

# OAE Connections

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER  
OF STANFORD'S OFFICE OF  
ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

In this issue, we share an interview with one of our most valued and appreciated colleagues, Susan Weersing, Associate Dean, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies School of Humanities and Sciences. We also highlight our Paul Grossman event from January, attended by a very engaged audience of staff and faculty who brought their own questions around what disability and disability rights look like in 2020. This event demonstrated once again, for me, that what we do in the Office of Accessible Education is constantly evolving.

Paul Grossman shared a helpful, concise overview of some of the decision making processes that are closely evaluated by the Office of Civil Rights in disability discrimination lawsuits. Many of the attendees found this insight valuable, and so we offer a similar overview breaking down the process that guides the OAE when we are making accommodation decisions. As we say at every opportunity, the determination of accommodations is an individualized process for each student, and sometimes several times for the same student.

Lastly, please take note of the conference mentioned in the adjacent column! We are thrilled for our colleagues at Stanford Medical School for all the outstanding the Disability Awareness work they have done, and are doing, in the last year.

As Spring Quarter approaches, the OAE is gearing up for a busy "Housing Season" when we work with our colleagues in Housing Assignments and Housing Operations to explore how best to accommodate students with disabilities in on-campus housing.

*-Teri Adams, J. D.*

## Upcoming Events

### First Annual Conference on Disability in Healthcare and Medicine

- 9 - 4 pm on Saturday, April 18th, 2020
- Li Ka Shing Learning and Knowledge Center, LKSC 101 and LK 102-206
- Register: <http://med.stanford.edu/smac/events/disability-conference.html>
- Hosted by Stanford Medical Abilities Coalition (SMAC) and Medical Students with Disability and Chronic Illness (MSDCI)

# Staff Spotlight: Accessibility Ally

**Suzi J. Weersing**

Associate Dean,  
Graduate and Undergraduate Studies

## **How did you first get involved supporting students with disability or accessibility in your work in higher education?**

My first career, prior to Stanford, was working at a non-profit providing programming and services to persons with developmental disabilities, chronic illnesses, and their families. In this work, we focused on access to opportunities and accommodations that permitted each person to succeed and thrive. When I transitioned to Stanford, these values and objectives were a natural fit for work with students and other members of our community.

## **In what capacities do you work with the OAE?**

My work permits for multiple intersections with OAE. My office, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies, provides guidance to faculty and staff who have questions about academic accommodation. When helpful, we partner with OAE and a department to clarify accommodations and consider how best to implement them. Similarly, my staff and I work directly with students, and so may refer them to OAE as we help them to navigate Stanford. Finally, I partner with OAE as a member of a small working group focused on implementing changes that will positively impact students with academic accommodations and the departments that have to implement accommodations.

## **What has been surprising to you in your work with the OAE?**

OAE staff are great thought partners, I encourage students, faculty, and staff to contact them whenever there is a question about academic accommodation.

