

Supporting Students with Invisible Disabilities



Art credit: [CHRONIC: A zine about living with chronic illness](#)

What is Invisible Disability?

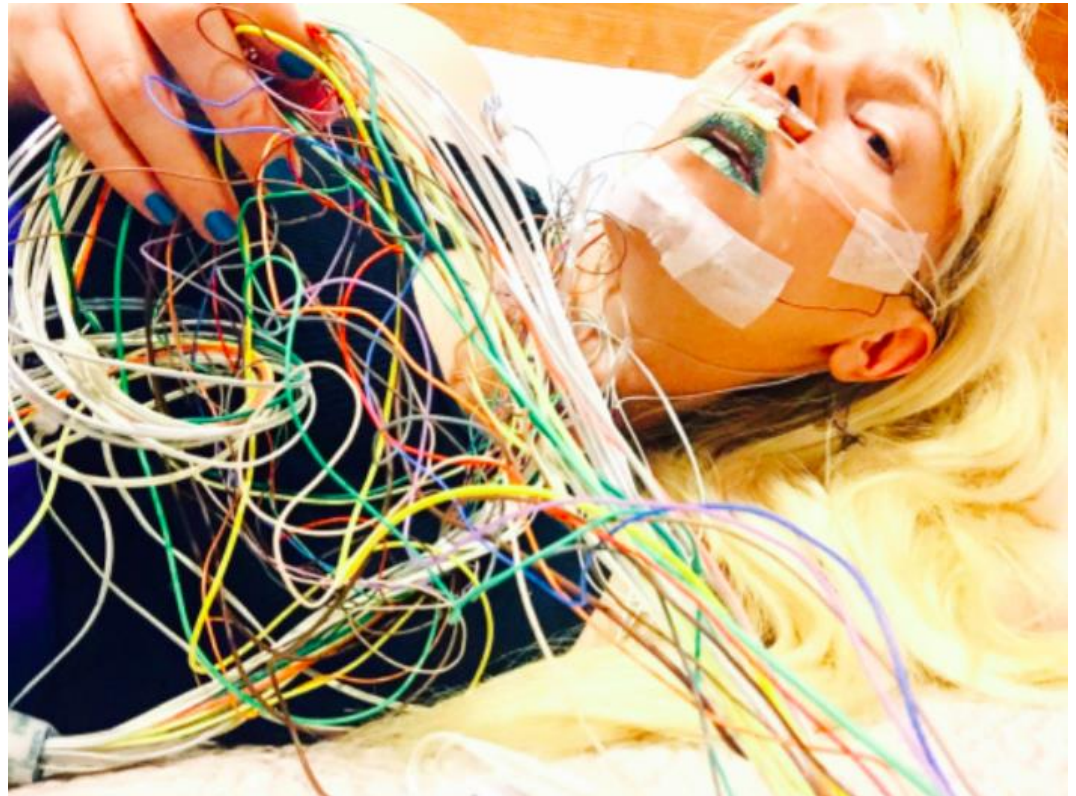
Any disability that cannot be observed simply by looking at a person.

Examples:

- * Auto-immune disorders: lupus or diabetes
- * Chronic illnesses: fibromyalgia, heart and lung disease
- * Learning disorders: dyslexia, auditory processing disorder
- * Mental illnesses: depression, anxiety, OCD, PTSD

Common Effects of Invisible Disability

- * Chronic pain
- * Physical and mental fatigue



Art credit: [The Hospital Glam Project](#)

* Alienation



Art credit: [The Hospital Glam Project](#)

“Employees with non-apparent disabilities have the most difficulty in convincing their employers that they are covered by the ADA [...] If they do not satisfactorily establish the severity of their condition, they relinquish their right to reasonable accommodation.

Conversely, if they succeed in convincing their employer that they have a disability, they may be penalized in other ways.”

[*Women with Visible and Invisible Disabilities*](#)

Unique Problems for College Students

Mental Illness peaks:

- * “Half of all lifetime cases [of mental illness] start by age 14 and three fourths by age 24” ([Kessler](#)).

- * “Mental illness peaks, in both prevalence and incidence, during early adulthood, with 20-25% of persons age 18-39 experiencing active disorder” ([George](#)).

Delays in treatment:

- * 2005 Study co-sponsored by Harvard, U Michigan, and NIMH documents “long delays – sometimes decades – between first onset of symptoms and when people seek and receive treatment” ([NIMH](#)).

