



november-december 2021

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diversity equity & inclusion

# newsletter

## supporting disabilities in academia

### editor's note:

*In the interest of encouraging dialogue and engagement with the perspectives and ideas shared in the newsletter, each of our main articles will now include reflection questions. Consider using these articles and reflection question for a moment of introspection or as a starting point for conversations about DEI in your lab meetings or with colleagues. These questions do not promise definite, straight-forward nor comfortable answers. These questions aim to cultivate more empathetic and honest discourse.*



## learning environment for DSP

special guest writer Dr. Kelly Agenew

The best advice I can give for instructors is don't differentiate **DSP** students from everybody else: try to get to know all of your students as human beings. Learn their names and the pronouns they use, and model those in class as best you can. Learn where they come from. I usually a survey and ask them

to help me pronounce their name correctly and to tell me something interesting about themselves—it helps me remember who they are, and can serve as an entry point to conversations to get to know them better. Face masks have made it difficult to learn or recognize people quickly; it's fine to ask students to remind you who they are. If you are teaching a class with more than 50 students, it can be difficult to learn everybody's name if you aren't interacting with them regularly. Still make the attempt. For your students with DSP accommodations, it is especially important to meet them early in the semester, get

to know them, make it clear that you'll do what you can to meet their accommodations, and clearly set out the course expectations.

DSP letters usually come to the instructor of record, but sometimes GSIs. Letters are accessed through the DSP's new online system, called **AIM**. The AIM portal also allows instructors to schedule exam dates. The system puts the responsibility for coordinating exams and other arrangements squarely on students. Additionally, the DSP office recently moved to University Hall—access their space from University Ave, about halfway west on the block, and down to the level below the street. The DSP office houses the Disability Specialists and manages student accommodations for exams. The basement of University Hall is an absolute warren, so advise your students who might be taking exams at the DSP offices to find their testing location early.

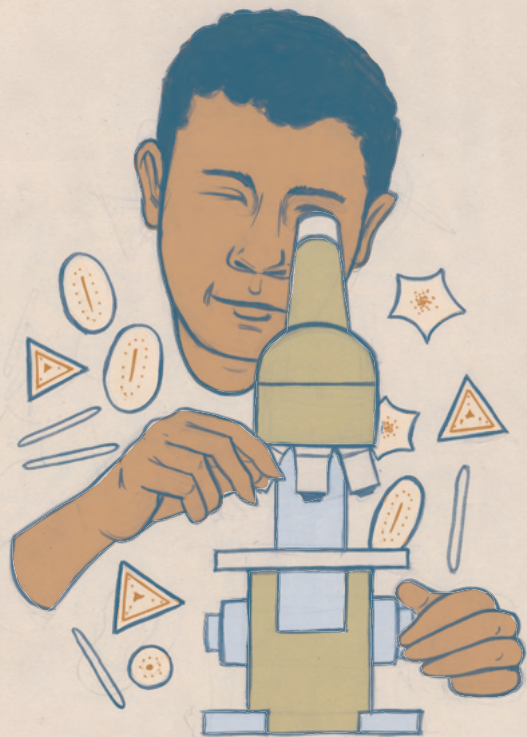
Exam accommodations must be scheduled well in advance. If you are giving an exam on paper, exams must be delivered in person to the DSP office by 4.00pm the day before the exam. You will have to return to the DSP office to retrieve your paper exams. DSP needs the exam 48 hours in advance if you send it electronically. This is probably one of the most challenging aspects for instructors—I rarely have my exams completely finished 48 hours in advance, because the content I can cover and the breadth and depth I expect students to understand changes semester to semester. Fortunately, IB has support staff who manage some DSP accommodations in VLSB. But, as the number of students requiring accommodations grows, it will be challenging to fund and staff the support needed, as well as find appropriate space in VLSB. We will have to redirect DSP students to the University Hall offices.

The student's DSP accommodation is confidential. Do not talk about it in conversations with anybody not involved in that course's instruction and try to keep conversations with individual DSP students about their accommodations private—it's *not* okay to chat casually with them after class if you can't maintain some privacy or prevent other students from walking up on a conversation. Keep those exchanges

to email or for office hours when other students are not present. DSP letters do not tell you the specific nature of a student's disability, and disabilities can vary widely. Most common are requests for extra time on exams, like 150%-200% time, or a testing environment removed from the rest of the class. If there are vision disabilities, sometimes the exam needs to be printed larger, or given on a computer where graphics can be magnified.

