



## Enabling Geographies

Mapping Campus Spaces through Disability and Access

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In recent years, composition instructors, scholars, and researchers have been adopting and adapting elements of cultural geography into the writing classroom. In doing so, they have helped to promote students' awareness of and participation in local community issues—particularly with regard to how local place-based issues impact stakeholders and communities at large. Most commonly, mapping assignments and exercises have been implemented in the classroom to analyze and interrogate those places that students visit frequently and/or parts of campus that they feel are closed off, undesirable, or difficult to visit. Such assignments show the value of asking students to engage with familiar and unfamiliar spaces, for the purpose of engaging with local issues. Here, I further the work done on place-based mapping pedagogy by showcasing how asking students to interrogate issues of access for individuals with disabilities as they map may help them gain a broader understanding of the ideologies that shape seemingly neutral landscapes.

Like other assignments based on place or disability, this project helps strengthen for students the impact that writing has in the world. For example, the work that writing does becomes evident for students in how written policies shape the way that spaces should look or how individuals are diagnosed as ill or disabled according to agreed-upon written constructs in medical and health communities. As I show here, considering disability and access in the uses of place necessitates that students keep in mind the rhetorical nature not only of defining disability but also of designing spaces. That said, this

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mapping assignment also serves as a heuristic to help students realize that the writing they produce in the classroom and beyond has consequences of its own. In each of the classes that I have implemented this assignment, the emphasis has been on teaching students to produce professional genres and to utilize rhetorical principles in their work, but as I explain, this heuristic can aid in a variety of English-based classrooms that focus on disability, culture, literacy, and rhetoric.

Below I describe the different approaches to mapping assignments that have recently circulated in the literature on writing pedagogy. I then highlight the importance of asking students to engage in multimodal mapping assignments in helping to build critical thinking on local community issues before describing how students' multiexperiential engagement with space led to critical reflections and discussions on the ideologies of design and locality. Hence, this essay serves as a response to Lisa Arnold et al. (2015: 299–300), who ask us to push students to consider more complex notions of how their geography, location, and space intersect.

### **Assumptions and Positionality of Place-Based Pedagogy**

Arnold et al.'s (2015) assignment sequence helps highlight some of the main threads that are common in place-based pedagogy assignments. I first briefly describe their assignments before discussing how they share similar goals with previous scholarship published on the subject of place-based pedagogy. Specifically, the authors concern themselves with composition students' high level of *immappancy*—a term they borrow from Kai Krause but extend to signify not only insufficient geographical knowledge but also “a lack of clarity about the relationship of physical spaces to one another” (273). To that end, Arnold et al. are interested in having students explore the situatedness of their positionality in terms of both space and argument. As a result, the authors combine aspects from Nedra Reynolds's (2007) “Mapping URI” assignment with Virginia Crisco's (2009) Community Action Project in which students are asked to research a local issue and then use writing to take action on that issue; thus, Arnold et al.'s assignment sequence asks students to analyze the politics and ideologies of maps, as well as how a global issue of their choosing may be intertwined with local issues, and then to take a position regarding that issue. Students trace out spaces on campus, detailing the types of people and objects that reside in a current space, and discuss how the material conditions that they found align with or contradict written representations and previous assumptions of those spaces (Arnold et al. 2015: 298). Such meta-awareness of positionality is then transferred to

research projects involving local and global issues so that students can gain an appreciation for how one's position is impacted by and, in turn, impacts concerns about place.

Similar elements can be found across place-based pedagogy scholarship as a whole. First, mapping is thought to help students familiarize themselves more with the physical and discursive elements that make up their local surroundings. This is most evident in Arnold et al.'s introductory assignment in which students draw mental representations of spaces they inhabit, but can also be seen in Barbara J. Blakely and Susan B. Pagnac's (2012) description of their own assignment sequence in which students study the spatial history of Iowa State University. In this sequence, students begin by writing a letter describing a place that they have mapped on campus "in ways that [connect] it to their current experiences and more distant futures" (26); they then research the history and design features of particular places of the campus and remediate the initial report into a presentation with visually rhetorical choices.

Secondly, these mapping assignments also ask students to break out of their regular routines. This can happen by having students explore new territories that are unfamiliar and describe them either visually or textually. To illustrate, in Reynolds's "Mapping URI" project, students explore parts of campus that they normally don't visit (2007: 158), after which they often report being treated with suspicion by those who regularly inhabit those spaces merely because they "looked like, acted like, and were *students*" in these regulated spaces (161). But breaking out of a routine can also occur by asking students to resee their normal routes in new ways, such as in Robert Brooke and Jason McIntosh's (2007) deep maps wherein students retrace their normal walking and traveling paths and answer reflective questions pertaining to what objects and people appear or are absent from places.

Third, it is thought that this critical awareness will help students become more attuned to developing a civic-minded ethos, as they take on issues that deal with community interests and literacies. The best example of such ethos comes from Abby, a student described by Brooke and McIntosh (2007), whose own deep map leads her to investigate the inequalities in Nebraska's mental health reform bill, which "shut down two of Nebraska's three mental hospitals in Hastings and Norfolk" (144). These circumstances carried sustainability and infrastructural concerns for Abby, who wrote, "It is likely that many communities will not be able to meet the needs of their mentally ill citizens, and other agencies, like the police department and private hospitals, will become overburdened" (145). And, as mentioned above,

Arnold et al. (2015: 294–95) also emphasize attention to civic literacy in their assignment sequence.

