

Slide #1 (Lina)

Welcome to the fourth module in a series of Training Modules for Health Sciences program faculty.

This module, Accessible Admissions Practices, will assist admissions faculty and staff in better understanding their role when working with qualified applicants with disabilities.

This module is brought to you by the University of California, San Francisco in partnership with Case Western Reserve University and is funded by the UCSF Disability Training Series project.

I am Dr. Lina Mehta, Associate Dean of Admissions at Case Western Reserve University's school of medicine,. Grace Clifford, Associate Director for ESS Disability Resources at Case Western Reserve University and I will be facilitating this module.

Slide #2...[insert CREATIVE COMMONS SLIDE]

Slide #3: Learning Objectives (Lina)

To simplify our discussion, we will use the term "the admissions team" to describe those involved in the admissions process.

It is our hope that upon completing this module the admissions team will understand how to:

- Identify barriers to admissions for applicants with disabilities
- Communicate accessible admissions practices
- Respond to disability disclosures in the application
- Ensure applicants and admitted students are aware of disability procedures
- Avoid unintended discrimination in the evaluation of qualified applicants with disabilities

Slide #4: ADA and Defining Disability (Grace)

Admissions Teams should familiarize themselves with The Americans with Disabilities Act as amended. This law governs equal access and protection against discrimination for applicants and students with disabilities. The ADA defines an individual with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.

Major life activities include seeing, walking, eating, talking, learning, hearing, concentrating, thinking, and impairments to major bodily functions and systems.

Slide #5: Admissions Lead in on BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBLE ADMISSIONS PRACTICES TITLE SLIDE (Lina)

In order to promote accessible admission practices in the health sciences, we must first be aware of the most common barriers for students with disabilities. These include:

Stereotypes
Stigma

Role Confusion
The Interview and
The Technical Standards

Stereotypes are the largest barrier for students with disabilities. When decisions are grounded in assumptions about an applicant's functional abilities and are based on limited information there is the potential for bias in the process. Without the context of the student's experience and a clear understanding of his/her abilities you risk making decisions that may be discriminatory.

Stigma is also a huge barrier in the admissions process. Stigma can be one of the most overwhelming barriers for students with disabilities to overcome. Despite a steadily increasing number of students with disabilities attending health science programs, students quite often are reluctant to disclose a disability for fear they will be seen as incompetent, as less qualified than their non-disabled peers, or that it will impact their future prospects. When students do not disclose their disability they also frequently fail to request accommodations that may be critical to their success. For this reason, it is important for admissions teams to promote a culture of inclusion, by including disability in the diversity narrative.

Role confusion is another common barrier. When a student self-discloses their disability via their application or during an interview, medical professionals on the admissions team may inadvertently slip into the role of physician. Admissions teams must step away from their clinical knowledge and not make assumptions about or try to assume a student's capabilities, should not try to predict functioning nor predict success and should instead focus on their duties as admissions officers.

Admissions team members may sometimes feel uncomfortable discussing a disclosed disability. It is important that admissions team members receive training regarding how to discuss these topics with sensitivity. When the parties involved in an admissions interview are uncomfortable with discussing disability or when they do not acknowledge a disability disclosed in the application or in the interview, the interview itself can serve as an additional barrier.

Finally, research suggests that Technical Standards continue to pose barriers to admission for students with disabilities. Technical standards that are not well designed, that are unwelcoming or that include discriminatory language that precludes an entire group of people with disabilities serve as significant barriers to students.

Remember, if the candidate is otherwise qualified and meets all other parameters for admission – the student's application and candidacy should go through the same process as any other prospective student.

The admissions teams' responsibility is to accept the best applicants and to ensure a diverse student body, one that is representative of the population in general, including individuals with disabilities.

