

Dear Provosts Harte, Strong-Leek, and Willie-LeBreton,

We are a group of tri-co students who belong to various disability clubs at Bryn Mawr and Haverford (Disability Advocacy for Students at Haverford, Mawrtys for Access and Neurodiversity Affinity and Awareness Group), and we have a proposition to make.

We are asking you to consider adding a Disability Studies minor, or at least more Disability Studies classes, to the Tri-Co curriculum. According to the Society for Disability Studies (2016), Disability Studies is a field that explores the meaning and nature of disabilities in medical and social contexts. The field often focuses on the lived experiences of those with disabilities, rather than on what nondisabled people say and think about those with disabilities. The Society goes on to discuss the importance of the field:

“Disability Studies recognizes that **disability is a key aspect of human experience**, and that **the study of disability has important political, social, and economic implications for society as a whole**, including both disabled and nondisabled people”.

Despite the field’s importance, Bryn Mawr has not offered any Disability Studies classes since Dr. Clare Mullaney, a former English professor who specialized in U.S. literature, Disability Studies, and material text studies, left Bryn Mawr in 2020. Haverford is not much better - they currently regularly offer only two classes in the field. Neither school has a Disability Studies program. Additionally, Swarthmore and UPenn offer a handful of Disability Studies classes, but Bi-Co students are often lotteried out of Swarthmore classes and UPenn is inaccessible to Bi-Co students because of its distance from the Main Line. The lack of Disability Studies courses available to Tri-Co students is illogical, especially given the schools’ prestige and the significance of the subject.

Students clearly enjoy learning about disabilities and want more than what the tri-co currently offers in terms of classes. There are eleven disability groups in the Tri-Co; most are student-led and all have mainly or only student members. After being involved in so much work supporting those with disabilities, we’re ready to learn about disabilities from an academic perspective. Many of us have taken classes like Critical Disability Studies or Portraits of Disability, but we want more, and other students feel the same way. According to [our related petition](#), which currently has 392 signatures (almost all from current, incoming, or former tri-co students), 95.6% of people want to be able to access more Disability Studies courses, and 76.5% might or would definitely consider minoring in the field. Professor Kristin Lindgren, Director of Haverford’s Writing Center and professor of HLTH H304: Critical Disability Studies, can attest to students’ interest in and passion for the subject; in an email from January 2021, she stated, “I think students on all three campuses want more disability studies courses and more ASL.” So, it’s clear

that this field is important to the student body and that people would love more Disability Studies courses!

One reason why student interest is so strong is that disabled students often see themselves represented in Disability Studies courses, often in ways that they do not see in other courses. When students see their identities reflected in educational experiences, they feel seen and heard and included, as proven by students' answers on our petition form, mentioned above. In an [article about representation](#) of minority - including disabled - students in schools, the Anti-Defamation League stated that "providing both "mirrors" (self-reflection) and "windows" (understanding others) for students at all ages is critical to their education". As you can see, adding Disability Studies courses benefits all students - they would expose nondisabled students to disabled peoples' experiences and would make disabled students feel seen - in ways that other courses can not.

In addition, similar institutions have classes or even entire departments dedicated to the study of disability. Springfield College (Springfield, MA) offers a [Rehabilitation and Disability Studies major and minor](#), as well as a [minor in Deaf Studies](#). Springfield offers classes like Human Disease and Chronic Illness and Psychology of Disability and Illness. The Five College Consortium (UMass Amherst and Smith, Mount Holyoke, Amherst, and Hampshire Colleges) is [developing a Disability Studies Certificate](#) and offers classes like Medical Anthropology, Disability in Popular Culture, and Advanced ASL. This consortium is similar to our Quaker Consortium. So, offering a Disability Studies program as a small liberal arts college is certainly doable, and offering one as a consortium of multiple schools is even easier.

Moreover, the Tri-Co and Quaker Consortium conveniently already offer a handful of courses that touch on disability and accessibility, so we would not need to start from scratch to make a full disability studies program. Swarthmore College offers [classes in American Sign Language](#) as part of its Linguistics Department, and the Bi-Co has a smattering of disability studies courses. UPenn offers a [Health and Disability Studies concentration](#) in the Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies major. Clearly, our schools already have a bunch of courses surrounding disability, so making a whole program is definitely feasible.

Additionally, Disability Studies is a growing, exciting discipline, and prioritizing the subject would enhance our schools' positions at the forefront of higher education. The first Disability Studies program was developed at Syracuse University in 1994 (Simon, 2013). Since then, 34 other schools have developed programs in the field (Simon, 2013). Expanding the Tri-Co's curriculum to include Disability Studies courses (or even a minor) is a practical, strategic choice that would add to our schools and strengthen our institutions' reputations.

Disabilities and Disability Studies affect everyone directly or indirectly - disabled and abled, students and professors. Additionally, Disability Studies draws on and has implications for a variety of fields, such as sociology, history, health science, anthropology, law, ethics, and more. Given the field's impact and broadness and student desires, adding more Disability Studies courses to the Tri-Co curriculum is a logical next step in academic development.

We welcome the chance to discuss this with you all further. Please let us know what you think!

Thank you for your time and consideration.

From,

Sophie Greer, Bryn Mawr College '23, Mawrtys for Access, Disability Advocacy for Students at Haverford, Neurodiversity Affinity and Awareness Group