At the heart of this pedagogical mapping as well is developing a stronger idea of the other—focusing on places that others inhabit in one’s community and on issues that matter to other people; this relation to the other comes through by, paradoxically, interrogating one’s self. In this way, students are encouraged to develop a stronger sense of community, understanding the different perspectives that others in the community take on important issues (see, e.g., Brooke and McIntosh 2007: 132–33; Arnold et al. 2015: 297).

Such goals have rather large implications not only for the interactions that we hope our students will cultivate with others in their community but also for the actual physical design of spaces. In both, relating to others spatially can help to promote communal equity. As Dylan Dryer (2010) has argued, spaces are often designed with individualistic consumer driven interests that negate or ignore community ties. In his case study of urban planners’ surveys in the pseudonymous municipality of Portstown, Dryer found that urban planning survey questions situate residents in consumerist positions that force residents to respond to these questions from an isolationist, neoliberal mentality. What is needed, according to Dryer, is to develop questions that give residents a more ecological mind-set—one that alerts them to the intertwined nature of problems as having large impacts on individuals in the community (not just on their own property taxes) and the collaborative work necessary to address them together.

Most of the place-based assignments I have described here attempt to strengthen such connections to some extent. As scholars have posited, by having students become more aware of how local issues impact multiple people in the community, we can create a citizenry that will resist thinking of spatial design and spatial issues as individualistic concerns and, in turn, reveal in what manner multiple groups are impacted by them. While I certainly believe this sentiment to be true, the assignments I have discussed have focused mainly on asking students to interrogate their own positionality within local issues or to examine how they themselves use spaces. I further this work by asking students to interrogate the issues of access and the unstated premises that go into these campus spaces themselves from a position outside of their everyday experience.

I propose that a way to get students to consider such questions as “Why do you think that differences in personal identity produce different perspectives?” and “What are the difficulties you encounter when trying to imagine perspectives other than your own?” (Arnold et al. 2015: 297) may

be to ask them to tease out these different imagined perspectives by focusing their maps on access and disability. This would invite them to consider the material realities that permit and restrict how others move through space. Here, specifically, I discuss the ways in which asking students to cast a critical eye to the built environment with a disability in mind can instill a greater appreciation for how space is socially and politically composed.

As I have alluded to through Dryer's research, the design of spaces is a highly contentious issue that involves a communal solution. Yet previous discussions of mapping have not asked students to engage fully with the ideology of design. Rather, mapping has been used as a way to appreciate architecture and campus design or to analyze it as part of a larger campus mission, as in Blakely and Pagnac's (2012) assignment. For instance, one student quoted in their article describes the electrical engineering building on campus as having a motivating aura: "Just by the technology and how the building's [interior] architecture is set up influences me to work harder in my studies" (29). Little critical attention is placed, however, on why this might be. What aspects of the building might seem inspirational, and how might they compare to less inspiring places on campus? There are, after all, numerous political and material factors that go into the feel of a place.

### **Place and Disability**

Many scholars in disability geography have attempted to note the ways in which spaces are materially and politically determined and how such determinations privilege certain bodies over others. Such critique likely stems from the fact that since the 1980s the social model of disability has been a consistent paradigm in disability studies at large, showcasing society's role in disabling individuals. Mike Oliver (1983, 1990, 1996) posited the social model to stand in contrast to the medical model of disability. Thus, instead of locating disability within the body and seeing it as an inherent flaw or problem with a "nonstandard" body, the social model views disability as stemming from societal structures that disable individuals from participating in activities or performing functions. Rather, the term *impairment* is used to signify the medical and physiological lack or defectiveness of the body, while *disability* as a term alludes to "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities" (Oliver 1996: 22).<sup>1</sup> Reconstituting disability to focus on social structures instead of bodily flaws has shifted the conversation to focus not solely on fixing an impairment but

on changing these structures to negate disability, and this has led to scholars in other fields, such as geography, to pay attention to how structures impede impaired bodies.

Reginald G. Golledge (1993: 64), for example, has charged geographers with the task of mapping the spaces that those with disabilities inhabit in order to make recommendations for a more usable landscape. Other scholars in the field of geography, such as Brendan Gleeson (1996) and Vera Chouinard and Ali Grant (1995), have furthered this call, and numerous geographers have conducted empirical research on everyday experiences of disability that reveal how disabilities and geography intersect. Robert Imrie (2010), seeking to challenge designers' conceptualization of the idea of "home," notes that, for example, "most kitchen units in homes are provided as a standardized package in which tabletop and cupboard heights are reachable only by an upright person" (28). The ideologies that help us imagine the kitchen in this particular way have real material consequences on bodies that do not align with what designers conceive of as being standard, and as a result, "people who are dependent on a wheelchair or whose mobility is such that they have to hold onto a support structure to stabilize themselves, often find it impossible to use their kitchen unless it is adapted to meet their needs" (28). The same can be said of other rooms we associate with the home, such as bathrooms—not just their size to accommodate wheelchairs but also their placement in the home. As homes began to grow larger, designers and homeowners saw the need for two-story houses to have full baths with sinks, toilets, and showers in the upstairs of the house, not on the main floor where the kitchen and living areas are. This naturally has led to some difficulties when people are unable to go up stairs. As Imrie notes, such designs cause people with disabilities to see their dwellings less as places of sanctuary and more as places of confinement.<sup>2</sup>

In other cases, disability geographers have mapped out the ways in which people with disabilities can adapt to their environments or even change their environments to suit their needs. Robert J. Kruse II (2010), for example, showcases how Paul and Mary, a couple with dwarfism, use tables and chairs that are appropriate for their height, while at the same time keep their photographs hung at "standard-height" eye level because, as they state, "objects look odd when hung lower" (190). Additionally, while Paul and Mary experience difficulty with the design of the home, their experience of the social environment in public is also challenging, given that people may stare at them or, conversely, not see them, which can be dangerous in large crowds. As a result, the couple state, they typically avoid places with a lot of people.

