such contexts construct the assessment instrument and procedures. This can include considerations of the specific writing program, its curricula, particular student populations, and even the broader cultural landscape (Adler-Kassner 74-75).

In the end, the standards objection to complex accommodation can be answered with a simple response: complex accommodation entails inquiry and does not necessarily imply the diminution or even adjustment of standards. If anything, complex accommodation can lead to clearer, better, more “valid” standards. As I note above, though, site-specific research would be needed to bear this out. I will have more to say on site-specific research below, but before doing so, I have a number of additional objections to address.

#### Objection 2: Complex Accommodation Might Obscure the Extension of “Disability”

Given that complex accommodation flips the direction of accommodation and works at analyzing and critiquing the conditions that lead to disability in writing curricula, there seems to be a danger that “disability” may disappear, become conflated with general social marginalization, or lose prominence as pedagogy, policy, and theory become more attuned to individualization. This echoes the critique of the social model of disability that I reproduce in Chapter 2, and it creates tension with the complex model of disability that I espouse. In reality, though, this is not really an objection to complex accommodation and its heuristics as I frame them.

While complex accommodation focuses on the conditions that construct difference as disability, it is not grounded in the social model of disability, but in something more complex. The heuristics as provided align more closely with Siebers’ concept of “complex embodiment” wherein one’s body and the experience of one’s body, representations of bodies, and the environment all exist within a mutually-transformative relationship. In complex accommodation, the ad hoc heuristic foregrounds negotiation

between the instructor and the student. This negotiation includes the instructor's own capacities, understanding of the course and course content, and administrative affordances and limitation; but it also includes the student's own experience and articulation of his or her needs, preferences, and experience. In such a way, the student can introduce his or her own specific, lived experience of having a disability in the accommodation process and, in so doing, guard against both medicalized and simplified social approaches to disability. However, there could be a lurking danger that students may be cut out of the process of complex accommodation.

In some institutions, instructors may attempt to work only at programmatic levels in their inquiry; in other words, they may work only with policies, procedures, and theories while leaving actual people out of the process. Such an approach could, in theory, yield some interesting and valuable results, but it also borders on paternalism and, more importantly, it elides the lived realities of having a disability. While working closely with individual students is the most direct way to avoid this problem, there may also be programmatic avenues that could work towards keeping the complexity in disability. For example, a writing program could easily structure midterm and end-of-term course evaluations along axes of ability, disability, and success. In other words, in addition to questions posed to students in these course evaluations, students might also answer questions such as:

- How did the instructor work to meet your learning needs?
- What does “success” mean to you in this class?
- Did anything about the class seem to put some students at more of an advantage or disadvantage than others?

- What changes in the class, curriculum, and/or policies would better help you succeed?

The above questions are not perfect. One might want to ask more specific/direct questions about ability and disability, but such questions could identify students, and midterm/end-of-term course evaluations tend to be anonymous so that students will be encouraged to respond honestly and openly. Such openness might also be cultivated by more directly foregrounding disability in the composition classroom.

One final way to keep the complexity of disability intact is to center disability in the classroom. As “A Policy Statement on Disability in CCCC” affirms:

Just as it is imperative to bring the subject matter and authors of formerly excluded groups into the classroom and canon, disability as a subject of study needs to be part of the curriculum. Teacher training can address ways of creating inclusive classrooms and curricula that are sensitive to both students and teachers with disabilities.

As instructors select readings, craft assignments, and facilitate discussions, they can (and should) include disability issues. As Lennard Davis has said, and others have echoed, “What is universal in life, if there are universals, is the experience of the limitations of the body. Yet the fantasy of culture, democracy, capitalism, sexism, and racism, to name only a few ideologies, is the perfection of the body and its activities” (“The End of Identity” 314). While some instructors may shy away from foregrounding disability in composition curricula for various reasons, that decision need not relegate disability to a disembodied social condition. Certain simple procedures and policies—open accommodative dialog, altered accessibility statements, structured course evaluations—



can help position disability as individual and normal within a particular course, a positioning which both sustains complex embodiment and encourages students to help instructors best accommodate individual learning needs and preferences. But, one might wonder, can dispreference slide into disability, and if so, what does this mean for complex accommodation?

