imagining the
ANTI-ABLEIST
UNIVERSITY

I WANT A UNIVERSITY

Edited by Daniel P. Jones & Lauren White

Foreword

by Daniel P. Jones

This zine has been co-created by a collective of critical disability studies scholars and professional service colleagues who have come together to imagine what an anti-ableist university might entail, and whether it is even possible. Ableism is rife within the academy, and many of us have first hand experiences of this from across our education and careers in academia.

Many of us identify as disabled, neurodivergent, or chronically ill (or a combination of the three). Some contributors do not identify with these categories, but are deeply engaged in working around the areas of anti-ableism and education. For the purpose of anonymity, contributions to this zine are not credited individually. However, a collection of the contributors can be found on the back page of this zine.

A zine is a collection of self-published works or original and reused texts, images, etc and are powerful ways of sharing ideas that may not fit in with conventional thought. This zine traces our conversations as a community of critical disability studies researchers regarding the anti-ableist university, and what that might mean to us. Beginning with reflections on the ableist university, we have spent the previous 6 months imagining what an anti-ableist university might be. There is no wrong or right answer, and no conclusion that an anti-ableist university is objectively possible. However, we believe that taking any productive steps towards an anti-ableist university - whatever that may be - can only be achieved through having these conversations, sitting with tensions, disagreements and discomfort, and through allowing a space where frustrations and hopes are able to be shared freely and without any negative implications.

With this in mind we invite you to also reflect on what an anti-ableist university might look like for you. What do you agree with? What do you disagree with? We'd love to know!

waarc@sheffield.ac.uk

GOD IS DIFFICULT

this IS so

BUT FINDING REST IS ALWAYS A GREAT THING.
... FOR ALL PEOPLE INVOLVED...

REST AND RECHARGE
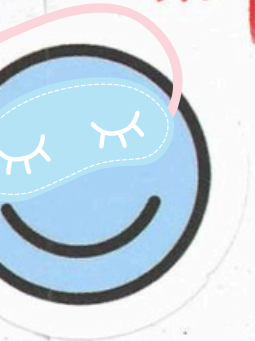
Tired

Too many emails
How do we manage the otherwise when in powerful institutions?
What would we want the otherwise to be?
BREATHING ROOM
Forever feeling like I've forgotten or made a mistake
Where has that email gone
STATE FUNDED
Indigenous theory
Cosmology
Undoing the cognitive normative ways
LESS THINKY
Feel the earth and the soil
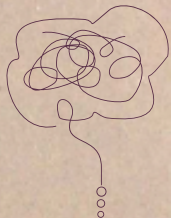Slippers in the university

READ MORE

less is NO MORE.
METRIC

Create a POSITIVE and INCLUSIVE learning ENVIRONMENT

INSIDE:

A lecturers life - too much to do, too little time

DEAR DIARY

> "This one time, I had to go on compassionate leave. It was the most horrible process. It almost makes me wish I didn't bother in the first place."

It should be called

NOT VERY COMPASSIONATE LEAVE.

Does the word 'compassion' belong in the university?
What does a compassionate university look like?
Where can we find it? Why do we need to search so hard for it?
So many questions
So...
Little...
Compassion

It's just a
SIMPLE FORM

Being overworked and just generally exhausted seems to be the standard in academia. Complaints of "I'm tired" or "I'm so busy" are often met with chuckles and retorts of "Aren't we all!"

There's a general agreement that we are all overworked and on the verge of burnout, whether we are disabled or not. But still we plod along, waiting for a sudden burst of energy to appear out of nowhere; for disabled people to feel welcomed into academia, without anything more than signposting practices that oftentimes lead to nowhere. The university, as it is, is inherently ableist.

Old ways won't open new doors. We need change.
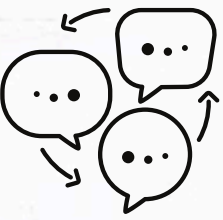
It's hard to imagine a future of institutional anti-ableism. We are so used to the same doors being offered to us as disabled folks, and these doors do not lead to solutions - they lead to a long and winding road of othering and dismissal by alienation. Constantly sending Zoom yoga sessions instead of offering practical support; conducting the same research project again and again and again with no actionable outcomes, or otherwise... these doors are pointless. They don't belong in my hopes for an anti-ableist future in academia.

