



## Out of time: (Re)working disabled graduate employability

Shona Edwards<sup>1</sup> and Alexandra Sudlow-Haylett<sup>1</sup>

Corresponding author: Shona Edwards ([shona.edwards@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:shona.edwards@adelaide.edu.au))

<sup>1</sup> School of Humanities, University of Adelaide, South Australia

### Abstract

As interest in disability employment increases across the world following the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding the employability of disabled graduates becomes an imperative for governments, universities and employers alike. This article investigates employability through the lens of the lived experience of disabled graduates, with one author (Alexandra) serving as a case study. Alexandra's experience in higher education has been defined by living in crip time, a unique disabled experience of time as non-linear. Alexandra's story describes how surviving within institutions which operate on normative understandings of time as linear, chronological, and inextricably tied to productivity has caused harm to disabled students. Disabled students are made to feel as though they are 'falling behind time,' 'wasting time,' and 'losing time,' resulting in a struggle to 'catch up time,' which impacts upon their wellbeing, confidence, and their sense of self. This struggle disadvantages disabled students from spending time building their 'employability skills' throughout their degree. As disabled students complete their studies and seek graduate employment, they come into further contact with industry who further compound harm through placement experiences and the graduate hiring process by not accommodating for crip time. This case study poses conventional mentoring programmes as a site in which disabled students such as Alexandra face barriers to engagement. We argue for a co-designed model of accessible, non-hierarchical peer mentoring, where crip time is accommodated and supported. Such accessible mentoring may serve as an effective intervention and an opportunity for disabled students to develop essential employability skills.

### Keywords

disabled students, employability, crip time, mentoring, higher education

### Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, what disability justice advocate Imani Barbarin (2021) calls a 'mass disabling event', there has been an increased interest globally in disability employment (Jones Lang LaSalle, 2022). Pandemic measures taken by states and corporations resulted in the rise of hybrid and remote work and, in Australia, an imperative to enhance the inclusion of disabled people in work to offset labour shortages (Olney, 2021). Hybrid and remote work, however, have raised questions about where, how, and when people work best. The current Australian Labor government's Disability Plan includes a funding commitment to develop a Disability Employment Centre for Excellence (Children and Young People with Disability Australia, 2022). Universities and other major employers have been developing their Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies, strategies and frameworks in a trend stretching broadly across the last 20 years (Dewidar et al., 2022). There has also been significant research in the last decade looking at the wellbeing of student equity groups including disabled students (Children and Young People with Disability Australia, 2020).

The awareness about greater inclusion in the workplace has also shown a light on the concept of student 'employability'. Employability, which has far ranging conceptualisations, is typically defined as a given individual or group's suitability to participate in paid employment/work (e.g., Williams et al., 2016). Universities accordingly prepare students for paid work to inform their employability post-graduation. Yet complexities remain about how, and to what extent, employability as a concept is inclusive. From the perspective of disability justice, we believe it is incumbent upon employers and universities to account for the skills, support needs, and experiences which are unique to disabled graduates.

This article draws on our lived experiences as disabled students with one author (Alexandra) serving as a case study. Both authors have served as organisers and peer mentors in the Disability Illness and Divergence Association (DIDA), a student union affiliated club and advocacy group at the University of Adelaide. Our aim is to address the ways that the increasingly marketised, consumer-driven academy upholds and perpetuates normative notions of time as linear, chronological, and tied to productivity, and how that normative understanding of time causes harm to disabled students in higher education. We argue that understanding disabled students' experiences of time is essential to understanding how that student will arrive at, experience, and participate in their tertiary education, their transition into employment, and in the workforce itself. We utilise crip time theory, in contrast to the normative, linear, and quantifiable time often upheld by the university (refer to Dollinger on the projectification of the university, 2020). Crip is deployed by McRuer (2006) to describe non-normative understandings of disabled identities, practices and positions, including orientation towards time. Although historically a term used derogatorily as a slur, crip is used by the authors as a term of disability pride, reclaimed by disabled communities (Kotzer, 2021).

We build off significant research that has underscored the variations on how people experience time (e.g., Bennett & Burke, 2018). We believe that understanding the ways disabled graduates experience time differently to their non-disabled peers will facilitate trust between employers and job seekers, and facilitate better design of support interventions, both support before the graduate hiring process, while students are at university, and support during the graduate hiring process, including onboarding, training and ongoing workplace conditions. The ways Alexandra lives in crip time, and the ways that understanding, and therefore accommodating for crip time has benefited her wellbeing, performance and success, demonstrates an opportunity for both universities and employers.