Be aware that the nature of accommodations varies from institution to institution. For example, UC Berkeley allows time extensions on homework and take-home assignments, rescheduling exams if the student has more than one on a particular day, and extended time on practical examinations. Other universities do *not* allow these accommodations.

It's in the best interest of the student, the class, and University if you continue to expect the highest quality of academic performance. Accommodations may need to be adjusted to meet the requirements of the course, and they must be reasonable. If you have concerns about the requested accommodations, or their effect on your course, contact DSP.





It gets complicated if a student cannot take an exam during the same time and day as the rest of the class. It's not fair to the rest of the class if a particular student takes the exam up to three days after the regular exam date; it can delay your returning graded exams to students and it might mean you need to create multiple forms of an exam in order to minimize the chance of potential academic dishonesty. The policy is clear that the accommodation cannot compromise academic integrity, but some students will still be awarded exams scheduled after the rest of the class has taken the test. It puts the instructor in a bind because it's also not fair to give the DSP student an exam that is different from the exam that the rest of the class takes. Furthermore, the DSP office requires an instructor to be available by phone during the time a student is taking the exam. But, if the instructor is not contacted about their schedule, the student might schedule an exam during a time when the instructor is teaching another class. It is not reasonable to expect the instructor to be "on call" during a time they are delivering content to other students. It takes careful coordination and attention to these details, and in my opinion, verges on unreasonable demands of the instructor.

Some DSP students enter and leave the classroom at different times. It can be distracting to other students (and to you while lecturing), but most students try to minimize the disruption. On exam days, some students will be absent altogether. While this identifies DSP students to the rest of the class, most people understand that there are DSP students with accommodations. UC has made efforts to ensure ADA-compliance in our classrooms, but keep an eye out for students who may need arrangements they hadn't anticipated. This is true for *all* of our students. Some rooms might be missing desks appropriate for people using wheelchairs, or that are more comfortable for larger-bodied people. Sometimes rooms have dim lighting, broken flip desks or inadequate surface area. There's not nearly enough seating for left-handed people in some rooms—try to make sure every student is in as comfortable a setting as possible for exams.

Field courses present particular challenges for people with chronic conditions or physical limitations—very few field courses I've taught have been wheelchair accessible or appropriate for the visually or hearing impaired. There's little you can reasonably do to alter those courses that would not fundamentally change the nature of the class and the content you deliver. It's a good to have a statement in the course catalog and syllabus making students aware that there may be situations that are atypical of an indoor classroom. Students are entitled to have their disability-related needs met in their coursework, but accommodations also cannot impose an undue burden on the instructors that would compromise their ability to deliver course content to the entire class. Accommodations should also not fundamentally change course content or how the course is delivered.

The expectation is that our courses are taught in spoken English. Hearing-impaired students often face some of the same challenges encountered by many people in the UC Berkeley community for whom English is not a first language. When speaking and writing course materials, avoid idiomatic phrases and speak carefully and clearly. Wearing face masks and microphones has made understanding spoken content even more difficult, and lip-reading near impossible. Classrooms that have

Course Capture capability can caption spoken content, but this service is not available in most smaller classrooms and labs on campus. ASL interpreters can be provided, but it is the student's responsibility to contact DSP to make those arrangements.

There are ways DSP has certainly changed pedagogy for all students. For example, we no longer give pop quizzes—there is no way to meet accommodations for all students by giving an unannounced five-minute quiz. Quizzes remain a great way for students to gauge their understanding and for instructors to assess how effectively they deliver content. Many instructors use small-stakes, online quizzes with a 24-hour deadline to assess student understanding of the content. The pandemic has meant that many students are going to have unpredictable attendance, so using quizzes as a means of taking attendance has been discouraged for now.

There is probably some disparity in student access to disability diagnoses. Students from some school systems or communities may not have been aware of their disability or were never evaluated. You can include a link to the DSP office on your syllabus and in other course materials. But, it is important to avoid asking a student directly if they identify with having a disability; disclosure is protected under the ADA.

