**Transcript: Reach All Your Students | April 17, 2025**

[Accompanying PowerPoint Presentation](https://nationaldisabilitycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Webcast-Reach-all-your-students-Practical-tips-for-teaching-in-higher-ed.pptx)

## 0:00 - Introduction Music

*(No speaker. Introduction music only.)*

## 0:11 - Introduction and Course Outline

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I'm Andrew Dillon. I'm a professor at the School of Information, and I'm also the Director of Research Communications at the National Disability Center. I've been a psychologist all my career with a particular interest in the design of technology for improving user and learner experiences.

And I've come to this work in particular through learning over time that my understanding of the needs of a tremendous number of people in higher education really has not been as sufficiently developed as I'd like it to be.

And students and becoming aware of the issues that many students have in accessing and benefiting from the educational opportunities we give them has made me realize that we all must do a lot more to incorporate accessibility into the design and to the delivery, not only of instruction, but then actually the presentation of the university life, university context, the buildings and the infrastructure, so that the entire learning experience is one that enriches all students and provides opportunities for all students.

I invite you, since you're coming at us from all around the country, to introduce yourself in the chat room, if you feel comfortable, just to tell us your name and the location that you're joining us from. That's very informative to us and helps us understand the sort of audience that we're reaching with these webcasts.

With that, let's understand that we're going to meet a couple of instructors who have a range of experiences which I think you'll find extremely beneficial.

And the focus of today's session is really to give you ideas that you can take and enact yourself in your own work practices. I think many of us feel that we all wish we could do more. We all wish we understood the accessibility challenges that face our students and could address them more appropriately.

And we're hoping that by listening to today's speakers and having a chance to engage with us, you'll leave with an enriched sense of practical insights, activities and steps that you can take to apply the desire and exactly to improve the accessibility of learning experiences for all your students on your campuses.

## 2:26 - Introduction Our Panel

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** So with that, let's move on to the next slide. I think it's probably just a little introduction to the panel. Our first speaker, well, that's me. You've probably heard enough of me already. So let's move straight on to Jen.

## 2:46 - About the Instructor: Jen Moon, PhD

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I'd like to introduce Jen Moon, who's a professor of instruction in biology and interestingly, a vice provost for professional track faculty here at the University of Texas at Austin. She regularly teaches genetics and honors genetics, has had several teaching awards, and is a member of our System Academy of Distinguished Teachers, which sets out to sort of recognize the very special and very talented, superb teachers that we have here. And Jen, it's a pleasure. Thank you for joining us today.

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Appreciate being here. Thanks, Andrew.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Jen, let's next off, tell everybody a little bit about your background in teaching and what draws you to the work that we're doing here in the center.

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Yeah, so as you mentioned, I teach genetics at the University of Texas at Austin. I've been teaching for about 20 years, just shy of 20 years, mostly large undergraduate courses.

I've always been drawn to figuring out how to make challenging material accessible to students and over time, I've realized that thinking broadly about accessibility is a huge part of that.

So I'm a big fan of Universal Design for Learning. I think making my course accessible to everyone improves learning for everyone, and it's just a good idea.

And I also feel like when students feel like I'm designing the course with them in mind and not based on my own convenience, and they understand why the course is designed the way it is, they tend to be more engaged, more confident. They feel like I'm on their side. And I think that sets the tone.

## 4:30 - Panel Discussion with Jen Moon, PhD and Andrew Dillon, PhD

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** In your new role, working through the provost's office, what are some of the key issues that you seek to address through that work? And what are some of the opportunities? And of course, what are the challenges? Because being at the provost level, you have a tremendous overview of what's going on on-campus. So tell us a little bit about this work, particularly the opportunities and challenges.

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Yeah, so I focus on supporting a large and pretty diverse group of faculty. It's about 1,300, give or take, most of whom are in a teaching role. And in addition, our instructional professional track faculty, which is what we refer to as our non-tenure track, are usually responsible for the high enrollment survey type courses for primarily first and second year students.

And this is such a critical window of time for our college students. In those first couple of years, it sort of sets the tone of their college career.

And so I think working with this particular group of faculty has the potential to make a major impact on the student experience. So one opportunity I see is, you know, working with our own Center for Teaching and Learning, our Disability and Access Unit, the National Disability Center, to integrate accessibility into the culture of teaching.

So we're thinking about that as we are designing our course, not as an add-on. And I think by communicating this to a large component of our teaching faculty can have a real impact.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** So where do you see the professional track faculty in particular need additional support when implementing accommodations that come in an official capacity?

