

Chicago Disability Studies Conference 2018

From the Margins to the Center: Disability Studies in Other Disciplines

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CONFERENCE DESCRIPTION

The Chicago Disability Studies Conference was held on April 20-21, 2018, as a way to connect students, advocates, and community members around disability studies. A committee of students from University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Chicago coordinated the activities, which included concurrent panel sessions, a round table discussion, a keynote address, and a disability arts performance.

Goal: Create a low-risk opportunity for students to share their research and engage the broader community around disability.



BACKGROUND

- Began in 2015 as a 1-day interdisciplinary conference at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)
- Organized by UIC graduate students as a safe place for students to practice presenting in academic conference spaces
 - Developed into community space to discuss disability issues.
- Annual themes:
 - 2015 - Power, Disability, Justice, and Coalitions
 - 2016 - Intersectionality and Disability
 - 2017 - Disability and Violence
- Over the years, conference grew to also include:
 - Undergraduate students
 - Community members
 - Activists
 - Postdoctoral people
- In 2018, conference expanded.
 - Collaboration between UIC's Disability and Human Development Student Association and University of Chicago's Organization of Students with Disabilities
 - 2 days instead of 1 day
 - National scale

Conference flier:



Picture of Andy Slater's disability culture performance

It was difficult to go back out into the world after spending two days with people who understand and acknowledge what it means to have one or more disabilities and work hard at making everything accessible. It was amazing.

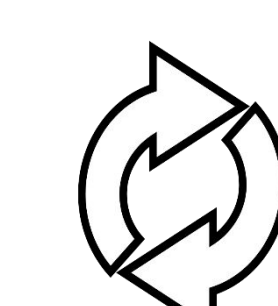
Conference Evaluation:



89% responded that the conference was very good or excellent



95% responded that their knowledge about disability studies increased



98% indicated they would be interested in attending a conference like this again

List of presentation topics:

- Disability Inside and Outside Disciplinary Boundaries
- Disability Organizing and Activism
- Accessibility in Higher Education
- Recognizing/Misrecognizing Disability
- Disability, Citizenship, and Political Belonging
- Disability, Gender, and Sexuality
- Deaf Citizenship and Representation
- Disability, State, and Economy in the Global Context
- Lived Experiences of Disabilities: Stories from the Margins

Conference Snapshot:

- Over **100** attendees
- Representation from over **40** institutions and organizations
- **84** submissions from the CFP



Picture of conference committee



Picture of panel discussion.

Accessible, collegial, supportive, friendly, high-energy, and stimulating!

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The committee was dedicated to making the conference accessible. Some of the access practices included:

- Questions about access needs on communication materials
- Accessible transportation between the two campuses
- Live captioners at all panels and presentations
- ASL interpreters
- Accessibility guidelines for all presenters, including materials available online prior to conference
- Sensory sensitive room available for live performance
- Quiet room
- List of food served available on website prior to meal time
- Gender neutral restrooms
- All rooms were flexible and had adjustable chairs/tables

LESSONS LEARNED

- Accessibility!
 - Providing accessibility is an ongoing learning process.
 - Important to both improve the accessibility of a space and acknowledge and work with contradictory access needs.
 - Providing access recognizes Disability Culture
 - Challenges academic standards that often exclude disability.
- Community members, activists, and academics have differing needs.
 - Meeting all of these needs can be difficult!
 - But! Worthwhile to cultivate the opportunity for unique discussions.
- Need to be more intentional in inviting and supporting an intersectional pool of presenters and audience members alike.
- Different institutions have different needs and navigating those needs can be difficult though fruitful and enlightening.

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