Slide #6 : Accessible Admissions (Lina)

The practices that an admissions office follow are critical in maintaining an equitable and fair process. Written and verbal communications regarding disclosures and the request process for accommodations are a critical component in ensuring accessibility. These communications can also aid in dispelling biases and misconceptions. In addition, having defined processes in place can help to eliminate both conscious and unconscious bias in the admissions process and ensure that all parties are familiar with procedures for disclosing disabilities and requesting accommodations.

When policies around disability are not well-developed and details of the accommodations process are not well-defined, applicants may feel unwelcome and admissions teams may inadvertently and unintentionally discriminate against applicants with disabilities. It is important that applicants with disabilities are aware of the school's processes in this regard and that disability related information is readily available.

Slide #7 – Title slide, Check for understanding (Grace)

Now let's take a moment to check in for understanding.

Slide #8 (Grace)

Which of the following could be considered as potential barriers for qualified applicants with disability?

- A. Role Confusion
- B. Stereotypes
- C. Stigmas
- D. The Interview Process
- E. All of the above

Slide #9: Answer – E. All of the above. .

Slide #10 TITLE SLIDE Addressing the Barriers (Grace)

So how might we remove these barriers? Schools must work to create a culture of inclusion and access that is at the core of their practices. The very act of addressing how students with disabilities can access your institution goes a long way in reducing stigma, as does providing a safe space for applicants to ask questions about medical education and technical standards and also acknowledging that students with disabilities have been successful in your program. By training admissions teams and implementing some best practices in your admissions process you can reduce the opportunity for bias based on stereotypes.

Slide # 11: Setting the stage for students with disabilities (Lina)

To set the stage for students with disabilities it is helpful to have a statement that articulates the school's vision.

As you see on this slide, Case Western Reserve University uses the following language to communicate with student applicants via our website:

“Case Western Reserve University aspires to be an inclusive environment, believing that the creative energy and variety of insights that result from diversity are a vital component of the intellectual rigor and social fabric of the university.

As a scholarly community, Case Western Reserve is inclusive of people of all racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, national and international backgrounds, welcoming diversity of thought, pedagogy, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, political affiliation and disability”...

SLIDE #12: Setting the stage for students with disabilities (continued)

...We believe in a culture of inclusion that encourages relationships and interactions among people of different backgrounds, a culture that enhances human dignity, actively diminishes prejudice and discrimination and improves the quality of life for everyone in our community.”

Slide #13: Accessibility of website and Materials (Grace)

Schools should begin to cultivate the culture of inclusion via their websites. Your website is the first stop for students and may determine whether or not a student is interested in attending your program. It is important, and a legal mandate, to ensure accessibility of the university's website, including the admissions website and posted materials.

The standard for measuring this is WCAG 2.0 with which your information technology department should be familiar.

All admissions materials and documents should be available in multiple, accessible formats. This ensures that prospective students who may utilize assistive technology such as a screen reader are able to access all available materials.

An individual in need of accommodations should be able to find the necessary information regarding the disability services office and accommodation process within three navigations of the website. This is often referred to as the “three clicks” rule.

Slide#14: Disclosures in the essay (Lina)

Although the clear posting of policies and procedures related to requesting accommodations will minimize unwanted and/or unnecessary disclosures, you may still become aware of a student's disability status through their application, particularly in the essays. In fact, many students are motivated to enter medicine based on their personal experience with health or health care providers.

If the information disclosed in the personal essay creates a cause for concern related to the individual's ability to succeed in the program, it is important remember that the focus should be on the student's academic, personal and professional qualifications and that no assumptions should be made about the student's ability to meet the technical standards. In fact, students with disabilities often do not require accommodations to fully access the program. If the student is unsure if the accommodations required to

meet technical standards are reasonable, the disability services officer may discuss proposed accommodations with faculty to make the determination, while ensuring the student remains anonymous.

For this reason, at Case Western Reserve University, we include a copy of the School of Medicine's Technical Standards with the offer for admission- in addition to posting them on the website as mentioned above.