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Yeah, I think our professional track faculty, again, they're largely instructional faculty. They have pretty complex teaching loads, sometimes multiple courses, sometimes across multiple departments. I know that when accommodations are issued, they want to respond effectively, but may not be totally clear how to handle various scenarios that might come up, and I'm thinking particularly in lab-based courses.

I feel like we're more comfortable in classroom-based courses, but something where there's a practical output like lab or a practicum or an internship, it's a different sort of beast, so to speak, than a classroom.

And to be honest, we do have issues with faculty compliance. That is to say, sometimes faculty will get an accommodation request and maybe not do everything we hope they will do.

And so I'm really interested in learning what those barriers are and why faculty feel that they can't accommodate students, even though they're supposed to, could be some perception of rigor. It's hard to know, but I think by understanding what the hesitation is, we can start meeting that challenge so that we can encourage more faculty just to meet that compliance barrier.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** No, I was just going to say, I mean, I think the university is always aiming to support this group. You know, we have a lot of direction. But we do have such a diverse range of classes that sometimes it's not always clear.

I think that's sort of a fascinating problem that you've highlighted there. I think many faculty are just so unsure of what they should do, that when we talk about at least complying with what's expected or what's required as a basic minimum, but you know, would like to even do more. There is this sort of lack of awareness, I think, among faculty about what they can do.

So the fact that you're at the provost's office overseeing this kind of initiative, I think, is sort of a really positive development for the University of Texas here.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Let's get sort of practical and sort of personal. What strategies and systems do you actually use when you teach? You're an award-winning teacher. What can we learn from your experiences and what advice would you give faculty who are thinking, what do I actually do?

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Well, I can give advice, but I don't pretend to have the corner on this. So in my mind, I think establishing trust has always been a big thing for me. I think it's the foundation of all communication.

And I think this is true for all students, having trust with you in the classroom. But I think particularly for students with accommodations, I've come to understand that students with accommodations can sometimes be hesitant to be proactive about their needs. Or maybe they are concerned they might have to defend their accommodation because of some difficult interactions they've had in the past with teachers and professors, unfortunately.

So, you know, you want to make sure that you create a classroom where they trust that you're on their side and that you're compassionate.

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Secondly, I do think about Universal Design for Learning when I structure my course. This helps me when accommodations come up in the middle of the semester, I don't have to change course or kind of think of a corner case of how I'm going to solve a problem.

If basically the course, the infrastructure is set up where it will meet most of the accommodation needs, and they tend to be, you know, you've seen a number of these over the years, you kind of have a sense of them, without having to adjust anything mid-semester.

Some examples of this are, using captioning for everything. I record my lectures and those are captioned as well. I provide all my course materials in advance on our learning management system.

I do have an attendance grade, but it's quite flexible. You can miss several courses. It's mostly just to kind of give some people some motivation to come, you know, drop quizzes. Here's an opportunity to make up an exam if they do poorly or miss it or something like this.

The most common accommodation that I think most of us see is the extended time and reduced distraction on the exams. And I will say we're very lucky to have a testing center at the university to handle those accommodations.

We have sometimes college level testing centers as well. And that's been a huge boon. I think that more than anything has been incredibly helpful just on the university level, having a testing center.

I mean, right now, a fourth of my students have accommodations. So. Wow. It's a lot of work. So I'm very grateful. But I think that that's the trick.

I think thinking about creating your course such that you're not having to pivot and accommodate or adjust on the fly for every letter that might come in through the semester, but rather having an overall sense of what tend to be accommodations and then seeing how much of that you can just bake into the course on the front end.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** That's fascinating. What I'm hearing from you certainly is this idea of not being reactionary, actually being quite planned. And I think that the deliberate nature here is sort of important.

But what would you say to faculty who think that's just more work for me at the front end? I have to do so much more to be ready. Because I hear that from colleagues. What would you say to counter that belief?

**Jen Moon, PhD:** It does pay off in the long run. I mean, it's more work. Hopefully you're doing that work kind of in the summer, you know.

Meaning you're not doing it in the middle of the semester when things are really busy. But what I would say is, once you kind of have that framework in place that accommodates most needs, you don't have to recreate the wheel every semester.

So you're kind of good to go for the rest of the time you're teaching. It's time well spent, at least in my experience.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** So that's the important lesson here, that there's a sort of startup cost, but it's amortized, if you like, over time so easily because it's the same, you're just going to be applying it repeatedly in sort of different courses.

You said one in four students, and that's sort of a frightening proportion, and that's what we know about. What do we do for those students who are sort of not declaring or perhaps a little reticent or shy about revealing what might be a disability for them?

