

# ***And You Can Quote Me On That: Students with Disabilities at the University of Michigan***

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Introduction**

*And You Can Quote Me On That: Students with Disabilities at the University of Michigan* is a thirty-minute documentary that gives voice to students with disabilities—a community on our campus that often is overlooked when the subject is diversity. The video presents the perspectives of undergraduate and graduate students with a variety of physical, mental and learning disabilities. The featured students share insights on stereotypes, identity, institutional realities and accommodations as they speak candidly about their experiences at the University of Michigan.

The questions in this guide are designed to facilitate discussion after viewing *And You Can Quote Me On That*. Its purpose is to promote awareness and to stimulate consideration of issues raised by the students in the documentary. Here in the guide you will find sections that provide general questions, specific questions about the content, statements for discussion, and group exercises. The facilitator is provided with material to stimulate discussion about the disabled in terms of: challenges they face; accommodations; institutional changes; stereotypes; individual and group identity; the value of diversity.

The video and guide have been produced by Dialogues on Diversity at the University of Michigan by Bessie Chuang. Excerpts from *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook* (Adams, Bell and Griffin, 1997) have been adapted and are included in this guide to provide focus and assist the facilitator. For more information, contact Pat McCune at 734.647.2655 or [phmccune@umich.edu](mailto:phmccune@umich.edu), or write to Dialogues on Diversity, 1004 Rackham Building, 915 East Washington, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1070.

## General Questions

- ❑ How do you define disability? Is there anything in this video that does not fit your definition or understanding of disability?
- ❑ What information surprised you or contradicted something you believe?
- ❑ Were there times during the documentary when you felt uncomfortable? What was the source of your discomfort?
- ❑ Why are people with disabilities referred to as an invisible population?
- ❑ What were some of the negative stereotypes or prejudicial assumptions about the disabled?
- ❑ What would you like to remember about the perspectives or experiences voiced in these interviews?
- ❑ What questions were raised for you in the tape that were left unanswered?
- ❑ How would you define the term ableism?
- ❑ What are some of the difficulties of working with students who have hidden disabilities? With students who have hidden disabilities and come from other cultures?
- ❑ What do people mean when they talk about the “level playing field” in terms of disabilities? Is this a realistic notion?

## Specific Questions about the Content

- ❑ Heidi Lengyel says, “When I looked at what Michigan said that they had to offer, it looked like everything I needed was going to be there and that it was going to be fairly straightforward. Then in reality it was more that there are things that are offered, but that you have to do a lot more than I was led on to know--you know, for yourself.” What should disabled students do for themselves? What are some basic expectations we have of all students at the University of Michigan? Are some groups privileged by receiving certain accommodations?
- ❑ Michael Gonzales says, “And you kind of show your worthiness like yes, I can handle this and yes, I am capable. And they [the Medical School] are going to do everything they can to make sure you get through.” Does this statement describe what is happening at your school?

## Specific Questions about the Content (continued)

- ❑ What needs should be accommodated by the University administration? What accommodations should faculty provide? And students?
- ❑ Mary Kay Sisson recalls a Japanese instructor who insisted that translation from oral examination based on hearing and not seeing was “part of the task.” Was she expecting him to adjust his method of evaluation in a way that would give her an advantage over other students?
- ❑ How can we modify our course requirements and the ways in which we teach in order to accommodate more students? How might these changes effect others in the class positively or negatively?
- ❑ Many students talk about disclosing their hidden disabilities. Does this help faculty? Why do you think some students hide their disabilities?
- ❑ What are some of the hidden disabilities that might go undiagnosed or unacknowledged? How might they be recognized? How do we educate our colleagues and students about these hidden disabilities?
- ❑ While most students have come to terms with this part of their identity, some have not. How do we assist those who have not accepted their disabilities? What about those who do not realize they might have a disability?
- ❑ Rebecca Messing shares her experience at the College of Engineering of being told “chemical engineering is not for you.” Brian Pomerantz had a similar experience at the Law School. What does this suggest about assumptions regarding those who are different? Are we sometimes intimidated by differences?
- ❑ Many of the students interviewed spoke of having to prove they belonged at the University of Michigan. Do students *without* disabilities have the same burden? In the same ways?
- ❑ Many of these students talk of being stigmatized. How might this affect their academic performance? Their relations with other students? Their intellectual growth?
- ❑ What are some positive aspects of life at the University of Michigan expressed by the students in the video? Are there others that occur to you?