Clearly, we can see how the world we inhabit is made for specific individuals and how both homes and public spaces can seem uncomfortable or even dangerous to those whose bodies do not fit the ways that we have come to conceptualize them. What is needed is to bring these experiences to the fore and show how one size may not necessarily fit all in abundant situations. In this way, nondisabled individuals and disabled individuals alike can observe, as Aimi Hamraie (2013: n.p.) argues, “that misfit is an active construction of what appears to be a lack of information about the range of human diversity. Knowledge and ideologies privileging the normate are always present in built environments.” Asking students to critically examine and map out the accessibility of campus spaces may draw out examples of “misfit” that exist on campus, given that, as Bruno Latour (2005: 81) has noted, exposing breakdowns in use makes us more aware of the material effects of artifacts. Although Latour is speaking primarily of objects’ agency, I think that the same argument could be made about ideology here: the design of a space may seem neutral until the moment that one, for example, becomes blind or has difficulty walking, thus rearticulating one’s relationship with this “innocuous” design. In this way, because we all have the potential to become disabled—and, as Dolmage asserts, disability is always present in the sense that there is no such thing as the “perfect” body (Dolmage 2008: 17)—this exercise, by making the familiar unfamiliar, may alert students to the challenges experienced by the Other.

### **Disability in the English Classroom**

Before I discuss how I have implemented a disability and access mapping assignment, I give a brief overview of how issues pertaining to disability have begun to be more visible in the writing and reading classroom. Having implemented this assignment across two sections of Healthcare Writing and one in Technical Writing, I approach it primarily from a usability perspective, given that much of the work in professional writing and technical communication has tied the two together.<sup>3</sup> Susan Youngblood (2012), for example, has had her class redesign web pages so that they take into account individuals with sight impairment. Similarly, Shannon Walters (2010) has discussed how her class has remediated a number of multimodal artifacts while specifically keeping in mind those individuals who have trouble hearing, seeing, or moving. One can also find a number of other projects centered on disability and access in Lisa Meloncon’s *Rhetorical Accessibility* (2013), an edited collection that showcases numerous theoretical, classroom-based, and professional projects aimed at making artifacts more accessible for individuals with disabilities.

More broadly, pedagogical interventions within composition and literary studies classrooms have focused on studying discourse associated with disability and “normality” (see Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson 2002; Price 2008; Bloom 2014; Fox and Wessner 2015; Row-Heyveld 2015; Selznick 2015). In these instances, students engage with how specific language used in novels and popular media might “other” those with impairments and promote what a normal body should look like and do. Hillary Selznick (2015: n.p.), for example, asks students to “take notice of some of the societal commonplace assumptions in regard to normalcy, stigma, and stereotypes and to arrange them in a [digital] ‘book.’” By the end of the semester, students amass collections that showcase the ways in which bodies are marginalized through linguistic and visual representations, and they produce counternarratives of normalization. Similarly, students in Ann M. Fox and David R. Wessner’s (2015) course studied the literary and cultural representations of individuals with HIV/AIDS, as well as the scientific portrayal of AIDS in news media. With this information, students created cultural artifacts, such as poetry, short stories, and public advocacy campaign materials, that showcased their growing awareness of issues associated with the illness.

I also see my assignment, which asks students to interrogate assumptions about disability and access—from the perspective of the built environment instead of popular media—as a way of having students produce artifacts that speak to their growing awareness of disabilities and disabling structures. In my classes, these artifacts take the form of proposals, instructions, or technical descriptions, all of which ask students to take usability into consideration when they think about how people will use technological and medical artifacts on a regular basis. Mapping and remapping the campus is a way of providing us with a common language because, despite the fact that students will pursue careers in various fields, space is an equalizer that they all experience and that engages them to talking about disability and usability. Additionally, focusing on disabilities highlights the importance of paying attention to the different relationships people have with common spaces. As Deb Martin (2008: 87) has suggested, by introducing topics of disability, “students, situated squarely inside their own cultural framework, can start taking notice of the cultures outside them that until now seemed remote or unrelated. Disability interrogated as difference can start students pondering the complicated ways they themselves are related to the seemingly unfamiliar.” This work is particularly important for all writers who must make connections between their own experiences and those of others. In that way, while my context for place-based pedagogy stems from professional writ-

ing courses, I see broader uses for this assignment, which, as I have shown, touches on scholarship from literary studies, writing, and cultural geography classrooms, particularly as it pushes students to think critically about the experiences that others have and how these might differ or even contradict their own experiences.