After working through this project, one might be concerned that “disability” could become too expansive and that it might come to include so many bodily, mental, and social configurations as to become incoherent as a term or category. In one sense, many activists might argue that this is sort of the point: if social and ideological conditions are equitably reconfigured, then disability might disappear as each person’s needs and lived experiences substitute the continuance of, and desire for, a hegemonic norm. In another sense, though, in terms of this project specifically, one could be concerned that “discomfort” and “disability” might become conflated within the composition classroom, with first-year composition potentially devolving into a series of mollycoddling transactions wherein students are never challenged and, as a result, never grow as writers. While I think this objection is hyperbolic in its formulation, it does indicate an important underspecification of “discomfort” that could reasonably crop up in discussions on complex accommodation; as such, it’s worth exploring in some detail.

Certainly, discomfort seems to be endemic to many areas of education, and especially to composition. However, “discomfort” is a slippery term not only because it implies subjective judgments, but also because it implies multiple species. In the present case, student discomfort could be made more precise by bifurcating it to include intellectual discomfort and procedural discomfort. By “procedural discomfort,” I refer to

pedagogical, administrative, and environmental practices that stress students. Similarly, by “intellectual discomfort,” I refer to ideas, arguments, or enframings that stress students.<sup>68</sup> In one sense, I’ve addressed procedural discomfort throughout the course of this project: if a student feels stressed by particular pedagogical, administrative, or environmental features, then an instructor faces a kairic moment wherein s/he can interrogate and potentially optimally reconfigure such features. Of course, there is a continuum of discomfort, but any attempt to a priori quantify and classify such a continuum in terms of classroom features seems as if it would be arbitrary. Additionally, complex accommodation makes such quantification and classification moot: if a student feels uncomfortable, this discomfort creates the possibility for interrogation and possibly critique, with the result that the necessity and utility of the practice can be probed and either transformed to alleviate the discomfort (if the discomfort is found to be unnecessary), or it can be better understood and resituated within the instructor’s frame of reference (if it is found to be necessary and nonaccommodatable). In short, I believe that as far as complex accommodation is concerned, there is no functional instructional difference between procedural discomfort and disability: each provides a kairic moment to reverse the direction of fit, critique one’s own procedures, and determine if and how reconfiguration might better student success. Intellectual discomfort, on the other hand, seems both more necessary and less disabling than procedural discomfort.

Many teachers feel that intellectual discomfort is not only salutary, but is actually natural and necessary in the course of intellectual growth and development; in fact, some

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<sup>68</sup> I’m employing “stress” here in a capacious sense to include various forms of tension, pressure, and strain that disrupt physical and/or psychological homeostasis or may lead to such disruption.

teachers may see a fundamental aspect of their work as tied to productively inducing discomfort. As Donald Murray has said (in the context of the writing conference), “I’m uncomfortable when my students are uncomfortable, but more uncomfortable when they are comfortable” (15). This valuation of discomfort may be linked to the idea that students must abandon simplified yet identifying worldviews and/or skill sets in order to more fully participate in a culture, a discipline, or some other specific in-group. In composition, students learn to move from writing for themselves or for some imagined monolithic reader and towards real(ish) readers. In this process, most students find they must change their frames of reference for what it means to communicate with other people. They may move from a sort of naïve semantic realism or linguistic positivism and towards more agnostic discursive horizons; in other words, what it means to “mean” may first be called into question for these students in the seemingly innocuous confines of a first-year composition course. The question for the present project then becomes: Does or can such paradigm-shifting discomfort equal disablement—perhaps even violent disablement—if it systemically disadvantages some students and not others? Is the devout literalist Christian disabled by the composition instructor who denies that the Bible is an authoritative source? I think I can and should answer this broader question of whether intellectual discomfort should be treated as disablement in a manner that some might find objectionable but which I find reasoned: I’m going to dodge it.