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Yeah, I mean, this is why I think thinking about your course in this sort of universal design for learning aspect is so important because there very well, and I think statistically speaking, probably are students in my class that don't have a documented accommodation.

And by setting up my course where they can still be successful, it just really encourages everyone to have that being on a level playing field there.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Yeah. Thank you. So we sort of touched on this, but I'll sort of drive it home. What advice would you give to instructors, particularly, well, not just new instructors, but obviously we want to encourage new instructors to think about this, but every instructor who would like to improve accessibility in their classroom, but they're just not quite sure where to start.

And institutionally, what supports are there for faculty to be successful in this effort in environments where it's done well, if we have models like that?

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Yeah, I mean, I would recommend starting small. Anything you do to make your course more accessible will be beneficial. I totally appreciate having, you know, a thousand balls in the air and not really able to do all you want to do in a course in a single sitting or, you know, a semester.

But I think one thing you could do is, you know, when you look over your syllabus, I always think about what hills am I willing to die on in terms of like, identifying aspects of my syllabus or my course infrastructure that maybe I could be more flexible about.

So if I can give you a couple examples. One thing that I'm not very flexible about is I have these weekly quizzes. And the reason why I'm not flexible on them is students will take the quiz over, they have a couple of days to take the quiz, it's online.

And then I want, I'm using it as sort of a formative assessment. So they take the quiz, it's pretty low stakes, and then they get the answers as soon as the deadline is hit. And that allows them to kind of figure out what they missed and so forth.

So the point of that is I really do need to have that everybody done at the same time. I don't have a lot of time or I can't really bake into it where they can take it a few days later and, you know, because then nobody gets the answer, you know, that kind of thing.

So for the quizzes, I'm pretty strict about that's the hill I'd want to die on there. I mean, but then there's other things like, you know, other kinds of formative assessments like homeworks and things like that. They're just completion grades and they're just for them to stay on topic or stay on track.

And so if they want to turn that in a few days later, I'm not going to fuss about it. So I guess one helpful tip is just to kind of look at your syllabus, think about what's really important to you to have, in this sense I'm talking about flexibility with deadlines, and then what isn't.

And then you can explain that. I'm always a big fan of telling students what they're doing. They tend to have more buy-in if they understand that there's logic behind it. It's not just to make them miserable, you know. And so that would be the first thing I'd suggest.

And the second thing is, you know, if you go, there's many workshops, I think, available. I don't know if there are many, but, you know, at your institution, not to become an expert on disability, but just to get a sense of what resources exist at your campus.

We're quite lucky here at UT Austin with a lot of opportunities. So I think over time, in my mind too, I'm thinking about how we can embed some of these professional development skills, and I consider making courses accessible to be one of those as part of our teaching mission, as part of our culture.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I think that's a very important point, embedding it as part of the culture. Much as we're required to deliver a syllabi, we're required to deliver a course coverage in certain ways, accessibility might be a sort of a core requirement as well that we need to grow to.

Obviously, few universities are there yet. What about faculty just talking to each other more? I mean, do you sense that this is something that seems to fall individually on faculty and there are the motivated few who lead with it and because we're just not talking enough about it?

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Yeah, I think that's a big thing. You know, I can say from my own experience, I've learned so much about ways of doing things. And I think this is true beyond just accessibility, but just designing a course in general, right?

Ways of doing things that are time savers, but don't sacrifice any of the intention, the spirit, the rigor of the course from talking to other faculty.

So, you know, there's peer networking communities or peer learning communities that can be built around this topic where folks are invited to share things that they do with their course or maybe issues they've come across and, you know, have a group think about how to solve it in a way that is, you know, equitable and maintains the spirit of what you're trying to do in your course.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Jen, one final question for you, Jen. You mentioned universal design and access for all and have you seen this kind of proactive accessibility system benefit your students and maybe has it benefited you in your own teaching?

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Oh, absolutely, absolutely, without a doubt it has. And I know that you had mentioned earlier, you were asking about students that maybe haven't gotten documentation around their disability. I mean, students have shared with me that they had documentation maybe in K-12 and then just didn't seek that out in college.

So, you know, they are already now positioned in the class because I'm trying to make it accessible for everyone where they feel comfortable, they already know that they can succeed. And that's really important to me.

So I have heard that positive feedback. I think it's benefited me too, because not only are the students, I think, happier, they feel supported. They feel like I'm intentionally trying to create an environment where they can trust me and trust the design of the course is meant to support them, not to catch them or trick them.

I think that goes a long way for them investing their time and effort in the course.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Jen, I mean, this is a lot, a lot to sort of take away from that and some really, really interesting answers. I'm quite taken by circling back again to this idea of trust, that so much of education rests on building the right context and the right environment where people can learn and feel comfortable learning.