### **Assignment Synopsis**

I begin this assignment by having students read Brooke and McIntosh's "Deep Maps" (2007) and then asking students to design their own deep map. Much as in the authors' assignment sheet, I ask students to

draw a map of campus that is rich with places and pathways you inhabit today. In particular, pay attention to the places that you normally reside in, locations of people who are important to you, commonly traveled routes, bike or walking trails, parks, sites where memorable events occurred, favorite places, businesses you frequent, bodies of water, landmarks, and other geographic elements. You will have to differentiate these different types of movement and places as best as you can. (adapted from Brooke and McIntosh 2007: 135)

These student-produced artifacts are generally interesting to discuss in class because students highlight the different relationships that they have to campus space. Some students focus on a very specific area of campus because they choose (or consequences force them) to stay within a very specific radius, such as the area between their dorms and classrooms. Others who might take public transportation or drive to their jobs may focus on dorm life only as an afterthought and map a much larger geographical area depicting their range of travel.

Much more can be said of students' deep maps, but I mention them here only as a springboard for what I consider to be the more important mapping assignment: reexperiencing and representing space through issues of access. I ask students to read the definition of disability as found in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to help set certain parameters on how disabilities are defined (from a specific legally driven source). Students are generally surprised by the inclusive language used to frame disability. The act states that "the term 'disability' means, with respect to an individual, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual. . . . Major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning,

reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working” (§35.108). Furthermore, impairments of major bodily functions, “including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions” (§35.108), can also be documented as disabilities as long as the condition is not expected to last fewer than six months.

Students also read a number of articles on disability and access, pose questions to one another based on the readings, and answer writing prompts associated with the topic of disabilities. In the past, we have read portions of the Department of Justice’s “Americans with Disability Act: Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities” (1994), Jim Swan’s “Disabilities, Bodies, Voices” in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities* (2002), and Tom Shakespeare’s “The Social Model of Disability” and Lennard J. Davis’s “Constructing Normalcy” from *The Disability Studies Reader* (2006). Although the Americans with Disabilities Act’s definition of disability serves as a good launching point, I have found that, much as Lindsey Row-Heyveld (2015) states, students typically find it inadequate in capturing the experiences of individuals with disabilities once we have considered the social and political structures that turn impairments into disabilities. Moreover, these readings have spurred students to ask one another and consider difficult questions regarding the difference that terminology makes when referring to individuals with disabilities, the role that DNA testing should play in identifying disabilities in human embryos, and the potential impact of looking at disability through the lens of the social model on the work that they do or will do once they professionalize. Throughout these weeks, students also answer broader prompts about their own biases and experiences with disability, as well as how they would identify barriers that impair their learning even if they do not have a disability.

Once we have discussed the various constructions of disability, students must conduct primary and secondary research on a disability of their choosing. Primary research can include joining a forum and asking questions about specific disabilities, interviewing someone with a disability, observing the daily routine of someone with a disability (with permission), or other forms of data gathering that they run by me first. Secondary research takes the form of looking at scientific and popular sources that lay out the different causes and symptoms of a disability so that they can gain a big-picture view of how different bodies can exist on a physical or genetic level. Having conducted research via scientific descriptions of the causes and symptoms of disability, students go back out and map paths through campus, finding which

structures/infrastructures enable and disable bodies with the disabilities that they have researched.

### **Caveats**

Before proceeding further, I need to clarify a few aspects of this project. First, I do not see this exercise as a way of giving students firsthand experience with what it must be like to have a disability. Many different factors play a role in experiencing a disability that cannot be captured by simply “pretending” that one has a disability. For example, Swan (2002: 288) has discussed the potential drawbacks of asking students to simulate blindness by closing their eyes or simulating walking impairment by sitting in wheelchairs. He writes that “simply trying on a disability . . . cannot convey the continuous no-time-out experience of being impaired. Worse, it focuses too much attention on the impairment and too little on the social construction that turns impairment into disability. The risk is that a simulation will simply confirm nondisabled persons in their belief that they are normal and therefore superior to anyone who is disabled.” What is more important, according to Swan, is to “consider how the technological culture, the materially constructed environment, which is the result of specific design and policy decisions, acts to enable even those who think of themselves as already enabled on their own. In this view, culture and technology, the telephone and the paved highway, the public school and the home mortgage function as prostheses to overcome the limitations and extend the capabilities of—in principle—all members of society.” I argue that asking students to look at spaces with a critical eye toward disability and access does just this. In short, I seek to promote students’ awareness of what Gleeson (1999: 65) has termed *enabling geography*, which promotes “knowledges that can be used to empower disabled people and disempower ableist structures, practices and institutions” and, furthermore, highlights how “disability is a form of oppression which is socio-spatially produced rather than naturally given” (Gleeson 1996: 387).

In one of the courses in which I have implemented this mapping assignment, a student whom I will refer to as Evan echoed this exact sentiment in his reflection when he wrote about his experience during a volunteer training module on disabilities at his local hospital. In this training, volunteers were asked to take part in “disability simulations” where they would enact the types of performance of disability that Swan describes.<sup>4</sup> This included, as Evan described, sitting in a wheelchair with an oxygen tank attached or playing the role of “someone who could not physically speak.” While this simulation was helpful for Evan to consider others’ experiences,

he noted that “those with good intentions may actually be counterproductive in their actions . . . [because] these simulations may actually undermine the possible struggles that the disabled community faces. I therefore came to the conclusion that [one] can never fully understand what it means to have a disability unless you have it. This helped me to focus more on how I can better accommodate these people [with disabilities] rather than trying to recreate a disability for simulation purposes.” In short, here we see how this student moves from finding value in simply simulating an experience to focusing on the physical and policy-based barriers that impede individuals with disabilities. Indeed, his choice of words is particularly apt here: he wishes to now focus on how to *accommodate* individuals with disability, a word that denotes not just providing for someone’s needs but also to “make room for” within a space—in other words, altering spaces, figurative and/or literal, to meet the needs of individuals.

