Kindness in the Writing Classroom: Accommodations for All Students

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Abstract

In this essay, I remind readers that the composition classroom can be an apt model for how active learning should take place and that, as WPAs and writing teachers, we should consider interdisciplinary approaches that promote inclusivity for differently abled—and all—students. Perhaps it doesn't matter what abilities students have, as long as everyone is treated fairly, receives assignments that are built for success, is given extra time when requested, and is allowed to use a computer, for example. This benefits everyone and singles out no one. So why not accommodate all of our students in these ways? This essay examines inclusive pedagogical approaches in the context of several students' composition experiences—to what extent have active learning, universal design, or simply patient, thoughtful teaching affected their experiences in writing classrooms? Can't we just teach all students in a more friendly and humane way? I believe we can—and should.

A September, 2015, article in *The New York Times* "Sunday Review" addressed the notion of whether the college lecture format was unfair. The writer, Annie Murphy Paul, showed that some students who sit in lecture-based versus active learning classes are discriminated against and thus perform less well than other students (Paul). She pointed out that "minority, low-income, and first-generation students face a[nother] barrier in traditional lecture courses: a high-pressure atmosphere that may discourage them from volunteering to answer questions, or impair their performance if they are called on" (Paul).

Paul might just as well have been describing the experiences of students with physical, learning, or emotional disabilities; they are often similarly silenced. The good news for writing program administrators, faculty, and

students is that the typical writing classroom is the perfect model for how active learning can and should take place; this is learning and teaching that can benefit all students, and, in particular, those with so-called disabilities. In fact, when writing about the difficulties of being inclusive across the many types of college classes and classrooms that exist, Rick Godden and Anne-Marie Womack acknowledge that "it is not lost on us that our experiences with small writing-intensive classes are markedly different than those of instructors with hundreds of students in lecture halls" (n. pag.). The good news for most composition teachers is that we do teach in settings that allow for paying more close attention to each student. Thus, on a daily basis, we as writing teachers and administrators would rather do well by our students by considering what interdisciplinary approaches to teaching writing promote inclusivity, for differently abled—and, indeed, all—students. Being inclusive, for example, means creating assignments that give everyone a chance to succeed. Does it matter what abilities students have or don't have, as long as everyone is treated fairly, is given extra time when requested, and is allowed, perhaps, to use a computer? These practices benefit everyone and single out no one. So why not accommodate all of our students in these ways? As Jay Dolmage points out in his book *Disability and the Teaching of Writing*, can we plan for diversity in the classroom rather than react to it (21)? Can't we just teach all of our students in a more friendly and humane way?

Undertaken herein is an examination of inclusive writing-pedagogy approaches that would benefit all students as well as discussion of several students' academic experiences with and/or opinions of this idea. To what extent have active learning, universal design (Roberts et al. 5), or simply patient, thoughtful teaching affected their experiences or their perceptions of others' experiences? What if accommodations were offered to everyone? What would happen?

It was Paul's article as well as recent discussions about college writing with a new friend that brought these pedagogical matters to the forefront. I met a young woman, Donna, in my exercise class.[1] As I got to know her, I learned that she was in her early '30s and had taken dozens of classes at two local community colleges over a period of several years in an attempt to earn her associate's degree. She explained that she had multiple learning and anxiety issues, and she had trouble focusing and participating in the classroom, taking notes, reading effectively, and writing coherently, among other challenges. She had spent her high school and college careers struggling, being called stupid, feeling like a failure, and having zero confidence in herself academically and otherwise. Somehow, she had persevered and had gotten almost to the point of achieving her goal of an associate's degree,

but one course that stood between her and the degree. Her nemesis was Composition 2. She had taken it 11 times and had dropped it six times and outright failed it five times.

