



Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Internship Positions

The federal disability law which has the most direct bearing on doctoral and postdoctoral internship sites is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The primary purpose of this law is to ensure equal access and equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities.

An individual with a disability is defined as:

- A person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits a major life activity (including caring for oneself, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, reproducing, breathing, sleeping, learning, thinking, concentrating, and working);
- A person who has a record of such an impairment (e.g., someone with a history of alcohol addiction who is in recovery and no longer drinking, but is discriminated against because of that past history); or
- A person who is regarded as having such an impairment (e.g., someone with a disfiguring scar who is discriminated against because of prevailing attitudes toward the impairment).

By definition, "disability" does not include: current use of illegal drugs, compulsive gambling, kleptomania, pyromania, transvestism, transsexualism,

pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, gender identity disorders not resulting from physical impairments, or other sexual behavior disorders.

Interviewing Candidates with Disabilities

In order to ensure that all candidates can compete on an equal basis in the application and interview process, you may be required to provide those candidates with disabilities reasonable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are adjustments or modifications which range from making the physical environment accessible, to providing assistive equipment or providing certain types of personal assistants (e.g., a reader for a person who is blind, an interpreter for a person who is deaf). All candidates should be asked about the need for accommodations prior to any scheduled interviews. Each request for an accommodation must be addressed individually, and on its own merit. The candidate himself/herself can provide the best information regarding a needed accommodation.

Pre-Interview Suggestions

- Incorporate statements into your recruitment messages and other correspondence inviting all applicants to identify any special needs that might require an accommodation during the interview. A sample statement is as follows: "The (insert program or department name) is committed to providing access for all people with disabilities and will provide accommodations if notified within...(specify length of time)."
- Provide reasonable accommodations during the interview process, when a person with a disability has made such a request.
- Delineate the essential functions of the internship position and its marginal functions. Essential functions are those that are critical or fundamental to the position.
- Be willing to ask how to be of assistance to a disabled candidate.

Interviewing Suggestions

An individual with a disability should be afforded the same courtesies that are extended to any other interviewee. Do not stare at a manifestation of a person's disability or call undue attention to it. Extend a handshake or physical contact to an individual with quadriplegia, short arms, a prothesis, or blindness. Maintain eye contact with an individual who is blind or who uses an interpreter, even when the interpreter is speaking. Give the interviewee your undivided attention, even when he or she cannot see you. If requested to do so, escort a blind person through an office, discreetly, and without fanfare.

Interviewing Candidates with Mobility Impairments

Mobility impairments can range from stiffness of joints due to arthritis to complete paralysis below the neck.

- Some candidates with mobility impairments will phone in prior to the interview date, specifically for travel information. You should be very familiar with the travel path in order to provide interviewees with detailed information.
- Make sure the place where you plan to conduct the interview is accessible by checking the following:
 - Are there handicap parking spaces available and nearby?
 - a. Is there a ramp or step-free entrance?
 - b. Are there accessible restrooms?
 - c. If the interview is not on the first floor, does the building have an elevator?
 - d. If an interview site is inaccessible (e.g., steps without a ramp or a building without an elevator), inform the person about the barrier prior to the interview and offer to make arrangements for an alternative interview site.
 - e. Enable people who use crutches, canes, or wheelchairs/scooters to keep them within reach. Be aware that some wheelchair users may

choose to transfer themselves out of their wheelchair and into an office chair for the interview.

- f. During the interview, sit at that person's eye level to facilitate conversation.

Interviewing Candidates with Visual Impairments

Visual impairments range from difficulty in reading small print to total blindness.

- When greeting a person who is totally blind, identify yourself and introduce anyone else who is present.
- Upon request, allow a person with a visual impairment to take your arm at or about the elbow. This will enable you to guide rather than propel or lead the person.
- Use specifics such as "left a hundred feet" or "right two yards" when directing a person with a visual impairment.
- If you will be providing written materials, find out before the interview if an accommodation will be required. Accommodations will vary according to the candidate's degree of visual impairment, from providing information in large print to providing a reader.

Interviewing Candidates with Speech Impairments

- Allow time for the person to speak, and resist the temptation to speak for the person or complete his/her sentences.

Interviewing Candidates with Hearing Impairments

Hearing-impairments range from partial loss of hearing to complete deafness.

- If the person lip-reads, maintain eye contact. Speak clearly, and at a normal pace.
- Use a normal tone of voice, unless otherwise requested.
- Using a Sign Language Interpreter
 - a. If an interpreter is present, the interpreter should be seated beside the person conducting the interview, and across from the person being interviewed.
 - b. Speak to the candidate, not to the interpreter, and always maintain eye contact with the interviewed candidate, not the interpreter.
 - c. The interpreter will be a few words behind the speaker, so allow for the extra time it will take for the candidate to respond.
 - d. Interpreters facilitate communication. They should never be consulted or regarded as a reference for the candidate being interviewed.

Prohibited Inquiries During the Hiring Process

Under the ADA, an employer, such as an internship site training director, may not ask disability-related questions and may not conduct medical examinations until after it makes a conditional offer to the applicant. Questions are prohibited which would likely elicit information about a disability, or whether an applicant has a particular disability. In general, questions are prohibited regarding the nature or severity of disability, the condition causing disability, prognosis, or treatment. Inquiries should also not be made about possible leave time for treatment, and certainly not about prior workers' compensation claims. These types of questions are now prohibited to ensure that persons with disabilities are given an equal opportunity to apply for a position without regard to their disability.