Finally, when you are asked for letters of recommendation, you should not disclose a student's DSP status—you have no idea whether they are applying to graduate or professional schools with accommodation. Some medical, dental and veterinary schools still have forms for recommendation writers to evaluate visual acuity, manual dexterity/surgical aptitude, bench skills, and mental calculation speed. For DSP students, you may have to respond with "no opportunity to evaluate or compare". Hopefully you will have had a conversation with the letter-requesting student beforehand, ensuring that you can write a letter that will showcase the student's potential to best advantage, but that will also maintain your reputation as a reference and the potential program's interest in attracting qualified students. Ultimately, the instructor's role is to set up all of our students to fulfill their potential. It is up to the student to do the rest.



### reflection questions:

1. To be successful, what are some reasonable accommodations that a student may need that would not be categorized as a disability related ?
2. In service to others, it's easy to overextend or experience burn-out, to the deficit of one's own wellbeing and goals. How do you personally negotiate the distinction between reasonable accommodation and undue burden in your work? What steps can be taken to alleviate those burdens?
3. Dr. Agnew suggests that there are students who could benefit from DSP accommodations but for varying reasons are unaware of their eligibility. What strategies do or can you implement to raise awareness of this service and those it can help?



## disability and community on campus: an interview with Ann Wai-Yee Kwong

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by Taronina Lepore  
Hlusko Lab

*Ann Wai-Yee Kwong creates, implements, and evaluates innovative strategies around empowerment, education, and collaboration with marginalized communities in her current roles as Coordinator of the new **Disability Cultural Community Center (DCC)** at UC Berkeley and graduate student at UC Santa Barbara. Her intersectional identity and lived experience as a first-generation college student, Chinese American woman, and blind professional greatly guide her work and research. Before coming to UC Berkeley, Kwong worked as a Program Manager at the Light House for the Blind in San Francisco, where she supported the transition of young adults who are blind/low vision as they pursue post-secondary education or navigate the pathway to employment.*

*Growing up, Kwong had never heard of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, nor knew of disability history, yet she personally felt the profound impact of societal perceptions and expectations around disability identity, often portrayed in limiting and derisive terms. It was at Berkeley that Kwong discovered, for the first time, feelings of agency through cultivating disability commu-*

**Although the Americans with Disabilities Act has provided many educational rights as well as opportunities for the disabled community, negative societal perceptions of disabilities in education persist.**

*nity and identity with her peers. Kwong aims to bring a positive philosophy, empowering students to reimagine their futures at Berkeley as she engages with the broader community to create a bold space and cultivate authentic connections at the DCC.*

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**As the new coordinator for the Disability Cultural/Community Center (DCC), what can you tell us about this new initiative and the importance of a cultural center like this one?**

As a Cal grad and member of the disability community, I am honored and humbled to be in this new role, partnering with the campus disability community to promote disability presence, access, and inclusion. During the first few months in my role, I met weekly with an advisory committee of disabled students, faculty, and staff to determine the mission and core values of the first DCC at Berkeley. During these foundational conversations, the phrases “community not compliance” and a “sense of home” resonated with me. Subsequently, I felt that it is important

for the mission of the center to provide a safe and social space for the Cal disability community to build authentic connections and support one another. The space is intentionally designed by, for, and with the disability community to serve as a platform to advocate, educate, and collaborate among students, faculty, and staff living with disabilities to advance and empower both the community on campus and beyond so persons with disabilities can fully learn, work, and live with dignity. It is also critical for the campus community to recognize and honor the energy and efforts of generations of disability activists from Ed Roberts (the Rolling Quads) in the 1960s to student change makers including Katie and Alena who contributed to the establishment of the DCC. I hope our core values can continue to build upon the legacy of previous generations as we aim to:

*1. Advocate with and for the disability community and disability justice movements to be represented and included on campus as well as provide a safe and social space for cultural activities to celebrate disability, and foster a sense of community for students, staff, and alumni to encourage authentic networks and leadership development.*

*2. Empower, equip, and educate members of the disability community with resources and a living disability historical archive to foster disability identity and share innovation with campus partners to advance equity and excellence.*

*3. Collaborate with various campus partners and departments to infuse and situate disability as a greater part of the social fabric of diversity at UC Berkeley and seamlessly integrate access into physical, curricular, social, and digital environments where perceptions around disability can be reframed from a deficit to a value-based framework to include disability perspectives and expertise across campus initiatives*

Whether folks are new to the disability community, have had a long relationship with their

Ann Wai-Yee Kwong,  
Coordinator of the Disability  
Cultural Community Center,  
UC Berkeley.



disability identity, or is an ally who is interested in learning about the disability experience, we invite you to join us and visit the DCC as well as participate in disability awareness activities!