At the same time, we had discussed how our exercise class was helping with some of her focus issues, and at one point, I asked, "Why don't you try Comp 2 again?" So, she did. She ended up in a class with an instructor who was in tune with students with disabilities like Donna's—not to mention that this was a professor who understood how to work with the accommodations that were legally due Donna and others. She passed Comp 2 and got her associate's degree the following spring. Her confidence soared, she started taking additional classes (including math, another nemesis, and even creative writing courses), and she is now considering enrolling in the local four-year college (not where I work) to pursue her bachelor's degree. Her struggles with academic work continue, but her experience getting over that seemingly insurmountable hurdle has also increased her self-advocacy and her own attempts to make peace with her so-called disabilities.

Donna's story reminded me of some of the stories of my own students, and I realized that the reasons for these students' successes focused on their persistence and their professors' abilities to support them. It also occurred to me that many of the so-called accommodations that we are asked to provide for our students by our Disability Support Services (DSS) offices and by the students themselves are so simple and straightforward that we might consider whether they—or even some of them—could be afforded to all students, in some ways. In their article, "Making Disability Part of the Conversation: Combatting Inaccessible Spaces and Logics," Godden and Womack suggest that

> there is no *one* answer even within one classroom. In contrast to singular best practices such as a universal ban on screens in classrooms, disability studies promotes multi-modal options and flexible design. When information and tasks are presented across multiple modes, it opens choices for *all* users about how best to access that information (first emphasis in original; second emphasis added).

As it turns out, this broadened form of teaching and learning is not necessarily a new concept—at least not across elementary, secondary, and, somewhat more recently, post-secondary education. Many so-called accommodations for so-called learning disabilities fall under the category of the concepts known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) or Universal Design for Instruction (UDI), or, simply, Universal Design. While these concepts were developed with learning disabled (or differently abled) students in mind, Danielle Nielsen, in her article on UDL and first-year com-

position in *The CEA Forum,* points out that "As a praxis . . . UDL attempts to address all students' needs, not just those with disabilities, and suggests that rather than focusing on specific disabilities and interventions, teachers should ensure information is accessible in many different ways" (6).

This concept is borne out in the research in several ways. In their review of studies of UDI in postsecondary educational practice, Roberts, et al., documented a study in which a large-enrollment special education undergraduate course employed, among other theories, UDI principles to

> develop predictable and accessible instruction for individuals with diverse abilities, address their varied learning pace and prerequisite skills, minimize nonessential physical effort, stimulate student interest and attention by presenting information in different mediums [sic], and create a welcoming and inclusive instructional environment. Student evaluations indicated the course was better than other courses offered in the department and other undergraduate courses, including their particular appreciation for making course materials online. (12)

Certainly, this type of success in a large classroom bodes well for college writing classrooms, which, according to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, should be no more than 20 students.

The idea of offering accommodations to all students cuts across several layers in a writing program administrator's work—teacher training, classroom teaching, and student learning. However, my particular interest is not simply in what teachers of writing can/should/might/will do in this regard—we are certainly in charge of our own pedagogy, and much of what we do naturally no doubt follows UD principles, as described below. But what do students involved in such classrooms think of this idea? What would students with diagnosed disabilities think about allowing all students to have accommodations that were designed with differently abled students in mind, especially accommodations that the students might have worked hard to secure for themselves? On the other side of the coin, as it were, how would students without diagnosed disabilities feel about being afforded certain accommodations without being asked? In a student-centered approach to teaching, in which, as described by Stes and Van Petegem in their study of approaches to teaching, there is a "focus on what the students are doing . . . [and where] the teachers . . . help students develop their conceptions . . . or change their conceptions" (645); perhaps it's most appropriate—indeed, it's paramount—to ask the students.

Before getting to the students, though, just what accommodations are we talking about? I have mentioned several above. In his book, *Universal*

Design in Education: Teaching Nontraditional Students, Frank Bowe notes that

> universal design challenges us to think again about who should be responsible for accessibility . . . . Universal design asks us to look at courses, texts, schedules, and other aspects of education: Is it really necessary for teachers to present the great bulk of our instruction via speech? Isn't there a way, or aren't there several ways, for us to offer much of the same material visually . . . ? Of course, the obverse obtains as well: Must we assign only printed materials for student reading? Can't we find audible (spoken) versions, too, and make those available for people who need or prefer them? (2).