And at its heart, that's the key to accessibility is what I'm hearing from your answers here.

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Yeah, that's really important. I can't, if you think about it, you really can't do anything in the classroom unless they trust you. You're fighting an uphill battle the whole semester, you know.

So number one is how do you create an environment, and that's with your syllabus, that's what your syllabus reads. You know, you think about the tone of your syllabus. What kind of impression is the student getting just from looking at your syllabus? Is that the tone you want to convey?

How you walk into the room, how you address them, all of those things communicate. You know, we're very, well, this is your topic, not mine, but you know, we're very social beings and we pick up all these cues.

So thinking about from the moment you put together that syllabus, how do you convey a sense of welcome and support. And then everything can kind of follow that.

I think students with disabilities or without feel more comfortable approaching you with their needs. And as I, you know, as we talked about a few minutes ago, there's many students out there that have disabilities that are not apparent to you and are not documented officially.

So I think it's just really important to have that relationship with them.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Absolutely. Jen, thank you so much. That was a very thought-provoking discussion with you. Many lessons to sort of take away from that. And I've really enjoyed your perspective. Congratulations on your position as sort of university leadership overseeing so much of our efforts here.

It's a joy to work with you and thanks very much for that conversation.

**Jen Moon, PhD:** Thank you.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I appreciate being here. Thanks so much.

Well, I think you've heard a lot of both practical advice and some overarching sort of principled thought leadership on how one may address sort of accessibility in the classroom.

What I heard there really was about trust and building the right context. I heard being flexible, building flexibility into your curriculum, but also because we all have particular demands on our time as well, having you know, issues that you can't be flexible on, just being clear on what they are when it comes to deadlines.

And then starting small and working on improving one class at a time until you sort of build up your own understanding of your own accessibility issues and the challenges that your students are facing.

The work that you put in on one class actually can transition to many, many other classes that you'll teach in the years and the semesters to come.

So thanks very much, Jen. That was quite fantastic. I'd actually like to introduce our second guest.

## 22:06 - About the Instructor: Earl Huff, Jr., PhD

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** And it's Earl Huff, who's a colleague of mine, actually, an assistant professor at the iSchool, the School of Information here at the University of Texas at Austin. And he's co-director of the Reality Lab.

His research looks at the intersection of human-sensitive computing, accessibility, AI, and education. And Earl has a sort of fascinating background in design and studying how people respond to particular innovations.

And he implements many teaching and learning interventions for increasing access to learning and skill development for marginalized and disadvantaged populations.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Earl, welcome to the webcast.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** Thank you for having me, Andrew. Thank you for the opportunity.

## 22:50 - Panel Discussion with Earl Huff, Jr., PhD and Andrew Dillon, PhD

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I've given a little backdrop there on you, but tell us a little bit about yourself and your own teaching and your research, and specifically, just as I asked Jen, what draws you to this kind of work?

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** Certainly. So with my background, I've actually been teaching since 2014, research more so since 2016. So come more from being an educator than a researcher, but it was during grad school that I really learned more about accessibility and challenges within accessible education.

So I started off originally focusing within the realm of computer science education because my background is in computer science. My bachelor's, my master's degree is in computer science.

My PhD is in human-centered computing, but still within a computing context. So I had originally focused on the barriers within a computer science education context.

So while Jen was looking, accessibility as more of like the teaching and learning process in the classroom. I focus more on the technology aspect of it, and I still do.

So a lot of my earlier work was looking at the technological barriers that sort of created the learning achievement gap. I focused originally on blind and low vision students. Since they have one of the larger challenges within computer science with tools such as code editors.

So you're trying to write code on this software, but it doesn't really work with certain assistive technologies like magnification or screen readers. They were not designed originally to support that.

Of course, now companies are kind of rolling back to address that problem, but they're still a problem even to this day. I looked at ways that we could mitigate some of that.

And it's funny because when I did that work is actually over the pandemic, and that pushed a lot of things into a virtual space. So companies and institutions that didn't feel they could go online could, but then they also realized just how inaccessible it can be because a lot of technology they were using for the online learning experience did not work well for a variety of people with different disabilities.

And so that kind of further propelled my work to look at e-learning at large. And so this ecosystem of technologies that we use a lot that we often take for granted, but don't consider some of the design faults that serve as these barriers, which I have worked at.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** So my early work had looked at learning management systems. Think Canvas that we use right now here at UT Austin, but there's others like Blackboard, Moodle, and many others are out there. Many of them were designed to help facilitate educational materials for students to access grades, for communications from teachers to students, but many of them also face similar issues in terms of the design being barriers.