Ultimately, I think that the question of whether certain movements in education are disabling is incredibly complex, contentious, and shot through with political, ideological, and disciplinary commitments (as most interesting issues are). Undoubtedly, certain intellectual pursuits and courses of study can be incredibly stressful for students,

as anyone who has taught courses concerning identity formation can attest to. Can such stress disable some students? Can exposure to certain ideas or theories impede the education and vitality of people with particular physical and/or psycho-social configurations? The short answer is: I haven't the slightest idea, but this is certainly an interesting line of inquiry. The longer and better answer is: within the context of complex accommodation in general and complex accommodation in composition specifically, functional agnosticism may be the order of the day. In other words, if a student approaches an instructor and indicates that particular ideas, theories, or courses of study are causing stress to him or her, then what is the harm and what is the benefit in working through complex accommodation *as if* the discomfort were functionally disabling?

Intellectual discomfort creates yet another kairic moment in the composition classroom. If an instructor subjects a discomforting idea, set of ideas, theories, etc. to the complex accommodation heuristics, s/he can uncover and perhaps understand the situation of those ideas within the writing program, field, or instructor's own curriculum. In addition, s/he can add the discomfort to the calculus in the sense of considering whether and how discomfort is actually necessary, if and how these elements might be framed or couched so as to alleviate discomfort, and so forth. In short, the encounter of intellectual discomfort, like procedural discomfort, like disability is a moment of opportunity and affordance: it is a moment to assess what we do, how we do it, and how we can best do it with our individual students and their individual needs and capacities.

In the final summation, I don't think the discomfort objection is really an objection. It is an interesting area of inquiry, and I acknowledge that I give it short(ish) shrift here. However, I contend that working through complex accommodation in cases of

discomfort potentially conveys similar advantages to working through complex accommodation in clearer cases of disability. The relationship between discomfort and disability, particularly in composition classes, should definitely be studied further in the future, but I believe that complex accommodation will allow instructors to remain productively agnostic as to the precise relationship. Of course, this entails that instructors will be able to engage in complex accommodation at all, and it might not be clear how possible such engagement might be across different institutions and in different writing programs.

### Objection 3: Complex Accommodation May not Be Feasible Across Institutions

A simple, yet potent objection to complex accommodation is that it might not work in different institutions with different faculty. One could argue that the heuristics may be useful and practicable for Composition PhDs, but the vast majority of composition courses are not taught by Composition PhDs; instructors of diverse academic backgrounds teach them, and graduate students and contingent faculty mostly teach such classes. In my own writing program, for example, graduate student composition instructors have Literary Studies, Media Studies, Creative Writing, and/or Rhetoric and Composition backgrounds, as do the contingent instructors. One might argue that the abstract theoretical and programmatic work of complex accommodation might come more easily to some of these instructors than to others.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, differences between

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<sup>69</sup> This is not to say that any of these students or scholars in these backgrounds do not engage in abstract theoretical and programmatic work, as they certainly do; rather, I am indicating that these different foci and the different years of study these instructors and contingent faculty may have will result in differences in tendencies to engage in the kind of inquiry suggested by complex accommodation.

writing program structures, administration, workloads, and institutional positioning might complicate complex accommodation by limiting not just action but inquiry as well.

Ultimately, these objections are answerable by recalling that the heuristics supplied in this project, and the broader mechanism of complex accommodation, are heuristics for inquiry and potential metamorphosis, not algorithmic procedures for transformation.

