

# Disability course helps identify personal and social privilege and power

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Mary Ellen Heiner and Alma Burgess

Registration is now open for a course on social power and privilege: recognizing it and using that knowledge to build advocacy skills.

*Social Power, Privilege, and Difference* is an eight-week, online course offered by the Utah Developmental Disabilities Council and the Center for Persons with Disabilities. The course is intended for a wide audience, including people with disabilities, their families, service providers, and anyone who wants to better understand systems of power and community- and self-advocacy. Participants will learn to make that knowledge work for them.

Course instructors are Mary Ellen Heiner and Alma Burgess, who expect the course will require three to four hours per week to complete assignments. Registration is \$25, and people of all abilities and education levels are encouraged to attend. Twenty slots are available for the course, which begins January 28, 2019. Registration closes on January 21.

“People will become better advocates if they become aware of the privileges and power each of us have,” said Burgess.

That’s an important first step, said Heiner. “It took years to develop the prejudices and societal norms that currently exist that may prevent our voices from being heard. So it may take years to overcome them.”

The online format will allow participants to work at their own pace, interact with other participants on discussion boards, and comment on others’ contributions. The instructors will also offer technical support to participants who may not be familiar with online study. Most of all they hope to stimulate some honest dialog. “If people can let down their barriers and put on paper what their feelings are, we can learn from each other...we can teach each other. Not everybody is going to agree with everybody else, and that’s what starts a good discussion,” Heiner said.

Burgess and Heiner said the Utah Developmental Disabilities Council funded the course after noticing that many people with disabilities hesitate to speak up for themselves or don’t know how they can advocate for themselves. It will help participants better understand what their options are in a number of different scenarios, like being denied insurance coverage or addressing physical barriers to accessibility.

The two instructors already work together to teach an interdisciplinary course at Utah State University—a class that brings people from a number of different backgrounds and abilities together to talk about disability issues.

*Social Power, Privilege, and Difference* is aimed at a much broader audience, they said. They hope for participants from all over Utah and the surrounding area. Certificates of completion will be available for those who finish the course.

Here is a list of topics that will be covered:

Week 1: Orientation, Expectations, and Introductions

Week 2: Disability History and Oppression

Week 3: Exploring Power and Privilege

Week 4: What It Has to Do with Us

Week 5: Breaking Down Barriers and Allyship

Week 6: Seeing it, Naming it, Fighting it

Week 7: Individual and Systems Advocacy

Week 8: Empowerment and What Are You Going to Do About it?

You can [register for the course online](#). For more information contact [Alma Burgess](#) or [Mary Ellen Heiner](#).

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