And so creating kind of a proof of concept to show, you know, the biggest issue a lot of times with these technologies, the fact that we don't include all of our users in the process. A lot of times we think we know how to build it, we know what they want, and then come to find out, you're wrong.

And so a lot of work I focus is on co-design, participatory design. How do we have users actually have their voice at the center of the design, talking about interaction modalities, talking about semantics behind webpages, that sort of thing.

So I've worked with blind and low vision users to actually correct some of these issues, to point out some of the inputs that are needed, really, and bringing more of deaf voices into the centerfold.

Meanwhile, me as a designer and researcher actually taking a more active role listening than talking and hearing more about their stories and bring it to the forefront to help make more accessible experiences.

And so, when I learned more about this Outcoming Center, this National Disability Center, it was Dr. Cawthon who invited me on. I saw the opportunity to kind of bring that experience in how do we bring more of the voices of the users, of people into the forefront to help make a more inclusive learning environment across a variety of different disabilities.

So, that's what kind of drew me in, and it's a lot of how I teach my courses. So, for background, I teach the Intro to User Experience Design course for the Informatics major.

I teach a graduate course on inclusive design, and then I teach another course for the undergrad program about understanding disability and accessibility, because it's really important that not only do we as researchers learn about making accessible experiences, but also for students, the future designers and developers, policymakers, whoever need to be, also learn about why our environment is so inaccessible and what we can do to change that.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I'd like to emphasize that point because it's a fascinating background and you're of course dealing in the design challenges which are enormous for huge swathes of a population. I'd like your take as an expert, particularly in sort of both the technology and education.

Do you think education technology is behind other technology or what do you see as some of the problems we have actually designing better digital tools or access or infrastructure for learning through technology in higher education particularly? What are the challenges here?

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** Certainly so, yes. Much of the educational technology is behind. They're trying to pick it up. So there has been strides made, but there's still ways to go. We're still having problems.

And it comes back to companies really investing in this accessibility first approach to design. Because a lot of the research has shown where you're making technology more accessible, but it's not just for people with disabilities. Even people without disabilities also benefit from them.

For example, captioning. They help a lot for those who are deaf or hard of hearing, but for people who do not fall in that category also use and benefit. I use captioning a lot.

And so I don't have any hearing loss, but I find it very beneficial. And so it's sort of the mindset that a lot of companies, a lot of designers have to change.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** And it really actually hits that. In fact, I'll even point to a framework that came out years ago that I actually teach in my classes that revolves around that because the premise of it is really thinking about one, the mindset of the designer.

So the onus falls on designers and the technology to improve, not the users. And once you make that change, you start to see a lot of the faults that you as that creator present.

And then the next layer is actually the interface. So the interface should know more about the user and be able to adapt to the ways people use technology.

And that's another thing that I also teach in terms of a principle of inclusive design, providing that comparable experience. People should be able to accomplish the same task regardless of the method they use without sacrificing that quality as well.

And so having these adaptable interfaces, being able to use it in different ways, having the freedom to use it what you want is another principle that we should think about.

And then lastly, the actual construction of it, making it accessible for cost. How many instance of technologies are out there that are inaccessible by cost?

Same thing with educational technology is these are fantastic, but many of them also come with a high price, and many of which most of us may not be able to get unless we're at a university, for example.

I find that it's very much a multifaceted process that we often have to, or we don't often think about when we're considering educational technology.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I think there's a fascinating aspect to your answer, which actually links back to Jen's earlier discussion on sort of universal access. When you talked about if you design well for accessibility, it's a benefit to everybody.

And I think that point is often sort of missed, that we're not trying to design a special niche technology that only a few people will benefit from, but the act of designing to be more inclusive actually has a knock-on, if you like, or an amplifying effect of benefits for everybody who is a potential user.

So that is sort of fascinating. Let's bring it down to the strategies and given your expertise, what strategies and systems do you actually use in the classroom to support students with disabilities?

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** Yeah, so they're actually not too far off from what Jen had mentioned from her responses. So for my classes, for one, the materials I ensure are accessible.

So I learned a lot about how to turn a lot of the printed materials into digital and make them accessible, especially as PDFs. Exactly, and that's not an easy task.

Anyone working at PDFs would know it is a pain to work through, but I ensure that all the materials are accessible. And the good thing about here at University of Texas at Austin is we have developers within the educational technology IT department that has worked on kind of a plug-in for Canvas that helps to check your materials, to give you kind of a score to see how accessible it is and offer some suggestions on how you can improve it if it's not terribly accessible.