Bowe (and others) describe seven (or nine for higher education) principles for Universal Design, which boil down to a few simple ideas:

> present information in multiple ways . . . offer multiple ways for students to interact and respond to curricula and materials . . . provide multiple ways for students to find meaning in the material and thus motivate themselves . . . make good use of . . . course web pages. (4–5)

Further into the twenty-first century, of course, this latter point means accessible course management systems and other digital technologies, but these remain valid principles, as discussed by Roberts, et al. (6–7), in the following list:

Principles of Universal Design in Higher Education

- **Equitable use**: Accessing course information, such as syllabi, in a variety formats, including print, disk, and online.
- **Flexibility in use**: Varying instructional methods, including lecture, discussion, and individual and group activities.
- **Simple and intuitive**: Clearly describing course expectations for grading, in different formats, for example narrative and rubrics.
- **Perceptible information**: Using videos that include subtitles, or captioning, for those who may not hear, for whom English is not a first language, or for those who have trouble processing verbal information.
- **Tolerance for error**: Providing ongoing and continual feedback on coursework rather than at specified interim periods, such as mid-term or final exams.
- **Low physical effort**: Providing lecture notes, so students who have difficulty taking notes do not need to take notes.

- **Size and space for approach and use**: Making seating easily accessible, if possible, so everyone can see each other and communicate with one another directly. Circular seating may address this principle.
- **Community of learners**: Creating a variety of learning settings, for example, use of email groups, social networking sites, or chat rooms.
- **Instructional climate**: Including a statement in the syllabus indicating the desire to meet the instructional needs of all students and for students to convey their needs to the instructor.

Several years later in 2006, again as described by Roberts et al, a study was conducted by McGuire and Scott with focus groups

> to explore the validity of UDI as a new construct . . . Instructional methods described by the student participants that make up a "good" college course included: clear expectations, organizational materials such as course outlines and study guides, information presented in multiple formats (e.g., lecture with visuals), affirmative classroom experiences, associating information with aspects of real life, frequent formative feedback, supportive of diverse learning needs, and effective assessment strategies . . . The authors noted that participant reports regarding attributes of high quality college courses . . . parallel the guiding principles of UDI. (9)

Writing Classroom UDI-Influenced Pedagogies

It is, perhaps, obvious from the list above how these ideas might work in the writing classroom, but what are some specific suggestions? In a perfect academic world, here's a start:

- Offer all students the option to use a laptop or other typing device in the classroom for informal writing as well as for in-class tests (if the latter is even necessary).
- Offer all students the option to use electronic books and/or online texts of some sort.
- Provide deadline extensions for both in-class and out-of-class writing assignments when requested/possible, or offer blanket extensions.
- Minimize lecture in the classroom and in office hours.
- Offer extended time on essay tests—or any tests.
- Provide written feedback on essay drafts.
- Provide clear/concise/written essay assignment sheets.
- Offer teacher-provided class notes (when relevant).

So, now, finally, to the students. I had informal conversations with six college students (three of whom replied via email and three of whom replied

in conversation), with varying degrees of learning disabilities—or no diagnosed learning disabilities—who have recent experience in writing classrooms in high school and college. None of them were my students; in fact, none of them attend my institution. I asked them a series of open-ended questions (Appendix A) about their experiences with and/or observations of accommodations in the writing classroom. Did diagnosed students who were offered writing-related accommodations use them? Were they helpful? Were they (and non-diagnosed students) aware of other students who used accommodations? What benefit (if any) did such students enjoy? What is the opinion of both diagnosed and non-diagnosed students regarding offering all students accommodations in the writing classroom?