- * New environment

“Students who choose to leave their hometowns may need to find physicians in new cities and transfer insurance benefits to hospitals clinics, and pharmacies” ([Kochar-Bryant, Basset, Webb](#)).

- * Financial cost of treatment plus college tuition

- * Medication

Side effects may “make academic work very difficult”

([Kochar-Bryant, Basset, Webb](#)).



Art credit: [Subversive Cross Stitch](#)

Creating an Inclusive Campus

“Participation in postsecondary education is not limited to being physically present in a lecture hall...

...It is the possibility to ask questions, to discuss ideas with classmates, to have a critical conversation with professors about papers, to reflect upon readings, to explore the library, to have access to information in accessible formats at the same time as their nondisabled classmates, to work on a research project, to have coffee with friends, to participate at campus social and cultural events, and to really take part in the college experience.”

- [Transition to Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities](#)

How do you support invisibly disabled students?



Art credit: [Doll Hospital: A Journal of Mental Health](#)

Have you taught an invisibly disabled student?
How did you enable their learning?

Trigger Warning Policy

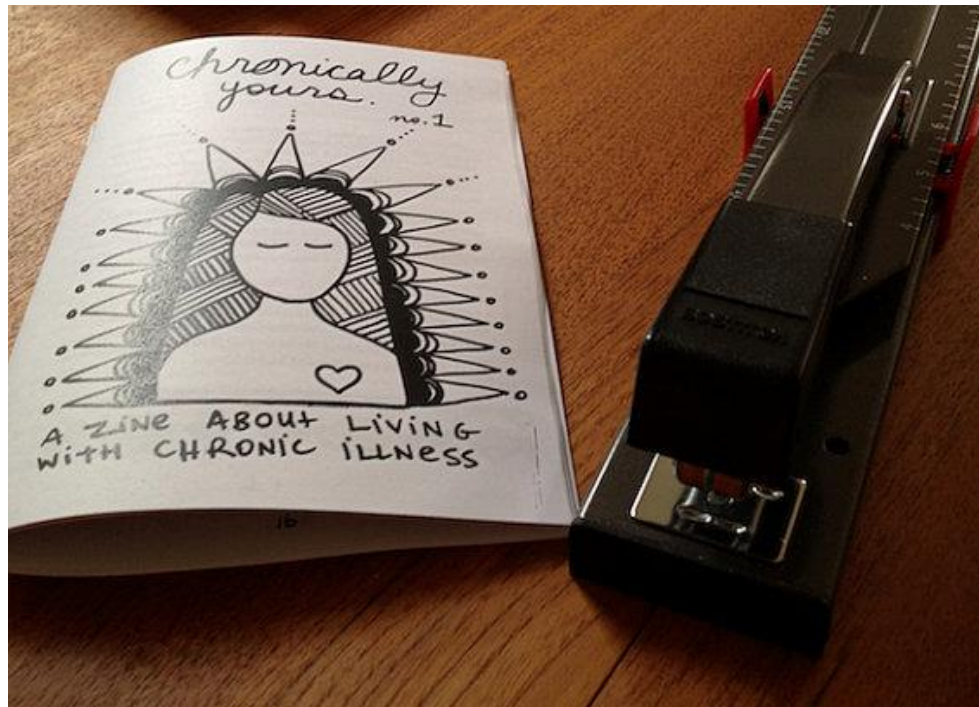
Trigger Warnings and Accessibility

This class will use trigger warnings as a matter of course. A trigger is a graphic representation of a subject matter that could spur a mental health crisis for a reader or viewer. Common triggers are: representations of rape, violence, suicide, discrimination, or victim-blaming of any kind. Since triggers might revolve around topics that I have not anticipated, I have created an anonymous Google form where you can indicate to me topics that you'd like me to warn for. I will send this form out via email. I encourage you to let me know how I can make this classroom as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Strategies for Supporting Invisibly Disabled Students

[Accessibility Questionnaire](#)

Trigger Warning Annotation Project



Art Credit: [Chronically Yours: A Zine About Living with Chronic Illness](#)

Revision Policy:

“Students are allowed to revise and resubmit any assignment before the next one is due.”

Attendance Policy:

On Absences: You are allowed **three free absences** from class. Students with four or more absences are required to come see me to work out a plan for making up the work they have missed. If you are concerned that you will be unable to make it to most of the classes, please come see me ahead of time to work out an alternate plan for your learning engagement.

Responsible Technology use