

OAE Connections

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
OF STANFORD'S OFFICE OF
ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Welcome back to OAE Connections. Publication of our newsletter was paused while we adjusted to life in the pandemic. Despite the incredible challenges faced by many - including personal and collective heartbreak, loss of loved ones, uncertainty, illness, and great risk - the University has continued to band together with great resolve and resilience. Our disability community is no exception.

This issue features an article aimed at demystifying an essential function of OAE: collaborating with faculty to determine reasonable accommodations in course-specific contexts. We also sat down with University Ombudsperson Brenda Berlin to learn more about the Office of the Ombuds and her work with community members. Disability Adviser Heather Hoover recommends five journal articles highlighting case studies and data about the disabled student experience in higher education over the past year, as well as an opinion piece urging disability to be included in campus DEI efforts.

OAE's very own Executive Director Teri Adams was recently featured in the monthly column "A Conversation With..." in the February 2022 issue of Disability Compliance for Higher Education. She talked about disability inclusion, remote attendance, and ensuring Covid-19 care for campus community members extends to staff as well as students.

As always, contact me any time for questions, concerns and ideas for future collaborations.

- Carleigh Kude, Director of Disability Advising

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Demystifying the Reasonability Determination Process: Steps, Roles, and Reasoning

Imagine the following: A professor has just concluded a first class session. It is a course that is newly designed with cutting-edge practices. It has been carefully crafted to gallop through 3 credits worth of material over 10 weeks, to engage students by stoking curiosity, and to assess the meeting of learning outcomes with a combination of projects, papers, and exams. The professor feels really good about this new class in this new term: it was a great first session. Then, a student who has lingered afterwards until they are alone with the professor, says: I'm really excited about your class. Here is my OAE accommodation letter.

What are the different reactions that this professor could have?

If they have designed their class with accessibility in mind (and even borrowed from the [University's resources](#) for designing curriculum using Universal Design for Learning, or UDL), they might excitedly review the letter and initiate a discussion on how each accommodation fits nicely within the course.

Or, if they welcome disabled students and expect some academic adjustments will need to be made to meet accommodation needs but worry that not all might be practicable or reasonable, they might proceed more cautiously. They might thank the student for their letter and ask for time to review it and continue the conversation later. They know they need to consult with OAE before proceeding.

Whether you find yourself ready to make adjustments to your course or in need of extra guidance, it's important to understand all parties' roles and responsibilities in this interactive process.



OAE Adviser

Authors Accommodation Letters Following Interactive Process



Student

Delivers Letter to Faculty in a Timely Manner



Faculty

Implements or Consults with OAE Adviser



OAE

Guides Reasonability Determination Process

Steps and Roles Defined:

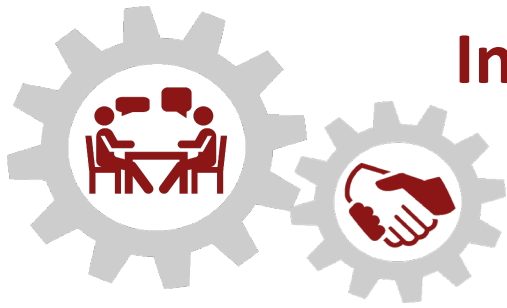
1. **The interactive process:** Students initiate the interactive process by disclosing their disability status to OAE and requesting services. An OAE Disability Adviser (DA) guides the interactive process by reviewing the student's medical documentation, taking a thorough self-report of disability experience, and discerning the appropriate accommodations for which students are eligible.
2. **Accommodation letter authored:** DA's author accommodation letters and generate them as a secure PDF valid for either a full academic year or a specified time frame (depending on the nature and duration of the disability). Students must distribute their letters directly to faculty with sufficient notice so that accommodations can be met in a timely manner. Ideally, this happens at the start of every term.
3. **Reasonable accommodation implemented:** Faculty, upon receipt of the letter, must either implement the accommodations with fidelity (including designation of another member of the instructional team to do so) or invoke the reasonability determinations process with OAE. In order to do the latter, faculty must contact the DA of record. The DA will guide the faculty through the reasonability determination process in order to elucidate information such as (but not limited to):
 - a. What are the relevant course policies, as stated in your syllabus or outline?
 - b. Would the accommodations, as listed, compromise the student's ability to meet defined learning outcomes?
 - c. Do the accommodations, if implemented as listed, have a detrimental impact on the educational experience for others in the class?
 - d. If the original accommodations, as listed, are not reasonable: what alternative accommodations could be in the context of this class?