Second, I want to make sure that this exercise does not assume that students who enter my classroom are nondisabled. My hope is that, after engaging in discussions regarding the difference between disability and impairment, as well as the privilege that systems give to standard abilities, students will be respectful of how they conceptualize disabilities, whether they identify as having a disability or not. While students have the opportunity to focus their map on their own disabilities, they certainly do not have to. Frequently, some students feel comfortable disclosing that they have specific disabilities in their written in-class prompts. While I make it clear that they do not have to disclose any disabilities, some students (but certainly not all) have chosen to use a disability that they have as the focus of their maps.

Interestingly, students’ deep maps (their maps depicting their personal embodied experiences of campus) often look very different from their disability maps even when they disclose having a disability. This may be because my students have not had any disabilities that have impacted their daily routes and/or because students do not focus on the topic of access unless they are asked to. For example, in his deep map, Taylor, a student who disclosed having color blindness, does not include any indication that he struggles with the built environment. For instance, red lines represent the paths he takes to work on a regular basis through campus, and blue stars depict where his classes are located. In his disability map, however, Taylor chose to convey his experiences as someone who is colorblind and the difficulty he has identifying the different markers that express information primarily by focusing primarily on color—or rather the lack of it. He writes:

It occurred to me that colorblind people do not face challenges simply in certain locations or another, rather the challenges they face are pervasive, throughout our society built for people who can unambiguously differentiate the entire spectrum of color. Anywhere some indicator depends on only color to communicate its message, there is a potential for someone with a color vision deficiency to experience difficulty. These indicators are everywhere, and are so pervasive that most people never think about it at all, everything in our society is based on color. Colorized symbology tells you whether you can park at a curb or not, whether it is safe and legal to go or not, whether your computer is on or off, and many other things as well.

Wanting to express his level of frustration, Taylor's map is drawn in black marker—and only black marker. The stoplights, the paths, and the parking areas are all undifferentiated from each other. Taylor ends his discussion of his disability map by advocating for changing some of the structures in place; for example, “avoiding color-changing LEDs in consumer products, adding text labeling wherever colored paint is used as an indicator, or changing the shape of lights, as in traffic lights, would nearly completely eliminate all of the challenges faced by color vision deficient people.”

I use this example only to note that even when students with disabilities choose to map out accessibility using their own disability as a reference point, the two maps they produce still may look different because of how they are being asked to map space. That said, I believe that this assignment allows students to learn more about a disability regardless of whether they disclose or even identify as having one. In either case, whether students choose to disclose a disability or to learn more about a disability, this assignment creates ways of seeing spaces as disabling or accommodating on a number of fronts.

A recent video produced jointly by the news website Vox and the real-estate blog Curbed (both owned by Vox Media) helps to showcase how spaces may facilitate or impair communication of particular bodies. In the video posted on YouTube, titled “How Architecture Changes for the Deaf” (2016), a narrator begins by stating that “we live in a world built for people who hear,” and the video offers a glimpse into how spaces would change if they were designed for people who don't hear. Specifically, the creators of the video focus on Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, a school for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. They interview Derrick Behm, who works in the Office of Campus Design and Planning and is also deaf. Behm, via sign language and a translator, explains to the audience that the university is currently redesigning and redeveloping numerous buildings on campus to be more conducive to communication between individuals who are

deaf. Such design decisions have included placing group spaces in U-shapes so that all students can see each other and widening hallways to increase the space available for two individuals walking together to sign with one another and also perceive each other's visual cues. Converting stairs to ramps also helps to reduce the amount of visual attention needed to where one steps and allows for more visual presence during conversations. Incorporating more glass and clear structures to help individuals quickly pick up on visual cues that may be otherwise signaled by noise (for example, if someone is behind a door). Even color in rooms is vital in facilitating communication and access: certain colors, such as muted blues and greens, "usually contrast with most skin colors" and thus help reduce perceivers' eye strain when reading what colleagues and classmates are signing to them. As is evident, certain spaces on our own campuses might be more accessible than others if we were to look at them from the perspective of deaf space. In essence, once students research the most common issues associated with a disability, I ask them to apply this same critical eye to the spaces that they inhabit and discuss why a place might be accessible or how it might impair individuals with the disability they chose to study.

### **Disability Maps: Beyond the Campus Accessibility Map**

While students can remap their common routes that they depicted on their deep maps, together we also brainstorm some of the most common places where students might go on campus as other options for them to represent in their disability maps; regardless of which option they choose, students pay attention to their surroundings under this new perspective. Students submit a visual representation of safe and unsafe places (or more accommodating and less accommodating places) on campus once they travel through and resee campus with attention to structures that limit and facilitate access. Students have to pay attention to their rhetorical choices for how and why they chose to visually represent such places on their map, as well as a reflection/textual key that explains their process, decisions, and results during this assignment. I trace out a few of the maps and reflections that highlight students' increased awareness to important spatial design features on campus and how they impact users of space.