So that helps a lot. And I wish more instructors kind of look into utilizing that even more.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** So that's the first thing. Secondly and similarly is recording. So I've made sure all of my lectures are recorded. Students have lives, we all have lives, things go on.

And so it's important that if they can't make the class, that they don't fall behind. And so being able to have recordings with caption as well, so they can catch up.

And so it's the idea that instructors kind of think, well, they have the notes and everything, they won't come to class and you know, it defeats the point and it's just like you're missing the point.

The students have the autonomy, they have the agency to choose what they do, but it is the thought more so that we don't want the students to feel if they don't come to class, they're going to fall behind tremendously.

Because we don't know what goes on in our personal lives, neither is it our business. So being able to have these recordings available for them at any time is a big help to them and takes a lot of stress off of them.

Like, okay, I'm afraid I have to end this class, but Dr. Huff has these notes that I can refer to and go back to any time that I want. And so it brings a particular mindset that they won't necessarily have to fall behind or make certain sacrifices or decisions in that realm.

Similarly with assignments, my assignments are fairly flexible. I always add in a submission policy that you have a window. So here's a deadline, but you do have some cushions.

So if you can't meet that deadline, guess what? You don't have to ask for an extension, it's already built in. So again, ease of mind, helping students out.

They're taking many classes and a lot of the deadlines will be all at once at some point. So if you give them the option that they can submit later, then you help them take a load off their shoulders knowing, okay, I probably can't get this assignment right now, but I know that I have a window to submit.

So I can work on this assignment and then do this one later. So I'm just thinking about the kind of well-being for the students to think about when they're trying to get stuff done.

As far as exam goes, so I actually don't do like actual exams in the class, I sort of have an issue where it's a matter of how students work under time pressure.

And so I'm more creative in sort of a final examination in terms of how they demonstrate their comprehension. Most of the classes that I teach are project-based anyway, and so they work in teams on a project.

I make sure to help that they are held accountable and hold their group mates accountable. And so it's something that most assignments are done with very flexible deadlines, but also they know about the final project in advance, so they can plan better how they will do their work from their other classes as well.

For my undergrad class on understanding disability and accessibility, it's more so a paper that they work on and can work on over the semester. So there is, again, that ability of flexibility and how to plan around their other classes that may have exams in that regards.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** So I also design course pages on Canvas also being accessible, so certain structures, certain elements. Now, admittedly, I have a background with web development, so I have a little bit more of an edge than probably most instructors in understanding how HTML works.

And so I can kind of fiddle around and play with things to some tricks to kind of make things work easier. But I leverage that expertise to really help make more accessible experience navigating these pages wherever they may go.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** So people maybe should look at your syllabi and your web pages and get some ideas to sort of help them improve their own. Can you give us an example of, have you seen students with disabilities thrive in an accessible environment? Any examples come to mind in particular?

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** I actually have to say, funnily enough, this semester, the course I'm teaching on Introduction to User Experience Design, I actually have probably more students with accommodations than I have in any of the courses I've taught so far since my time here at UT.

And a lot of it is centered around, you know, flexible deadlines and getting access to notes and so to speak. And so, you know, they have been very comfortable with reaching out to me, setting up meetings, saying, Dr. Huff, I'd like to talk to you about, you know, accommodations that I need, so on and so forth.

And so I'm like, okay, let's meet, let's talk, let's come to an agreement on things. And, you know, one of the things that helps a lot is the assignments that I already have cushions for.

And so they feel more at ease understanding that, okay, I have that baked in, so it's not, you know, they have to ask for it, so to speak, but I'm still willing to accommodate if need be.

Some may require additional note-taking as well. So I open up to, you know, have students volunteer to also help with providing notes. We have this Google Drive with notes so that students can access it.

And I don't just restrict it to the students with accommodations, I make it available to anybody. So anyone that needs notes can also just go up there and grab the notes when need be.

So it benefits everyone for that matter. And so to this day, I haven't had anyone really say they have troubles following with the class. You know, they feel more at ease, more comfortable.

I think more so for me, it's just them feeling comfortable to have the agency to work with the assignments, work with their teammates, and not feel a sense of this class is a struggle, or I need to leave because it's not very accessible in that sense.

So if that is the case at the end of the day, then I'm satisfied, I'm happy, because they feel comfortable enough, they feel they can take this course and not feel behind.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** I think because the course itself concerns accessibility, it actually raises the idea of accessibility being something to discuss, and that perhaps is part of the trust building that Jen talked about, the idea that I feel safe talking about it, because here it's a legitimate part of the class, but generally, if the instructor will actually talk about it, openly, it does tend to encourage students to reveal and engage more of those sorts of issues.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** So it's interesting, that you say that and it brings it to my, the other course on understanding disability and accessibility because we do have those conversations too at large. Like one of the topics is accessibility in education and just the stories that come out, a lot of it, a lot of it talking about their issues with instructors.