Through this process, OAE will determine whether the accommodations are or are not reasonable in the specific context of your course. The DA will notify the student if their original accommodations are not reasonable in this instance and offer alternatives. Those alternatives should then be implemented with fidelity by faculty and in good faith.

Find this explainer helpful? Read more details, including use cases, on our [website](#).

Check It Out: Access and Inclusion Happenings Across Campus

- The [Stanford Learning Lab](#) debuted in Autumn 2021. SLL's mission is to Prepare students to thrive now and into the future through services that identify their individual learning strengths, address their unique goals, and embrace their multiple identities as learners.
- In February 2022, VPSA's Inclusion, Community, and Integrative Learning unit opened the long-awaited Disability Community Space. Details about the space, and the graduate fellow coordinating programming there, can be read about in the [Stanford Daily](#).
- The Center for Teaching and Learning's Teaching Commons offers an [Inclusive Teaching Guide](#) with great tips for embedding accessibility in your course, whether it's on-site, online, or hybrid.



Interview with an Ombudsperson

Brenda Berlin

Office of the Ombuds

Please tell us about your background, how you got to Stanford and about your work in civil rights.

I actually went to Stanford Law School. After SLS I was an attorney with the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice doing employment discrimination work and the past 20 years, prior to rejoining Stanford in this role, I was on faculty at Duke Law School. At Duke I co-founded a law clinic working on behalf of low-income children and their families in need of advocacy in K-12 public schools. Our work focused on access to special education, reasonable accommodations under 504, and Social Security Administration appeals for rightful SSI benefits. My work also included representing students in appealing suspensions and expulsions, in which there is a significant overrepresentation of BIPOC students and students with disabilities.

In what ways would your position as Ombudsman intersect with Stanford's disabled community? When would someone with a disability seek assistance from the Office of the Ombuds?

My work as an Ombuds intersects with the disabled community in the same way it intersects with all community members – meaning anyone who is facing an issue, a conflict or has questions about Stanford policy or practices should feel free to reach out to me to privately discuss their concerns. Meetings are usually an hour long, and are confidential. I engage with my visitors as a “thought partner,” working with them to brainstorm options for the resolution of their concerns. I am a trained mediator, so if appropriate, I am also able to directly provide conflict resolution services to individuals in conflict.

I also can answer questions about formal policies and processes, although my office does not make policy, conduct investigations or participate in any formal process at Stanford. Sometimes students will reach out because they're thinking about filing a grievance or reporting behavior they feel is discriminatory. While not empowered to investigate their concerns, I am knowledgeable about Stanford policies, so meeting with me can sometimes help



students better understand the lay of the land, and make a more informed decision regarding how and whether to proceed. Or even if, in the midst of a process, if something feels off, or they have questions, they can come to me and have a private conversation about their experience. If I'm unable to answer their questions, I can reach out to the relevant offices and get more information for the student, while protecting their anonymity.

What has been your impression of the landscape of disability at Stanford so far? Do you see strides towards an inclusive and accessible campus or do you see many barriers that still need addressing?

There is always work to be done to be more inclusive. But there are a few things that strike me as being different from previous work and life experiences: first, there is an intentionality with which Stanford is striving to be more inclusive. For example, our celebration of neurodiverse individuals and our efforts to recruit and support neurodiverse individuals in our community. Also, for someone who grew up in a time during which there was so much stigma around mental health, and having watched family members suffer in silence, I am inspired and encouraged by this community, in which there are robust high quality well-being and mental health resources and a genuine call for people to care for themselves and for others.

What do you like to do for fun?

I am a big lover of the outdoors! I love hiking, running and walking. I truly appreciate all the beautiful opportunities to do that here in and around Stanford. I also really like yoga, even though I am not good at it – so I am super appreciative of Stanford Recreation’s Zoom yoga sessions with amazing, challenging instructors that I can take in the privacy of my own home. I also recently started taking group tennis lessons with Stanford Recreation, which I am really enjoying.