Generally speaking, the students seem to have no significant problems with making so-called accommodations available to all students, although a few of the students did take varying levels of issue with the idea. While the logistics of some of these accommodations could be difficult (Donna—the student mentioned above who does receive official accommodations—mentioned that perhaps not every student can get preferential classroom seating or alternate-site testing, for example), the idea of creating academic situations in which students can do better on their writing assignments makes sense to them. As Kevin (a student who does not receive official accommodations) points out, "Students should without exception be offered whatever accommodations are needed to allow them to achieve their maximum individual writing potential."

However, there were student concerns that focus on the ways that non-learning-disabled students might take advantage of some of these accommodations. The most common concern is that, if all students were allowed to have laptops in the classroom, they could take advantage of the opportunity to, for example, look up answers to questions that they should know from the reading that they should have done, or engage in even less productive work, like scrolling their social media sites or engaging in online shopping or checking their fantasy sports teams. This was both Saima's (a student who does not receive accommodations) and Georgie's (a student who did receive accommodations) concern—and it has been one of many instructors with whom I've spoken over the years. Of course, I share this concern. However, a savvy instructor can work with these kinds of concerns—there are software programs available that allow a teacher to glance at the screens of the students from his/her own console screen and send messages of warning to stay on task. I have used one or two of these tools in the past, including the DyKnow classroom management software. This type of product can also be used to some positive effect to prevent cheating on in-class tests, which could provide a way for teachers in larger

classes to implement across-the-board laptop access. In fact, in any setting, access to the internet can be disabled for a certain period of time or the whole class, if requested. This is similar to what some schools provide for students with DSS accommodations when they're taking in-class tests: an internet-disabled laptop. Steve (a student who does receive accommodations) mentioned that, at his current institution, he is often given such a tool to take tests, since he is granted the opportunity to type his responses on assessments.

Steve's experience and opinion lead to a concern that he has, which is that perhaps not all students should be offered accommodations. He questions whether the level playing field that accommodations are designed to provide would, indeed, still be level if everyone got the accommodations. He does not believe that accommodations should be offered to all students, because "the accommodation is intended to level the playing field and provide students with learning and/or physical disabilities the opportunity to produce their best work, which truly would not be possible for them to do otherwise." Even with Steve's physical disability, he types slowly—it's a symptom of his fine-motor-skills problem. If others without that disability are also allowed to use the computer, Steve points out, they would potentially type faster than others and thus could write more in the same amount of time. If essay length were valued by teachers or scorers, that would then give the non-disabled student a further advantage. Of course, this is the case anyway—some students think and write (and type) faster than others. One would assume that the typing would benefit everyone, but not necessarily. But then perhaps the students could get extended time on such assessments, which is another reasonable accommodation that is commonly afforded to students in certain situations. Georgie also pointed out that there is a sense that giving accommodations to everyone might not be fair for people who truly need them, that it would be as if they were taking advantage of the teacher.

Interestingly, however, Donna, who also has the accommodation to use a computer to take notes and tests, doesn't take advantage of that one, because, she says, "I hate computers and I write faster then [sic] I type. It would help with spelling but I hate computers!! I am getting better though so I decided to keep that on the list, maybe one day I will use it." In fact, Donna chose to hand-write her survey answers rather than type them out. For her part, Donna does not have an issue with all students being offered accommodations, because, she says, it could help them get a better grade.

> I think everyone has a LD even a little bit. Mine is just more noticable[sic]. . . . I think all the accommdations [sic] should be offered to all students – not just certain ones, with permission [sic] of the instructor of course.