Slide #15: Confidential Inquiry (Grace)

As an admissions professional and the identified contact point for the institution, it would not be unusual for a prospective student to contact you with inquiries related to requesting accommodations. In these instances, it is important to communicate the program's commitment to full access for qualified students and to encourage students to reach out to the designated disability services provider.

It is imperative that institutions have a separate, qualified individual providing advice about accommodations. It is not unusual for interviewees to contact admissions officers about simple accommodations or with questions for the interview day regarding physical accessibility or sign language interpreting. These requests and inquiries may be addressed simply; however, more complex requests or questions about meeting technical standards or accommodations upon matriculation should be directed to disability services. This ensures that determinations about whether or not a student can meet the technical standards or about potential accommodations if admitted are unbiased and confidential while eliminating opportunities for a student's disability status to become a consideration for admission.

Slide #16 Role Confusion (Lina)

To assist admissions teams in stepping out of their clinical roles, it is important to offer ongoing trainings around working with diverse populations, including students with disabilities.

By offering trainings like this webinar, you can inform admissions teams on best practices while highlighting common pitfalls such as the inclination to predict outcomes of prospective students based on their disability status.

Slide #17 The Interview (Lina)

During the interview an admissions team may be hesitant to discuss an apparent disability or one disclosed in the application for fear of appearing biased or discriminatory. However, students with disabilities often find this silence to be disingenuous. A graduate of our medical school who is a wheelchair user found this type of silence uncomfortable during his residency interviews, and said that "people who avoided the issue did both of us a disservice."

The admissions team should be trained to create a safe space for dialogue around a self-disclosed disability. Questions to open up the space for discussion could include, "What challenges do you think you will face as a medical student? How have your past experiences shaped your attitudes to medicine and your future approach to patients? Is there anything that concerns you about being a medical

student?” and “Do you have any questions for us about navigating medical school?” These are questions that can be asked to all students, regardless of disability, and can certainly be adapted to other health programs, as we show in the first bullet point.

Alternatively, there are questions that are inadvisable and illegal to ask. If a student has not disclosed a disability, even if you perceive one, you may not ask about it. Nor should you ask questions about general health, including mental health.

Keep in mind that although an applicant may have a disability that is visually apparent, they may not actually need accommodations. It is vitally important that admissions committees not pre-judge a student’s capabilities or make assumptions about the student’s ability to meet technical standards.

Slide #18: Communication for Interviewees (Grace)

To minimize the likelihood of applicants inadvertently disclosing to admissions officers, institutions should be sure to post the contact information for the disability service office, along with the process for requesting accommodations on the program’s website and in admissions communications.

Regarding the interview day, Case Western Reserve School of Medicine includes the following statement in its invitation to interview:

“If you feel that you will need any accommodations in order to participate in our interview day, please contact our student disabilities office at disability @[case.edu](mailto:disability@case.edu)”.

This can be adapted for your campus.

Slide #19: Communications at Acceptance continued (Grace)

The contact information for the disabilities office should again be included at the time of acceptance. This is particularly important as students may feel more comfortable disclosing once they have been accepted to a particular institution.

Case Western Reserve University’s School of Medicine uses the following language in the acceptance letter:

The School of Medicine welcomes qualified students with disabilities who meet the technical standards of the program, with or without accommodations. Our technical standards are located below. If you are a student with a disability who needs reasonable accommodations to fully participate in the School of Medicine and its associated programs, please contact Case Western Reserve University Disability Resources office at disability@case.edu or 216-368-5230. To ensure equitable access, students are encouraged to register with Disability Resources far in advance of the start of the program. Accommodations are not provided retroactively. Please note that as a matriculated student you will be required to sign off annually on your ability to meet our technical standards, again, with or without accommodations

Slide #20: Technical Standards (Grace)

Technical standards are the specific criteria or list of abilities and characteristics established by faculty as requirements for admission, retention, promotion, and graduation. Qualified students must be able to meet technical standards, with or without reasonable accommodation(s).

