

[See this page in the course material.](#)

Learning Objectives

- Identify implications of accessibility on campus and in communities

The idea of “accessibility” is an important force of change on college campuses today. *Accessibility* is about making education accessible to all, and it’s particularly focused on providing educational support to a diverse group of students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. According to the American with Disabilities Act, you can be considered disabled if you meet one of the following criteria:

- You have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as seeing, hearing, walking, learning, and others.
- You must have a history of such impairment.
- Others perceive that you have such impairment.

If you meet one of these criteria, you have special legal rights to certain accommodations on your campus. These accommodations may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Academic accommodations, like alternate format for print materials, classroom captioning, arranging for priority registration, reducing a course load, substituting one course for another, providing note takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, a TTY in your dorm room, and equipping school computers with screen-reading, voice recognition, or other adaptive software or hardware.
- Exam accommodations, like extended time on exams
- Financial support and assistance
- Priority access to housing
- Transportation and access, like Wheelchair-accessible community shuttles

Assistive technologies and Web-accessibility accommodations are critical in today’s technology-driven economy and society. The following are some examples of assistive technologies are the following:

- Speech-recognition and other assistive software like Dragon Naturally Speaking, Kurzweil, Zoom Text, CCTV Magnifier, and Inspiration Software
- Computer input devices, like keyboards, electronic pointing devices, sip-and-puff systems, wands and sticks, joysticks, trackballs, and touch screens
- Other Web-accessibility aids, like screen readers, screen enlargers, and screen magnifiers, speech recognition or voice recognition programs, and Text-to-Speech (TTS) or speech synthesizers

Students in the following video share some of their experiences with the Web accessibility.



[Video Link](#)

You can view the [transcript for “Experiences of Students with Disabilities” here \(opens in new window\)](#).

For more information about Web accessibility, visit <http://webaim.org/>.

Why So Many Questions?

The following essay about experiences of diversity in college is by Fatima Rodriguez Johnson (State University of New York). Even though at first the writer felt like an ethnic outsider at college, she grew in understanding the importance of diversity of campus and of speaking openly and honestly about connecting with diverse cultures.

Why So Many Questions?

I chose to attend a small liberal arts college. The campus was predominately white and was nestled in a wealthy suburb among beautiful trees and landscaped lawns. My stepfather and I pulled into the parking lot and followed the path to my residence hall. The looks we received from most of the families made me feel like everyone knew we didn't belong. But, he and I greeted all we encountered, smiling and saying, “Hello.” Once I was unpacked and settled into my residence hall, he gave me a hug and said, “Good luck.” I wasn't sure if he meant good luck with classes or good luck with meeting new friends, but I heard a weight in his voice. He was worried. Had he and my mother prepared me for what was ahead?

With excitement, I greeted my roommate who I had already met through the summer Higher

Educational Opportunity Program (HEOP). She and I were very happy to see each other. After decorating and organizing our room, we set out to meet new people. We went to every room introducing ourselves. We were pretty sure no one would forget us; it would be hard to miss the only Black and Latina girls whose room was next to the pay phone (yes, in my day each floor shared one pay phone).

Everyone on our floor was nice and we often hung out in each other's rooms. And like some of you, we answered some of those annoying questions:

- Why does your perm make your hair straight when ours makes our hair curly?
- How did your hair grow so long (whenever we had weave braids)?
- Why don't you wash your hair everyday (the most intriguing question of all)?

We were also asked questions that made us angry:

- Did you grow up with your father?
- Aren't you scared to take public transportation?
- Have you ever seen anyone get shot (because we both lived in the inner city)?

It was those questions that, depending on the day and what kind of mood we were in, made a fellow student either walk away with a better understanding of who we were as Black and Latina women or made a fellow student walk away red and confused. I guess that's why my stepfather said, "Good luck." He knew that I was living in a community where I would stand out—where I would have to explain who I was. Some days I was really good at answering those questions and some days I was not. I learned the questions were not the problem; it was not asking that was troubling.

My roommate and I put forth a lot of effort to fit in with the community—we spent time hanging out with our peers, we ate together almost every evening in the dining hall, and we participated in student organizations. We were invited to join the German Club, and were the only students of color there. In doing all these things we made ourselves approachable. Our peers became comfortable around us and trusted us.

Although my peers and I all had similar college stresses (tests, papers, projects, etc.) my roommate and I also had become a student resource for diversity. Not because we wanted to, but because we had to. There were very few students of color on campus, and I think students really wanted to learn about people different from themselves. It was a responsibility that we had accepted. The director of HEOP would often remind us that for many students, college was the first opportunity they had to ask these types of questions. He said we would learn to discern when people were really interested in learning about our differences or insulting us. If someone was interested in insulting us, there was no need to respond at all.

Although I transferred to another college at the end of my sophomore year, during those two years I learned a great deal about having honest conversations. Taking part in honest conversations challenged my notions of the world and how I viewed people from all walks of life (race, class, sexual orientation, ability, etc.). Those late nights studying or walks to the student center were when many of us listened to each other's stories.

My advice is to take time to examine your attitudes and perceptions of people different from yourself, put yourself in situations that will challenge your assumptions, and lastly, when you make a mistake do not get discouraged. Keep trying. It's easy to stay where we are comfortable. College is such a wonderful experience. Take it all in, and I am sure you will enjoy it!

—Fatima Rodriguez Johnson, *Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom*

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