Some editing is needed if we want to see a well-rested self in academia. Why keep opening the same old doors when we can so easily begin to work on creating doors that lead to new places, that offer new hope for the future of a crip, anti-ableist academia? Offering therapy, flexible working, permanent contracts, implementing mask mandates, zero-tolerance disableism policies... the list goes on. These are the new rooms that we need to build doors into...
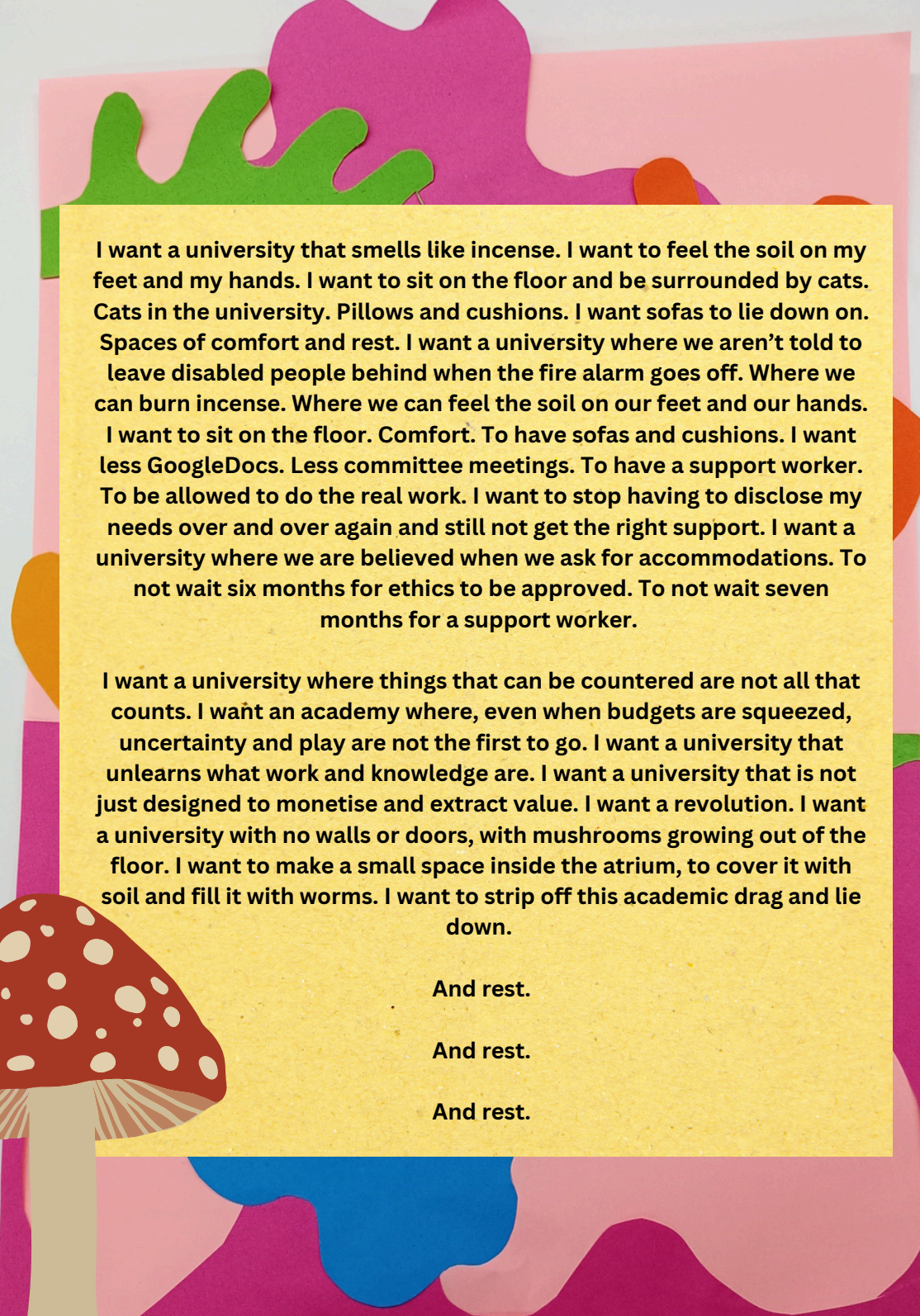
hello future
Wel RESTED me

WHAT'S THE BEST THAT COULD HAPPEN?

I WANT
I want a un'v
I want a universt
thatt smells lik
I want to feel the
I want to sit on
Pillows and cus
want sofas to lie
Sp acesof comfort
i want a university
where we arent told to leave disabled p peoplebehind
when the fire alarm goes off

EVERYTHING ACCESSIBLE ALL THE TIME

I want a university that smells like incense. I want to feel the soil on my feet and my hands. I want to sit on the floor and be surrounded by cats. Cats in the university. Pillows and cushions. I want sofas to lie down on. Spaces of comfort and rest. I want a university where we aren't told to leave disabled people behind when the fire alarm goes off. Where we can burn incense. Where we can feel the soil on our feet and our hands. I want to sit on the floor. Comfort. To have sofas and cushions. I want less GoogleDocs. Less committee meetings. To have a support worker. To be allowed to do the real work. I want to stop having to disclose my needs over and over again and still not get the right support. I want a university where we are believed when we ask for accommodations. To not wait six months for ethics to be approved. To not wait seven months for a support worker.

