

Marijke E. Large

613-894-5599

354 Sunnyside Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1S 0S4

marijke.large@carleton.ca

You can also reach me at melarge@gmail.com

Project title and Category: IDEA Contest – Attitudinal

Carleton University, combined honours degree in journalism and women and gender studies

As a practicum student at the READ initiative I researched and prepared a PowerPoint presentation on the IDeA contest. As you are aware, the IDeA contest seeks to engage the creative minds of undergraduate students to develop “innovative, cost-effective solutions to accessibility-related barriers in the community” (“Innovative Ideas for Accessibility”). The contest was inspired by the goal of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* to make Ontario fully accessible by 2025. The five key barriers the contest seeks to address are as follows: organizational/systemic, architectural/physical, information and communication, technology and attitudinal. The focus last year at Carleton University was primarily related to the technology and architectural standpoint and catered to the Faculty of Engineering and Design. As a result, Carleton only received submissions related to design based accessibility solutions. Therefore, my role was to engage students in women and gender studies, a discipline that works to deconstruct systemic and attitudinal barriers, in hopes of increasing awareness and getting students to engage with accessibility-related issues.

I created my presentation using a feminist disability studies theoretical framework, in order to construct a presentation appropriate for women and gender studies students (Appendix A). Both the disability movement and the feminist movement are rooted in the control of our bodies and our lives and so there is a clear link between the two (Finger 294-295). Just as feminist scholarship and research extends beyond women

to critically analyze the entire gender system, so too does a feminist disability studies politic. A feminist disability studies politic seeks to challenge “dominant assumptions about living with a disability and works to unsettle stereotypes about people with disabilities” (Garland-Thomson 1557). With this in mind, my presentation challenged students to identify and deconstruct these stereotypes, a process aimed at removing attitudinal barriers in society, by engaging with the IDeA contest (Appendix B). This goal would be actualized when, through their entries, students actively created solutions to combat discriminatory attitudes and practices directed at ‘disabled’ bodies. Through this process students would be able to re-imagine culturally dominant, and discriminatory myths, fears and stereotypes of disability, such as, people with disabilities are inferior, dependent, asexual, genderless et cetera (Shapiro 42). Feminist disability studies highlights how the stigma associated with these stereotypes results in the unnecessary exclusion of people with disabilities from complete participation in society (Garland-Thomson 1557). I hoped students would realize that engaging with this contest matters, as representations of people with disabilities have “real consequences for real people” (Titchkoksy 198).

I will now outline the process I undertook in order to speak with twelve classrooms. I made a spreadsheet that included the professor’s name, their course code, their classroom information, contact information and whether they agreed to allow me to speak to their class and on what date. I then proceeded to personally email all fourteen professors (Appendix C). Of the fourteen professors I contacted, I had the opportunity to speak for ten minutes about the contest to twelve classes ranging from first-year to

fourth-year. One professor didn't respond and the other I emailed the presentation, as she did not have time to fit me into her schedule.

Furthermore, I will outline the elements of the PowerPoint. The presentation was a total of nineteen slides. I started by asking the students whether they were interested in making a change in the Carleton community? Were they interested in seeing their ideas become a reality? Next, I outlined how the IDeA contest was a way to get involved, what the IDeA contest was and details about the contest. As I was trying to encourage an increase in submissions in the attitudinal, I first outlined last year's focus, the winning submission and then explained this year's new focus. I followed this by explaining why this contest is relevant to women and gender studies. I also included a short video produced by the government highlighting the need for the IDeA contest. Finally, I outlined what their job was, provided several examples of ways they could improve attitudes, the details of a successful submission and how and where they could find further information in order to make their document accessible. Finally, I encouraged them to contact me if they had any questions or concerns and invited them to ask me if they had any questions.

On a practical level, this experience fostered my public speaking skills by providing a space where I could learn how to present in an effective and timely manner. On an academic level, I was able to reflect on and make these issues relevant to women and gender studies students by highlighting the parallel between sex and impairment, both physical characteristics, and gender and disability, both of which are socially constructed. This relates to the social model of disability. The social model differentiates between one's impairment, or biological conditions, and the social restrictions, or

disabilities, to show that physical and attitudinal barriers in society can create disability (Burchardt 736).

Though Carleton received no submissions in the attitudinal and systemic barriers category, I hope that I fostered an awareness about the importance of accessibility related issues to the over 350 students I had the opportunity to speak to. Going forward, I hope other Universities throughout Ontario actively promote this contest to their students, as creating an awareness about the contest can be seen a solution unto itself. Changing attitudes matter as representations of people with disabilities have “real consequences for real people” (Titchkoksy 198).

* Please find a link to the presentation attached

Appendix A

How is this connected to women and gender studies?

- **Parallels:**
 - ✓ Sex and Impairment
 - ✓ Gender and Disability
- **Disability, like gender is socially constructed.**





“In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society.” (UPIAS, Fundamental Principles document), 1972)

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Stereotypes

- Common misconceptions of people with disabilities:

How is this gendered?	Both:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feminine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Undesirable sexual partners and mothers ▪ Masculine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Supercrip (Hegemonic masculinity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inferior ✓ Dependent ✓ Receive Pity from others ✓ Ignorance from others ✓ Asexual

Representations of people with disability's have "real consequences for real people" - Tanya Titchkosky, 2003.

Appendix C

Good afternoon Professor _____,

My name is Marijke Large and I am a fourth-year women and gender studies student. This semester I am working with Dale Stevenson of the Read Initiative at the Paul Menton Centre as a practicum student.

I am emailing you about the possibility of coming in to talk to your class for 10 to 12 minutes about a really exciting opportunity for undergraduate students. It's called the IDeA contest. IDeA stands for "innovative designs for accessibility" and is hosted by the council of Ontario universities. The goal of the contest is to get students more engaged and develop innovative ideas on how to eliminate barriers around Carleton and throughout the community.

Lasts years winner was a Carleton student. The focus last year was primarily relating to technology and architectural barriers, and catered to the Faculty of Engineering and Design. This year, our new, expanded focus is on attitudinal and systemic change; we will be catering to all disciplines, with a special emphasis on the faculty of public affairs and in particular, women and gender studies students.

For more information: <http://www5.carleton.ca/read/current-projects/idea-student-competition/>

I realize class time is precious, so if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Dean Mellway, director of the READ initiative at Carleton.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Warm regards,
Marijke Large

Dean Mellway: dean_mellway@carleton.ca

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Model of Disability." *Disability and Society*. 19.7 (2004): 735-751. *ProQuest*.

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