We begin by describing crip time and illustrate through our own lived experiences the ways in which disabled students are made to feel as though we are 'falling behind time,' 'wasting time,' and 'losing time,' resulting in a struggle to 'catch up time'. With 'less time' than their non-disabled peers, we further argue the ways disabled students engage with employability skills training and learning is significantly impaired. We then posit accessible peer mentoring practices as a valuable intervention which can support and accommodate crip time when designed by those with lived experiences. Finally, we describe the implications of this understanding of disability employability as crucially bound to crip time for policymakers at universities and within governments alike and suggest fruitful areas for further research.

## Crip time theory

Crip time theory emerged from queer and disability studies in order to describe how non-normative bodyminds experience time differently from abled bodied and able minded individuals (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2005). Bodymind here refers to a disabled selfhood which is experienced in both physical and mental senses and rejects binary constructions of the 'mind' as distinct from the 'body' (Price, 2015). Crip time is defined in contrast to the normative time upheld by the neoliberal academy, in which time is experienced as linear, progresses chronologically, and is intimately tied to productivity (Dollinger, 2020). Brown and Leigh (2020) and their contributors stress the pressures of the higher education labour market on academics, and the resulting productivity culture. Griffiths (2020) says 'We need to be always productive and always performing' (p. 137). We suggest that the 'always' that Griffiths uses is a representation of the way normative time functions within and is upheld by the

academy: it is pervasive, inescapable, and defines the work and even sense of self of individuals within the academy. As we shall demonstrate, it is also harmful to disabled individuals.

Kafer (2013) defines crip time as reorientation towards time, a departure from 'straight time', and the 'expectation of linear development from childhood to independent reproductive adulthood' (p. 34). Our article centres an embodied understanding of the experience of time which impacts when and how a disabled individual sleeps, eats, rests, works, studies, socialises and performs other tasks of daily living (Raghavan, 2020). The need for 'more' time, in order to facilitate reasonable accommodations and to allow for dependency on attendants and equipment, is the most well understood manifestation of crip time, but it is the principle of flexibility – and acceptance of this disabled way of being, doing, and knowing flexibly – that is most essential to crip time (Kafer, 2013; Price, 2015).

Recent scholarship has posited the importance of crip time as a lens to explore (in)flexibility and authenticity of inclusion in higher education. For example, Rodgers et al. (2022) investigated the ways disabled academics were excluded from the academy through the negation of their crip temporalities. Similarly, Samuels (2017) described the impact of crip time on academic work and identities, describing crip time as 'grief' and 'sick' time. Schumm (2022) further urges for a post-Covid world to recognise the value of crip time for all, but especially disabled academics. Important to our discussion, Rodgers et al. (2022) argued that crip temporalities are *necessarily* deployed by disabled academics to survive the neoliberal academy. Yet literature has not yet explored the application and use of crip time for disabled *students*. Through our reflection therefore we contribute significant to the research to extend beyond academics perceptions and experiences of crip time (e.g., Brown & Leigh, 2020) to explore crip time for students, not only as a tool, but a way of living.

### Falling behind time

Disabled students meet identifiable milestones of their education and career progression at different stages and a different pace than is expected for non-disabled students. This includes entry into higher education at later ages than non-disabled students, studying at lower rates of full-time attendance, and resulting later completion times (Pitman, 2022). These students may feel as though they are or have been 'falling behind', even from the outset of their degree. Others may have entered higher education immediately following high school but, due to part time attendance, sick leave and other reasons for extending the length of their degree, age up into the 'mature age student' demographic (e.g., commencing at 21 or later). This further can compound disadvantage for disabled students, who not only must balance study with healthcare related processes, but also may be socially marginalised by their younger peers.

Both authors of this paper have studied as part-time students for periods of our bachelor's degrees out of necessity due to mental health conditions and chronic illness, and both entered university via atypical pathways. Alexandra began university in her mid-20s. She feels she sacrificed much of her health and took 'extra' time to complete her degree, though she shares this experience with many of her disabled peers. For Alexandra, 'extra' time was spent preparing for and recovering from classes and deadlines, and non-linear bouts of illness or disruption would upset this balance and exact a further time debt. This resulted in a cycle of constant 'catch up' that could not be remedied through deadline extensions. It was only when Alexandra met other students who experienced crip time that she could recontextualise her experiences from a perceived personal failure to a systemic issue. In many cases disabled students experience significant stress and anxiety that they have 'fallen behind' the peer group they may have graduated high school with, and concern about how potential future employers would perceive the length of time it took to complete their degree.

