

Accommodating Researchers with Disabilities in Field Settings

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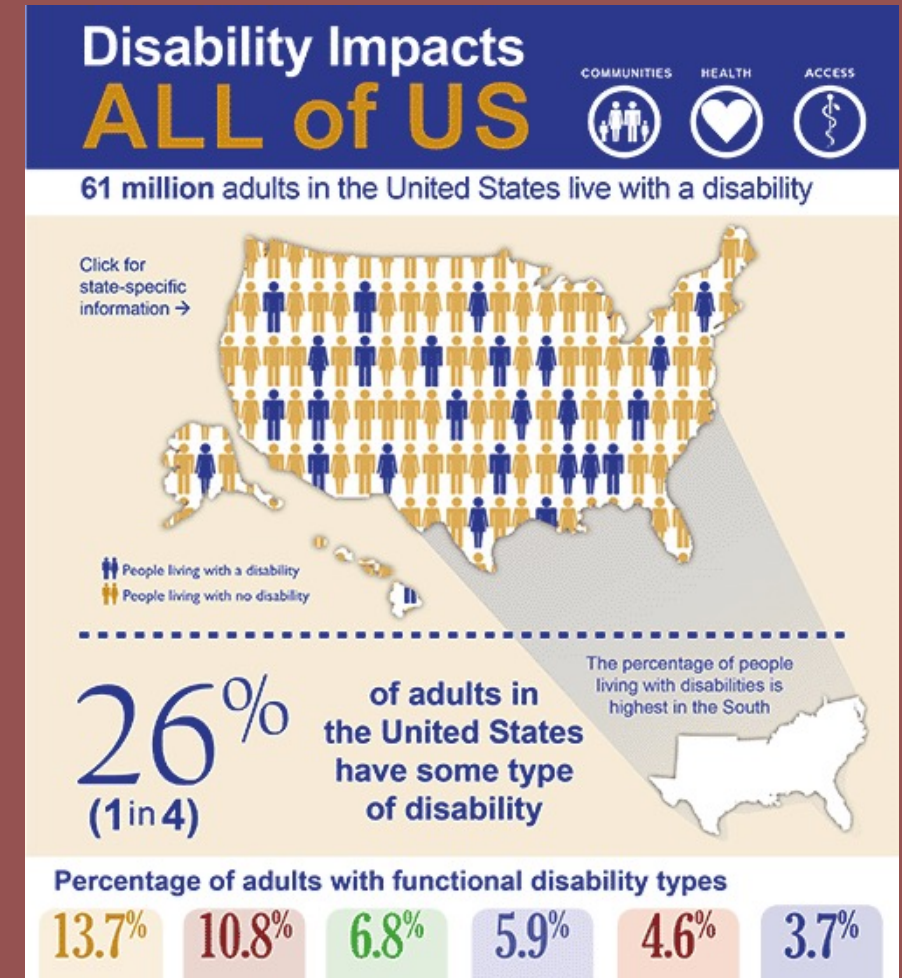
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What is a disability?

A disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to:

- Do certain activities (activity limitation) and...
- Interact with the world around them (participation restrictions) – U.S. CDC



Disabilities may affect...

- Vision
- Movement
- Thinking
- Remembering
- Learning
- Communicating
- Hearing
- Mental health
- Social relationships...



Disabilities can be...

- Temporary / Permanent
- Visible / Invisible
- Well-managed / Uncontrolled
- Affecting two people with the same condition differently



Needs of
persons with
disabilities
may
fluctuate...