Complex accommodation and the sorts of heuristics that represent it are flexible enough to lead to systemic thinking and potential reconfiguration in any writing program, staffed by instructors of diverse backgrounds. Even in the “Programmatic Heuristic,” where one set of procedures may lead to field-level inquiry, that sort of inquiry is intentionally underdetermined. “Field level inquiry” could refer to extensive scholarly inquiry, perhaps including a literature review and construction of a state of the art. Alternatively, “field level inquiry” could signify picking up a collection of essays on the particular issue/subject/concern. “Field level inquiry” could even be as simple as trading lore with instructors from other institutions over a meal. The point of the “field level inquiry” portion of the heuristic is to expand inquiry beyond one’s immediate writing program context. How that hashes out will vary between instructors. I’ll have more to say about field-level inquiry a bit later, but there is yet one more cross-institutional feasibility issue that must be addressed, a veritable elephant in the living room (or shared department office).

One final cross-institutional objection centers on labor: in a field where instructors are already asked to do so much, is complex accommodation the proverbial straw that breaks the adjunct’s back? When kept within rhetorics of requirement and framed as an imperative, complex accommodation might be taken as an additional

burden, especially for overtaxed instructors. However, when approached within a rhetoric of affordance, complex accommodation may lose this burdensome aspect. As I show in Chapter 4, complex accommodation can be multidirectional: instructors are not merely accommodating student's learning styles and needs, but they are accommodating their own teaching styles and capacities. There is no reason why labor expenditure cannot or should not be a component of such inquiry and deliberation. Additionally, as I continue to underscore, complex accommodation is utterly flexible and a function of possibility within context, so it does not necessarily imply specific courses of action. Where complex accommodation does imply certain courses of action, it creates possibility for various sorts of proceduralizations that may clarify and—in some senses—simplify ambiguous, stressful, and inefficient processes (like ad hoc accommodation). Ultimately, these responses are vague, and the vagueness is a function of trying to address the possibilities across contexts.

How complex accommodation really works—its affordances, its limitations—will be a function of local context, of individual schools, writing programs, classrooms, teachers, and students. How it affects standards, how it constructs ability and disability, and even its practical feasibility will all depend on particular instructors in particular writing programs in particular institutions working with particular students. As such, there is much research to be done on complex accommodation, research that will continue the inquiry begun here.

### Further Research and Directions for Inquiry

In general terms, complex accommodation needs ethnographic research from multiple sites before its overall utility might be discussed with any degree of specificity. Thick analyses of complex accommodation will help us to see how it might impact standards, but more importantly, it will help show whether and how it might be implemented at different types of institutions with different structures.

One of the limitations of the current project—as I’ve indicated previously—is that I am immersed in both Composition Studies and Disability Studies. In addition, I currently work within a large progressive writing program, staffed by highly-experienced instructors who undergo continual professional development and who participate in and help constitute a vibrant writing program culture. Complex accommodation would doubtlessly look very different at different institutions, with different instructors, and with different student bodies. Accordingly, a future direction into complex accommodation might compare its implementation at different schools (R1, small private institutions, community colleges, etc.), by different levels of instructor (MA-level education, PhD-level, contingent faculty, tenured faculty, etc.), in different programmatic structures (writing studies programs, English departments, humanities departments, etc.). This type of research can help shed light on how complex accommodation might be more or less specified, whether it is practicable in some writing programs but not others, and a host of other informing results. Of course, an integral component of such research would be tracking attitudinal shifts that might occur as a result of complex accommodation.

Complex accommodation embraces social approaches to disability that also account for the ways in which embodiment (including impairment) relates to, interacts



with, and constructs disability. However, instructors, students, and even broader programs wherein complex accommodation might occur may subscribe to more medicalized conceptions of disability. As complex accommodation is structured to reverse the direction of fit by inquiring into (and potentially changing) structurally- and systemically-disabling practices, environments, and ideologies, research should be conducted into whether and how complex accommodation may shift attitudes on disability. How does complex accommodation shift instructor's attitudes from medical to social models of disability, or does it leave attitudes unaffected? How does the administrative framing of disability suggested by complex accommodation—the syllabus alterations, the ad hoc negotiations, the course evaluations—affect students' perceptions of disability? Do instructors even implement complex accommodation when they are not required to do so?

