  So, welcome. My name is Jess or Jessica Schomberg. I am part of the Disability Alliance which is an affinity group on campus that is focused on working towards accessibility. Anyone who is a member of the campus community is welcome to join this Affinity group. Whether you have a disability or not, we would love to have you in the future and feel free to contact me or Anne Ludvik in the Affinity group office to get added to our information list. We have one more session after this one scheduled for this semester, and then in the fall we'll be starting up regular meetings again. So. Disability justice is a concept that I'll be describing over the course of the next hour or so.

The purpose of this particular presentation is Both to highlight the full humanity of people with disability especially people who are often left out of mainstreamed disability rights movements, particularly black indigenous people and people of color, LGBT people who are disabled, poor disabled people, and institutionalized or incarcerated disabled people.

Another purpose of this is to support and encourage more creative problem solving among people with disabilities and allies working together towards creating a better world so that no one is left behind. As part of this, I'll be presenting some information that I hope challenges you to think of things in a new way.

And with that said, I will get started. Talking a little bit about comparing the ADA the Americans with Disabilities Act model to a disability justice model. So in January Dr. Andy Johnson presented on the ADA for this group. So I'm not gonna go over everything that he shared in January.

Mostly this is just a purpose of comparison between the two ways of thinking about disability. The ADA is built on a civil rights model, and it's focused more on reforming the existing structure and not massively changing the existing social structure. It's focused on modifying built spaces like buildings, classrooms, political and economic systems, and how resources are allocated in and to schools to combat ableist oppression.

In this model, this is a medical model in a lot of ways, but it's also kind of a gap model focusing on how individuals fit within existing systems and how existing systems might change to better include individuals with disability and within the ADA, the way the ADA is designed is that civil rights are guaranteed through litigation.

So if someone is not providing accessible services, often the only way to get them to change is by suing them. And that is how the ADA was designed. The disability justice model is a response to that that was developed by LGBT disabled people of color who felt left out of mainstream disability rights movements.

Within Disability Justice, the focus is on making sure that people who were left behind, and this could include people who don't have the resources to file lawsuits when their civil rights aren't met, that everyone in those situations are prioritized and deliberately included. And also by deliberately including people who are LGBT and disabled, people who are people of color and disabled people who are poor and disabled.

It means looking at the other aspects of their life and of their identities beyond just focusing on their disability.

In a practical way of approaching this, I tend to come to things from a theoretical perspective because I find theory helps me make sense of the world in a really powerful way that keeps me motivated and engaged. But sometimes you need a real practical way of speaking to these things.

A practical difference between the ADA model or a disability rights model is that places like Mount Rushmore would be required to build ramps to provide access to a broad array of people. Whereas a disability justice model because it has a more intersectional approach, it recognizes that what we call Mount Rushmore is land that was violently taken from the Lakota people and the focus is not on providing access to every tourist who wants to see it, but it's returning the what the Lakota people call the Six Grandfathers to their control, for them to decide how that space should be protected.

So there are 10 principles of disability justice. For the sake of time, I'm not gonna go in depth on any of these. I'll just briefly just describe them. And these principles were identified by the performing arts group, Sins Invalid, which is based in San Francisco, and it is a performing arts group of disabled people, often disabled people of color who engage in theater and artistic movement to share stories and build community, and the principles of disability justice that they identified include intersectionality, looking at the multiple identities that people bring to disability work. Leadership of those most impacted which is to say that that disabled people, people with disabilities should be leading disability rights movements. And to anti-capitalism and I'll get into that a little bit more later. Cross movement solidarity. So we can't just focus on disability, we also need to focus on environmentalism. We also need to focus on anti-racism. We also need to focus on trans rights because people who are disabled also experience oppression along those lines. Wholeness, looking at disabled people as whole and complete humans. Sustainability, which is focusing on making sure that those of us who are working towards disability justice can be engaged in that work over the long term, that we sustain ourselves and each other. If I have to take a break because of health reasons, I can call on Eric, who's also in this group with me. I can call on Eric to step in and keep things going while I recover and can come back later. It doesn't require you to use yourself up and then you get thrown out. It requires us to work and support each other. Cross disability solidarity. You know, disability is a really broad umbrella term that covers people with a lot of differences in how things work with their body and bodies and their minds. And so we can't forget anyone when we're working towards this. I come to things with a chronic illness approach. And I also have to remember people with visible physical disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, and I, we can't forget anyone, cuz everyone is important.

Interdependence. We have to build things where we can work in support of each other. No man is an island is very much the approach of this. Collective access that we're building spaces that we can, as a collective, that we can all access and collective liberation, we're building a world where everyone is free.

Bringing disability justice to topics like equity 2030, which any of us who are employed by Minnesota State have heard about equity 2030 quite a lot. It's focused on at least part, partly focused on closing educational attainment gaps between people in dominant groups and people in historically disenfranchised groups Disability justice fits in there in ways that I would like to see more clearly expressed.