Not surprisingly, because this assignment focuses on movement, many students opt to explore campus with a mobility disability in mind—that is, looking at campus spaces with attention to wheelchair access. Students who represent segments of campus through a walking impairment typically map out which campus buildings have accessible entrances, which have ramps

that are accessible, which streets have the smoothest sidewalks (or no sidewalks at all), and how long it takes for walk signals to cycle through when crossing streets.

Often students' maps showcase the difference between representation of physical space and its actual experience. I often find it intriguing when a student blocks out chunks of campus as being inaccessible because there are no ramps or entrances that facilitate access to individuals who use wheelchairs. To illustrate, on each of their maps, students Harley and Alli noted that a particular building (a sorority and a classroom building, respectively) lacked accessible entrances, which surprised me given how highly trafficked both are; it stands to reason that because so many people use these buildings, they should have some kind of accommodating entrance. In moments such as these, I consult our institution's accessibility map online, where I typically find that the buildings that students label as inaccessible are, according to our institution, accessible. In these instances, buildings can have hidden accessible entryways that are difficult to find because they are located in less trafficked areas and lack visible signage. Students frequently give up after initially struggling to find these entrances on older buildings. In other instances, buildings that students find inaccessible can be labeled as partially accessible on our institution's accessibility map, meaning that they have "one or more accessible entrances but with limited use, no elevator, or elevator requiring key." This often (but not always) explains students' confusion: these constraints might convince them that buildings are completely closed off.

How much effort they expended on this search varies by student, but I find it intriguing that our accessibility map of campus and students' own maps could differ so greatly on the status of a building. From an experiential point of view, the buildings seemingly cannot be entered, yet a top-down view of our campus map's buildings indicates there is not an accessibility issue here; they are represented as being just as accessible as the other buildings that surround them—many of which are newer and have visibly identifiable accessible entrances. Students initially feel guilty for having been "wrong" about the accessibility of space, but when we bring it back to a larger class discussion, we talk about issues of visual representation and the constraints that inform in-the-moment decision-making processes when little information about what to do is available to individuals.

At the same time, students also investigate a wide array of disabilities, illnesses, and disorders that may not necessarily appear on campus accessibility maps. For example, Adam's research on hyperacusis—extreme sensitivity to sound—stems from his experience with migraines. Adam notes

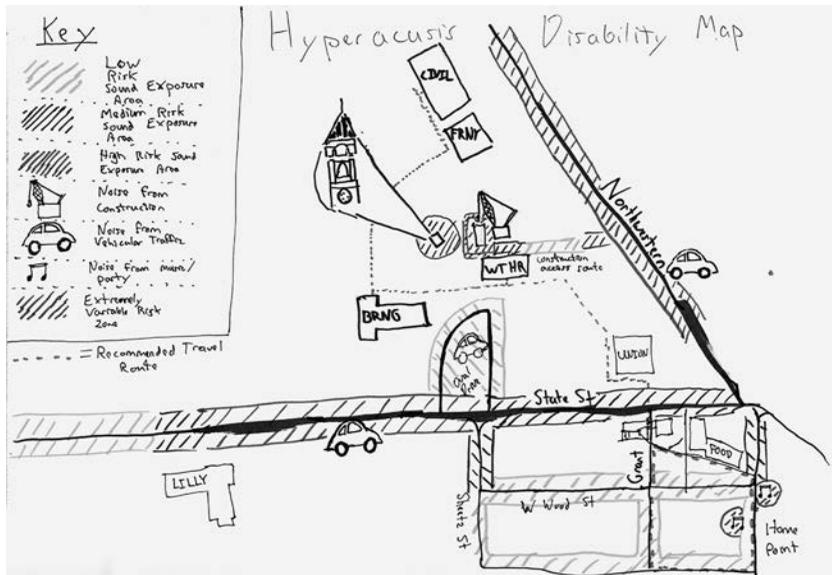


Figure 1. Adam's hyperacusis map

that when tracing out his map (figure 1),<sup>5</sup> he began to notice barriers along his route that he had not normally considered. These took the form of areas with what he terms “intense noise,” such as those with “high traffic roads, construction sites and miscellaneous sources of noise, such as the [campus] clocktower.” Indeed, we can see these points of activity in Adam’s map, wherein he depicts these and otherwise open areas as impassible. The routes he ends up taking circumvent the heavy noise but are, as he describes them, “inefficient” because of the extra time that needs to be taken.

Kelly’s project also highlights this attention to time and space. Her map, titled “Where to Go When You Have to Go” (figure 2), focuses on the location of bathrooms for those who experience what she refers to only as “bowel issues,” which could be caused by Crohn’s disease, celiac disease, or irritable bowel syndrome. Kelly takes an extra step in mapping out space by including the duration of time that it took her to get to these bathrooms and how many stalls were located in each of the rooms. Tracking her normal route, Kelly noted that it took her one minute and forty-nine seconds to find a bathroom from the time she enters the student union, which may not seem significant but, she explains, “would be a long time for someone who . . . needs to use the bathroom very urgently.” She also points out that, despite this length of time to find them, one of the advantages of the student union’s bathrooms is that “they have a marker that sticks out from the wall