**How could different departments, like Integrative Biology, help spread disability awareness and advocacy within our classroom and research communities, and be more supportive of disabled community members? For example, in our teaching of human biological diversity, what might help us center disabled people within that fold?**

As with many social and rights movements, the disability rights and independent living movements and campus departments such as IB,

must continue to grow and incorporate diverse perspectives and individuals from marginalized identities, such as BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities, to truly encapsulate and embrace the spirit of inclusion. In the disability community, there is the belief that “nothing about us without us.” It takes a village to embrace a culture of inclusion where administrators, faculty, GSI, and students must also reflect the natural diversity of the broader human experience in representation and teaching pedagogies as we strive for a more just and inclusive society.

**One issue that has come up in science lab and field work environments is a lack of true accessibility for disabled people, whether through physical barriers or other planning logistics that center able-bodied or neurotypical people. In your career, have you come across academic or societal communities that are engaged with breaking down these barriers? If so, how might biologists collaborate with these groups? If not, do you feel there is a need for a biological science disability group of some kind?**

Absolutely yes, there is definitely a need to have genuine conversations and follow-through actions around inclusion of folks with disabilities in traditionally underrepresented fields whether that be forming of groups or coalitions, or

*“Just because an individual does not fit neatly into established categories does not mean those experiences and perspectives are not valid. Undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral rates of disability at UC Berkeley, 35%, 25% and 23% respectively for 2019”*

*—Ann Wai-Yee Kwong  
Coordinator DCC*

greater disability representation. From my personal observations, I noticed similar challenges in the broader STEM landscape, where the physical environment in lab or maker spaces may not be fully accessible or built with universal or disability centered designs. For instance, many well intentioned, but misinformed projects have been designed for the blind and low vision community, and their concepts are often presented using a video with music overlay, no audio description, where the blind/low vision community is unable to access the information presented in the videos demonstrating or advertising the product. I feel that this shows

Hearst Annex: Home to the new Disability Culture/Community Center.



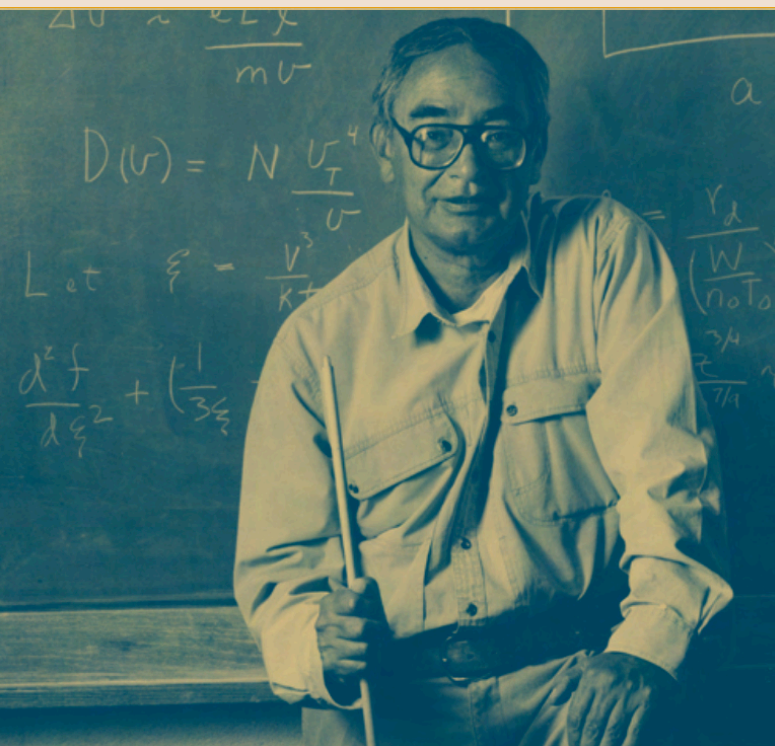
that oftentimes, the disability community is not consulted nor included in the process from the beginning, resulting in this gap. This is the reason that spaces such as Prof. Karen Nakamura's Disability Lab or the DCC needs to be present, to challenge folks to, flip the notion of "normal" and medical definitions of health and disability up-side-down and zig-zag and redefine what is meant by the human experience. Just because an individual does not fit neatly into established categories does not mean those experiences and perspectives are not valid. Undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral rates of disability at UC Berkeley, 35%, 25% and 23% respectively for 2019, were almost twice these values for 2020, meaning there is a sizable population of folks on the Cal community that needs to be included and recognized.<sup>1</sup>