And so, you talk about the learning environments, we talk about the technology, but really a lot of the trouble they have are with instructors who are not flexible, who refuse to have recordings, who refuse to write notes in advance, who refuse to do accommodations, and a lot of that is the main pain points.

And so, you know, as instructors, we really have to kind of get out of our own way and get out of our own students' way and really take the extra effort to make sure the classrooms are accessible.

Because once you start and once you actually prepare your materials to be accessible, it's really not as much work in the future because you've already done it.

So take the extra time to actually rework your materials. And you'll find that there's not as much tweaking you have to do other than changing content to prepare moving forward.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Excellent. I think the idea that you do invest at the front end and it pays off long term is another lesson that we're getting from both you and Jen today. It's something that really people might want to take away.

And building the trust and encouraging people to talk and just the payoff being sort of huge here. Earl, you're an expert in technology and educational technology. Is there anything coming down the pike or are there emerging issues in the research literature on accessibility and technology that excite you? What should we know what's coming?

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** So I'll say it's something that excites me, but also worries me. So I'll take on both ends. So it's not a secret, but artificial intelligence. It's already has been making its way into education.

But now we're looking at ways to which perhaps it can improve accessibility, especially with the advent rise of generative artificial intelligence.

So think about the ChatGPTs, you think about Claude, you think about Copilot, all this generative AI technology brings the hope of improving accessibility in the classroom.

So ways that maybe it can help with generating sign language interpretation on the go, right then and there, or improving course design for instructors, even for students to reach.

And so there's a lot of promise behind that, but I also have worries and concerns, even from some of my own research.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** So while I think AI can be a huge boon, if wielded properly, that's the big thing—wield it properly and ethically. We are seeing how it can be misused, used for less than ideal purposes, whether it's writing someone's own paper for them.

And we may have seen that, we've seen even adults write their own research papers with it, but it's another topic for another day. There's concern about how AI is being trained, how it's being developed, who is actually at the table when they make decisions in terms of how it's being built?

Are they considering the voices and the perspectives of people with disabilities when they're developing them? And so that's why I'm excited but also have caution in terms of what it is that we're bringing to enhance accessibility in the classroom.

To make learning more accessible in that sense. And even when we had this kind of conversation of talking and talking about like AI fluency or literacy, like how do we train and make people become aware of this technology, but then also be aware of the ethical use of it and kind of put safeguards in.

So it brings the matter that with AI, we can see kind of the enhancement of student learning, but it may also break about ways that certain skills can atrophy as well, because we may be concerned about the heavy reliance on it to start doing the heavy lifting for us, but what do we sacrifice by doing that?

I'm very interested in exploring these benefits, but then what are some potential trade-offs are we looking at if we start using it too heavily in the classroom?

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** So certainly we hear lots of negatives about AI, but we may be looking at a future where for faculty who are a little concerned about how do they make their syllabi or how do they make their course software more accessible, AI might actually give them a quick way of actually achieving that with all the caveats that you've built in about the concerns or the negatives there. Well, that's a very thought-provoking sort of comment.

There's one question that someone directly asked you, and I'd like to sort of give you a chance to answer it now. And it's from a guest, Brittany, who said, do you ever get pushback? Are there other sections of the course being offered at the same time? Do instructors teach this course other semesters? Or do you get pushback from colleagues on your approach to proactive inclusion and accommodations that are rooted in trusting students?

I ask because I've encountered something similar where policies have been revised in semesters for faculty who do not share the same values as you. Have you felt any sort of tension or challenge here in your own experience?

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** Actually, no. In fact, many colleagues kind of encourage or are interested in this kind of approach, the students themselves like the approach as well. So for me, I feel fortunate to kind of be in an environment that embraces kind of the approach I take to the class to teach the way I do.

Even outside of the iSchool itself, other faculty in other departments have taken notice. Students outside of the iSchool have taken notice. And so this approach really works well.

And as far as kind of the pushback that you may be getting, I think it's very important to really find those that support it, kind of find those allies that can advocate for you or be alongside you or have those conversations as far as maybe how you may go about it differently.

Ways that you don't necessarily abandon, but maybe you find a workaround or find something so that you don't really sacrifice what you're trying to do, but at the same time, you don't maybe ruffle feathers, depending on who it is that is giving that pushback.

Because we all like to say, we want to fight back, but then the powers that be, maybe it's higher administration, maybe it's something at the more state level, could have a say, of course, you don't want to lose your job by trying to say, no, I'm not.

