

An Interview with Jose Tapia-Fuselier, College of Education

As part of ACCESS @ UCCS series



Why is ensuring access and inclusion for students with disabilities in the classroom important to you?

I believe access is a fundamental part of higher education. I believe that my role and responsibility are to ensure the students engaging in my courses can engage with the materials and discussions held. I have found that creating these accessible opportunities does not come at any cost to me; it enhances the learning outcomes when all students can truly engage with the course. Students with disabilities have every right as other students to learn and grow within their specific fields of study; I genuinely care and am passionate about taking the necessary measures to make that happen. Our role as educators comes with great responsibility. We should never send “less than” or “not enough” messages to students who may find materials inaccessible. The landscape of higher education has much room for growth in how students and faculty are supported with accessibility.

What steps have you taken in the classroom to improve accessibility in your courses?

I have utilized principles and practices from University Design for Learning and disability-responsive practices to ensure I make the environment as restrictive as possible. I have done this by providing my font sizes, and format of PowerPoints do not become difficult for individuals to access using software or other devices for accessibility. In my department, I teach many clinical-based courses that require learning and integrating counseling skills; I work with students to understand their limits and strengths to enhance their development as a counselor-in-training. I teach students about broaching with clients and utilizing their identities as a strength in the counseling room. Additionally, materials such as books, videos, case scenarios, and assignments are considerate of various intersecting identities that demonstrate the reality of individuals they may serve. Lastly, I incorporate reflective assignments to investigate further “self” and areas of their own biases and prejudices serving various communities.

What is one piece of advice that you'd give to faculty to incorporate accessibility into their teaching practices?

It is essential as a faculty member to consider the individuals in your classrooms. They are there for a reason; we often serve as a safe haven for the students to explore and grow. When we create barriers to students in learning, we perpetuate an ableist mindset that society often communicates to students with disabilities. We can genuinely change that with some thought, creativity, and consultation. We must continue to challenge our instruction to explore ways to ensure accessibility in the classroom.