Alexandra was prepared to enter academia but was discouraged to learn that disabled academics shared many challenges with disabled students in higher education. Like disabled scholars, disabled students are often left to negotiate implementation of their own supports when institutional policy is insufficient or ignored or when disability service staff are over-burdened and under-resourced (Rodgers et al. 2022).

## Wasting time

Disabled students often require time spent resting, to manage or recover from the flare up of symptoms, particularly chronic pain and fatigue (Sheppard, 2020). In Western, capitalist, work-focused societies, notions of time are premised on conceptualising human progress as linear and perfectible (Halberstam, 2005; Ljuslinder et al. 2020; Rice et al., 2017). Thus, resting time is framed as 'wasted time' insofar as it is viewed as unproductive (Piepzsna-Samarasinha, 2021). This may result in intense feelings of guilt and shame for disabled students (Martin, 2010; Raghavan 2020). Crip time allows us to reframe rest time as not unproductive, and instead something restorative, catering to the needs of the disabled bodymind, and therefore productive for the self.

There is also time spent with the administration of existing as disabled students. Attaining accommodations, extensions, and even sick leave requires paperwork and communication with many administrative staff and academics. Alexandra struggled to receive adequate support for her disabilities while at university, 'wasting' time emailing academic and support staff over the course of weeks or months to secure accommodations. She experienced disability discrimination on several occasions but decided not to pursue complaint in order to prevent further loss of time.

## Catching up time

The experiences of disabled students in higher education are organised according to rigid semester or trimester timelines. Even with accommodations such as extensions, disabled students may not have enough time to 'catch up' with coursework. Disabled students may spend their time in semester breaks and holiday periods catching up and completing work, or on working on upcoming coursework material to 'get ahead' and account for anticipated delays in future semesters due to flare ups of symptom or health crises. Assignments are often scheduled by teaching staff anticipating that the semester breaks are opportunity to spend more time on that study. Thus, these students are 'losing time' that might otherwise be spent on fulfilling their social needs, recreation, and attending to their mental health and wellbeing, as the breaks are intended. These students also therefore 'lose time' that non-disabled students may use for additional study and extra-curricular commitments, including club and society work, internships and placements. As completion of a degree or diploma for disabled students may take longer than anticipated due to illness, hospitalisation or medical treatment, and other 'time off', this need to 'catch up' is exacerbated, and compounds over time (Pitman, 2022).

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## Envisioning a better relation to time

While employers may conceptualise stages of a graduate recruitment process and a lifecycle of an employee in linear terms, crip time demands that we reconsider our assumptions about life stages, milestones, age, and experience. Western conceptualisations of time emphasise the chronological progression of the life course through childhood to adolescence, from dependence to independent productivity (Browne, 2014; Rice et al., 2017). Thus, colloquially we refer to career 'stages' with the assumption of linear progression. We also assume that independence and capacity increase over time. Failure to meet assumptions and expectations of progression can result in stigma, which is detrimental to employee mental health and wellbeing (Brewer, 2022).

As a graduate, Alexandra worries that though she has no work history, a continued period of inactivity will reflect badly on her resume. This 'lost' time is time she cannot explain without disclosing her disabilities. As such, while disclosure of disabilities to employers is not compulsory in Australia, disabled graduates without work history may feel pressured to do so.

Kafer's monograph *Feminist Queer Crip* (2013) advocates for the imagining of crip futurity, and on that basis, we imagine processes of graduate employment and a lifecycle of employees that is inclusive of disabled bodyminds. This process would accommodate the strengths, support needs, and experiences of disabled graduates entering the workforce. Rather than conceptualising crip time as a negative relation to time, or an impairment, we believe that the disabled graduates' experience of crip time, when respected and appropriately accommodated, empowers them with valuable understandings of the ways we can relate to people, things, the environment, and ourselves.

We now turn to the intersection of crip time with employability, to address how assumptions about normative time is harmful for disabled students and graduates seeking employment within systems which do not accommodate their disabled experiences and how an affirmative reading of crip time might help to transform the relationship between employability and disability.

