



Providing Reasonable Accommodations to Individuals with Disabilities in Internship Sites and Postdoctoral Internship Positions

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As stated in my article in the last issue, individuals with disabilities, applying to doctoral and postdoctoral internship sites, must not be subjected to discrimination in the interviewing and selection process. This article will now examine how doctoral internships and postdoctoral residencies can provide reasonable accommodations and ensure equal access once sites have provided admission to otherwise qualified applicants with disabilities. The term qualified refers to an individual with a disability who is able to fulfill the essential functions or requirements of the position with or without the provision of reasonable accommodations.

Requests for Accommodations

The term reasonable accommodation functionally means providing or modifying devices, services, or facilities, or making changes to policies,

practices, and procedures to enable an individual with a disability to perform the job or activity.

Reasonable accommodations often come in the form of aids and services that allow individuals with disabilities to participate in positions and activities to the same extent as other people do.

Types of Aids and Services

- Qualified sign language interpreters, or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing (i.e., written materials, assistive listening devices, transcription services, TTY/TDD machines).
- Qualified readers, materials offered in alternative formats, or other effective methods of making visually delivered materials available to individuals who are blind or visually impaired (i.e., taped texts, notetakers, adapted computer software).
- Acquisition or modification of equipment or devices,
- Other similar services and actions.

If a student knows that he or she will require accommodations at the internship site, it is best to encourage the student to disclose, either orally or in writing, to the appropriate person early in the process. Internship and postdoctoral residency sites must make reasonable accommodations or adjustments for qualified individuals with known disabilities. An institution is not liable for failing to make accommodations or adjustments for a student's disability if the individual does not disclose the disability and request assistance.

The process of providing reasonable accommodations should proceed in an individualized and rational and systematic fashion. If a qualified intern or resident with a disability identifies the need for an accommodation, the training site should make a fair attempt to provide an accommodation that will give the individual an opportunity to be equally effective in performing the position's

essential functions and to enjoy benefits and privileges equal to those enjoyed by other individuals.

Individuals with disabilities themselves are often in the best position to suggest appropriate accommodations, as they are most familiar with the strengths and weaknesses they present and with the best ways to adjust jobs, training situations, and environments to address conditions related to their impairments. An individual with a disability may even bring an assistive aid or device he or she has used previously to the training site. However, if a suitable accommodation is not apparent, talk to the individual with the disability about that person's particular abilities and limitations as they pertain to the position's essential functions. The discussion should identify the barriers to performance and should evaluate how an accommodation might overcome these barriers. Also in consultation with the individual with the disability, the employer should identify possible accommodations and consider each one's effectiveness.

The EEOC advises that if several effective accommodations would provide equal employment opportunity, the employer (training site) should consider the individual's preferences and select an accommodation that is most suitable for both parties. While an employer should consider an individual's preferences, EEOC notes that the employer is free to choose among effective accommodations and to pick one that is easier to provide or is less expensive. Interns or residents with disabilities, however, need not accept accommodations they did not request and that they consider unnecessary. If rejecting a proposed accommodation renders a person unable to perform a job's essential functions, the person with the disability may no longer be qualified for the position.

The internship or residency site generally assumes the duty for providing accommodation on the site, but provisions may also be made through vocational rehabilitation services or other community resources. Establishing connections with community resources can be an important and often essential component for successful placements for some students with disabilities. Knowing how to access assistive technology at the training site or obtain support to address behavioral issues related to disability can be critical

issues that need to be resolved in order for students to fulfill their requirements. It is recommended that training site supervisors work closely with a university's students with disabilities office to establish relationships with key agencies for consultation.

Contact with local vocational rehabilitation service directors can provide a solid link to potential community resources. One primary role of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is to provide direct aid and educational assistance to eligible students who have been accepted as clients in the vocational rehabilitation system. Education assistance may entail defraying expenses for books, tuition, supplies, or auxiliary services such as notetakers, readers, and interpreters. A recent example involves a deaf student who was completing her final requirements at an internship site and was working with colleagues who were unfamiliar with sign language. Her internship site staff contacted the State Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and a TTY was loaned to the agency. In addition, sensitivity training sessions were conducted for coworkers. The non-profit employer had not anticipated the need for a TTY answering machine and the expense involved in the installation of the private telephone line. Coordination with the Department of Rehabilitative Services proved successful for addressing this concern.

Finally, the use of a team approach is recommended for site supervisors, faculty or students who are uncertain about how to address support needs. Having prior connections with vocational rehabilitation specialists to identify effective compensatory strategies or counselors familiar with assistive technology may have a positive impact on the successful completion of internship responsibilities. Often, assistive technology equipment can be loaned on a short-term basis or technology can be purchased that can move with the student from job to job as his or her career progresses.

Referenced Materials

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LRP Publications. (May, 1999). Attorneys create accessibility guidelines to assure internship opportunities. *Disability Compliance For Higher Education*, 4(10) 16.

Scott, S.S., Wells, S., & Hanebrink, S. (1997). Educating college students with disabilities: What academic and fieldwork educators need to know. American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

Organizational Resources

- State Vocational and Rehabilitation Agencies
(<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/SBSES/VOCREHAB.htm>)
State vocational and rehabilitation agencies coordinate and provide a number of services for people with disabilities. These services can include educational assistance, vocational and guidance counseling, testing and assessment, information on assistive technology and devices, and training and job placement. For more information, call or write the office nearest you. For a listing of agencies by state, you can refer to the website (<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/SBSES/VOCREHAB.htm>).
- Job Accommodation Network (<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>) (JAN)
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. For information, you can contact JAN at 800-526-7234, or access its Website (<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>) .

- **HEATH Resource Center**

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. You can contact HEATH at 202-994-8770/800-544-3284.

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