EEOC regulations interpreting the ADA list numerous questions that may not be

asked on application forms or in job interviews. Some of these are:

- Have you ever been treated for mental health problems?
- Are you disabled?
- Do you have a disability that would interfere with your ability to perform the job?
- How many days were you sick last year?
- Do you have high blood pressure?
- How much alcohol do you drink each week? Have you ever been treated for alcoholism? (Alcoholism, past or present, and past drug addiction can be a protected disability, unlike current use of unlawful drugs, which is not protected.)
- Asking an obviously disabled candidate questions about how the disability happened, what the prognosis is, or how the impairment affects the applicant's daily life activities.
- Can you stand? Can you walk? (These questions are probably too broad to be directed to ability to perform a job function, and instead are regarded as inquiries into the existence of a disability.)
- What medications are you currently taking?

During the interview process, doctoral and postdoctoral candidates with disabilities should also never be counseled toward more restrictive career options. They can be informed of the requirements of a given career, and the difficulties they may encounter, but cannot be counseled away from an area of interest simply because of their disability.

Permissible Inquiries

During the interview, questions can be asked to determine whether or not a candidate is qualified to do the job. You may ask if an applicant can perform essential functions of the position, as well as ask the applicant to describe or

demonstrate how he or she would perform the essential functions of the position with or without reasonable accommodation.

For example, your position may require that telephone calls be made. A candidate with a hearing loss applies for the position. She states that she can perform the essential functions of making telephone calls with a volume control for the telephone. Therefore, the candidate can perform that essential function of the position with a reasonable accommodation. If the candidate states that he or she cannot perform the essential functions of your position with or without reasonable accommodations, then that person is not qualified for the position. While not required, it is strongly encouraged that you repeat the question and ensure that the candidate understands the meaning of "with or without reasonable accommodation."

In another example, a candidate for your intern position arrives for the interview accompanied by a guide dog; thus we are aware that the person has a disability and is covered by ADA. This person is interviewing for a position involving the opportunity to see career counseling clients as part of the regular caseload. Such counseling would be integrated with personal-social psychotherapy, and would include vocational testing. You may ask the applicant how she/he would administer such tests as the Strong Interest Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator with an accommodation. It would not be appropriate to ask how the applicant might handle a hypothetical situation in which a patient tries to attack intern and the intern does not see him coming (not essential to the intern role), or how long the person has been blind (question will elicit information about a disability).

Information that may be requested on application forms or in interviews includes the following:

- You may ask questions to determine whether an applicant can perform specific job functions. The questions should focus on the applicant's ability to perform the job, not on a disability.

- You may ask a candidate to describe or demonstrate how he/she would perform specific job functions with or without an accommodation.
- When there is reason to believe that a candidate will not be able to perform a job function because of a known disability, you may ask that particular person to describe or demonstrate how he/she would perform a job-related function. A candidate's disability would be a "known disability" either because it is obvious (for example, the applicant uses a wheelchair), or because the candidate has voluntarily disclosed that s/he has a hidden disability.
- You may ask about a candidate's non-medical qualifications and skills, such as his/her education, work history, and required certifications and licenses.
- You may ask if the candidate can meet attendance requirements.

Concluding Remarks

Regardless of physical limitations, it is the fit between an individual's abilities and your doctoral or postdoctoral position that matters. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, but accept a share of responsibility for making the interaction successful. You can give candidates with disabilities a fair chance to present their qualifications by ensuring that:

- Your application and interview process comply with the ADA, which prohibits disability-related questions or medical exams before a real job offer is made.
- Your office or other interview location is accessible to candidates with mobility, visual, or hearing disabilities. When setting up interviews, explain the interview process in detail and provide a vehicle by which any candidate can request a disability-related accommodation.
- All questions asked during an interview are job-related, open ended and focused on the disabled candidate's technical and professional knowledge, skills, experiences, and interest, and not on the disability itself.

Reference Materials

Jarrow, J. (1992). The ADA's impact on postsecondary education. Columbus, OH: AHEAD.

Organizational Resources

- Job Accommodation Network (<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/>) (JAN)
800-526-7234

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is an international toll-free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations and the employability of people with disabilities. It was established by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. Calls are answered by consultants who understand the functional limitations associated with disabilities, and who have access to up-to-date information about accommodation methods, devices, and strategies.

- ADA Information Center (<http://www.adata.org>)
800-949-4232

The ADA Information Center (for the Mid-Atlantic Region) is one of ten regional centers established to provide training, information, and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to businesses, consumers, and state and local governments. Funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, under the U.S. Department of Education, each center has a toll-free hotline staffed by specialists who can answer specific questions on the ADA.

- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (<http://www.eeoc.gov>)
800-669-4000

The EEOC coordinates all federal equal employment opportunity regulations, practices, and policies. The Commission interprets employment discrimination laws, monitors the federal sector employment discrimination program, provides funding and support to state and local Fair Employment Practices Agencies (FEPAs), and sponsors outreach and

technical assistance programs. It contains a wealth of information about ADA requirements affecting employment.

- HEATH Resource Center

202-994-8770 / 800-544-3284

The Heath Resource Center of the American Council on Education is the national clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities. Support from the U.S. Department of Education enables the Center to serve as an information exchange about educational support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, and opportunities at American campuses, and other postsecondary training entities. Heath provides information on a broad range of disability-related topics such as accessibility, career development, functional limitations (including vision, hearing, mobility, and learning disabilities among others), and training materials designed to enhance the training of faculty and administrators who work with students with disabilities.

Last updated: September 2022 Date created: 2008

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