## Employability

In the spirit of dreaming a crip futurity, we first look to the current conceptualisation of 'employability', and how disabled students and graduates relate to this concept, in order to understand where we are and have been in the world of disability employment, and where we may go.

Only 47.8% of disabled, working-aged people in Australia were employed as of 2018, and only 16.1% held a bachelor's degrees or higher, though this number is increasing over time (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Of university graduates, unemployment estimates indicate that disabled people are more likely to be unemployed, with 23% of graduates reporting unemployment compared to 14% of graduates with no reported disability (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), 2021, p.9). The employment and financial security of people with disability is a high priority outcome area in *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* (Australian Government, 2021), including the goal of improving the transition of young people from education to employment. Job seekers, including graduates, are subject to expectations of knowledge, skills and understandings adapted from the desires of industry and employers. These are widely referred to as 'employability skills, attributes or capabilities' (Australian Government, 2013). Yet employability itself is a widely contested concept that differs depending on economic, social, or political contexts. It further relates to unemployed people, employed people, and those looking to change jobs or employers, most often focused on labour supply and demand (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2004).

For university graduates, employability is inextricably linked to higher education. When neoliberal policy attached student debt to income thresholds in the UK and Australia, governments shifted the responsibility for skills and training away from employers and towards universities. As a result, placing increased pressure on graduates to develop the kinds of generic, soft and transferable skills and personal qualities desired by employers which are thought necessary to secure high quality jobs (Ashe, 2012). By focusing on the development of individual skills and personal qualities, an absence of employment after graduation places undue responsibility on the individual graduate, as opposed to other stakeholders (Ashe, 2012; Reid, 2016; Reid & Kelestyn, 2022). The 'employability agenda' establishes the ideal graduate as one with ample time, capacity and interest in achieving the best possible employment outcome (Ashe, 2012). In a challenge designed to elicit reflection on narratives of employability at a UK university, Reid and Kelestyn (2022) found that students faced pressure to 'make the most' of their time at university by engaging in select, tokenistic activities designed to improve their employability over other activities that aligned with their interests. This pressure came from multiple sources, including university materials and wider societal expectations. These students also felt employers saw their time as free and disposable, presenting problems for students already engaged in work or those pursuing activities associated with their values and interests.

We argue that crip time helps us understand that disabled students perceived to have 'less time' than their non-disabled peers, in addition to functioning out of normative experiences of time in their tasks of daily living. The pressure on these graduates is therefore significant not only for their health and wellbeing, but their ability to successfully find employment. Even as Australian employers are



beginning to hold disabled people in higher regard, employment outcomes have not changed to reflect this (Hemphill & Kulik, 2016). Research shows that employers continue to hold negative attitudes about disabled employees based on lack of trust, perceived lack of contribution or insufficient external support (Strindlund et al., 2019). We believe that an improved understanding of crip time may improve mutual trust between jobseekers and potential employers as well as facilitate improved support for disabled graduates.

In Alexandra's final year of university, a curricular internship designed for abled students (and their experience of linear time) reduced her confidence to enter the workforce, and she found that course material designed to improve her employability was largely inapplicable due to her disabilities. In contrast, her extracurricular activities with the Disability Illness and Divergence Association allowed her to develop several skills in 'cripped' working conditions. This included committee roles that mimicked aspects of job-sharing, non-hierarchical peer mentor-mentee relationships, and networking only with trusted professionals in accessible settings. The co-authorship of this article represents such 'cripped' working conditions between two peers who otherwise would not have had the confidence to write for publication, nor the time, energy and institutional knowledge to do so. With the security and trust of a peer partnership where support needs are respected and not moralised, we have worked with greater flexibility than any internships we have come across.

Employability is increasingly characterised by transferable 'soft skills' desired by employers, with many of these dependent upon a presumed experience of linear time and an abled bodymind. Employers may be unaware that crip time shapes the development of many of these skills, more obviously in terms of timeliness, but also qualities like adaptability and flexibility. Disabled graduates like Alexandra may lack work experience, have unexplained employment gaps, or possess experience that has developed these skills but is not considered professionally meaningful.

Ashe (2012) demonstrates that dominant graduate employability discourses erase the experiences of equity groups who do not or cannot mirror the highly self-managed and flexible worker constructed by external stakeholders, including career service professionals. Preparing disabled graduates for the workforce requires specialised resources and knowledge to address issues associated with disability disclosure, discrimination, stigma and self-advocacy skills. Addressing these problems requires an approach to employability driven by an ethics of care that implicates external stakeholders like the state, employers, institutions and their staff (Reid, 2016), that elevates student voice, and supports the efforts of peer mentors and associations who already do this work.

