Equal Access: Universal Design of Career Services

A checklist for making the career services welcoming, accessible, and usable
by Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

The number of students with disabilities entering and completing education at all levels has increased dramatically in recent years, yet people with disabilities are still underrepresented in challenging careers. Barriers to employment include inadequate support systems, little interaction with successful role models, lack of access to technology that can increase independence and productivity, and, most significantly, low expectations on the part of people with whom they interact.

Participation in work-based learning experiences, such as internships and cooperative education activities, can be integral to success after graduation. Work-based learning allows students to network with potential employers, explore career options, and apply skills learned in the classroom. For students with disabilities, the benefits of work experiences may be even greater than for their nondisabled peers. Work-based learning experiences give students practice in identifying appropriate accommodations for specific situations and disclosing and discussing their disabilities as they relate to the performance of job tasks. However, students with disabilities access work-based learning programs at a lower rate than students without disabilities.

This publication is designed to help career services and campus units that offer internships, cooperative education, service learning, and other work-based learning opportunities to better serve students with disabilities and other underrepresented groups.

Legal Issues

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. According to these laws, no otherwise qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of a public entity. Educational institutions must provide equal access to programs and services, including career development programs, and employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities. However, employers and career development professionals are not required to initiate discussions about accommodations. Instead, students or employees should disclose their disabilities and request specific accommodations when needed.

The ADA defines a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, including walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. Cerebral palsy, specific learning disabilities, muscular dystrophy, AIDS, head injuries, and hearing and visual impairments are some but not all of the disabilities covered by this legislation.

People with conditions of the same name often have very different abilities and challenges. An accommodation is necessary only when a disability impedes the performance of a specific academic or employment task. An employer must provide a reasonable accommodation that will allow a qualified applicant or employee to perform the essential functions of the position. A qualified applicant or employee with a disability is a person who, with or without reasonable accommodations, can perform the essential functions of the job in question. Accommodations may include the provision of a sign language interpreter for job interviews, staff meetings, and training sessions; assistive technology, or a modification to the physical layout of the work site.

Educational institutions and employers are not required to make an accommodation if it causes an undue hardship. An undue hardship is an action that requires significant difficulty or expense in relation to the size of the employer, the resources available, and the nature of the operation. Rarely is an accommodation so costly that undue hardship can be claimed. Accommodations often cost less than anticipated. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a toll-free service that advises employers and employees about job accommodations, reports that most accommodations cost very little.

Although inquiries about disabilities should not be made in a job interview, employers can ask applicants questions related to their ability to perform specific job functions as long as they ask similar questions of other candidates. For example, if a student is applying for an internship as a web designer, the employer may ask about her ability to meet deadlines, use computer software, and perform specific job tasks.

Career development professionals, like employers, should not ask a student if he has a disability. Even if he volunteers information related to his disability to a career counselor or work-based learning coordinator, staff should not share that information with an employer unless the student has given written permission to do so. Since potential clients may have disabilities that they do not disclose to you, it is a good idea to offer disability-related service information in brochures and websites for all students.

Universal Design
To make your career services operation accessible, employ principles of universal design (UD). UD means that rather than designing your facility and services for the average user, you design them for people with a broad range of abilities, disabilities, ages, reading levels, learning styles, native languages, cultures, and other characteristics. Keep in mind that students and other visitors may have learning disabilities or visual, speech, hearing, or mobility impairments. Preparing your program to be accessible to them will make it more usable by everyone and minimize the need

for special accommodations for those who use your services and for future employees as well. Make sure everyone feels welcome, and can
* get to the facility and maneuver within it,
* communicate effectively with support staff,
* access printed materials and electronic resources, and
* fully participate in events and other activities.

Train staff to support people with disabilities, respond to specific requests for accommodations in a timely manner, and know whom they can contact on campus if they have disability-related questions.

Recruiting
Many students with disabilities see internships and cooperative education experiences as optional program components that are not designed for them. To increase their participation, directly market your programs to students with disabilities. The office that serves students with disabilities at your institution may be your best resource. Provide this office with copies of your informational publications so that they can assist you in recruiting students with disabilities. They may be able to pass out program information to new students during orientation meetings and intake interviews. A short introduction to your services during an orientation will alert students to the importance of participating in work-based learning experiences. The disabled student services office may also be aware of student groups that would welcome a presentation from your office staff.