Donna's point brings to mind one of my own students. I didn't interview this student (or any of my own students), but in office hours recently, he commented about using computers in the classroom—he's a slow typist and worries about getting everything done in class. (If it's not obvious already, I allow all my students to use their university-issued laptops in class for in-class writing exercises.) He says he does not have a diagnosed disability and thus is not working with the DSS office, so I told him to simply let me know if he needed any more time to complete an in-class writing assignment and I would give him extra time (beyond class time) to submit. I don't know if he would have even brought this up if we were not chatting one-on-one outside of the classroom. This brings up the very important issue of students who are not diagnosed or who have not self-disclosed and who might benefit from this kind of accommodation. Much has been written about disclosure of hidden disabilities; suffice it to say that, as Alexandrin et al have pointed out,

> though they will acknowledge that there are advantages to people being unaware of their disability, like not having low expectations inflicted upon them [see Nick, below] or not being stared at, the risk and fear people with hidden disabilities face over needing to disclose often outweigh the comfort of their invisibility. (377–78)

Yet another student concern revealed by the surveys focused on the notion of extensions. One non-diagnosed student, Michaela, wondered whether blanket extensions are appropriate or helpful. To explain, she pointed out that extensions that are given a day or two before an essay is due because several people asked the professor for an extension can be considered unfair and even off-putting. In her case, she gauges her other work according to assignment due dates. If she has worked on that paper because it's due Friday and then finds out Thursday she has more time on it, that can be upsetting if, for example, she had given less attention to another class or another assignment because she had the Friday due date on the essay in question. If she had known earlier that she would have had more time, then she might have been able to give better time to other projects or assignments or meetings or clubs or her other commitments. My best response to this concern is to explain, vis-à-vis due dates, that students can be given blanket notice that anyone who needs an extension is welcome to ask for one, with sufficient time before the due date—at least 24 hours is my normal practice.

This way no individual or group is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged, and it allows the individual student's academic situation to remain a private matter between the student and the professor.

On the other hand, the students who had been diagnosed with one or more learning or other disabilities said they liked the idea that, if everyone were given accommodations, it might be less obvious that they were the few in the class with the so-called learning disabilities. Some students described feeling embarrassed, at first, by being highlighted (either intentionally or unintentionally) by a teacher endeavoring to make their accommodations available to them. Both Georgie and Donna mention the stigma factor (Georgie's term) associated with being a student with official accommodations. Donna points out that she wishes more professors had training in how to deal with accommodations—she says that she's had professors who didn't know what accommodations were, and, on the other hand, she has had a

> few instructors say in front of the class, I think without thinking, not wanting to cause a problem, '[Donna] don't forget the test in the LD office.' That's embrassing [sic]—now the entire class knows. I think if all students were allowed accommdations [sic] I wouldn't have to worry about all the list [of accommodations] above. We would fit more in[sic].

In that vein, Saima described situations where students with learning disabilities actually helped the whole class, such as when an assignment wasn't clear. In that event, if the LD students asked for more clarity, they and everyone else got the improved information or response from the professor or teaching assistant. This observation points to the idea that UDL-based assignments are good for all students, not just students with so-called learning disabilities.

The literature reflecting the student perspective on this particular issue—accommodations for all students in the writing classroom—appears rather thin. Most of it focuses on learning disabled students who were commenting on their experiences in the general college classroom, not necessarily a writing classroom. However, in "Learning Differences: The Perspective of LD Students" by Patricia Dunn, I was particularly struck by Nick, an LD student who, when asked about dos and don'ts for teachers, pointed out the following:

> I guess there's numerous dos and don'ts, but probably the number one don't would be to look at [students with learning disabilities] differently—because a student usually is uncomfortable with their disability anyway, and any time a teacher almost looks down upon them

> and says, 'You don't have to do this quality of work because you have
> a disability,' that, in my mind, says that they don't think that we can
> do the work, so therefore they're not making us do the work. There-
> fore, they set a lower standard, and that perpetuates a continuously
> low quality of work. I see that happen continuously in high school as
> well as college. (149)

This is a very important perspective, and one that should make all teach-
ers—and writing teachers in particular—pause and think about how we
deal with our expectations of all of our students, whether learning disabled
or not.

