Disability as an Identity

Allison Penfield – Assistant Director, Resources for Disabled Students
Joe Tiner – Graduate Assistant, Resources for Disabled Students
What are some messages that popular culture sends about disability?

- An object of pity
- An inspiration
- A “super crip”
- A charity case
- A burden
- A “fate worse than death”
Short Timeline on Disability

- For most of history people with disabilities were pushed to the edges of society, hidden, or institutionalized
- Disability rights and access fueled by disabled veterans who wanted to attend college on the GI Bill after WWII
- Continued to gain momentum during the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
  - First U.S. federal civil rights protection for people with disabilities
  - Programs receiving federal funding cannot discriminate based on disability
  - Allows for reasonable accommodations
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
  - Expanded civil rights protection of Section 504 to all public and private entities
Medical Model of Disability (pre – 504)

- Disability is a problem of the individual
- Caused by disease, trauma or other health conditions
- Management is aimed at cures and fixes
- Medical care is main issue
- Modification of healthcare
Social Model of Disability (post – 504)

- Disability is a social construct and should be managed through social action
- Focuses on full participation/integration of individuals in society, and is the responsibility of society to make modifications possible
- Equal access is a human right
“It’s the first really militant thing that disabled people have ever done. We feel like we’re building a real social movement. We want people to listen to us.”
Disability Identities

- Physical or mobility impairment
- Low-vision, blind, other visual impairment
- d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Learning Disability
- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
- Mental Health Condition (Mental Illness)
- Chronic Health Condition
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

**Not an exhaustive list!**
- Person with a disability
- Considered by many to be more respectful
  - See the person and not the disability
- Based off the idea that disability is something negative
  - Promotes the “Narrative of Shame”
- Disability is only negative because society makes it so
Identity-First Language

- Disabled person
- Like folks from other minority groups, disability is a huge part of who a person is
- Can’t be separated from the person
- Wouldn’t refer to someone as a “person with Jewishness”, rather a Jewish person
- Promotes a sense of group and belonging
What to use?

- Ask the person or follow their lead
- Typically, people involved with intellectual disabilities prefer people-first language
- Typically, people in the Deaf, Blind, and Autistic communities prefer identity-first language
- No hard and fast rules
Gibson’s Disability Identity Development Model

- Stages of Identity Development
  - Passive Awareness
    - Unable to recognize their disability
  - Realization
    - Trying to reconcile their relationship with society
  - Acceptance
    - View themselves as equal to peers
    - Embrace a personal disability identity
    - Develop a group disability identity

- This is fluid, can move back and forth
Six Themes of Disability Narratives

- Communal Attachment
- Affirmation of Disability
- Self-worth
- Pride
- Awareness of Discrimination
- Finding Personal Meaning