One concern I have with complex accommodation, especially in terms of further research, is whether it ought to be required of instructors. In one sense, complex accommodation ties up a number of compositional best practices in a neat package: it invites reflection, metacognition, exploration of other ways of teaching and doing composition. I wonder, though, what happens to the “rhetoric of affordance” if complex accommodation becomes a programmatic requirement. Could complex accommodation become as reified and proceduralized as ad hoc accommodation is in some contexts? Part of me thinks that complex accommodation is structured in such a way that such ossification is impossible in the ways in which it depends so heavily on inquiry rather than algorithmic procedure. But this raises the following question: if complex accommodation is voluntary, why would instructors choose to participate in it? This is far

from a simple question. Exploring why or why not instructors would utilize complex accommodation can reveal where priorities, values, and exigencies lie at different institutions and among different instructors. Such data could be helpful for “selling” complex accommodation to instructors in different ways, but it could also be invaluable for institutions and the field in general insofar as it can create snapshots of instructor priorities and senses of the means and ends of composition.

The reception, critique, and effects of complex accommodation at the field level may reveal much about both complex accommodation and the field as a whole. As instructors and scholars critique complex accommodation, what do these critiques focus on? For example, focused critique on practical implementation might reveal anxieties about, or preferences for, more rigid proceduralization. Alternatively, I can imagine critical focus falling on complex accommodation’s alignment with social and complex models of disability. A field-level response along this vector may be revealing about dissonances (or consonances) between different scholars and the CCCC organization as a whole (at least in terms of model alignment). Which programs implement it, how they implement it, and why may also provide valuable insight into the field’s (and different institutions’) willingness and ability to approach disability more systemically. In the broadest strokes, I wonder if and how complex accommodation might change scholars’, practitioners’, and programs’ senses of the purposes and ends of composition.

Throughout this project, I’ve discussed how complex accommodation changes the directions and kinds of fit that accommodation creates. But it does more than this. It begins with the encounter of disability as a moment of *kairos*, a moment where certain sorts of inquiries and questions become opportunely possible when they may have

previously been impossible or inaccessible. Moving through the heuristics of complex accommodation and exploring how systems rather than individual student configurations create a lack of fit can then lead to further kairic moments (remembering, of course, that these are not necessary implications but only possibilities). When this inquiry happens at the local levels of the classroom and program, it becomes theorization: making sense of the articulations and imbrications of the practices, policies, and ideologies that frame and construct one's composition class necessitates the construction of explanatory systematization. Put another way, the narratives that instructors track and create to make sense of the provenance and continuance of their practices, pedagogies, and policies create local explanatory theories of composition. Of course, these theories are utterly provisional and continually subject to change; in the process of complex accommodation, these theories are continually "passing," to borrow the language of Donald Davidson and the Post-Process theorists. This is a metaphorical comparison, but it may be an important one.

Post-Process theorists who borrow from Davidson's work use "prior" and "passing" theories to describe how we communicate with one another by drawing from background beliefs/knowledge (prior theories) to construct in-the-moment interpretive schemes to make sense of other people's communicative attempts ("passing theories"). As Kent describes it:

...people cannot communicate from nowhere; in order to communicate, you must be somewhere, and being somewhere—being positioned in relation to other language users—means that you always come with baggage, with beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears about the world. What matters is how we employ those beliefs,

desires, hopes, and fears to formulate passing theories in an attempt to interpret one another's utterances and to make sense of the world. And, first, as the term "passing" suggests, a passing theory goes by us; it never 'stops' so that we can capture some sort of unitary, complete, or determinate meaning. Second, a passing theory "passes" away; it never endures, never works twice in quite the same way. Most important, generating passing theories—using our prior theories, our situatedness, to create utterances—can never be reduced to a predictable process. (4)