## The case for mentoring

Considering the disabled student's non-normative relationship to and experience of time, it is important that their social support and the people around them understand crip time in order for the student to feel understood, validated, and seen. Understanding crip time can also allow for more effective and needs-specific accommodations. For that reason, we emphasise the importance of peer mentorship for disabled students, through their tertiary education and through their transition from their institution into the workforce. While intervention programmes to assist disabled graduates through the transition and placement into employment have been developed in recent years (Cassiani et al., 2020; Lindsay et al., 2019), a crip time informed framework may improve the design of these interventions, including by providing access to mentoring interventions before a disabled student reaches the milestone identity of 'graduate'.

## Conventional mentorship

Mentorship in many institutions is understood as an opportunity for academic achievement, personal and professional development, and career advancement. This is usually a relationship between two people, where the 'mentor' is at a more advanced level of study or career progression than the 'mentee', creating an unequal/unilateral dynamic where mentors share their knowledge for the benefit of the mentee.

Brewer (2022) identifies an urgent need for social support for disabled students and staff within higher education. Academic literature and mentorship programmes within higher education have often focused on other role model types (for example, female academics, as in Levinson et al., 1991) rather than those with disabilities. While literature on the benefit of mentoring programmes for disabled people within higher education has focused on disabled staff, such as Jones (1997), we have identified a need to consider the possibilities for and value of peer mentorship amongst disabled students.

### **Issues with conventional mentorship**

One barrier that disabled students may encounter with conventional mentoring programs is through their eligibility. For example, mentoring programs may require a minimum academic performance requirement in order for students to be selected as mentors. For example, at Alexandra's institution, a minimum grade point average of 6 and high grades in the nominated preferred courses is required to be a Peer Assisted Study Session (PASS) leader (University of Adelaide, 2023). This often creates competitive entry into mentoring programmes such as PASS. And unfortunately, the resulting outcome may be the manifestation of a prohibitive barrier to disabled students' entry. To illustrate, a disabled student who may have struggled during their studies for health related concerns, which reflects on their academic record, but masks their otherwise valuable academic knowledge and the contribution they could make to supporting their peers.

Alexandra's institution also explicitly appeals to applicants in mentoring roles by framing PASS as an opportunity to develop skills in 'leading and managing groups', to 'enhance your career prospects' and to 'improve your future chances of being selected for tutoring jobs' (University of Adelaide 2023). While 'satisfaction from helping other students succeed' is mentioned, the career focus along with mention of prizes, certificates and an honorarium create an overwhelming focus on the benefits and advantages of the programme for the individuals serving as mentors, rather than a focus on the benefits for mentees or for the community as a whole. The phrasing 'skills in... managing groups' emphasises that the mentors are in a hierarchical dynamic with their mentees, and there is no reciprocal element to inspire mentee confidence nor of the potential interpersonal and organisational skills involved in community building.

Even where participation in mentoring programmes is not prohibitively competitive, disabled students may have other barriers to participation. As disabled students the authors have been interested in participating in conventional mentoring programmes but have turned down opportunities when they arose out of fear that we did not have the time and energy to commit to them. This underscores the importance for programs to consider not only who can become a mentor, but how the program will support crip temporalities.

Prior to her work with the Disability Illness and Divergence Association, Alexandra had accessed both academic and peer mentoring as part of her undergraduate programme. She struggled to understand what mentorship could do for her and found most of the advice she received was too generalised or inapplicable to her situation. In contrast to this experience as a passive recipient of standard mentorship, the informal mentorship structure in DIDA has been purposely constructed to reflect crip time. This includes asynchronous discussion; flexible and adjustable accommodations as an on-going and dynamic process to not only shape an individual's experience, but to improve the way DIDA functioned; non-hierarchical relationships; and no presumption of age-associated life milestones. Alexandra actively built her confidence and personal network in an environment that reflected her experience of time as both mentee and mentor, providing valuable professional experience she could not access through conventional mentoring.

