Creating Inclusive Events and Experiences

Reframing Access

Shift your focus. Consider that it is the environment that presents barriers to participation and use. It is the environment that is inaccessible. If we locate the "problem" in the environment, rather than within the disabled individual, we can more effectively create a campus culture that values access. Design makes a statement about who and what we value—inclusive design demonstrates our commitment to welcoming and valuing all individuals.

Students, staff, faculty and community members attending your event or participating in your program may be blind or have low vision, Deaf or hard of hearing, use a wheelchair, scooter or other mobility aid, have a mental health condition, learning disability or chronic health condition (e.g. asthma, heart difficulties, etc.) among others. An individual's disability may not be visible to you and this must be taken into consideration when creating accessible and inclusive events and programming.

Event/Program Planning

1) **Designate one committee member** to focus on accessibility throughout the entire planning process.

2) **Plan for access.** By incorporating access early in your planning process you will have fewer last minute retrofits (e.g. needing to hire a sign language interpreter).

3) **Choose locations (on campus and off campus) that are accessible** for wheelchairs and other mobility aids and can support the possible use of accommodations. Items to consider include:

☐ Availability of accessible parking and an accessible drop-off area. Is it close to the accessible entrance?

☐ Accessibility of the primary entrance: Is it level or ramped? Does it have either an accessible door or automatic door opener?

☐ Is the meeting room on an accessible route? Elevator required?

☐ Availability of wheelchair seating in a space that allows for companion seating.

☐ Clear signage to the accessible parking? To the meeting room?

☐ Accessibility of restrooms and drinking fountains. Are they nearby?

☐ Adequacy of lighting and space. Is the space appropriately lighted for its intended use? Is there adequate space for Sign Language interpreters, service animals, wheelchair maneuverability, etc.?

☐ Accessibility of outdoor space. Does the path of travel to the venue present barriers? If any activities will be held outdoors, does the space provide offer access for all participants?

4) **Promote the event as accessible** and include information how to arrange for accommodations on posters, flyers, webpages, and other announcements/advertising for the event:

Template for announcements/advertisements: *If you have questions concerning access or wish to request disability-related accommodations please contact {insert name and contact information including an email}.*

Template for online and paper registration forms: *Please describe any disability-related accommodations that will facilitate your full participation in this {insert activity: seminar, conference, etc.}*

5) **Be prepared to respond to questions.** If you receive questions about accessibility or an accommodation request and are unsure of how to respond, ask for contact information, ensure you understand the question or request, and let the person know you will be back in touch with an answer shortly. Contact Liz Martin, Director of the Access*Ability* Resource Centre (905-828-5406 or elizabeth.martin@utoronto.ca)

6) **Maximize the accessibility of planned activities and program content**. Events can include a variety of activities that may pose accessibility challenges and require advance planning.

- If a Power Point presentation will be used, encourage your presenter(s) to:
  - provide you with a copy that can be converted to an accessible format (electronic text, large print or Braille) and/or used as background information for Sign Language interpreters
  - describe visuals during the presentation
  - design slides with clear, well-sized fonts and appropriate white space
- Ensure that any films or audiovisual content is captioned and be prepared to audio-describe visual content
- If activities are a part of the event, consult with the Access*Ability* Resource Centre to maximize the accessibility of activities for all attendees.

General Communication Tips

- Address the person directly, not through a third party.
- Converse at eye level (especially important for persons in wheelchairs or those who lip read).
- Take the person's lead in communication style, whether it is verbal, written, or other.
- Talk and act naturally. Using phrases like "see you later," "let's walk over there," "you'll hear from me later," is quite appropriate.
- Speak at a normal volume unless the person also has a hearing loss.
- Let the person with the visual disability know of your presence and when you are departing.
- Always ask before offering assistance.
- Do not ask the person for information about their disability; they will volunteer what information they think you need to know.
- Avoid any discriminatory words or phrases.
- Always put the person before the disability (a person with a disability, instead of a disabled person).

Disability Programming and Simulation Activities

To more authentically understand a diverse or underrepresented group, you might think to create a simulation or immersion activity. However, within the disability community, simulations are highly controversial. Simulations cannot truly or completely replicate the disability experience. Focusing on only certain pieces of the disability experience, simulations tend to leave participants with increased negative perceptions of disability—feelings of pity for disabled folks or relief that they are not disabled, rather than engender a feeling of pride or respect for the community.

It is helpful, when planning an event, to ask yourself reflective questions. What do you want participants to gain, learn or appreciate as a result of having attended your program? How would you program around another cultural group? Rather than try to simulate a complex cultural experience, you may want to focus on one aspect, for example, accessibility, sports, or activism.
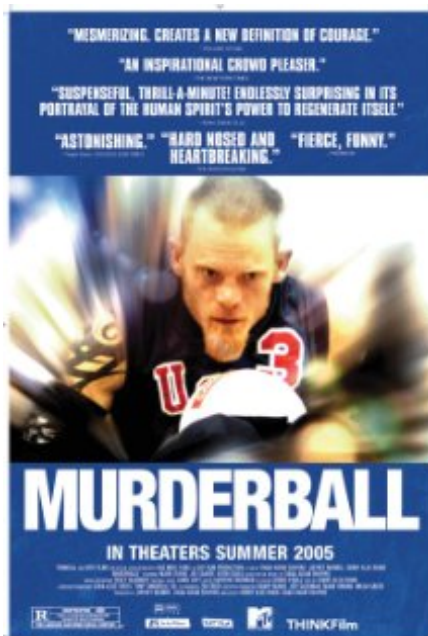
Here are some programming ideas:

- Attend a wheelchair sports event
- Study disability art
- Watch a movie like Murderball or Crip Culture
- Discuss disability activism and the disability rights movement
- Reflect on campus design and consider the impact design has on access and equity

Access*Ability* staff are here to help you think of creative and effective programming that will be respectful of the disability community and culture.

Please contact Liz Martin at 905-828-5406 or elizabeth.martin@utoronto.ca for additional information.