

Interdisciplinary International Symposium
“Disability Studies & Participation in Higher Education”
University of Innsbruck (Austria), 27 - 29 June 2019

Organisation:

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Based on a longstanding cooperation between the University of Innsbruck (Centre for New Orleans) and the University of New Orleans (Centre Austria), we are organizing a Disability Studies conference. This international and interdisciplinary symposium will focus on the topic of disability and higher education and will be held in June 2019 in Innsbruck (Austria). We will discuss a social understanding of disability, following the paradigm shift that took place with the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Research on disability and educational inequality has gained traction since the 1980s. Then, the international disability rights movement combined their efforts to fight for access to the regular public education systems and also gained access to universities, as did the women’s movement earlier in the century. As a result, more and more people with disabilities could attend schools and obtain graduation certificates allowing them to access higher education. At the same time civil right movements started working on alternative routes to higher education in order to supplement the highly selective systems of secondary and tertiary education.

But, how inclusive have higher education institutions in different parts of the world become over the last decades, especially universities? What impact had these developments on the participation of persons with disabilities in higher education? What possibilities are available to offer ‘higher education’ outside of universities and which alternatives have been developed to create inclusive learning spaces for people with disabilities and social disadvantages?

With the University of Innsbruck celebrating its 350th anniversary in 2019, we want to address these questions by taking a critical look back and by developing future perspectives for the way forward. The symposium therefore addresses four thematic areas: barriers *to* access higher education, barriers and participation *in* higher education, the contributions of Disability Studies and Inclusive Education and, finally, alternative routes to participate in higher education.

1. Barriers *to* access higher education: With this thematic area, the focus is on the transition from schools to universities and the employment market. What do structural and individual effects in secondary education have on the possibilities to access higher education? How can transitions be best facilitated?
2. Barriers and participation *in* higher education: Focusing on the ways and possibilities to succeed in higher education, this thematic area is concerned with the

following questions: What opportunities do students with disabilities have to participate in higher education, within and outside universities? What difficulties and challenges do they face there? How can universities accommodate the diverse needs of all students beyond counselling, mainstreaming, and infrastructural adaptations for persons with disabilities? And, how are disability and inclusion negotiated and understood within higher education institutions?

3. *Contributions of Disability Studies and Inclusive Education*: How do cultural norms and concepts shape academic knowledge? And how can disability models be changed by knowledge politics? With regard to this thematic area, the focus is on the role of research and scholars in Disability Studies, Inclusive Education, Mad Studies and Gender Studies in making higher education more inclusive. What kind of intersectional academic research and curricula are needed to allow for meaningful participation of all students? How can self-advocates be included in various academic disciplines and curricula in higher education?

4. *Alternative ways to participation in higher education*: Focusing on the efforts of civil right movements to challenge barriers in and to transform public education systems, this thematic stream focuses on practices of self-advocates in knowledge production outside the academia. When and where have people 'illegitimately' gained academic knowledge and agency? How can Mad Studies, Crip Studies and Queer Studies activists challenge today's mainstream notions and forms of higher education? What experiences have groups and individuals gained in doing so?

We would like to invite researchers in the fields of Disability Studies, Inclusive education, Mad Studies, Gender Studies, Education, Sociology, History and neighbouring fields to discuss these questions with us as a participant or presenter.

Keynote speakers: Prof. Sheila Riddell (University of Edinburgh), Dr. Jos Boys (University College London) & t.b.c. Prof. Justin Powell (University of Luxembourg)

The International Symposium will take place at the Kaiser-Leopold-Saal of the University of Innsbruck, a wheel-chair accessible location. If you wish for technical or personal support to attend the Symposium: Please contact us prior to 1 March 2019.

If you would like to present a paper or a poster on your theoretical or empirical research, please send an abstract of no more than 500 words (including a short description of your person and your research fields) in a pdf-file prior to 1 December 2018 to tamara.peljord@uibk.ac.at; julia.biermann@uibk.ac.at; l.flynnwi@uno.edu.

We are also planning to organize pre-conference workshops on alternative ways to participation in higher education. These will be announced later in 2019. To take part at the Symposium or the workshops, you will need to register prior to 1 March 2019. There are no admission fees. Please register with tamara.peljord@uibk.ac.at.

We are looking forward to see you at the International Symposium in Innsbruck!