RESOURCE GUIDE: SUPPORTING FACULTY WITH DISABILITIES AT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

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"Disability studies holds that mainstream culture often behaves in an ableist way: assuming that disability is inherently bad, that a disability is a deficit justifying intolerance and stigma, that it should be cured or overcome; assuming that people with disabilities can be spoken and acted for; and allowing individuals to make these assumptions by claiming a position as ultimately not-disabled and therefore unmarked and entitled to diagnose and stigmatize others. Ableist positioning is thus normative."¹

At postsecondary institutions students with disabilities have increased access to on-campus disability services and accommodations to assist them on their academic journey. While support for students with disabilities has increased since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, it is unclear how support for faculty members with disabilities² at postsecondary institutions has increased or adapted since then. It is also unclear how many faculty members with disabilities are in the United States as there is no comprehensive source of this information. Students and faculty with disabilities often share similar concerns; however, faculty members with disabilities experience a larger barrier to access as there are limited resources, or knowledge of resources, for them on their campuses.

The following recommendations are not prescriptive and not all will work for every institutions; however, they will provide insight into retaining and supporting current faculty members with disabilities and recruiting and supporting future faculty members at postsecondary institutions. They are drawn from faculty with disability research, implicit bias research, and various news outlets (e.g., The Chronicle of Higher Education).

Establish Clear And Consistent Policies For Faculty Accommodations Requests. A consistent concern present in the literature discussing faculty with disabilities is the difficulty accessing accommodations at their institutions or not knowing accommodations are available to them, coupled with a pervasive sense of fear and risk with disclosure.³ Clear, consistent, and accessible policies must be created at institutions with input from faculty, staff, and other members of the campus community. The faculty accommodation request process should be shared with incoming faculty at their time of hiring and the start of each academic term.

Ensure Website Accessibility. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has a goal of providing [guidelines and recommendations](#) to all individuals, governments, and organizations internationally to ensure web content is accessible for people with disabilities. In a [2011 study](#) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 24% of responding institutions reported their websites followed web accessible guidelines and recommendations. Following web accessible guidelines are an easy way to ensure the information they are making public can reach the most amount of people. The W3C works to ensure accommodations for a wide range of disabilities are included (e.g., blindness, limited mobility, and speech disabilities). There is no one size fits all solution to web accessibility; however, these guidelines should be followed by postsecondary institutions to ensure the most reach.

1 Lewiecki-Wilson, Cynthia, and Jay Dolmage. "Comment & Response: Two Comments on 'Neurodiversity.'" *College English* 70.3 (Jan. 2008): 314–18.

2 There are two schools of thought within disability studies: [people-first language](#) usage and [identity-first language](#) usage. Throughout this document, people-first language is employed.

3 Price, M., Salzer, M. S., O'shea, A., & Kerschbaum, S. L. (2017). Disclosure of Mental Disability by College and University Faculty: The Negotiation of Accommodations, Supports, and Barriers. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 37(2). doi:10.18061/dsq.v37i2.5487

Dedicated Administrative Staff. Universities should have dedicated administrative staff with requisite professional training to support and advocate for faculty members with disabilities housed within a centralized unit, not within departments. These staff members allow faculty members to discuss their disabilities and required accommodations, limiting the need to disclose with departmental or college colleagues. These staff could provide documentation to support faculty needs, in a similar process to the student disability accommodation process. Faculty members with disabilities, particular mental health disabilities, often face fear that disclosure of invisible disabilities will reflect negatively on their promotion and tenure process.

Include Disability In Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Work. Universities benefit from including disability in their DEI work. Research is limited on faculty members with disabilities but, it should be assumed they are present at all postsecondary institutions. The issues people with disabilities face are often compounded by intersecting aspects of their identity (e.g., race, gender, and socioeconomic status). It is beneficial to include disability in DEI mission and vision statements signaling to faculty and staff members with disabilities the university sees them as a valued community members.

During this time of COVID-19, it is imperative for policymakers to consider faculty, staff, and students with disabilities and the impact policies will have on this community.

Include Disability In Training For Hiring Committees At Postsecondary Institutions. Information on inclusive hiring practices and implicit bias must be included in trainings for hiring committees to address prospective faculty members with disabilities. [A 2007 survey](#) on implicit bias found 76% of the sample had a pro-abled implicit preference; this bias was found across genders, ethnicities, age, and political orientations. Academia is productivity driven and focuses on an ideal producer. This ideal producer creates implicit bias against faculty members, and academics more broadly, with disabilities often seen as the other: not able to produce at the same level because of their disability. This implicit bias allows for committees to overlook candidates who have disclosed their disability in an effort to be transparent. Hiring committees need to embody diversity statements and practice inclusive hiring.

Include Faculty Members With Disabilities On Campus Planning Projects. The NCES 2011 survey, in addition to reporting on web accessibility, reported only 64% of institutional respondents indicated they included faculty members, staff, and/or students with disabilities on project planning and allowed for input. Accessibility is not one-size-fits all and all voices must be heard; postsecondary institutions cannot speak for people with disabilities and must consider accessibility as a continuous process. Continued investment in more [universal design](#) makes campuses accessible for all members of the community, not just those with disabilities.

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