And that's one of the reasons I'm, I'm saying this now to remind people that people are disabled by the environmental conditions in which they live. This includes living through war, natural disasters, poverty, sexism, and racism also create conditions that disable people. Those same conditions make it harder for people who are already dealing with poverty and racism to get effective healthcare and other supports that they need to survive and be successful in this world.

Equity 2030 in some ways does has a, a sort of a compliance or metrics-based approach to closing equity gaps. But in particular the ADA and how disability accommodations managed in universities creates a sense of that disability is purely focused on legal compliance and ignores how disability is an intersectional identity that intersects with other aspects of DEI. And sort of the final point that I want to make, and this is a complicated point that I'm gonna do my best to express clearly. Because environmental conditions like poverty and sexism and racism create disabling conditions, people who are people of color are statistically more likely to have disability impact their lives.

And so we need to recognize that reality, and we also need to recognize the full humanity of disabled people of color, who are marginalized, both because of their disability and because of racism

When incorporating disability justice in a school setting, there are a few different ways that you can approach it. One way that I advocate is to design for difference. Recognize that people with different bodies and minds and experiences will be in classrooms. Deliberately building in anti-racism and universal design for learning principles, building that into course structure, course content, and course delivery methods allows you to start your courses and start schooling with more people automatically being included and not having to go through the barriers of requesting formal accommodations. It also approaches students from an asset lens.

Disability justice in a lot of ways is a revolutionary approach because it's based on love. It's approaching other people with a sense of love, not a sense of scarcity or fear. And saying that, it also takes courage and patience to make that movement because that's not how we generally are enculturated in the United States.

To work with people from a place of love that's, that's not necessarily part of our culture. And that requires changing both the mental models that we use to approach people, how we think about people. It also requires us to change behaviors. And changing behaviors and changing culture is really hard because we, we have those things, they're sort of built into our heads. It's like, if you can imagine a brick wall and approaching people with certain stereotypes is a brick in your wall. You can't just remove the brick and leave an empty space. That space is going to either be filled by something or the whole thing will fall apart.

So when you are removing bricks that contains stereotypes or misinformation, you have to replace it with something else. Replacing it with recognizing the strengths that people bring, recognizing the beauty that people bring, recognizing the knowledge that people have. And this includes the strengths and beauty and knowledge that are developed within communities that have historically been marginalized and oppressed.

And that's a real big difference compared to how a lot of educational systems are built, and that means not engaging in surveillance, not pathologizing people, not using coercive or punitive teaching practices. That means that things like the lockdown browser and turn it in and requiring cameras in Zoom classes, those are all coming from a policing point of view, a controlling point of view. Disability justice is not about that. It's about believing students when they express a need, not requiring governmental proof that what they're saying is true. It's means providing multiple options for students to demonstrate their understanding and believing that students are capable of being skilled learners when they have the right supports.

It also means interrupting students and others who make racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, or transphobic statements. Interrupting those students, letting students know, all the students in the room know that those behaviors are unwelcome in the classroom. And why. It's, again, going back to that, that taking your brick out of the wall metaphor, you don't just say you can't do this, but explain why that matters, why those statements are harmful, why those statements close down possibility for a lot of people, why those statements make environments unsafe for a lot of people.

Disability justice at work. A lot of the things mentioned in the schooling system carry over to the workplace, which I'm sure everyone in here probably recognizes.

And this is where I am going to present a point of view and this is my point of view. This is not a point of view that you all are expected to agree with, but I just want you to take this point of view seriously and consider it. While I recognize that the US culture is built on capitalism and built on white supremacy in a way that a lot of people are maybe uncomfortable acknowledging. The things within that capitalist white supremacy framework really focuses on productivity, efficiency, perfection, making a profit. All of those things are more important than people. Than real, actual humans.

Disability justice is against all of that. Disability justice is about putting people over profits. It's about recognizing that sometimes to make equity happen, to make those important changes, we need to slow down. We need to be less efficient, and we need to recognize and acknowledge that people are imperfect and that when people try new things, they will make mistakes and they need to be supported in learning from those mistakes.

And I'll just say from my own personal experience, as a person who has spent many, many years in school before spending many years working in higher education. It took me a few years to wrestle through these concepts. So if this is your first time hearing this and it sounds like a lot, it's fine.

That's fine. We're all coming to this conversation from different places and I just ask that you listen to what I'm presenting and don't, don't necessarily expect that you're gonna figure it all out today. I've been working towards this for a few years now, and I'm still learning how to do better and I'm still making mistakes along the way, and I'm still benefiting from people trusting me enough to tell me when I'm making a mistake so I can do.

The way that has helped me do this is remembering our shared mission of we're in an educational environment. Our shared mission should be to help people learn, and that means helping ourselves learn as well and remembering our shared humanity.

To try to bring some of this, what I have shared here into how would this work in practice sort of way. I have some ideas here. Again, these are just a few ideas that make sense to me and this is not an all inclusive list. There's a lot more that could be here, but some ideas: rethinking what I would label as unhelpful practices which include punitive attendance policies that work against people with chronic illness, they work against people who have caretaking roles, they work against people who have unreliable transportation, people who are trying to do a good job but maybe can't make it that day. Also unhelpful: mandates that all work and all learning be done in person.