### **Valuable disabled knowledge**

Disabled students who have faced difficulties throughout their study have vital knowledge that can benefit their disabled peers. This knowledge may be unique to the disabled experience, from 'survival skills' like where to go on campus when experiencing a symptom flare up (e.g., panic attack, migraine, or pain crisis), to 'institutional knowledge' such as how to retroactively withdraw from classes and

apply for remission of fees on the basis of illness. These survival skills are intimately intertwined with how disabled students experience crup time. The learning which disabled students do may therefore not be reflected in their academic record. We argue that this valuable and unique knowledge is equally applicable in the workforce. When conventional mentoring programmes fail to equitably include this knowledge and the disabled students who hold that knowledge, the participants of those mentoring programmes may miss out on the skills and support which could benefit them as graduates seeking employment, and maintaining sustainable, meaningful employment.

### **Support from trusted peers within the disability community**

We argue for the importance of social support and mentoring from peers, with similar lived experiences. It is not simply enough for disabled students to be identified as a vulnerable equity group which would benefit from mentoring programmes. Those programmes must be designed with the needs of those students in mind, including their experience of crup time. One way to ensure this is to source mentors for these potential mentees from within their own community. When mentors are embedded in the community they serve, they have greater community ties and as a result, there is accountability for their behaviour and shared values. When students, potential mentors and mentees both, know and trust that they are part of a community of shared values and life experiences, there is a sense of security and safety which can build student confidence. Confidence allows students to push themselves to develop and improve their skills, to take risks, and to face uncertainty in the job market or wider world.

### **Non-hierarchical mentoring**

We argue further for a non-hierarchical form of mentoring, where it is not primarily the mentee who benefits from the relationship, but a mutually beneficial dynamic. As described above, when disabled students are more likely to come to higher education at different times to their non-disabled peers, are more likely to study part time, more likely to meet milestones at different rates and in different ways, it is much more likely that disabled students have a range of experiences which can inform a mentoring relationship. Peers at an equal level of study or career progression have valuable knowledge to share.

In 2021, the Disability Illness and Divergence Association held a series of career skills workshops in conjunction with a University Specialist Employment Partnership (USEP) representative employed by Career Services at the University of Adelaide. These workshops, initiated and designed by DIDA, addressed common concerns about disability disclosure and workplace discrimination and introduced students to key employment resources and allowed students to come together and discuss their experiences in seeking and maintaining work. These workshops became a site in which casual, as-needed mentorship could occur.

More broadly, the benefit of participation in DIDA gave Alexandra the opportunity to develop skills in the security of a peer environment. During Alexandra's time on the DIDA committee, she started a campaign to secure an access space on campus for disabled students, contributed to surveying students and co-authored a report which was sent to university management. She gained experience in building and maintaining a website, attending meetings and taking minutes, liaising with university stakeholders and assisting with events. She acted in both a mentee and mentor capacity, offering other committee members guidance on matters of writing, feedback and conduct. More informally, DIDA members would regularly provide advice to each other on navigating work and study. However, as a graduate, Alexandra still worries that employers may not value this experience in the absence of paid work history, despite the significant contribution her work with DIDA has made to her employability.

Peer to peer mentoring programs which account for disabled students experiences of crup time, and that progression, retention and completion may address issues with how the higher education sector prepares disabled graduates and invest them with 'employability' skills. This mentoring must be accessible, inclusive, and value difference and diversity as enriching. Accessible mentoring must be



mindful of the way their recruited disabled mentors have 'less time' to commit to unpaid volunteering work, and that disabled mentors and mentees alike experience daily and weekly schedules differently.

Accessible mentoring may also make use of understandings of 'care work' and an 'ethics of care' (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2021; Reid 2016) and collectivist approaches. Chatzidakis et al.,'s (2022) monograph *The Care Manifesto* calls for a recognition of our shared vulnerabilities and interconnectedness as citizens (p. 13). Understanding crip time improves the quality of mentoring programmes by encouraging participants to value difference and different ways of knowing, being and doing, and not stigmatising dependence and the need for support to work effectively. By centring care and decentring an individualistic and profit focus on mentoring, mentoring can be framed as more than simply a tool of career progression, but a means of attending to wellbeing and building resilience and capacity to participate in society on all levels, not just in terms of employment. 'Capacity building' is a focus for the Department of Social Services, as evidenced in the Individual Capacity Building programme which provides grants to organisations to enable access to peer support, mentoring and other skills for people with disability (Australian Government, 2022). A mentoring programme which has capacity building as a goal can attend to the practical challenges involved in sharing vulnerabilities and support needs in order to make the most of the programme.