I want a university where things that can be countered are not all that counts. I want an academy where, even when budgets are squeezed, uncertainty and play are not the first to go. I want a university that unlearns what work and knowledge are. I want a university that is not just designed to monetise and extract value. I want a revolution. I want a university with no walls or doors, with mushrooms growing out of the floor. I want to make a small space inside the atrium, to cover it with soil and fill it with worms. I want to strip off this academic drag and lie down.

And rest.

And rest.

And rest.

Intersectional access

WE LOVE TO CALL THINGS DISABILITY JUSTICE WHEN THEY'RE NOT. IF WE WANT INTERSECTIONAL ACCESS IN OUR VISION OF THE ANTI-ABLEIST UNIVERSITY WE NEED TO CONSIDER THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF DISABILITY JUSTICE BY SINS INVALID:

INTERSECTIONALITY

LEADERSHIP OF THE MOST IMPACTED

ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC

COMMITMENT TO CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING

RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS

SUSTAINABILITY

COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY

INTERDEPENDENCE

COLLECTIVE ACCESS

COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

INTERSECTIONAL ACCESS MUST INCLUDE THESE PRINCIPLES OF DISABILITY JUSTICE - THIS IS MY HOPE

Welcome

EXPERT

Hello!

I
can
learn

That
means
you!

Academic
drag

uncertainty

Hello, I can learn

When I was a university student, there was always this assumption that if you were disabled then you weren't expected to even be there. It was almost a surprise to examiners when someone would wheel into an exam hall, or act as the leader in a group project. Yes, there's a lack of access in education on the whole that makes it harder for disabled folks like me to access Higher Education, but the gasps as somebody tells their lecturer that they are not injured and that they use crutches every day, or confusion from personal tutors when a learning disabled student asks for information about doing a year abroad are deeply felt.

This also extends into other spaces within academia and research. It's not just about learning, but also about the production of knowledge. I might walk into a conference ready to present my research, but as soon as I enter the same space as clinicians and medical professionals, all eyes are on me. There's an assumption that I am attending as a patient representative of Tourette Syndrome, and not as somebody who is a published academic who specialises in Tourette Syndrome.

Disabled, neurodivergent and chronically ill folks are here and we're here to stay. We're digging our heels into the ground, staying firmly planted in the university… from student to professor. We can learn. We can research. We can innovate. It's time to welcome us as the experts and the capable learners that we are.

INCENSE

Imagination

Can we slow ...

Joy   Dreams

PLAY

Get rid of FORMS

Being Human

COOK & CONNECT

NO SHOES

CUDDLES

Rest

Intimacy
Acce...

THINK IT,
WANT IT,
GET IT

Space to breaaathe
zzz aah ...

A nice hot
bath

Pyjamas

Feminist
mentorship

Candles
& scents

my cat

Access
Intimacy

Colleagues
with cake

It could have
been an
email...

Flowers

What is the anti-ableist university?

No inaccessible documents or forms/tables
No screen-reader incompatible practices
Less meetings for meeting's sake
Less group 'thank you' emails
Less admin
More time for meaningful connections, understanding, validation, solidarity, and
opportunities to heal ableist trauma
Communities of care, support, love and joy
Access intimacy, collectiveness, togetherness, unity and compassion
Work alongside Support Workers
Appreciate our interdependency and interconnection with each other, the nature, our
local and global communities
Opportunities for group meditation, reflection and grounding
Generative discussions and nurturing interactions
Availability of sofa beds and armchairs
Play time, fun, friends
Accessible buildings
Acceptance of difference
Understand the fatigue that accompanies disclosure and requesting for reasonable
adjustments over and over
Rest and break times
Flexible working
Slow academia
Remote working
Accessible transport to arrive at the university
Some type of structure to help plan support and reduce anxiety
Room for creativity and expression
Challenging the power hierarchy

Humility and transparency
Constructive discussions as critical friends
Room for making mistakes and learning from them rather than becoming defensive