Guidelines and Examples

The following questions can guide you in making your career services universally accessible. Your disabled student services office may also be able to assist you in increasing the accessibility of your unit. This content does not provide legal advice. To clarify legal issues, consult your campus legal counsel or ADA/504 compliance officer, or call your regional Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

Planning, Policies, and Evaluation

Consider diversity issues as you plan and evaluate services.

— Are people with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, young and old students, and other groups represented on your staff in numbers proportional to those of the whole campus or community?
— Do you have policies and procedures that ensure access to facilities, printed materials, computers, and electronic resources for people with disabilities?
— Is accessibility considered in the procurement process?
— Do you have a procedure to ensure a timely response to requests for disability-related accommodations?
— Are disability-related access issues addressed in your evaluation methods?

Physical Environments and Products

Ensure physical access, comfort, and safety within an environment that is inclusive of people with a variety of abilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages.

— Are there parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building that are wheelchair-accessible and clearly identified?
— Are all levels of the facility connected via an accessible route of travel?
— Are there ample high-contrast, large-print directional signs to and throughout the office?
— Do elevators have auditory, visual, and tactile signals and are elevator controls accessible from a seated position?
— Are wheelchair-accessible restrooms with well-marked signs available in or near the office?
— Is at least part of a service counter or desk at a height accessible from a seated position?
— Are aisles kept wide and clear of obstructions for the safety of users who have mobility or visual impairments?
— Are there quiet work or meeting areas where noise and other distractions are minimized and/or facility rules in place (e.g., no cell phone use) to minimize noise?
— Is adequate light available?

Consult the *ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal* at *www.ada.gov/checkweb.htm* for more suggestions. For computing facilities within your service unit, consult *Equal Access: Universal Design of Computer Labs* video and publication at *www.washington.edu/doit/videos/index.php?vid=12*.

Staff

Make sure staff are prepared to work with all students.

— Are staff members familiar with the availability and use of the Telecommunications Relay Service and alternate document formats?
— Do staff members know how to respond to requests for disability-related accommodations, such as sign language interpreters?
— Do staff members have ready access to a list of on-and off-campus resources for students with disabilities?
— Are staff members aware of issues related to communicating with students with different characteristics such as race and ethnicity, age, and disability? (See Communication Hints at the end of this publication.)

Information Resources and Technology

If career services uses computers as information resources, ensure these systems employ accessible design, that staff members are aware of accessibility options, and systems are in place to make accommodations.

— Do you provide adequate work space for both left- and right-handed users?
— Is software to enlarge screen images and a large monitor available to assist students with low vision and learning disabilities?

— Do pictures in your publications and website include people with diverse characteristics with respect to race, gender, age, and disability?
— In key publications and on your website, do you include a statement about your commitment to universal access and procedures for requesting disability-related accommodations? For example, you could include the following statement: "Our goal is to make all materials and services accessible. Please inform staff of accessibility barriers you encounter, and request accommodations that will make activities and information resources accessible to you."
— Are all printed publications available (immediately or in a timely manner) in alternate formats such as Braille, large print, and electronic text?
— Are key documents provided in a language(s) other than English?
— Are printed materials within easy reach from a variety of heights and without furniture blocking access?
— Do electronic resources, including web pages, adhere to accessibility guidelines or standards adopted by your institution or your specific project or funding source? *Section 508 Standards for Accessible Electronic and Information Technology* (*www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/*) and the World Wide Web Consortium's *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* (*www.w3.org/WAI/*) are most commonly used. For information about making your website accessible to everyone, consult the *World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design* video and publication at *www.uw.edu/doit/Video/www.html*.
— Are videos used by your office captioned or audio described?
— Is an adjustable-height table available for each type of workstation to assist students who use wheelchairs or are small or large in stature?
— Do you provide a trackball to be used by someone who has difficulty controlling a mouse?

— Are staff members aware of accessibility options (e.g., enlarged text feature) included in computer operating systems and of assistive technology available in the facility?
— Are procedures in place for a timely response to requests for assistive technology?

Note that your organization need not have special technology on hand for every type of disability but should have available assistive technology that can benefit many people. For more information about assistive technology, consult the videos and publications at *www.uw.edu/doit/Resources/at.html*.