As Godden and Womack point out in "Combatting Inaccessible Spaces
and Logics,"

> this debate is about more than the best way to take notes. It is about
> the assumptions instructors make about students. It's about the nar-
> ratives educators construct about learning. All too often, underlying
> discussions of appropriate student behavior and traditional best prac-
> tices are narrow visions of students' abilities and classroom praxis.
> Seeing a study [sic] body as an undifferentiated group leads to strict
> rules and single solutions. (n.pag.)

Is it an overstatement to claim that this discussion is an issue of human
decency and ethical treatment of students? Of what benefit is it to be hesi-
tant about offering accommodations to everyone or discouraging students
from asking for favors or breaks? What is the harm of setting up situations
in which students can actually learn to write better? There must be ways of
making accommodations available to all students that are still deferential
to the ways we make specialized accommodations available for differently
abled students. And, has been mentioned, the generally-offered accommo-
dations might even help non-diagnosed LD students or students who have
hidden their disabilities, which could be an excellent unintended outcome.
According to the National Council on Disability, about eleven percent of
undergraduates have a disability —however, how many of us can say with
confidence that we have even ten percent of self-disclosing diagnosed stu-
dents in our classrooms? There must be many students who are going unno-
ticed and are thus potentially unserved.

There are reasonable concerns that could be and have been expressed
regarding these ideas; some of them are based on academic freedom, some
are based on access, and some are based on comfort level, among other
issues. Certainly many faculty lack a comfort level with introducing these
ideas into their classrooms. As Donna said above, teachers need to be
trained. Of course there is the issue of academic freedom—faculty should

be allowed to teach in the ways that work for them. Generally speaking, no one would decry a faculty member's reliance on print media or hand-written notes—it is the stuff of traditional education. But I would submit that writing faculty need to consider rethinking their reliance on what John Jones, in his article, "The Situational Approach to Learning with New Media," calls "the nostalgia approach" to teaching with (or without) media (Jones), and I would extend his ideas to teaching with accommodations. He says that "to the extent that electronic devices do not fit in *that* cultural context . . . they are considered bad (for society/kids)." And surely, not all students—or faculty—have access to the electronic devices (the technology) that open opportunities for writing. But this is changing. Many students with and without so-called disabilities have access to, for example, laptop computers and smartphones.

Jones would add that some faculty, as they relate to technology use (or avoidance), are focused on the "work habits approach," which implies that people do their best work by following certain habits—but he contends that it is "important to not let habits close us off to new opportunities for learning" (n. pag.). He ultimately suggests a "situational approach," which "is respectful of the other two approaches, while simultaneously clear-eyed about the potential benefits (and drawbacks) of new technologies" and new ways of teaching. He points out that "when it comes to learning, we should be always open to questioning our own processes and assumptions, particularly as the material and social conditions of our learning change." (Jones). This should extend to teaching. It would be my recommendation that writing faculty should constantly consider, situationally, what types of accommodations can work in their classrooms. Academic freedom means nothing if it, in effect, imprisons students in the professor's ideal world.

Indeed, what about the students? Who speaks for the students? I believe that students want to write better and teachers want to teach writing better. Perhaps some of the ideas expressed herein could be a start. From the perspective of access to technology, these ideas are admittedly based on a few important premises, and not all WPAs, writing teachers, and even students are at a place (literally and figuratively) in their teaching/learning careers, in their programs, and/or in their institutions to fully embrace these tenets. Indeed, these philosophies of teaching/learning probably require writing faculty to consider whether the following principles are realistic in their settings:

1. Writing classes are small (no more than 20 people).

2. Students have laptops or other mobile devices—or access to them.

3. Students and teachers are comfortable with technology.

4. Teachers are aware of their own disabilities, biases, pet peeves, hang-ups, and are willing to work with them—or let them go, if necessary.