In the above terms, as instructors tentatively move through complex accommodation, they are continually drawing from their prior theories—their knowledge about ability, pedagogy, program, policy, institution, composition itself—to create passing theories about how and why things are the way they are within the contexts instructors find themselves in. I have tried to underscore how complex accommodation, like the prior-passing theory relationship, is underdetermined. Unlike post-process approaches to communication which may imply radical indeterminacy<sup>70</sup>, I do think that complex accommodation can be scaffolded even if it is underdetermined, hence the metaphorical rather than literal comparison between the two theoretical perspectives. That said, what happens at the level of field-level inquiry, the blank spot in complex accommodation's

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<sup>70</sup> One could run with the prior-passing theoretical dialectic all the way to asserting that communication is impossible or merely guesswork, but genre, efficiency (in the sense of communicative work actually happening), and linguistic stabilities seem to militate against such extremism, at least in practical terms. As Kent says, "All a prior theory amounts to is the background knowledge with which we begin in order to create passing theories. Our prior theories do not need to match the prior theories of other people; that is, we do not need to come from the same communities, nor do we need to believe the same things about the world or even speak the same language in order to communicate. However, there is no doubt that coming from the same community will help us communicate more efficiently and effectively" (4).

heuristics? Is it possible to scaffold complex inquiry at that level, or would such scaffolding defeat its purpose?

Throughout the last few chapters, I have kept the field-level inquiry portion of complex accommodation intentionally vague, and I have held off addressing it until the very end of this project. This is because I *don't* want to suggest a specifiable way to engage in inquiry at the field level. Such a suggestion would itself be theory laden and risk determining the process. Complex accommodation is already shot through with theoretical commitments, and the theories that underwrite how I think about the field and how I might conduct research and inquiry at the field level might be insupportable in different contexts and by different people. This is not an attempt at intellectual slight-of-hand or legerdemain. As I worked through the heuristics presented in this project, I initially began constructing a field-level heuristic but quickly realized that the “possibilities” that I created and tracked were so inflected by my own background—by my prior theories about composition—that they were subtly leading to disciplined ways of proceeding through field-level inquiry. The power and potential of complex accommodation lies in beginning from one's own context, with one's own students and their perspectives, and *one's own commitments* and then to move through individual, programmatic, and institutional inquiries. Complex accommodation can suggest the sorts of questions to ask at these levels to stimulate inquiry, but even these questions are framed and shaped by local contexts. I hesitate to offer field-level suggestions and instead elect to wait and see what questions local instantiations of complex accommodation produce. In short, seeing how people conduct field-level inquiry, and how it comes to bear on complex accommodation and thinking about complex accommodation, should

itself be an object of research rather than a clean procedure. At that point, my own field-level questions may more profitably join the conversation. Of course, I have not remained completely silent on my own field-level inquiry, as Chapter 4 evidences. However, given my anxieties about over-proceduralizing complex accommodation, I think it prudent to merely provide an example of field-level inquiry rather than anything that might be mistaken as a prescription.

### A Deliberate Conclusion

At the end of this project, I recall the “deliberative procedure” elaborated and critiqued in Chapter 1. In that context, “deliberative procedure” was framed as a harmful and hegemonically-legitimizing mechanism, one that could continue to perpetrate marginalizing and disabling practices and ideologies in the composition classroom. Now, I invite the reader to reconsider the idea of a deliberative procedure in light of complex accommodation. In the encounter of a disabling practice or policy, it is my hope that compositionists and writing programs will continue to ask “How can we justify this?” In reversing the direction of accommodation, however, I believe this becomes a very different question, and what this question refers to, what it implies, what possibilities it creates might lead to fundamental changes in composition for all students and for all teachers of composition.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Adam M. Pacton

