



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MAINE

**Center for Community Inclusion
and Disability Studies**

University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

2019 Interdisciplinary Disability Studies Celebration of Achievement

Remarks by Dr. Stephen Gilson

Professor of Interdisciplinary Disability Studies and Social Work

Welcome Disability Studies students, family members, and friends.

Please let me begin, by thanking you for coming tonight as we spend this time acknowledging and celebrating our academic and scholarly journey.

However, let me back up a minute to first introduce and thank our colleagues at the Center for Community Inclusion and

Disability Studies, without whom neither our journey nor " tonight's celebration would be possible.

Alan Cobo-Lewis, Director

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

Sue Russell, Associate Director

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

Ann Zielinski, Administrative Specialist CL2

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

Bonnie M Robinson, Research Associate II

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

Sandra A Horne, Coordinator for Community Engagement

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

And, of course

Liz DePoy

Now, let me return to the real focus of today's celebration – our Disability Studies students, and in particular for this event – those of you who are completing the requirements for your **Minor in Interdisciplinary Disability Studies or the Graduate Certificate in Interdisciplinary Disability Studies.**

As you know by now, Disability Studies courses are particularly challenging but great fun and provide much thinking and learning opportunity. In these courses students are asked to read some dense and unfamiliar literature, access imagery in the form of video, social media and so forth and consider ways of thinking about disability that are not widely held. All of our courses are based on several

principles; the meaning and value of humanness and view of " disability as a complex human experience. But each semester, we discuss contemporary and historical issues anew.

In the undergrad program, students study in three courses.

DIS 300: Disability: Interaction of Human Diversity and Global Environments

This course allowed us to examine disability as an element of humanness and human diversity that has a significant reciprocal relationship with the environment. We began with a riveting video of Amy Mullins who challenges us to think of disability not as deficit but as opportunity for sculpting the body. And we explored disability as our fit and at times, our ill-fit within environments. Some of us were surprised at how disability inventions, such as Doc Marten's Shoes, Talking

Books for the Blind, OXO products, typewriters, and even Jacuzzis, influenced the world.

In another eye-opening activity, we sent students to evaluate our own campus both for ADA Compliance as well as for analysis of who is invited and NOT in images and spaces. We therefore look at accessibility broadly beyond just how many parking spaces exist for wheelchair access. For example, what bodies are showcased in the marketing materials for our university? Age, size, color, dress, and what those bodies are doing. Who is not reflected in these images? This learning activity is powerful in understanding how imagery shapes our view of fit or not, where not fit is a disabling experience. We encountered thinkers such as Peter Singer, a philosopher who advocates for infanticide, who debated with Harriet McBryde Johnson who suggests that all life is worthy if one is loved.

DIS 400: Disability as Diversity

This course was revamped last year to reflect the role of design in disability. **For example**, we analyzed the design of mobility equipment, policy, services, technologies and architectures in promoting or impeding participation. We explored redesign and “enhancement” of the body and even looked at humans as cyborgs. We asked students to design their own innovations to promote function for diverse bodies and of course, incorporate good design into all ideas.

DIS 450: Disability: Population-Environment Diversity

This year we focused on disability in popular culture. We looked at the inclusion of impaired bodies in fields such as fashion; dance, performances, museums, and even superhero genres.

DIS 500: Contemporary Disability Theory and **DIS 520: Disability–Advanced Interaction of Human Diversity and Global Environments** examine similar material as DIS 400 and 450; and then in our graduate sequence, **DIS 530: Disability Policy**, we examine policy primarily from an ethical analysis. We discuss knotty issues such eugenics, selective abortion, assisted suicide, human rights, work, and financial resources among others. We look at how determination of worth of a life shapes and reflects policies and practices that emerge from them.

You have learned a great deal; we are proud of you. We know this is only the beginning of your journey, so we hope to see you in future courses, and look forward to watching, hearing, and reading about your many accomplishments.