Monthly

Weekly

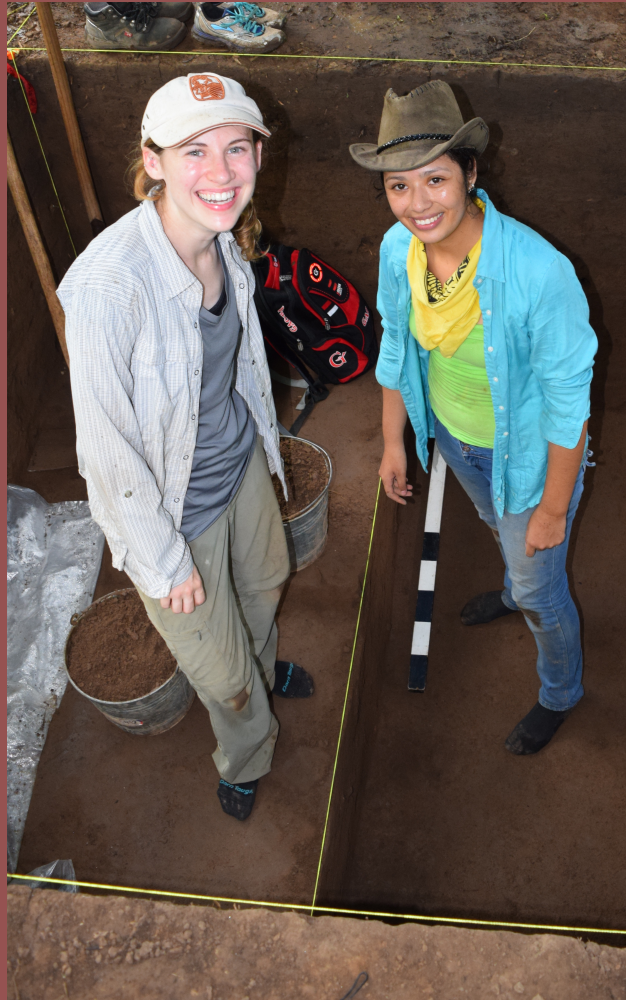
Daily

Hourly

By the minute

Unexpectedly

A personal anecdote...





Stress & Mental Distress

- Adults with disabilities report frequent mental distress...
 - almost 5 times as often as adults without disabilities – U.S. CDC
- COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities:
<https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2020/11/04/new-research-documents-how-covid-19-multiplies-stress-and-trauma-for-people-with-disabilities/>

Intersectionality (Race)

No Disability	Some College or Associate's	Bachelor's or Beyond
Non-Hispanic White	34%	35%
Black/African American	38%	20%
Hispanic/Latino	29%	15%
Asian	23%	52%

With Disability	Some College or Associate's	Bachelor's or Beyond
Non-Hispanic White	33%	15%
Black/African American	31%	9%
Hispanic/Latino	25%	9%
Asian	25%	26%

Source: American Community Survey (2015)

Types of assistance

University Accommodations

- Different departments depending on affiliation
- Follow certain federal regulations
 - Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
 - Volunteers still subject

Best Practices

- Anticipate that students have various abilities/disabilities
- Provide options for students who do not seek out institutional channels
- Set an example for future generations

University accommodations

- Subject to:
 - Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – 1990
 - Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) – 2008
- ADA provides legal definition of a disability:
 - “An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a:
 - Person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,
 - Person who has a history or record of such an impairment,
 - Or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.
 - The ADA does not specifically name all of the impairments that are covered.”



Reasonable accommodations

- Reasonable accommodation (used by ADA & ADAAA):

“Modifications made in the educational environment to help create an equal educational opportunity for an otherwise qualified student to fulfill course requirements” (UCSB Disabled Students Program)

- Not every accommodation is a reasonable one!

Universal Design Learning

- Goal is to plan every activity to be accessible to everyone
- BUT... reality is more complex
- Planning tailored experiences, not universally-accessible experiences, saves time and money

Before the Fieldwork



Publicizing: An Example

Field Study: Nutrient content of leaf litter of trees in the northern Rocky Mountains



Perfect for people
with disabilities!

Publicizing: A Better Example

Field Study: Nutrient content of leaf litter of trees in the northern Rocky Mountains

Accommodations provided for individuals with disabilities (under ADA if domestic)

Provides six units of credit and professional experience in ecological research required for entry level positions

Note: No electricity access at field site



Things to avoid

- Disability-related symbology: examples →
- Wheelchair = only mention of disability
- Making promises that you can't keep
- Leaving out off-putting facts
 - Because you think it will reduce enrollment