How can people initiate a meeting with you?

I manage my own calendar and can usually meet with people within a week. To request a meeting, email ombuds@stanford.edu or call 650.497.1542. You can also view my brochure or annual report, [available on my website](#).

To Learn more about the [Office of the Ombuds](#) please visit their website.



Disability-Centered Readings

Curated by Heather Hoover, OAE Disability Adviser

[Disability As Diversity: A Case Studies Companion Guide](#)

A series of case studies, this text introduces us to medical and nursing students with a variety of disabilities in order to investigate the importance of recognizing disability as a valid form of diversity within medical candidates. This includes investigating best practices in understanding the needs of qualifying students with disabilities who choose to pursue careers in health sciences, with input from faculty, disability professionals, and the students themselves. In addition, each case study delves into what barriers existed for these disabled college students, and what accommodations were reasonable in order to provide them equity to their peers.

[COVID-19 Related Experiences Among College Students With and Without Disabilities](#)

In this article, McMaughan et al. discuss the various ways that college students with disabilities have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to their non-disabled peers. Results include evidence of minoritization across the board, including findings that indicate that disabled students are experiencing psychosocial distress at a much higher level than their non-disabled peers. These findings echo an [earlier study](#) that found that while 87 percent of non-disabled students felt supported by their campus through the pandemic, less than half of disabled students felt the same.

[Effects of Assistive Technology for Students with Reading and Writing Disabilities](#)

This research study focused on students with learning disabilities, and sought to determine whether using assistive technology affected disabled students' reading ability, ability to assimilate text, and/or motivation for schoolwork. While the control group utilized reading in a mainstream fashion, the intervention group used assistive technology as the sole means of reading for the duration of the study. Results showed that both groups had comparable reading levels and assimilation of the texts in question, but that in the intervention group, there was a 50% increase in motivation for schoolwork.

***Stanford University offers access to the [SCRIBE Project](#), which can convert text and image-based files into different formats, for free to all members of the Stanford community.**

[Improving the Academic Experience of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: Faculty Members of Social Sciences and Law Speak Out](#)

Through a series of interviews, 25 faculty members from seven universities discuss their own best practices when working with students with disabilities within higher education. The resulting recommendations from these interviews can be summarized as follows: 1) While faculty training on disability may not be required by their universities, interviewed faculty felt quite strongly that pedagogical training which included "at least a basic level about each type of disability" allowed them to understand how best to hold inclusive practices in their policies. 2) Faculty-student relationships are improved when students' own viewpoints are seen as equally important in designing their own learning process. This, they argue, increases student motivation as well as their perception towards the faculty member. 3) It is important to understand that accommodations for disabled students are not a special privilege, as do not change the learning objectives that must be reached by all students, but instead provide them with equity to learn the same content as their non-disabled peers.

[Could Disability Be Further Included in Diversity Efforts?](#)

In this opinion piece within *Inside Higher Education*, Lilah Burke argues that disability has a valid place as not only a medical condition, but an identity and a community worthy of inclusion within diversity work. According to the CDC, 26% of the US population is disabled (a statistic echoed at Stanford, with [1 in 4 undergraduates](#) registered with the OAE), but very few universities consider disability when discussing DEI or other inclusion work. Interviewed students mention there is no intersectionality for disability within other identity spaces, and that so few of their faculty members are disabled themselves meaning they do not see themselves represented in their university. Most discussion of disability within higher education, they write, is focused solely on legally mandated accommodations. But this, they argue, should not be the end of the conversation. Many individuals with disabilities consider their disability to be a valid and vital part of their intersectional identity, and several interviewed students discuss the impact that seeing their identity recognized would have upon their academic experience.

[Accommodating Stress: Coping With Student Requests](#)

This opinion piece within *Inside Higher Education* discusses the stress many faculty members find themselves under in the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically relating to the trouble professors may have in determining reasonability when students ask for accommodations. How do you be fair without being taken advantage of? Over the course of the article, the author invites faculty to examine their own class structure and policies in order to determine what truly is or isn't a fundamental aspect of their course design. In this way, faculty are now equipped to understand where they can (and where they can't) be flexible when students submit accommodation requests.



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