

Position Statement on Disability and Writing Centers¹

Based on current research on best practices, the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) recommends that writing centers explicitly consider disability as we carry out our professional work, including our tutorial practice and our scholarship. The IWCA accepts the United Nations and World Health Assembly's definition of disability as "Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being....[Disability] is a universal human experience and not a concern to a minority of humanity: every human being can suffer from a decrement in health and, thereby, experience some disability" (FAQ 4-5).

As an organization of writing center professionals and those involved in writing center activity, IWCA, therefore, holds that all writing centers should

1. Make every effort to include all writers and staff by enacting communication that takes into account various learning styles or ways of processing language. We believe that people with disabilities should be accommodated and welcomed in the writing center not only as recipients of services but also as people who work in writing centers;
2. take positive steps to ensure that our physical and virtual layouts and materials such as handouts are welcoming and accessible--not merely legally acceptable, but thoughtfully, accommodatingly, and graciously accessible, since writing centers should adequately serve both those who disclose their disabilities and those who don't;
3. remain current and familiar with disability issues (including the standards followed by local government and other organizations/institutions) and be involved with disability officers at their institutions; be aware that varying estimates show 15 percent or more of the population is disabled and people with disabilities are considered "the population's largest minority."

Therefore, be it resolved that as a professional organization

- IWCA encourages scholarship that explores the ways disability intersects with writing center work;
- IWCA expects that the IWCA conference, IWCA Summer Institute, and other membership experiences will be accessible to all (which entails all facilities, meetings, materials, and initiatives). Conference organizers should work with their institutions, conference sites, and other entities to make full access a priority, based on the local conditions;
- IWCA will ask the IWCA Press, Writing Center Journal, Writing Lab Newsletter, and IWCA Update staffs to consider making publications available in large print, Braille, tape, CD or other accessible formats upon request;
- IWCA will make accessibility and usability a continuing priority for writingcenters.org;
- IWCA will include disability as a category for special consideration in IWCA training materials and will encourage publishers and authors to include disability as a category in their tutor training materials;

¹ Approved by a vote of 18/0 by IWCA Executive Board on May 1, 2006

- IWCA will take into account the needs of disabled writers when planning or assessing IWCA services so that discriminatory and inaccessible policies and procedures can be identified and eliminated;
- IWCA will request that the Outstanding Research Awards Committee encourage and recognize research into the ways disability intersects with writing center work; and
- IWCA will work toward making its Constitution and other relevant policies and procedures reflect an understanding of disability and toward making opportunities for officer and board positions accessible to all members.

Work Cited

“Frequently Asked Questions.” (FAQ). United Nations Enable. >. 2 November 2004.
<<http://www.un.org/esa/.socdev/enable/faqs.htm#definition> 24 April 2006.