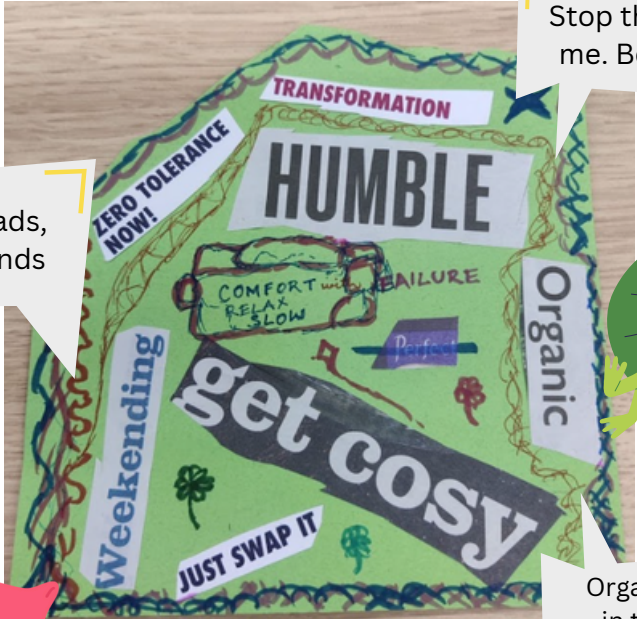If we embrace a relaxed scholarship, failure feels less scary. What would happen if we embrace failure in the name of play and creativity? Would we feel more comfortable with the idea of disrupting the ableist university?

change requires disruption.

ALSO A LITTLE PLAY AND NUISANCE

I'm all about the SQUIGGLY UNIVERSITY

whatever that is...

Squiggly is relaxed and disruptive. Curvy, squiggly lines are out of the order and hyper-productive nature of the university. I want an academia where I can go on tangents and explore, create and play with knowledge production.

But straight lines mean a spiky university. Spiky university feels very representative of the current stressful and overworked nature of the university. I'm hopeful for a squiggly, relaxed, failure-safe future of the university.

Keep DESIRING

explore

MAKE SPACE FOR PLEASE... peace JOY AND LoVe

As critical disability scholars and as those with lived experiences, we know and feel injustice. That's why we have to re-centre. We have to centre hope, joy, peace and love. We don't have a choice not to. Choosing the alternative and the affirmative is not because of, it's in spite of. It's resistance.

Time to

choose nope

To choose 'nope' is something that I *wish* that I could do without fear of discipline. An academia where saying 'no' is not only permitted, but encouraged! That's my hope.

Disabled people face a whole bunch of additional labour in order to just survive in academic spaces. To make space for rest and play is to say 'no' to a fast, overworked academia. To say 'yes' to access intimacy is to say 'no' to bureaucratic processes that results in a huge amount of isolating and additional labour for disabled folks. To say 'no' is a radical act of treating yourself. An anti-ableist university would mean that refusal and saying 'no' would no longer be a radical act. That's my hope.

cruel optimism

Can an anti-ableist university ever exist?
Can we ever be joyful in the confines of academia?
Of the ableist university?
Of any university, as we know it?
A new door must lead to a new university
A complete overhaul

DON'T WORK MORE THAN YOU LIVE.

An Anti-Ableist
Afterword
by Lauren White

Let's make this afterword easy to read....

We came together to discuss 'What would an anti-ableist univeristy be like?'

Our group discussions led to collated calls to action. Our individual artefacts are images, collages, poetry and political statements. These contributions led to the creation of this zine.

To end with our 'anti-ableist afterword' we gather our themes across this zine.
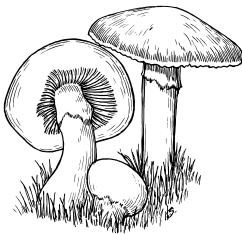
We want rest. We want comfort, cats and slippers.

We want reduced workloads and high expectations to be able to be, and do, the impossible. This is ableism and none of us meet this ideal. We want to say no.

We want everything accessible all of the time. We want less admin.

We want squiggles, play, joy and rest. We want to be.

We don't need the door opening, we need a new door.

waarc

WELLCOME ANTI-ABLEIST RESEARCH CULTURES

A number of the contributors to this zine are currently working on the Wellcome Anti-Ableist Research Cultures project hosted by the University of Sheffield, UK. The project attempts to address many of the issues raised in this zine, and to imagine what an anti-ableist university might look like, along with steps needed to be taken to move towards it. This work is collaborative alongside local Disabled Peoples' Organisations.

Anti-Ableist Environments

The team are working to experiment with new ideas for inclusive recruitment and employment practices. Working in higher education is not accessible for many reasons, and this project seeks to address these inaccessibilities.

Anti-Ableist Developments

The project also is working to create an Inclusive Research Methods course and guidance on Accessible Event facilitation to ensure that research and research events are designed, conducted, and taught in anti-ableist, inclusive ways.

Collaborative Enquiry

Putting disabled people at the centre of disability research is of upmost importance - we must be sure to centre the most affected in disability research. Within the WAARC project, the team are working with researchers at the University of Sheffield and disabled partner organisations to facilitate collaborative disability research that centres disabled people as a priority.

Cross-Cutting Themes

We are working to develop a set of key performance indicators that will allow us to monitor the continuing development of these three aforementioned areas to ensure the legacy of the project. Alongside this, we are hosting a range of public facing events to engage staff and publics in conversations surrounding inclusive research cultures.

www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/waarc

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