1. data source: UC Berkeley disability statistics 2019 My Climate Survey

## reflection questions

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1. Kwong cites that between 23-35% of students at UC Berkeley had a disability or disabilities in 2019. Does the percentage of students with disabilities at UC Berkeley surprise you? If so, what does this say about how we as a society discuss, define and interface with disabilities?
2. Kwong mentions the refrain: "nothing about us without us." Why would the inclusion of members of a disenfranchised group in conversations about inclusion and equity for that group be important?
3. Whether you are someone with disabilities or work with persons with disabilities in what ways can the Disability Cultural/Community Center help you personally build inclusive and equitable community?



Above: Dr. Fred Begay.

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## in history: Dr. Fred Begay

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by Emily Bögner  
FAVE Lab

Dr. Fred Begay (Clever Fox), a nuclear physicist of Navajo nationality, drew parallels between modern science and Navajo ideas of religion and medicine for his research in thermonuclear fusion. At the age of 10, Dr. Begay was sent to a government-run vocational school where his teachers decided he would be trained as a farmer. He spent eight years at the school before joining the airforce and fighting in the Korean war. Upon returning home, Dr. Begay enrolled at the University of New Mexico (UNM), taking college courses during the day and high school classes at night. Having never gone to high school, meaning typical academic subjects were unfamiliar, Dr. Begay recounts his decision to study physics as "just an accident".

This year marks the 31st anniversary of the observation of National Native American Heritage Month in the United States.



Nearly 20 years after applying to UNM, Dr. Begay received his PhD in nuclear physics and joined the Los Alamos National Laboratory research staff. He credits his unusual route to success to his Navajo upbringing, and upon completing his PhD, Dr. Begay spent 10 years studying the parallels between Navajo ideas and modern science. His work in the use of lasers (Hatsoo'algha k'aa' in the Navajo language), electron and ion beams to heat thermonuclear plasmas was used as an alternative energy source and was pivotal to advancing our understanding of behaviors of gamma-rays.

UC Berkeley and broader academia benefit not only from the intellectual and cultural contributions of indigenous people, like Dr. Begay, but from the

traditional homelands of native peoples that this and other universities occupy. The following acknowledgment was co-created with the **Muwekma Ohlone Tribe** and **Native American Student Development**. "We recognize that UC Berkeley sits on the territory of xučyun (Huichin), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and other familial descendants of the Verona Band. We recognize that every member of the Berkeley community has, and continues to benefit from, the use and occupation of this land, since the institution's founding in 1868."

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## upcoming local events + resources

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- Nov.-Jun.—The Incarceration of Japanese Americans, **The Bancroft Library Gallery**
- 5-13 Nov.—**American Indian Film Festival**, San Francisco and Streaming
- 7 Nov.—**Indigenous Red Market**, 11am-5pm, 3050 International Blvd, Oakland
- 17 Dec.—An Evening of Pacific Islander Poetry, 6pm-8pm.  
**Pacific Islands Studies.**

Shares your thoughts and perspectives on these article or tell us about a story or event you would like to see featured in newsletters at [DeiNewsletters@gmail.com](mailto:DeiNewsletters@gmail.com)

*Supervisors—please circulate this newsletter to lab members and staff who may not be on our listserv.*