C S D E C

Center for the Study of Disability, Education and Culture

College of Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis • One University Boulevard • St. Louis, Missouri 63121

OUR MISSION

The Center for the Study of Disability and Culture is an academic organization dedicated to the scholarly study of the meanings of disability within human experience and cultural structures, processes, and representations.

OUR VALUES

The Center believes that all of our activities should reflect a clear adherence to a set of values that recognizes the rights and responsibilities of people with disabilities and their families to be fully participating citizens in our community and the cultural institutions that help define that citizenship. While we expect these values to evolve as they respond to changing circumstances, the following beliefs will guide us in all of our planning and activities:

a. Disability is an important part of human diversity and should be valued for its contributions to our life and culture.

b. Disability is a central part of human experience and its place in the curriculum at all levels of higher education should reflect that centrality;

c. People with disabilities and their families have the right to be included in all aspects of society and all dimensions of our culture;

People with disabilities and their families should be involved in all aspects of research and education that affect their quality of life and cultural participation, including those activities sponsored by the Center;

OUR APPROACH

The Center begins with the assumption that both “disability” and “culture” are unavoidably plural in meaning and that an equally pluralistic approach to scholarship is needed to describe, interpret and understand those meanings.

We approach disability as unavoidably social in nature. This is not to say that disability in all of its various forms and categories may not be associated with specific physical, cognitive, emotional or other conditions. However, it does imply that such conditions can never be fully explored or understood outside of the social policies and cultural representations that shape the questions we ask and the answers we find. Our approach to the study of disability, then, will reflect this centrality of cultural context.

We also intend the term “culture” to be broadly inclusive of all those beliefs, practices, settings and social arrangements through which we collectively identify and define ourselves and others. We want to explore disability and culture in all their variations.

Finally, and as implied by our understanding of disability and culture, our approach to research and teaching will be open and pluralistic. Research should be rigorous and consistent with the highest standards of the scholarly inquiry in all its disciplines. Teaching should be inclusive, participatory, critical

and reflective. There is more than one way to do both well.

a. The third broad area of Center activities will be a series of annual events and activities that will attempt to bring discussion of our issues and approaches to a larger academic and community audience. Some of these events will sponsor scholarly presentations and academic forums by Center faculty and affiliated researchers. Others will bring in national and international speakers or performers to share their work with our local community. Finally, many of these activities will provide opportunities for interaction and exchange between the disability studies research community and the larger community of disability advocates, educators and human service professionals.

i. **Annual Colloquium and Lecture Series**

This will typically be a special event built around a guest speaker or performer of national or international prominence in the disability studies fields of study.

ii. **Annual Symposium or Conference**

This will be a one or two-day gathering of local and national scholars and advocates looking at specific issues of cultural practice and representation that affect people with disabilities and their families.

Collaborative Events with Community Organizations and Institutes

These events will arise from discussions with members of the disability community in St. Louis and will reflect current topics of concern or interest. The format will vary from event to event but will attempt to be participatory and inclusive in both planning and content. We foresee most of these being events where the Center serves as a co-sponsor with one or more disability organizations from the community.