Campus Career Development Services: Promoting Inclusive Practices

By Abigail Waugh, Melanie Jordan, and Cynthia Zafft

1. Why Are Disability Issues Relevant to the Office of Career Development?

The Office of Career Development is for all students, with and without disabilities.

Did you know that . . .

- Students with disabilities make up 9.4% of the students in postsecondary education?[1]
- You cannot always tell just by meeting someone whether they have a disability?

The Office of Career Development is the campus resource for employment preparation, career exploration, and job placement.

- The Office of Disability Services helps students locate academic and student life accommodations.
- Consulting the Office of Disability Services to find translators, accessible locations on campus, and other accommodations for students is a great idea, but the Office of Career Development is the expert on career development for all students, those with and without disabilities!

Students with disabilities have the desire and qualifications to work after they graduate, but typically they do not obtain appropriate jobs as frequently as their peers without disabilities.

- Even with a postsecondary education, only 50% of people with disabilities are employed.[2]

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) influences the interviewing process and promotes accommodations after hiring.

- Students can request accommodations for job interviews.
- On the application and during the interview, students do not have to answer certain questions related to their disability.
- On the job, students can ask employers for reasonable accommodations.

Making the Office of Career Development welcoming to everyone is easy.

- A few simple, inexpensive changes can make the Office of Career Development more inclusive for all students.
- Taking a moment to learn about disability etiquette and accessibility can help the Office of Career Development serve students even better!

To learn more . . .

- The Disability Exchange
  www.disabilityexchange.org/
- Chartbook on Work and Disability
  www.infouse.com/disabilitydata/workdisability.html
- Women with Disabilities
  www.4women.gov/wwd

1. Henderson, C. (1999). *College freshmen with disabilities: A biennial statistical profile.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
2. Swenson, S. & Richards, C. (1999). *Report from the subcommittee on expanding opportunities for young people with disabilities*). Washington, DC: OSERS.

2. Career Planning and the Americans with Disabilities Act: The Basics

What is the Americans with Disabilities Act?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates that people with disabilities have freedom, equality, and the opportunity to participate in public life.

What does the ADA mean for employment?

Title I of the ADA requires that accommodations be made so that qualified individuals with disabilities have access to the same employment opportunities as individuals without disabilities.

How does the ADA influence the application and interviewing process?

Students should be able to access application materials in alternative formats and ask for accommodations, such as a sign language interpreter, during an interview. Employers cannot ask interviewees about their health or disabilities. They can only ask questions that directly relate to the individual's ability to do the job.

What is a "reasonable" accommodation?

There is no easy definition of a "reasonable" accommodation. Employers should consider each request individually. Employers are only required to make an accommodation if an employee requests one. Employers are not required to suffer "undue hardship," such as extreme cost or diminished production standards, to accommodate an employee. Accommodations may be requested at any time during the period of employment.

Does the ADA require that people with disabilities automatically get hired?

No, the Americans with Disabilities Act does not require employers to hire people with disabilities. Individuals should be qualified for the position and be able to perform the essential job functions with or without accommodations.

To learn more . . .

- The United States Department of Justice
  www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/learnada.htm

- The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
  www.eeoc.gov/ada/adahandbook.html

3. The ADA and the Job Application Process

Job applicants have the right to ask for a reasonable accommodation at any time during the application process. This includes help with filling out a job application and any accommodations needed for the job interview.

Under the ADA, potential employers cannot ask questions that would cause an applicant to disclose information about a disability in a job interview. Here are some examples of questions that are not allowed.

Illegal questions

- Do you have a disability or medical condition?
- Have you ever been hospitalized?
- Do you take prescription drugs?
- Have you ever been treated for a drug or alcohol problem?
- Did you receive worker's compensation from your last job?
- What is your HIV status?

Potential employers are allowed to ask questions about an applicant's ability to perform essential job functions. Here are some examples of questions that are permitted:

Allowable questions

- Can you perform the essential duties of the job, with or without reasonable accommodations?
- Can you tell me (or demonstrate) how you will perform these duties?
- Can you meet the attendance requirements of the job?

About medical examinations

Employers may not require a medical exam before a job has been offered. They may require physical exams once a job has been offered, but only if they require the exam of all new employees. Tests to assess current illegal drug use are not considered "medical examinations" under the ADA and are permissible as long as all applicants are subject to the same requirement.

Preparing for an interview

Unfortunately, potential employers may not be aware of all ADA regulations. Students might want to role-play their responses to illegal interview questions. This will help students learn how to emphasize their strengths during interviews, without revealing unnecessary information about their disabilities.

To learn more . . .

- BT.Novations on the ADA
  www.btweb.com/ADAInfluence.asp

- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee
  www.uwm.edu/Dept/HR/refmaterial/adayou/vol4num2.htm

This publication will be made available in alternate formats upon request.

4. Are You Accessible?

Making the Office of Career Development accessible to students with disabilities may seem like a challenging task. You may wonder whether you have the time or budget to accomplish this. While it may take several years to make your office completely accessible to students with disabilities, there are some simple things you can do quickly and inexpensively. Small changes can make a big difference!

Steps towards inclusion

- Post a sign in your office that says, "Let us know if we can help you in any way." By announcing this to students as they enter the Office of Career Development, it lets them know your office is welcoming to all students.
- Make sure the lighting in your office is adequate. This is useful for students who are reading lips and students with visual disabilities.
- Avoid using any fragranced products in the office. Some individuals are highly sensitive to such scents.
- Advertise events in multiple ways, such as email, flyers, and announcements on the school radio station. By spreading the word using different methods, you will reach more students.
- Create a checklist for events that incorporates accessibility issues. This will be a useful reminder as you plan events.
- Create a process that will allow students to request necessary accommodations, and ensure that students know how to request such accommodations. Designate a staff member to be in charge of accommodation requests. Post "accommodations available upon request" on all brochures and fliers.
- Have resources available to provide accommodations when they are requested. This would include the capacity to put printed information into alternative forms, such as audiotape or digital text. It is also useful to have the contact information of several qualified American Sign Language interpreters.
- Have a public address system at your events. This will help your audience hear the speaker, especially people who are hard of hearing.
- Use physically accessible locations on campus for your programs. Keep in mind that newer buildings tend to be the most accessible.
- Have an inclusive attitude. An open mind makes you accessible to students with disabilities!

To learn more . . .

- The United States Access Board
  www.access-board.gov

- National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult
  www.onestops.info/category.php?cat_id=4

5. Building a Connection: Basic Disability Etiquette

Being respectful:

- Use your normal tone and vocal strength.
- Speak directly to the student, even if an interpreter is present.
- Ask before helping someone.
- If you are unclear about something a student has said, just ask for a clarification.

Thoughtful language:

- Use person-first language.

  For example, use "a student with a disability," instead of "a disabled student."

- Avoid judgmental language.

  Say "uses a wheelchair," instead of "wheelchair-bound."

- Avoid clichés about disabilities.

  Make your point without relying on such phrases as "the blind leading the blind."

Everyone is different:

- Students with disabilities, just like students without disabilities, all come to you with different life experiences and differing needs from the Office of Career Development.

  Even students who have similar disabilities have different needs. Asking is more helpful than assuming.

To learn more . . .

- National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult
  www.onestops.info (click on "Disability: the basics")

For more information, contact:

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