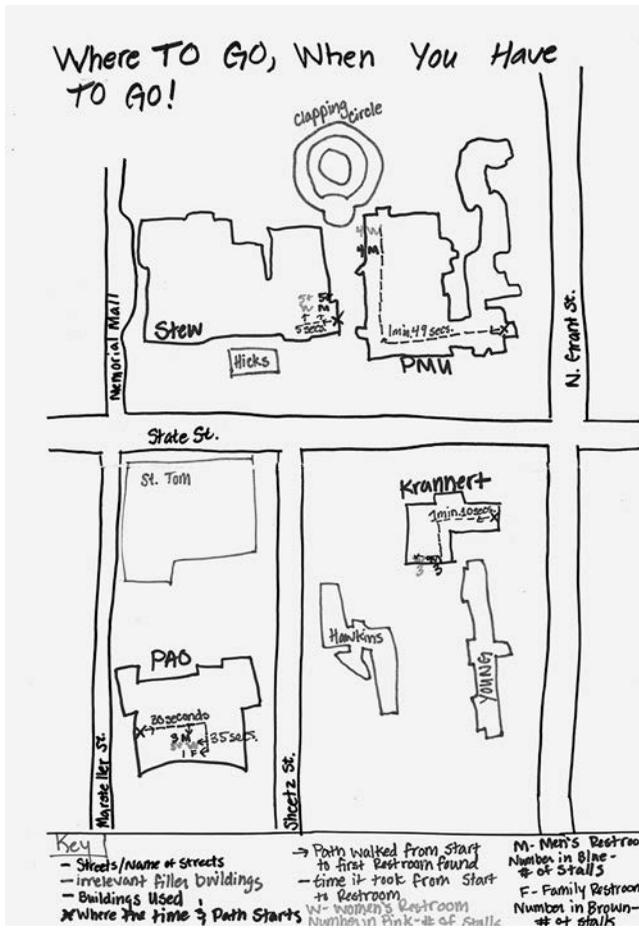


Figure 2. Kelly's "bowel issues" map

instead of lying flat so it is easier to spot from farther away.” Although we cannot know what exactly led decision makers to include these signs for the bathrooms, many people can benefit from having visible cues that alert them to the nearest bathroom from a distance—not only those who have an impairment that urges them to use the facilities frequently. In that respect, Kelly’s map makes salient the point that we are all, as Brueggemann et al. (2001: 371) remind us, only temporarily able-bodied individuals.<sup>6</sup>

### Implications and Future Work

Disability studies, in part, is concerned with analyzing the “political and material circumstances resulting from the assignment of values to certain

kinds of bodies” (Lewiecki-Wilson and Brueggemann 2008: 1). I have argued that having students discuss enabling and disabling geographies via place-based pedagogical practices can help solidify the importance that design decisions play in granting individuals with disability access, both physically and politically. In particular, because place-based pedagogy asks students to study how they themselves use space and imagine how others might use the same spaces, such attention to the accessibility of spaces on campus for individuals with particular disabilities drives home the point that they must share their dwellings with imagined others and, in many cases, will have to design textual documents and other artifacts that take a plethora of audiences into consideration. Students will need to carefully consider how they represent individuals with disability when they write narratives, how individuals with disability use different textual and electronic artifacts, and how physical, social, and political barriers impede full participation in discursive pursuits.

As I have shown from these student accounts, students rearticulate their relationship to disability and access when asked to consider the ways that spaces facilitate and foreclose actions for people with disabilities. Students question their own privilege when it comes to accessing spaces (for example, when students question their sorority or fraternity’s entrances). Students find ways of creatively representing their surroundings when they choose to focus on their own disability, and they propose ways of making changes to the built environment to facilitate usability, as when Taylor discusses the ways to remediate the flattened campus experience without non-color-specific cues to help him navigate spaces on campus. And through this heuristic, students become more politically aware of the structures in place that impact access to not just spaces but also services. Adam, for example, when writing about the discussions that took place in forums specifically for people who experience hyperacusis, notes that he learned more about how people with the disorder cope on a regular basis with having an acute sensitivity to sound. Some develop other mental impairments (such as phonophobia, the fear of sound) due to a lack of accommodation in policy and physical structures. Many experience difficulty with larger policy issues, which can contribute to disabling individuals. For example, Adam writes that

early in my research process, I was reading forum entries about people with this disorder filing for disability and being turned down on the premise that they could find work at a quiet location. Additionally, one individual stopped receiving unemployment benefits because she could not provide proof of her job search. I

originally assumed this person was just lazy searching for ways to get money without working. After my experiences, I realized how unreasonable it would be to expect anyone with this condition to find a normal, out of home job. While it [is] nice to recognize the abilities of people with disabilities, it is necessary to recognize limitations or barriers especially when they are produced by humans.

Adam, having paid particular attention to the barriers that impede others not just on campus but also in everyday life, gains a larger awareness not just of disabling spaces but also of disabling policies. Although Adam does still partition out “normal” from what is not normal in his response (seemingly holding bodies to a particular standard of what should be expected and not when it comes to employment), we can see a burgeoning sense here that impairment and limitations can be baked in to human-created systems and do not necessarily stem from a lack within the body.

