Disability culture has the potential of becoming a "beautiful and eccentric island" for its inhabitants, while the mainstream "drowns under the weight of its own rigid structures." Lehrer notes that technology has made it a moral imperative to possess a flawless body. Disabled people will never be able to stake out territory by merely being exempt from the illusion of bodily perfectibility. Lehrer concluded with this hope: "I want us to build a transformative destination, look with a panoramic eye, write a romance of all of our unexpected selves." —RGF

The Gallaudet Experience: Deafness and Disability

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FOR MANY OF YOU, SOME OF WHAT I HAVE TO say will be old information, and I ask you to bear with me. Gallaudet University was established in 1864 by an act of Congress. In the midst of the Civil War, when he had other pressing issues, President Abraham Lincoln took time to sign Gallaudet's charter, making it possible to award baccalaureate degrees to deaf individuals. That charter, incidentally, makes Gallaudet the third-oldest federally chartered institution of higher education, after the United States Military Academy and the United States Naval Academy. Gallaudet has been awarding degrees to people who are deaf or hard of hearing for almost 140 years. In fact, our charter was signed on 8 April 1864, so we will celebrate our 140th anniversary next month. It is my belief that today Gallaudet University is the only institution that awards college degrees signed by the president of the United States.

Our campus occupies ninety-nine acres in the heart of Washington, DC. We enroll approximately two thousand undergraduate and graduate students. Nearly all our undergraduate students are deaf or hard of hearing, whereas our graduate programs are open to both deaf and hearing individuals. At Gallaudet, deafness is not seen as a disability. We do not know exactly how many students we have with other disabilities, since we don't require them to identify themselves. What we do know is that last year 191 students, or about ten percent of our student population, were served by our Office of Students with Disabilities.

While Gallaudet is a unique institution, the one thing that people readily identify as special is the fact that we rely on visual communications. Most important, we sign. No matter where you are, in our classrooms, our meeting rooms, the offices where we work, public areas, the dorms, or the campus green, visual communications access will always be present in the form of sign language or text messages. People who come to our campus and who do not know sign language are communicatively disabled. To help people overcome that disability, we have about twenty-five top-notch full-time interpreters as well as seventy-five freelance interpreters who provide forty thousand to forty-five thousand hours of interpreting services each

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year. Included in this figure are tactile interpreters for people who are deaf-blind, some of whom are our students and employees.

Not surprisingly, the use of e-mail and other visual technology among students and employees is much higher at Gallaudet than at other institutions of higher education. Our IT staff strives to stay ahead of the "bandwidth curve" to accommodate Internet traffic, a good part of which is video-based. If you come to our campus, you will see the latest thing: public videophone booths that provide privacy for the use of video-relay services. This service allows deaf and hearing people to communicate on the phone with one another through a sign-language interpreter who is visible on a television or computer screen. In addition to IT, we have a staff in our academic-technology unit who work to ensure we have accessible classrooms. Gallaudet's technology access program (TAP) conducts research focusing on technologies and services that eliminate communication barriers traditionally faced by deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

Given the purpose of this conference, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Gallaudet deaf studies program, a popular program among our students. Deaf studies and disability studies share a common critique of the ableist paradigm. All of us know how dominant the notions of normality and abnormality have been during the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. In the 1800s, for example, Alexander Graham Bell wrote warnings regarding the potential spread of deafness and suggested, as remedies, not only the promotion of day schools instead of separate residential schools for the deaf but also the discouragement of marriage between deaf persons. More recent are the policies of sterilization of disabled persons that sometimes took place in the twentieth century. Bell's approach is considered "positive eugenics" and the later policies "negative eugenics." But both are eugenics. Today, we deaf and disabled persons know that our lives are more than just worth living, that they are both rich and full. Our communities don't need and are not interested in invasive state- and corporate-sponsored efforts to make us normal. I do not pretend to be a scholar in your area, but I believe that we hold in common this resentment of efforts to fix us. Where I think the fields of deaf studies and disability studies diverge is that deaf studies is based in the cultural and linguistic aspects of deafness, while disability studies may be based more in the political formation of the disability movement.

The convergence of a number of factors in the past fifteen to twenty years has had a positive effect on the lives of deaf people, particularly young deaf people. They include the evolution of the civil rights movement, the Deaf President Now revolution, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the advent of technology, and an increasingly diverse America. This has created an environment of ever-expanding opportunities for deaf people in this country, and globally as well. All this has been a boon for Gallaudet University. Today our students are better educated, more culturally literate, and possess greater self-confidence than ever. In the past, the epitome of success for a Gallaudet graduate would be to become the superintendent of a school for the deaf. While that position is still extremely important, we have graduates who are highly successful lawyers, businesspeople, and scientists. In fact, we have highly successful deaf people in nearly all professions.

All universities need to ensure that deaf students receive the level of services that allows them to have the full student experience. What I mean by that is that support services must not be confined to the classroom. Services begin with the provision of interpreting or captioning services in class. But outside it, do deaf students have access to all the information that other students receive? Are they able to understand movies and plays offered on campus? How are they to learn what is presented by the PA system during sporting

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events? Do televisions in public areas display closed captions? Will deaf students be able to ask a question of the student-government candidates during a debate and understand the answer given? For deaf and hard-of-hearing students to truly experience what those who can hear do, we must think about how to provide services in a way that treats the deaf person as a student, not as a mere learning machine whose needs are contained by the four walls of a classroom.

Reaching out to potential students is the first step to a partnership. How students find out about a university and what they learn are very important. Outreach materials should indicate a diverse workforce. All information should be accessible to everyone: ask people from a variety of groups for the disabled to help develop the materials and presentations.

Generally speaking, the goal of higher education is to produce leaders who can participate fully in our world. We need to change the way we define and think about disability and inclusion—respect and embrace all people—if we are to help every student and achieve a new, thoroughly integrated society.

Compulsory Feral-ization: Institutionalizing Disability Studies

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While disability studies has opened up new discursive spaces for revising cultural attitudes and beliefs about disability, its increasing legitimation in the contemporary academy comes with conflicts. The university as a research location cannot merely divorce itself from the ethical and restrictive practices that have characterized the past two centuries. In fact, it does so only at its own risk and, even more important, at the risk of further entrenching disabled people in its institutional grounding. The institutionalization of disability studies is just that—a formal cultural ingestion process that churns out knowledge about disability while resisting reflexive inquiries about whether or not more detail is inherently better. More knowledge is inherently better for the institution because it keeps the research mill active, but here we want to contemplate the degree to which generating more professionally based data about disability threatens to reproduce some of the problems that have characterized the study of disability to this point in history.

The title of this talk is one of our favorites, yet alas, the credit belongs to Bruce Henderson, who introduced it during a recent seminar on disability, eugenics, and the history of evolutionary theory in the PhD program in disability studies. By compulsory feral-ization, he may have intended both to pun off of the early-twentieth-century practice of compulsory sterilization and to suggest a manner in which disabilities tend to be automatically turned into examples of human insufficiences in need of professional mediation. In this scenario disability becomes a regressive throwback to a prior, primitive, subhuman state. Disabled people often contest this association of their bodies with lack. For instance, in a recent correspondence the *Cuckoo* comic book artist Madison Clell argued that "I *strongly* disagree that Dissociative

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