**Emphases**

- Composition Theory, Pedagogy, and Assessment
- Writing Program Administration
- Disability Studies
- Online and Hybrid Instructional Design
- Multimodal Composition, Creative Nonfiction, Experimental Writing

**Education**

- PhD, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2015  
Major: English
- MA, East Tennessee State University, May 2009  
Major: English
- BA, Marquette University, December 2001  
Major: Philosophy

Dissertation Title: Intertheory: Disability, Accommodation, and the Writing of Composition Dissertation

Advisor: Anne F. Wysocki

**Publications**

## Peer-Reviewed Articles

- “Perusing the Parousia: A Formalist Reading of ‘The Second Coming.’” *Peer English* 3 (2008): 75-84. Print.

## Other Articles and Book Chapters

- “Bringing Socrates to the Center: The Socratic Method as Functional Peer Tutoring.” *Southern Discourse* 12.1 (2008): 3,11. Print.

## Creative Nonfiction

- “East.” *The Great Lakes Book Project*. Ed. Walter Blake Knoblock. Traverse City: Felix Exi, 2013. 157-59. Print.
- “Composing: An *Ars Logica*.” *Writing on the Edge* 23.1 (2012): 71-83. Print.

## Poetry

- “Dissociation.” *3Elements Review*. 1.1 (2013): 29-31. Web.

- “Dasein,” *Now and Then: The Appalachian Magazine*. 25.2 (Fall/Winter 2009). Print.

#### Reviews

- Rev. of *Autism Spectrum Disorders in the College Composition Classroom: Making Writing Instruction More Accessible for All Students*. eds. Val Gerstle and Lynda Walsh. *Composition Studies* 41.1 (2013): 149-52. Print.
- Rev. of *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives*. eds. Lance Massey and Richard C. Gebhardt. *Composition Studies* 40.1 (2012): 120-23. Print.
- Rev. of *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*, by Jonathan Culpeper. *Anthropology Review Database*. The University of Buffalo and UBWings, 05 Jan. 2012. Web.
- “If I Don’t Know what I’m Teaching, How Can I Make the Best of It?”: Rev. of *Teaching What You Don’t Know*, by Therese Huston. *Pedagogy* 12.1 (2011): 187-91. Print.
- Rev. of *My Word: Plagiarism and College Culture*, by Susan Debra Blum. *Anthropology Review Database*. The University of Buffalo and UBWings, 25 Nov. 2009. Web.  
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- Rev. of *Reorienting Orientalism*, ed. Chandreyee Niyogi. *In-between: Essays & Studies in Literary Criticism* 15.2 (2008): 189-92. Print.
- Rev. of *Killed Cartoons: Casualties from the War on Free Expression*, ed. David Wallis. *Modern Language Studies* 38.1 (Summer 2008): 85-87. Print.

#### Invited Talks

- “Composing Autism, Constructing Ability: Re-visioning Accommodation for Students on the Autism Spectrum,” presented at Ball State’s Symposium: “Putting Together the Autism Puzzle: Meeting the Needs of Students on the Autism Spectrum in Higher Education” (Muncie, IN, September 2014).

#### Conference Presentations

- “Creation ex Nihilo: Building an Online Composition Course Architecture,” presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (Indianapolis, IN, March 2014).
- “Asperger’s Syndrome, Composition, and Self-Identification: A Model for Curricular Negotiation” presented at the Society for Disability Studies Conference 2013 (Orlando, FL, March 2013).
- “CMS-Mediated Identity,” presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (St. Louis, MO, March 2012).
- “Just Another Other: Oroonoko, ‘Noble Savagery,’ and Alterity,” presented at the Southeastern American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference (Johnson City, TN, February 2010).