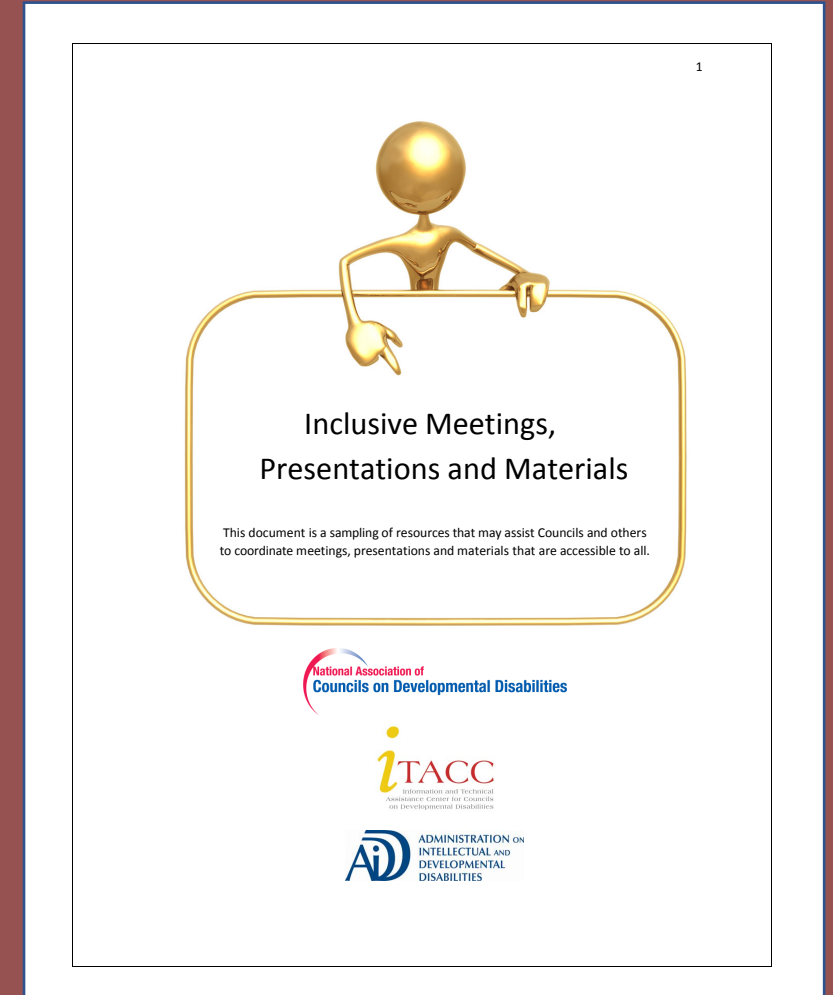
Barriers to declaring disabilities

- Professional judgement
- Standing out
- Being treated like the “favorite child”
- Poor understanding of what a disability is
- Stigma, especially with regards to mental health
- Disinclination to admit to yourself that you have a disability



Resources for creating accessible documents and webpages

- Accessible Syllabus (Tulane University):
<https://www.accessiblesyllabus.com/>
- Colorblind friendly / Print friendly / Photocopy safe color schemes @ ColorBrewer:
<https://colorbrewer2.org/>



Take home strategies for making your field projects accessible



Strategy #1: Anticipate

Three parts:

- Think of a time when something went wrong
- What were the contributing factors?
- How was it solved? Or how could it have been solved?



Bonus question

If you came to a solution...

- Did this solution cater to the specific needs of one individual?
- In other words, is it worth the time and money needed to anticipate for a repeat?