Moreover, Min-Zahn Lu (1998: 243) has called on writing instructors to push students “to explore the analytic possibilities of experience by locating the experience that grounds their habitual approach to differences; by sketching the complex discursive terrain out of and in which the self habitually speaks; by investigating how that terrain delimits our understanding of differences along lines of race, class, sex, and gender”—and I would add dis/ability to that list. Asking students to map their positioning within place can certainly lead to some of this reflective interrogation. As many of the instructors who have put forth mapping assignments have argued, it is by examining their positions on local issues (which may come after sketching a thorough representation of the physical spaces in which one resides) that students can develop a greater appreciation for why their mental terrain looks the way it does—with the hope that students learn “how that terrain delimits [their] understanding of difference” and thus has larger consequences and implications in society. For example, in the classes where I have used this assignment, these maps act as opportunities to write provisional usability instructions for individuals with disabilities (provisional in the sense that they would need to be tested and rearticulated with the assistance of individuals with disabilities if we had more time in the semester) or proposals for enacting spatial justice (again, with explicit attention to soliciting input and feedback from necessary stakeholders). Throughout these projects, I ask students to keep their attention on the individuals in their writing, which often is a valuable lesson for producing writing in workplace and civic settings once they graduate. Indeed, in some contexts, writing instructors tie place-based

proposals specifically to policy-based change. Jeffrey Bacha (2016: 285), for example, has students produce usability reports of campus space and then “prepare arguments intended for stakeholders outside of the classroom.” My hope, much like Bacha’s, is that students will use what they have learned to publicly advocate for change beyond the confines of our classroom and our semester.

Solely introspective work that asks students to critically dwell in (stay in, reside in, inhabit) their terrain can be tremendously fruitful, as demonstrated by previous mapping and place-based assignments. Yet, as Reynolds (2007: 141) cautions us, “dwelling can also prevent us from encountering difference—a shield from others, from those who do not occupy the same space.” I have proposed a way of asking students to continue to consider asking critical questions via mapping activities but in a way that takes the ideology of otherwise seemingly neutral designs to task.

While the assignment I have described occupies only a limited number of weeks in my semester, I could see a class centered entirely on accessibility, working more closely with the disabilities office on campus and formally connecting with individuals with disabilities. More formal engagement beyond the primary research component of this assignment with individuals with disabilities would certainly help to solidify the impact of inaccessible design for students. That is not to say, however, that students have absolutely no connection to individuals with disabilities as is. In their writing prompts, many students mention their friendships and family relationships with people with disabilities; such connections help students approach this assignment centered on people.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, a semester-long course centered on disability and place could also approach how intersectionality plays a role in issues of access. That is, students can begin to interrogate how race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity markers may impact the access that individuals with disabilities have to spaces. Such topics already begin to surface in this mapping activity. By the time the assignment sequence ends, students have come to gain a better understanding of how abilities are not inborn but, rather, are facilitated by different systemic structures. As Evan noted in response to one of his writing prompts,

One could argue that everyone has an “impairment” no matter how subtle because everyone is different from each other and have different capabilities. I would like to look at race and ethnicity more closely, and whether or not it has ever been disabling in recent human history. . . . Anybody of any race can be seen as having a disability

in terms of social inclusion because different parts of the globe are more or less welcoming to specific people of color.

He then goes on to explain how, during the civil rights movement, African Americans were socially and, in many cases, physically prevented from entering certain spaces. While I do not wish to conflate racism with ableism here, I do think that focusing on structures and places that facilitate and those that foreclose movement can highlight the intricate connection between ideology and design of spaces that dictates where bodies are and are not permitted to travel.

With that in mind, I do think that there is room to incorporate issues of disability and access in most courses and that they should not be reserved for special topics courses. Within my specific context, I have added to the discussions of usability within professional writing, but more broadly I have shown the benefits of extending conversations pertaining to place-based pedagogy to include matters of access, disability, and design. My hope is that instructors interested in these issues will continue to advance the scholarship on place-based pedagogy, given the potential rhetorical power that mapping has in and out of the classroom. In this way, I agree with Eric Mason (2009: 97) when he argues that constructing maps is a critical tool that is “necessary for full participation in a democratic polis.”<sup>8</sup> By asking our students to examine issues of access in the world, we can help them build the necessary connections with one another, which, as Dryer (2010) points out, is critical for physically changing our communities.

## Notes

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1. This is not to imply that all scholars within disability studies subscribe to the social model. Many have critiqued it for not placing enough attention to bodily impairments and for its epistemological definitions of *impairment* and *disability* (e.g., Hughes and Paterson 1997; Terzi 2004; Dewsbury et al. 2004).
2. This is reminiscent of John I. Gilderbloom and Mark S. Rosentraub’s (1990)

observation that, due to their social and physical barriers, American cities often become “invisible jails” for disabled individuals.

3. Typically, sophomores, juniors, and seniors are allowed to register for these courses, which are capped at twenty students.
4. All student names are pseudonyms. Students were asked for permission to use their maps and writing, and institutional review board exemption was granted (or granted retroactively) for all student work that appears in this essay.
5. Color versions of figures are available at fernandosanchez.org.
6. Indeed, Tobin Siebers (2008: 59) notes that “only 15 percent of people with disabilities are born with their impairments. Most people become disabled over the course of their life.”
7. This stance echoes many temporarily able-bodied researchers who have studied and written about issues of disability, who have noted that they have had to position themselves as outsiders given that they “only” see how individuals are impacted by disabling structures and policies and do not necessarily have a disability themselves (see, e.g., Dunn 2008: 96–97; Rodas 2015).
8. I see this as being true particularly in maps that showcase human geography, wherein the relationships between individuals and spaces are represented visually. Such mapping can be traced to Guy Debord’s ([1995] 2006: 8) description of *psychogeography*, a term coined for “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not on the emotions and behaviors of individuals,” which can help to uncover the ways that people make sense of space through their interactions with their surroundings.

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