So it's a careful process. So I say find those allies, find those supporters, people that you can talk to in confidence and maybe find ways to kind of mitigate those challenges.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Great. Earl, thank you so much. Lots and lots to think about there. It's really a pleasure listening to you. And the work you're doing is really exciting and we're delighted to have you here at the university working with us.

**Earl Huff, Jr., PhD:** Thank you, Andrew.

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** Mytra, if we could have the next slide, please.

## 48:10 - 6 Ways to Take Action in Your Classroom

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** We're reaching the last part of this webcast. And I just want to sort of pull some ideas together and give you a chance to think about the issues more holistically and understand how you can connect with us going forward.

So some takeaways, you know, a lot was put on the idea of building trust, obviously, with your audience and with your students, and we have found again and again and again that the official accommodations is one route where people will declare and signal the need for sort of help.

But there are many who just won't speak up and won't seek them. And of course, we also know there are many obstacles in the university system to even gaining the accommodations. So actually the pathway to actually initiating the accommodation request itself can prove to be a barrier.

So becoming sensitive to this, and the best way to do that is talk openly, I think, to your students. Again and again, I've been amazed at things I've discovered that are challenges for students only when they have told me, when I've asked them, when I've explored with them, what they're facing.

And I challenge any of you who've never used the screen reader, try it. You'll think you've stepped back a century in terms of computing technology, I can guarantee you.

Know what's available around. Identify what's available in your university. Different universities, different colleges, different education institutions have, you know, different levels of accommodation in office, but find out what's available as a resource and try to use it.

And also invite—what we hear a lot from accommodation professionals is, you know, they want to talk to us, they want to talk to faculty, they want to be engaged, they want to be used. So, you know, navigate with them, talk to them and build a relationship with them.

Lots about flexibility in the classroom, finding alternative pathways for students to satisfy the requirements of the course. I think we can all recognize that some of us are much more comfortable reading and writing than others are watching and listening.

And maybe we should think much more about the richness of multimedia possibilities in the delivery, as well as very practical things like some flexible deadlines and guidelines.

Opening up the conversation about accessibility so it's not seen as a special request or that the student is asking for something unique and different and to be treated in a different manner than other students.

No, they're really just saying, look, there are multiple pathways to learning. There are some barriers in front of me that maybe aren't in other people's pathways. Can you help me remove some of these barriers?

Aligning your course with your own learning goals and allowing students to sort of understand what's going on by giving them reminders, by giving them flexible ways, by giving them some deadlines, by pointing ahead what's coming, what they may need to be thinking about, and where they may need to particularly ask for help.

And of course, I went many years presenting classes on PowerPoint before a student actually said to me, I can't read your PowerPoints. And it was a shock to me that after years of producing slides, which I thought were visually quite appealing, one student in my class actually just said, oh, I can't see them.

I follow them by listening to the tone of your voice, which I found fascinating. I just asked if they could possibly have the slides in advance to use their own technology on them to be sort of prepared and have a version of them that they could follow along with in class directly.

Why had I not thought of it? I hadn't until a student actually felt brave enough to raise that issue with me. Ever since then, I've been very conscious of it when I go in and asking students, what do you need? What can you see? Has anybody got a problem?

You don't have to put your hand up. Let me know privately, and I'll do the best I can to make sure all the media that I use in the class will be accessible to all of you.

## 52:18 - Stay Connected

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** So at this point, I'd just like to invite you to stay connected with the center, visit the website. You can subscribe for updates. We don't push an extraordinary amount of information at you, but what we do push tends to be high quality.

You can access our reports on the state-of-the-art in the field. You can get access to our learning hub and you can join a communications network of fellow concerned educators with an interest in accessibility.

So we invite you all to participate in that. It's no cost and it's low load. So feel free to sign up at the earliest opportunity.

## 52:57 - Thank you and Conclusion

**Andrew Dillon, PhD:** This is the second in a series of webcasts from the National Disability Center, so look out for more. Sign up, stay connected. I appreciate the comments in the chat box.

Please don't forget to sign up. One suggestion was maybe we need a book club so we could share sort of readings and ideas. Stay tuned to the websites.

We're keen to facilitate a continual and growing discussion on this sort of item. With that, I'm Andrew Dillon at the School of Information and the National Disability Center for Student Success and thank you for your attendance today. Bye.

## 53:47 - Follow Us

*(No new speaker—continued invitation to stay engaged. No additional speech provided in original transcript.)*

## 53:56 - Legal Disclaimer

*(No speaker. End-of-webcast legal disclaimers shown on screen. No speech content.)*

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