Strategy #2: Engage

- Ask
- Act
- Assess



Example: Informational Interview

- Both parties can organize and plan for certain accommodations

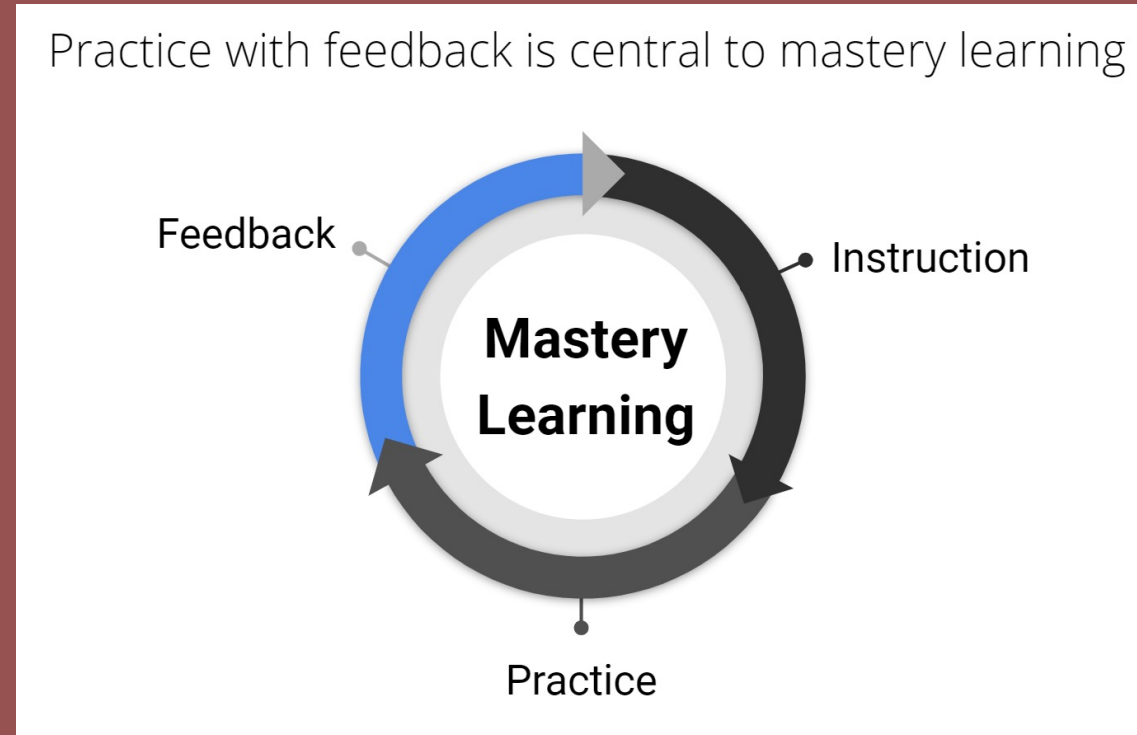


Strategy #3: Provide many “roads” to participation



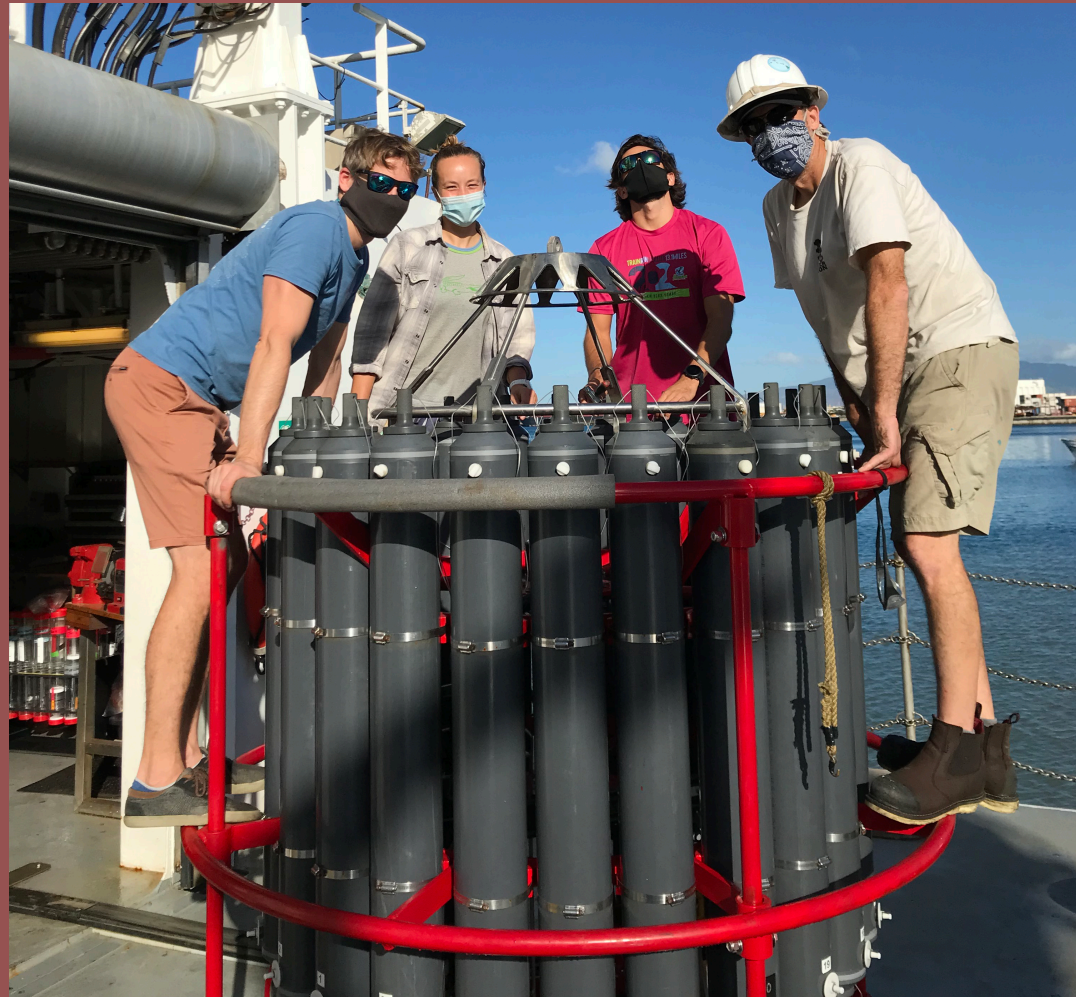
Shibuya Crossing, Tokyo, Japan

Strategy #4: De-emphasize “showing up” Instead, focus on engagement and skill mastery



- More on mastery learning: <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2019/08/28/what-is-mastery-learning/>

Strategy #5: Humanize the experience



Connecting the Dots

- Establish and communicate:
 - Expectations
 - Limitations
 - A safe space
- Iteratively improve
- Check in regularly

