

# Accessibility Guidelines for Astronomy and Astrophysics Meetings

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and the AAS Working Group for Accessibility and Disability (WGAD)

We present a preview of the AAS Working Group for Accessibility and Disability's best practice recommendations for meetings accessibility. Applying the principles of universal access and barrier-free design, we model a paradigm of anticipating and removing accessibility barriers in advance, rather than putting the burden of requesting accommodation solely on disabled astronomers and students. We cite several professional and nonprofessional societies identified as meetings accessibility exemplars, and model our guidelines on their best practices. We establish standards for accessibility budgeting, venue choice, publication of policies online, designating point persons, and identifying barriers. We make recommendations for oral and poster presentations, event registration, receptions and banquets, excursions, and other typical conference activities. For meetings which are constrained by fixed budgets and venue choice, we identify a number of low cost/high reward (0<sup>th</sup>-order) accessibility steps which might still have a large beneficial impact.

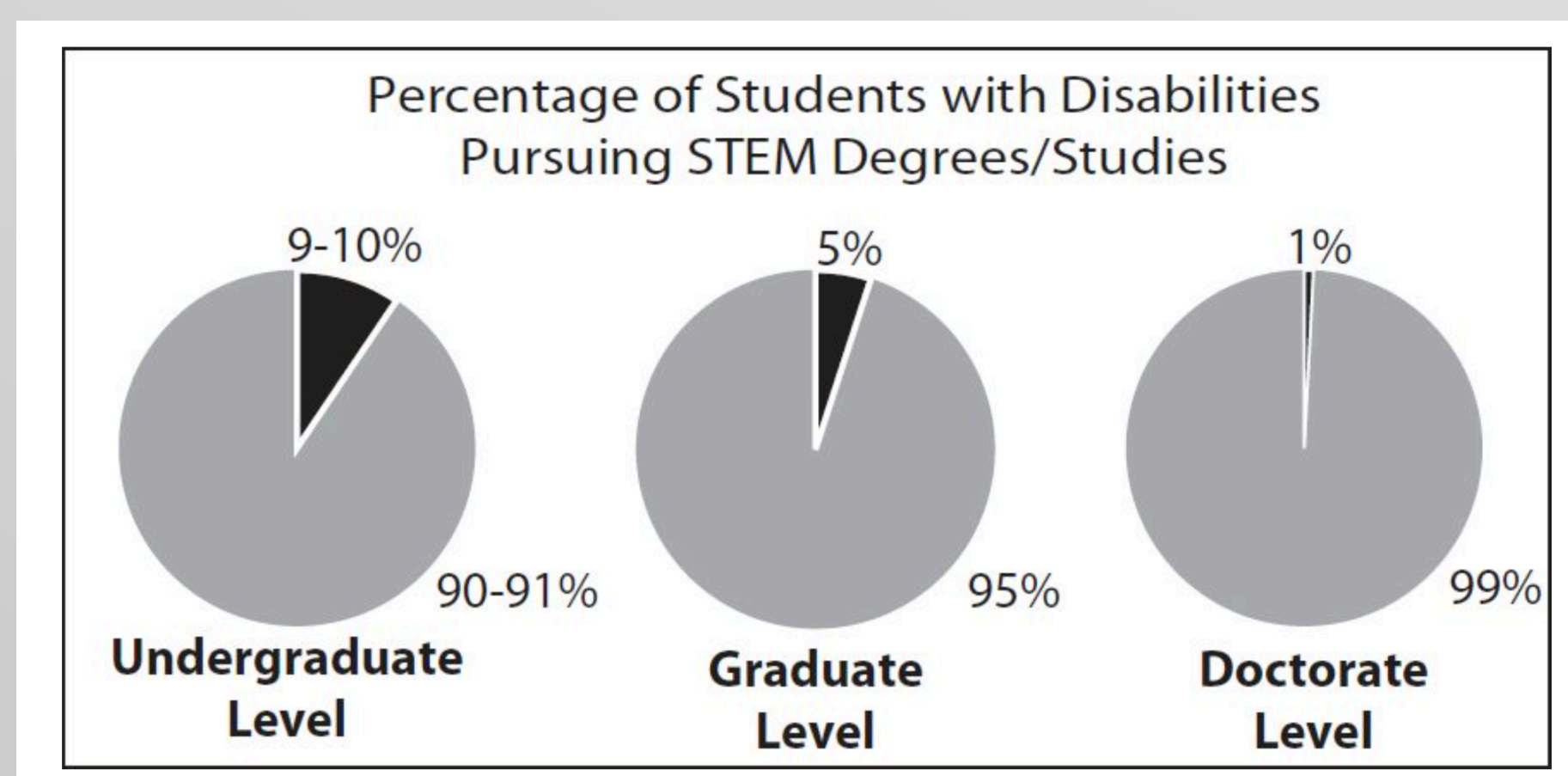


## Motivation:

Attendance at meetings and conferences is a critical component of an astronomer's professional life. Scientific meetings include opportunities for:

- presenting work to colleagues
- staying current in the field
- career networking
- scientific collaboration

Exclusion from these gatherings due to lack of accessibility or accommodation failure is a reality for disabled astronomers, and contributes substantially to low levels of representation in the senior-most levels of the field.