Thoughtfully composed technical standards should clearly explain the technical skills necessary for students to progress in the program. For this reason, standards should focus on what the student is required to do, not how. Technical Standards should also direct prospective students with disabilities to a confidential resource, often the disability provider, to inquire about potential accommodations.

A 2016 study by Zazove and colleagues found that only 31 percent of MD-granting programs specifically expressed a willingness to provide accommodations through their technical standards and that only 86% of schools posted the technical standards online. Even when posted, Zazove found that roughly 33% of these were difficult to locate.

We can and must do better. Researchers like Zazove, Meeks and Jain suggest that one way to promote the inclusion of qualified students with disabilities in health science programs is through the creation of well-crafted and highly visible technical standards.

Slide #21: Technical Standards (Lina)

Below is an example of a paragraph included in the technical standards for Case Western Reserve University's School of Medicine that directs prospective students to the designated disability service office. This is found on our website and again, this is also included in the acceptance letter.

"Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine welcomes qualified students with disabilities who meet the technical standards of the program, with or without accommodations. Our technical standards are located below. If you are a student with a disability who needs reasonable accommodations to fully participate in the School of Medicine and its associated programs, please contact disability resources at disability@case.edu or 216-368-5230. To ensure equitable access, students are encouraged to register with Disability Resources far in advance of the start of the program. Accommodations are not provided retroactively."

Slide #22: Yearly Attestation of TS (Grace)

The ability of any student to continue to meet technical standards can change year to year. Therefore, schools should have matriculated students sign off on the technical standards annually. This encourages transparency about the technical skills students need to progress in the program and encourages discussion with the disability provider about potential accommodations to meet technical standards.

Statements regarding yearly attestation can be simple and straightforward. For example, "Please note that as a matriculated student you will be required to sign off annually on your ability to meet our technical standards, again, with or without accommodations."

By being transparent about disability related needs, services and expectations related to the technical standards, the institution can remove uncertainty down the line for the student.

Slide #23: Check for Understanding (Lina)

Let's take another pause to check for Understanding.

Slide #24(Lina) : True or False: If a student discloses a disability in their personal essay, it is appropriate to inquire about their intention to seek accommodations.

Slide #25(Lina) : **Answer:** False. As noted in previous slides, a student's need for accommodations should not be taken into consideration in the admissions process.

Slide 26: Summary (Grace)

As we come to the end of the webinar, let's review the important steps for creating an accessible and inclusive admissions experience for students with disabilities:

- 1. Be aware of the barriers and provide training to aid admissions teams in reducing barriers*
- 2. Clearly post the program's technical standards - this will allow prospective students with disabilities to make informed decisions about the "fit" of your program.*
- 3. Designate a specialized disability provider as the contact person for questions regarding accommodations - this will minimize unwanted disclosures and reduce the chance that a student's disability will become a consideration for admission.*
- 4. Make sure your admissions materials and websites are accessible*
- 5. Make a statement--Clearly communicate the process to disclose a disability and request accommodations and your commitment to inclusion.*

Slide#27 - References (Grace)

Today's module was informed by the following references.

DeLisa JA, Thomas P: Physicians with disabilities and the physician workforce: A need to reassess our policies. *Am J Phys Med Rehabil* 2005;84:5-11.

Meeks, L.M., & Herzer, K.R. (2016). Prevalence of Self-Disclosed Disability Among Medical Students in U.S. Allopathic Medical Schools. *JAMA*.

Meeks, L. M., Jain, N. R., Phair, E. K., & Acteson, S. (2015). Professionalism and Communication About Disabilities and Accommodations. *The Guide to Assisting Students With Disabilities: Equal Access in Health Science and Professional Education*, 141. New York, NY: Springer.

Zazove, P., Case, B., Moreland, C., Plegue, M. A., Hoekstra, A., Ouellette, A., ... & Fetters, M. D. (2016). US Medical Schools' Compliance With the Americans with Disabilities Act: Findings From a National Study. *Academic medicine: journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*.