## Statements for Discussion

- Disability is not inherently negative.  
Lengyel: They come up to me and say, “What’s wrong with you?” I don’t think that’s the right terminology or words to use because I happen to have a chronic illness. I happen to have a disability, but there’s nothing right or wrong about it.
- The terms ableism and disability oppression reflect the view that people with physical or mental limitations are considered inadequate in meeting expected social and economic roles.  
Lengyel: They don’t speak right at you or act like you can do anything. And they’re always surprised to find out that I’m a college student. Then they are surprised to find out where I go to school. They think, “How could you go to U of M?” So sometimes they’ll even say that.
- Cultural norms about beauty, intelligence, physical ability, communication, and behavior negatively influence the way disabled people are treated.  
Arfa: I had this one professor who was very intimidated by having real-time captioning in the classroom. It was a piece of technology. She didn’t understand what it was for, she didn’t try to learn about what it was about. And then bad things started happening because as that affected me she wasn’t making the effort to reach out to me and treat me as a member of her class. She saw me as the girl sitting next to the real-time captioning.
- Becoming disabled involves major life changes including gain as well as loss, but it is not the end of a meaningful and productive existence.  
Laux: I don’t let anything keep me from doing what I truly want, whether that’s being an engineer or doing anything. So one of my buddies gave me the motto and it’s “No limits” and so I’ve been signing my emails and everything like that since the beginning. So that’s what I live by and that’s what I feel like.
- People with disabilities see themselves as disabled by social and environmental structures that were created without them in mind and that now prevent them from taking their rightful place in society.  
Sisson: I wrote a letter to the professor saying, “I can’t hear you in English. I need you to look at me when you give me this exam.” And he said that being able to understand conversation as it’s normally spoken, with people not looking at you all the time is part of the test. I said “Well, that’s well and good, but I’m deaf....This is not an issue of my attention or my ability. I’m asking you to do the same thing in Japanese as I need you to do in English.” And I just couldn’t get through to this man.

## Statements for Discussion (continued)

- Societal expectations about economic productivity and self-sufficiency devalue people who are not employed for pay, regardless of other contributions they may make to family and community life.  
Bernard: The kinds of conveniences we want—large screens, portable computers—those things were all developed to accommodate either, as I said, the needs of the military or people with disabilities. The whole ergonomic furniture movement arises out of the needs that people with disabilities have.
- People with disabilities are likely to internalize society’s negative messages about disability unless these are counterbalanced with positive messages.  
Gonzales: For me to get this diagnosis, it just reconfirmed that premise that I had, that I was dumb. And I’ve got documentation now that I’m dumb. I’ve got a disability, a learning disability. You know, it really does a number on my self-esteem for a while. I was like, “No one is going to know about this.”
- Independence and dependence are relative concepts, subject to personal definition, and neither is inherently positive or negative.  
Baribeau: Some of my professors don’t really I guess grasp or appreciate like what it entails for me just to be a student. I think they tend to overlook the fact that I do deal with more than the average student does on a daily basis.
- The right of disabled people to inclusion in our society now is protected to some extent by law, yet they still are not treated as full and equal citizens.  
Conaway: They say, “Well, it’s not legally mandated.” Well, what difference does it make? It’s your job to help me. I’m a human being. I expect to be treated like one.
- We need to confront and work through our own fears of becoming disabled, as this is one of the many roots of ableism.  
Bernard: I also think that maybe there’s something scary about it, because it could be any of us. I mean, any one of us could become disabled. And maybe it’s hard to look into that mirror?
- Acquiring a disability doesn’t just mean loss; it means adjusting to a new set of strengths and limitations.  
Messing: My anxiety disorder definitely puts me at a disadvantage and I’ve had to fight through many of my own physical limitations. It’s part of me. I wouldn’t necessarily...I wouldn’t give it up. It helps drive me to do what I do and move the way I do.
- Our laws can both help and hinder those who are different.  
Gonzales: Then if they know that I’m Mexican on top of that, they go, “Oh, you just got in medical school because you’re Mexican and you’re just not smart enough.” So there’s that stigma that I’ve got to kind of keep on top of; it’s that I don’t want people to think that I got into school because of affirmative action. I got into school because I can handle the work.

## Exercises

1. Ask your group to envision an accessible and inclusive university. Using the board or sheets of newsprint, first record the characteristics that the members of your group associate with such an ideal situation. Then consider the barriers to such access and inclusion that now exist. Finally, brainstorm a list of the variety of resources that can enable people with different disabilities to take full advantage of the opportunities they might find here at the University. The goal is for the members of your group to realize some of the strategies they can employ now that will move our University from the current reality for disabled students to this inclusive vision.
2. A week prior to viewing the video ask your group to take note of accommodations for the disabled in use on our campus and to bring these notes to the screening. Then when the group is together ask them, before you watch the tape, to list these on the board or sheets of newsprint for all to see. When the documentary has concluded ask what other accommodations they now realize are available. Did they notice the special transportation as well as the curb cuts? The note-taking service as well as the automatic door openers? The extra time on tests as well the sign language interpreters?

## Resources on Campus

The University of Michigan's Office of Services for Students with Disabilities is located in G-219 Angell Hall and open from 8:00a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays. The number is 734.763.3000 (voice/TTY/TDD).

The Faculty Handbook provided by the University of Michigan's Services for Students with Disabilities is available on their web site at <http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/ssd/fhb.html>.

The Adaptive Technology Computing Site (ATCS) currently is located in Room B126 (basement level) of the Shapiro Undergraduate Library on Central Campus. While staffed part time, a key is always available at the circulation desk. For more information about ATCS go to <http://www.umich.edu/~sites/info/atcs/index.html>.

The University's Council for Disability Concerns can be contacted through Equity and Diversity Services in Human Resources and Affirmative Action at 734.763.0235 or 734.647.1388 (TTY), or at [disability@umich.edu](mailto:disability@umich.edu). For more information go to <http://www.umich.edu/~hrraa/ability/>.

The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching has a range of resources and services. Their offices are located at 3300 School of Education Building on 610 East University Street and they can be contacted at 734.764.0505 or [crlt@umich.edu](mailto:crlt@umich.edu). Visit their web site at <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/>.