5. Teachers value kindness and are willing to help students learn and succeed rather than expecting them to do it alone. (It's important, as some teachers instead value toughness—and for good reasons.)

6. Teachers want to reflect and improve.

7. Teachers want to reach more students.

Certainly as WPAs and writing teachers we should regularly reflect on our practice. As noted by Juli Kramer in her article, "A Deweyan Reflection," we need to see problems from a different perspective. She contends that, by

> engaging in a methodical process [of reflection], teachers can examine and think about choices, methods, experiences, and other aspects of classroom life in order to uncover and understand what works, what does not, and perhaps identify paradigms that put up barriers to more effective learning (76).

In fact, I have come to realize that some of my so-called accommodations, which I thought were so helpful, might not be. The practice of allowing all students laptop access is a critical one at my university, as all undergraduate students are issued laptops as part of their academic programs. Many faculty do not allow laptops in the classrooms. I do—and require their use. However, I can think of situations (as have been described herein) in almost all of my classes where, even though everyone is typing, one or two students still took a while to type out their responses to, say, an in-class writing prompt. In this case, I can see where allowing everyone to have a laptop in the classroom may not be helpful. Maybe those students type slowly, maybe they take a while to compose their thoughts, maybe they struggle to do on-call writing/typing. Certainly if they asked me for more time or to post their response later, I would allow it, but it's interesting, nonetheless, to realize that the laptop may not actually help everyone. And yet for some people it's critical.

I also find myself thinking about whether I give too many accommodations—in other words, if a student has only certain accommodations on his/her list, do I give the student the benefit of the doubt in other areas just because I have a DSS letter? Do I expect less of her/him? Or does that just feed into my theory of giving everyone everything I can give, assuming it will help a lot of people and hoping it won't hurt anyone?

Ultimately, this pedagogical work rests on the idea of giving. When we teach, we are giving students us, and they are giving us them. In talking about the classroom as a home, where the teacher is hospitable to her/his students, Kramer gives life to students/guests:

> They are people with their own worth, experiences, and feelings. Teachers will always have the responsibility to control and shape student behavior and their classroom experience, but by putting on the lens of hospitality and kindness, they reframe how they work within and use their authority. (83)

It seems that, in our own ways, if we can be kind, inclusive, and understanding—while still challenging our students in the process—we can help our students learn through and about writing. They might become better writers—and we might become better teachers.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms. This research was determined to be exempt from IRB-required approval.

Appendix A: Questionnaire: Accommodations in the Writing Classroom

1) How many years of college have you completed? If you've graduated, when did you graduate and with what degree?

2) As a high school or college student, were you diagnosed with one or more learning, emotional, or physical disabilities?

3) If so, and if you feel comfortable sharing, which one(s)?

4) If you were not so diagnosed (or even if you were), did you know anyone in high school or college who was diagnosed with such disabilities? Do you know which ones?

5) If you did have such a diagnosis or if you did know people with such diagnoses, what accommodations did you receive (or are you aware others received) in classes that featured a significant amount of writing (two or more essays or papers)? These accommodations might have been untimed essay tests, extended time on papers, use of a computer in the classroom, and so on. Please list and any all accommodations that you either received and/or that you're aware that others received.

6) If you did receive such accommodations or knew people who did, how helpful (as far as you know) were these accommodations to the

students' academic achievement? Please describe how helpful they were as best you can.

7) As far as you know, were these accommodations not helpful? Please describe, as best you can, how they were not helpful.

8) Have you ever received such accommodations in a writing class without being asked if you needed and/or wanted them? If so, which accommodations and what is your opinion about that experience?

9) Do you think that accommodations for differently abled students should be offered to all students – at least those that involve writing? Why or why not?

10) If you think accommodations should be universally offered, do you think all accommodations should be offered or just certain ones? If just certain ones, which ones would be appropriate for all students?

11) Is there anything else about your (or others') experiences with accommodations in the writing classroom that you would like to share or add to what you've said above?

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