- “A Cock and Bull Paper: *Tristram Shandy*, Self-Reflexivity, and Filming the Unfilmable,” presented at the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference (Portland, OR, March 2008).
- “Peer Tutoring and the Socratic Method: the Applicability and Usefulness of *Elenchus* in Writing Centers,” presented at the Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference (Savannah, GA, February 2008).
- “Perusing the Parousia: A Formalist Reading of ‘The Second Coming,’” presented at the Southern Appalachian Student Conference on Literature (Johnson City, TN, November 2007).
- “Fantasies Final and Fantasies Infinite: An Exploration of the Transactional Nature of Role-Playing Video Games,” presented at the Popular Culture Association in the South/American Culture Association in the South (Jacksonville, FL, September 2007).

### Local Workshops

- “Access, Accommodation, and Dis/Ability in First-Year Composition” (Composition Forum for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), September 2013.
- “Supporting Student Success in English 101” (for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee New English Teaching Assistant Orientation), August 2013.
- “External Funding through Pivot” (for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee English Department), October 2012.
- “Conferencing: Nuts, Bolts, and Wrenches” (for University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee New English Teaching Assistant Orientation), August 2012.
- “English Technology/Pedagogy Workshop: D2L Roundtable,” University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. November 2011
- “Responding to Student Texts: Best Practices” (for University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee New English Teaching Assistant Orientation), August 2011.
- “Emerging Technologies in Composition,” East Tennessee State University English Composition Workshop, August 2009.
- “Online Resources for Composition and the Composition Materials Project,” East Tennessee State University Composition Workshop, August 2008

### Awards

- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Distinguished Graduate Student Fellowship (2013)
- James A. Sappenfield Fellowship (2012)
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Graduate Student Travel Award (2012)
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Chancellor’s Graduate Student Award (2010, 2012)
- John D. Allen Graduate Award in English (2009)
- Mary Bomar Herrin Memorial Scholarship (2008)

- James H. Robb Memorial Award for Outstanding Work in the Study of the History of Philosophy (2001)
- Marquette University Academic Excellence Scholarship (1999)
- Phi Theta Kappa Scholarship (1999)

## Teaching

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	2010-2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing, Rhetoric, and Culture: Constructions and Deconstructions of Identity (ENG 240)</li> <li>• College Writing and Research (ENG102)</li> <li>• College Writing and Research—Online (ENG102)</li> <li>• College Writing and Research—Hybrid (ENG102)</li> <li>• Introduction to College Writing (ENG101)</li> <li>• Introduction to College Writing—Online (ENG101)</li> <li>• Fundamentals of Composition (ENG095)</li> </ul>	
Cardinal Stritch University	2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written Communication II—Online (EN102)</li> </ul>	
Milligan College	2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rhetorical Composition (COMP111)</li> </ul>	
East Tennessee State University	2008-2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Thinking and Argumentation (ENGL1020)</li> <li>• Critical Thinking and Argumentation—Special Section: Conceptual Examination (ENGL1020)</li> <li>• Critical Reading and Expository Writing (ENL1010)</li> </ul>	

## Administration and Service

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online Composition Coordinator</li> <li>• Composition Advisory Committee</li> <li>• Center for Instructional and Professional Development Writing/Critical Thinking Assessment Pilot</li> <li>• Writing Program Assessment</li> <li>• Academic Policy Committee</li> <li>• Online Composition Instructor Mentor</li> <li>• English 101 Curriculum Committee</li> </ul>	<p>2012-2014</p> <p>2012-2014</p> <p>2013</p> <p>2011-2014</p> <p>2011-2012</p> <p>2011-2013</p> <p>2011</p>
East Tennessee State University	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant Director—Writing and Communication Center</li> <li>• Project Coordinator—<i>ETSU Composition Materials Web Site</i></li> </ul>	<p>2008</p> <p>2007-2009</p>

**Editorial Positions**

- Copyeditor, *Queen City Writers* 2013-present
- Editorial Coordinator, *Southern Medical Journal* 2009
- Editor-in-chief, *Mockingbird* 2008-2009
- Reader, *Mockingbird* 2007-2008
- Peer Reviewer, *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 2008