Events
Ensure that everyone can participate in events sponsored by your organization.
— Are events located in wheelchair-accessible facilities? Is the accessible entrance clearly marked?
— Is information about how to request disability-related accommodations included in publications promoting events?
— Is accessible transportation available if transportation is arranged for other participants?

Checklist Updates
Checklist drafts were field-tested at more than twenty postsecondary institutions nationwide (see *www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/admin.html).* A nationwide survey to test face-validity of checklist items led to further refinement of the checklist. To increase the usefulness of this working document, send suggestions to *sherylb@uw.edu*.

Additional Resources
An electronic copy of this publication as well as additional useful brochures can be found at *www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/.* Short videos, *Equal Access: Student Services and Access to the Future: Preparing Students with Disabilities for Careers*, demonstrate key points summarized in this publication. They may be freely viewed online and purchased in

DVD format from DO-IT. Consult *www.uw.edu/doit/Video/* for these and other videos that may be of interest. Permission is granted to reproduce DO-IT videos and publications for educational, noncommercial purposes provided the source is acknowledged.

The Student Services Conference Room at *www.uw.edu/doit/Conf/* includes a collection of documents and videos to help you make student services accessible to everyone. You'll find checklists for career services, distance learning, computer labs, recruitment and admissions, registration, housing and residential life, financial aid, libraries, tutoring and learning centers, and student organizations. *The Student Services Conference Room* also includes a searchable Knowledge Base of questions and answers, case studies, and promising practices.

For more information about applications of universal design consult *www.uw.edu/doit/Resources/udesign.html* or *The Center for Universal Design in Education* at *www.uw.edu/doit/CUDE/*. The book *Universal Design in Higher Education: From Principles to Practice, Second Edition* published by Harvard Education Press shares perspectives of UD leaders nationwide. Learn more or order online at *www.uw.edu/doit/universal-design-higher-education-principles-practice-1*.

The publication *Access to the Future: Preparing College Students with Disabilities for Careers* (*www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Careers/future.html*) lists resources for making careers accessible.

About DO-IT
DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

For further information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, request materials in an alternate format, or to make comments or suggestions about DO-IT publications or web pages, contact:

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Communication Hints

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration with which you treat others. Here are some helpful hints when it comes to delivering a presentation, hosting an exhibit, and otherwise relating to people with disabilities.

General
- Ask a person with a disability if that person needs help before providing assistance.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not through their companion or interpreter.
- Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant to the conversation.
- Avoid derogatory slang or negative descriptions of a person's disability. For example, "a person who uses a wheelchair" is more appropriate than "a person confined to a wheelchair." A wheelchair is not confining—it's liberating!
- Provide information in alternate means (e.g., written, spoken, diagrams).
- Do not interact with a person's guide dog or service dog unless you have received permission to do so.
- Do not be afraid to use common terms and phrases, like "see you later" or "let's go for a walk" around people with disabilities.
- Do not touch mobility devices or assistive technology without the owner's consent.
- Do not assume physical contact—like handshakes, high-fives, or hugs—is okay.
- Understand that not everyone uses eye contact.

Blind or Low Vision
- Be descriptive. Say, "The computer is about three feet to your left," rather than "The computer is over there."
- Speak all of the projected content when presenting and describe the content of charts, graphs, and pictures.
- When guiding people with visual impairments, offer them your arm rather than grabbing or pushing them.

Learning Disabilities
- Offer directions or instructions both orally and in writing. If asked, read instructions to individuals who have specific learning disabilities.

Mobility Impairments
- Consider carrying on a long conversation with an individual who has a mobility impairment from a seated position.

Speech Impairments
- Listen carefully. Repeat what you think you understand and then ask the person with a speech impairment to clarify or repeat the portion that you did not understand.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Face people with hearing impairments, and avoid covering your mouth, so they can see your lips. Avoid talking while chewing gum or eating.
- Speak clearly at a normal volume. Speak louder only if requested.
- Repeat questions from audience members.
- Use paper and pencil, or type things out on your cell phone, if the person who is deaf does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- When using an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is deaf; when an interpreter voices what a person who is deaf signs, look at the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.

Psychiatric Impairments
- Provide information in clear, calm, respectful tones.
- Allow opportunities for addressing specific questions.