From: Moon et al. 2010, *Accommodating Students with Disabilities in STEM: Findings from Research and Practice for Middle Grades through University Education*. SciTrain: Science and Math for All, Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access, George Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA

## AAS WGAD Guidelines:

### Fundamentals:

- Establishing an Accessibility Policy
- Universal Design vs. ADA Compliance
- Conference Website
- Assigning an Accessibility Lead
- Creating and Training an Access Team
- 0<sup>th</sup>-Order Access/ Access on a Budget

### Accessibility Guidelines for:

- Venue and Site Selection
- Hotel
- Registration Desk
- Oral Sessions and Plenary Talks
- Poster Sessions
- Exhibit Halls
- Badges and Signage
- Concessions, Buffets, Banquets
- Excursions



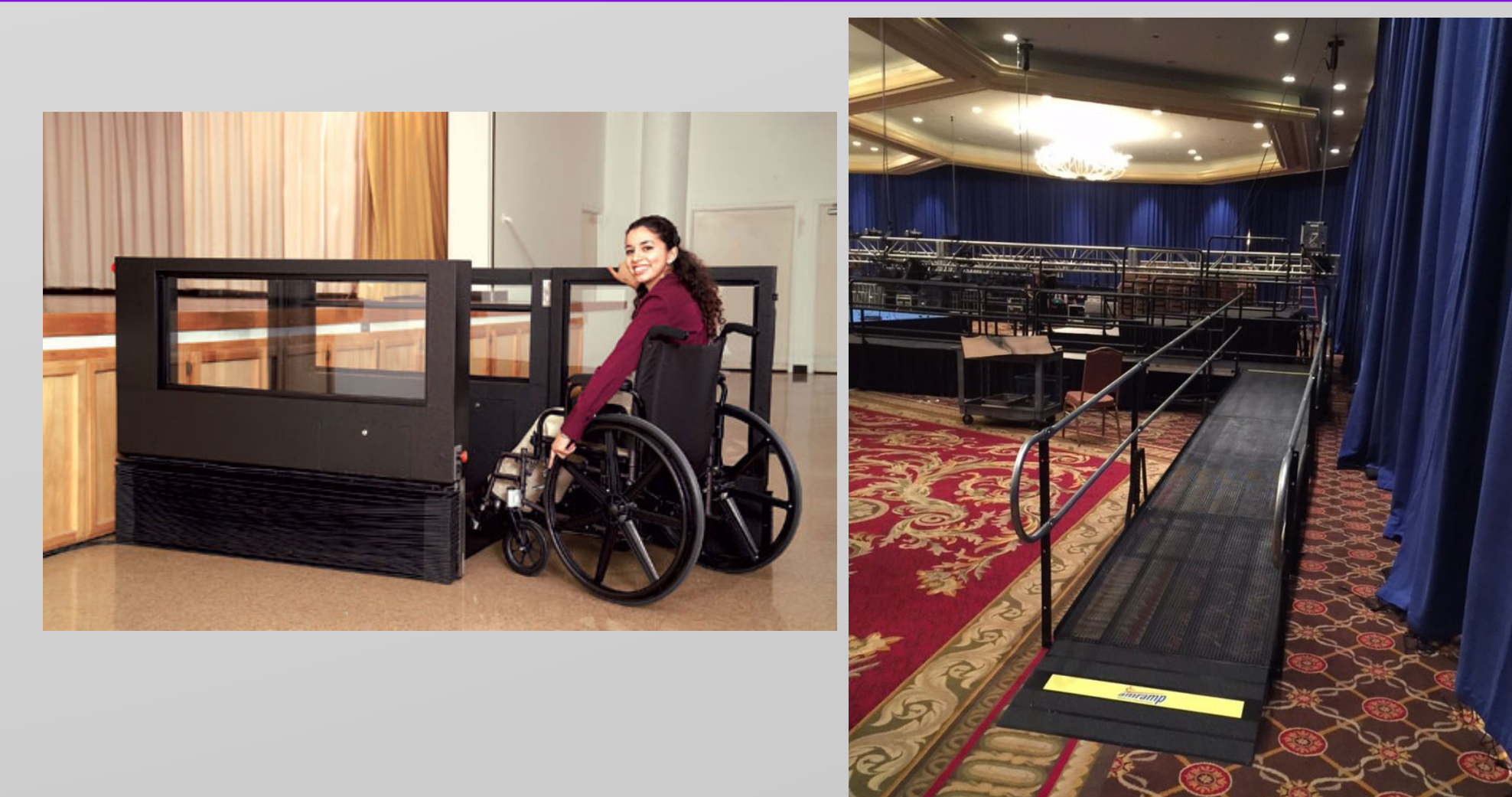
## Accessibility Lead & Team:

Assigning an accessibility lead is perhaps the most critical component of conference accessibility.

- Maintains accountability
- Minimizes chances of losing accommodation requests

### Responsibilities:

1. Maintains information on meeting website
  - Conference accessibility statement
  - Online accommodation forms
  - Access and barrier maps
2. Identifies pre-existing barriers at Venue, Hotel, Site
3. Arranges baseline accessibility to navigate these barriers
4. Point person for accommodation requests **before and during** meeting
5. Contact info should be posted in meeting guide and on website
6. Makes budget and access team staffing requests



## 0<sup>th</sup>-Order Accessibility Checklist (Access on a Budget):

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assign Accessibility lead/point person</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create Access team (volunteers and/or staff)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Publicize on conference website                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Access Policy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Barrier/access map</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify barriers and current level of access onsite                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Walk-through of venue/site/hotel</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Verify accessible rooms at hotel,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Verify service animal policies and rooms</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Braille in elevators</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All-gender restroom(s)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Encourage accommodation requests</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Webform</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Large signage                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Badges</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poster Labels</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Session Signage</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pronoun stickers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Complete ingredient lists and labels for all food</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Braille guides at snack bars</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reserved seating in oral sessions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Quiet Room</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

a. Arizona State University  
 b. Office of Astronomy for Development  
 c. Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics  
 d. University of Arizona  
 e. University of Colorado Boulder  
 f. Planetary Science Institute  
 g. Quinsigamond Community College  
 h. Central Connecticut State University