## Implications and discussion

This article and Alexandra's experiences highlight the importance of research done by those with lived experiences of a given issue. Crip time and the ways that normative time causes distress and harm to disabled students in higher education can be effectively illustrated when understood through the lived experience of those students. Alexandra's experiences make it clear that it is of utmost importance that services and support for disabled students in higher education are not only designed with the experiences of the end users in mind but co-designed by those end users. Alexandra's experiences with conventional mentoring at her university, which did not accommodate her living in crip time, stand in stark contrast to her experience with accessible, non-hierarchical, peer mentoring with the Disability Illness and Divergence Association, which did account for crip time. Similarly, her experiences working with her disabled peers contrasts against poor outcomes she experienced from university employability programmes unequipped to account for those living outside of linear time. This article has potential to contribute to a conversation around deploying co-design in the development of student services and support within higher education as well as within the graduate recruitment programmes and policies of employers.

### Implications for universities

While Australian federal and state governments have begun to integrate co-design in policymaking universities and employers alike have yet to make this change to regularly and reliably utilise co-design principles in the design of support and services (Australia and New Zealand School of Government, 2020). Students like Alexandra will continue to have these negative experiences until co-design is practiced across the higher education sector. With some Australian universities yet to draft disability inclusion plans (or have out of date plans), meaningful co-design of EDI policies is both timely and imperative (National Union of Students et al., 2022). These policies could better incorporate lived experiences and perspectives and further acknowledge disabled temporalities through co-design informed by active and practical student partnership. Co-design of these supports and services must include disabled students to ensure that they are inclusive, accessible, and accommodating for the lived reality of crip time. There is emerging interest in mentoring programs of the style described at Australian universities, as evidenced by the 'Students Mentoring Staff' program at Deakin University (Deakin University, 2021), upon which other universities can learn and build. Career service providers must also be prepared to adapt and develop purpose-built resources and materials for disabled graduates, including access to relevant and effective mentorship which is cognizant of their vulnerabilities and support needs.

## Implications for government

As described above, disability employment is a point of policy interest for the current federal Australian Labor government. For government employment strategies to be effective and sustainable, our article has demonstrated that it is imperative that policymakers understand the ways that disabled people living in crip time impacts upon their experiences during education, where they develop employability skills, and their experiences as graduate jobseekers transitioning into employment. Governments have a role to play in determining the policy priorities which determine research funding in this area. Alexandra's experiences demonstrate that evaluating the wellbeing and success of disabled students is a complex issue, and that government research funding in the areas of student engagement, retention and success may be effectively utilised by empowering researchers with lived experience of those complex issues. The capacity of the disabled workforce will increase if disability employment strategies recognise the unique skills and knowledge which disabled graduates have gained through their unique experience of living in crip time and through surviving in institutions and societies which run on normative time. The government can continue to improve how they engage with lived experience advocates in the development of disability employment strategies and relevant policies.

## Implications for employers

Much of what is true of government action on this issue is true for employers as well, in recognising the value that disabled employees can bring to their companies. Our article is a call to action for employers to understand crip time through the lens of lived experience in order to better understand their disabled employees and support the future disabled graduates they may hire. Co-designing graduate recruitment programmes and supports for new hires will ensure that disabled graduates have a better chance at long term, meaningful employment.

## Opportunities for future research

Future research could focus on changing institutional policy to account for the experience of crip time and secure improvements to employability outcomes for disabled graduates. Other research could explore the applicability of a crip time perspective in Australian legislation, such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. Researchers could also examine qualitative experiences of disabled peer mentorship and the work student collectives are already doing in several Australian universities to raise awareness and encourage institutional change in the treatment of students with disabilities. Other qualitative work might explore how disabled graduates experience and use employability resources regarding living in crip time alongside content analysis of career service materials. We suggest that any qualitative research is meaningfully and accessibly co-designed in order to maintain trust with disabled respondents.

## Conclusion

Understanding crip time is a disability justice imperative. When disabled students and graduates are forced to conform to normative time, their wellbeing, mental health and sense of self can be significantly harmed. Until crip time is understood and accommodated, their graduate outcomes, impacted by the compounding trauma of denial of their crip realities, will remain poor. This article has shown that by respecting and appropriately accommodating for the disabled graduate living in crip time, graduates and employers alike are empowered with valuable understandings of the ways disabled people can relate to people, things, the environment, and ourselves.

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