

Opening Remarks before Madelaine Reis's Workshop

Welcome to "Disability, Access, and Teaching: A One-Day Symposium"!

My name is Tanja Aho, and together with Perry Zurn, Monica Morin, and Marissa Zuckerman, we organized this event in order to provide a space for a richer conversation about disability and access. Since we decided to begin the day with a student-led workshop and not the keynote, you will hear me say these things twice, but I think they bear repeating. First and foremost, please do whatever you need to make this space more accessible to you: you can move around, lie on the floor, you can knit, stim, rock, flap your hands, stand against a wall, look out the window, or leave and re-enter as you like. I have learned to say this from Lezlie Frye, who used to be a performer with Sins Invalid, a performance project that centers artists with disabilities, especially artists of color and queer and gender-variant artists, and who is now an Assistant Professor of American Studies and Disability Studies at the University of Utah. I have learned almost all of my access hacks from other disabled colleagues and friends, and in that spirit we offer today as a space in which we are attempting to model access. We can always only be partially successful in this endeavor, but we can always strive to be a bit better. Thus, we welcome and encourage your feedback throughout the day. You will be handed white and color notecards during every session: these are meant to collect feedback and questions. The color notecards are for the particular session, and the white notecards are for the closing roundtable, in which we will revisit the day's insights, lessons, and discuss what kinds of outcomes and ideas for future access initiatives at AU we would like to witness. Please also wait to use the mic whenever making a comment or asking a question and start by saying your name. This helps everyone hear better and allows us to create a stronger learning community.

I will offer a more detailed framing and thank yous to co-sponsors before our keynote, so let me at this point just say this: even though I have only been at AU for seven months, I have already met so many dedicated, passionate, and welcoming people at American University who deeply care about creating more accessible and inclusive learning and working environments. I am beyond thrilled that we received such generous support from AU to organize this event, so that we can learn more from each other and in that learning center the experiences of disabled students, faculty, and staff. As people with disabilities, we bring a range of perspectives and a particular set of lived experiences to American University that is unique. We have ways of relating, cooperating, and caring that everyone can learn and profit from. And I am so grateful that Madelaine Reis, Research Associate at the AU Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP) and a current Masters of Political Communications student with the School of Public Affairs at American University, has generously offered to share her self-designed Disability 101 workshop with us, so that we can start off into this day of conversation with a shared understanding of what disability and access can be. Please help me in welcoming Madelaine.