Depending on your work area, you know, or the type of learning and teaching you do, this might be a real struggle to think through and might not be possible in all situations. But if we're thinking about like, does this work actually need to be done in person or can someone do this from another environment that is more supportive? does this learning have to be done in a classroom?

Another unhelpful practice and I know that there are federal regulations about this and other things. But I'm not talking about those things. I'm talking about how to approach things from my disability justice mindset. And from a disability justice mindset, putting up barriers to accommodation rather than offering them to everyone who needs them really excludes a lot of people who don't have the financial resources to get accommodations, don't have access to doctors that would provide the documentation required, may encounter medical racism or medical sexism. That means they're less believed by the medical authorities who are supposed to be providing this documentation. If we think about those barriers, I think it's pretty easy to see how they exclude a lot of people from the supports that would help them be successful.

Another unhelpful practice is inflexible scheduling. And that kind of goes along with the mandates of all work and learn to be done in person. More helpful practices would be inviting disabled people, particularly LGBTQ, disabled people, disabled people of color to work with you in cooperatively revising policies and practices.

It's helpful to think about how accommodations can be beneficial at the group. Like if somebody needs a ramp to access a building, you know, that's not a single person benefit there. There's a lot of people who benefit from that.

It's also helpful to wear a mask. We are still in a pandemic. It is not over. It's the third leading cause of death in the United States right now, is covid. There are a lot of people who are immunocompromised, or who otherwise are at high risk of poor medical care, lack of access to medical care, or whose bodies just don't bounce back that well. So wearing a mask to reducing the risk burden that other people take on makes public spaces more accessible.

And it's also helpful to thank people when they raise concerns about accessibility or discrimination. It's common to react defensively when you think that you're doing a good job and someone points out like, Hey, you're not perfect. Hey, maybe you didn't think of this.

It's more helpful to be like, oh, they're giving me the gift of trusting me enough to share with me how I can do better. They think that I care about them. They think that I want things to be better, and they think that I will listen to them in a trusting and respectful way. They're giving me a gift of helping me do better. Switching from a defensive mindset to a welcoming mindset can make that easier. But again, if this was the first time you are hearing some of these things, you are not gonna automatically make that choice in a day. It takes a little bit of time and a lot of effort to to make that switch.

And this is why I have this little slide about what disability justice means for you, whether you have a disability or you don't, working towards disability justice, especially if it's new to you, is going to create feelings of discomfort and uncertainty.

There's also no end goal for this. This is a journey that will go on forever. It's , a living process with living people, responding to environments that are changing. These days, changing very rapidly sometimes. So we need to work together to make it happen. It's, it's kind of a lifestyle almost. And it is often very localized. What we need here in Minnesota is gonna look different than what people need in Arizona or what people need in Florida. If for no other reason than we have different climates. Those things do make a difference.

So there's no end. And it's an ongoing journey. To take part in this journey requires you to. Read, listen, observe, question your observations. Observe again. Keep reading, keep listening, keep asking questions.

Getting more comfortable being embarrassed, getting more comfortable being uncertain and recognizing how sometimes that can help. Going through that period, going through those periods of discomfort together with community can help create a stronger and more supportive environment.

And there's a blog post that a friend of mine wrote about this specific to white people starting on anti-racism journeys that I have linked here. Because we are all going to screw up at one time or another. And, and that's fine. We're just gonna keep trying to get better after that.

And I have also in the slides included a few books and other resources that I think are really helpful for embarking on this journey.

The first book Just Care by Nishida talks about how people who need care often don't get the care that they need in ways that they. Because of a lot of different reasons. And also people who provide care are often black and brown immigrants who don't get the resources and supports they need to provide the care that they would like to provide. So Nishida talks about caregiving and care receiving as a real messy mix of things. And she approaches it with a real loving spirit.

I would say, I've found it a real joy to read through Care Work as well. Approaching how will we provide care for each other, how we accept care when care is often, when there's often a price tag to care. That can be emotionally guilting people, can be requiring people to go through years of requesting government support and being denied and having to request it again and being denied and going through that process multiple times. Sometimes care providers, if they're approaching care work from a white supremacist point of view can also be reproducing forms of racism and eugenics that are harmful. And so Care Work is just again a real lovingly written book about that.

Crip kinship was written by someone who is actively involved with the disability justice movement of Sins Invalid.

Black Disability Politics approaches disability, particularly from the perspective of a black disabled academic who works in Wisconsin.

And the Disability Visibility project. If you're not really big into books and you're more into podcasts and blog posts, the Disability Visibility project is another great resource coming from the perspective of people with a variety of disabilities, a variety of racial backgrounds, a variety of genders, and a variety of professions. It's just a really widely expansive a look at how disability impacts life.

And so we are kind of at the end of my prepared talking points. Again, if you would like to join the Disability Alliance contact me or Anne Ludvik. If you would like to participate in a follow-up discussion facilitated by Dr. Dani Scott, that will be on April 28th.