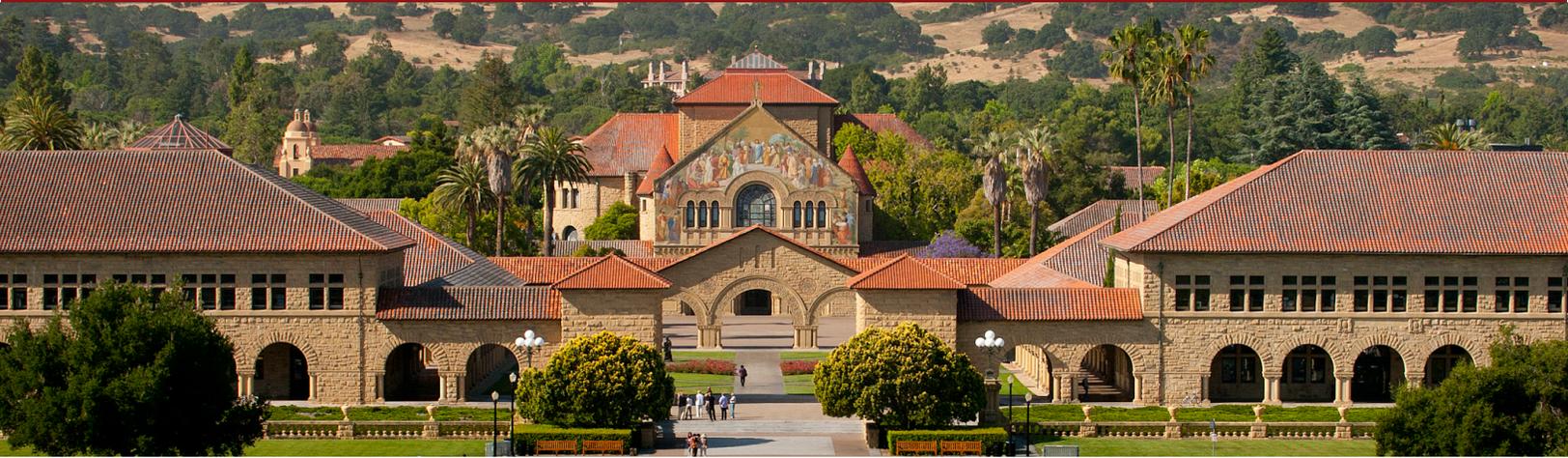


## **What do you see as the biggest challenges of providing services for students with disabilities at Stanford?**

The number of students with disabilities continues to increase at a significant rate, as are the types of accommodations that must be managed. Yet, we in the schools are not staffed or otherwise equipped to manage this growing number of academic accommodations. We do not have identified space, we do not have the graduate student TAs, and we do not have sufficient logistical support to manage academic accommodations in our large courses. Although our working group has been piloting some initiatives to address some of these challenges, Stanford will have to address this more holistically if the trends continue.

## **What do you see (or hope to see) in the future for students with disabilities at Stanford?**

Elimination of the stigma that is often attached to academic accommodation, this is especially true for our graduate students. Every student should feel comfortable requesting appropriate academic supports so that they can thrive during their time at Stanford.



## Event in Review

### Disability Rights Are Civil Rights: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Higher Education with Paul Grossman, J.D.



The Office of Accessible Education welcomed Paul Grossman and colleagues from across campus on January 24th for a full day of dialogue regarding the evolution of the Disability Rights movement, and the legal framework behind paramount civil cases that have shaped the landscape of disability in higher education. Attendees came with their own burning questions on topics such as service and emotional support animals, how to appeal decisions made by government agencies, and when accommodations can be determined as “good enough” (most answers, of course, are: “It depends”).

Grossman’s 30 years of experience as a civil rights attorney specializing in disability and educational discrimination cases for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR), informed the lively sessions. It was his personal anecdotes regarding his own experiences with disability, as well as his witty, straightforward, and approachable nature that brought deeper insight to the topics covered.

The sessions highlighted the dynamic work behind disability inclusion and civil rights within higher education by breaking down the detail intensive

considerations that go into identifying and facilitating accommodations. The sessions often focused on the legal and compliance-based concerns of educational equity. However, there were plenty of reminders that inclusion and equity requires a collaboration across departments and an openness to explore possible accommodations. Overall, the event was well received, with participants responding that they found the content to be engaging and informative for their own work with students and across campus.



***“He won my heart completely by sharing himself, being vulnerable. This is a hallmark of leadership.”***

***- Participant Feedback***

# Academic Accommodations

## Determination and Facilitation Process

### Student Registers with Office of Accessible Education (OAE)

- Student submits documentation;
- Disability Adviser reviews documentation to determine if student is eligible for accommodations
  - Duration, severity, and nature of condition must rise to the level of disability
  - If documentation is not sufficient, student is notified and may submit additional documentation to be reconsidered.

### Qualified Student with a Disability; Eligible for Accommodations

- Student meets with Disability Adviser to determine appropriate accommodations. Reviews disability-related functional limitations and consider cognitive, physical, access and episodic concerns that impacts their academics
- Disability Adviser generates Accommodation Letter outlining approved accommodations and provides it to the student.
- Disability Adviser explains next steps, student responsibilities, and makes referrals to campus partners for further support

### Informal Resolution or Grievance Process

- Students may appeal accommodations determinations made by OAE. Students are directed to have their case reconsidered by the OAE Assistant Director or Director.
- If a student continues to disagree with the outcome of a determination, they may file a formal grievance with the Diversity and Access Office.

### Student Notifies Instructors of Accommodations

- Student must notify their instructor of their eligibility for accommodations by providing them their Accommodation Letter.
- Students may submit their Accommodation Letter to their instructors at any point in the quarter but are encouraged to do so in as timely of a manner as possible.

### OAE Interactive Process

- Disability Advisers guide fundamental alteration reviews with instructors and academic departments. The decision is a collaborative effort.
- OAE is obligated to explore alternative accommodations with the student when a specific accommodation is determined to be not reasonable.
- Students should regularly check-in with their advisers to review their accommodations, discuss efficacy, and consider revisions as they move through their careers at Stanford.

### Instructor Implements Accommodations

- If the accommodations identified in the student's letter are not readily implementable, or if the instructor is concerned that the accommodation poses a fundamental alteration to course learning objectives, they are responsible for contacting the student's Disability Adviser. A fundamental alteration review will take place to determine if the accommodation is reasonable. OAE will communicate the final decision to the student.

Are you interested in

# Disability

at Stanford?

Advocacy



The **ASSU** (Associated Students of Stanford University) **Disability Advocacy Committee**.



**Power2Act** is a community of students advocating for disability issues on campus.



**SenseConnect** advocates for, and engages in research centered around Deafness/hearing loss at Stanford.



The **Stanford Medicine Abilities Coalition (SMAC)** is comprised of physicians, medical educators, learners, and Stanford Hospital employees with disabilities and their allies.

**Law Students for Disability Rights (LSDR)**

**Stanford Law Students for Disability Rights'** furthers legal research and topics concerning disability rights.

Community



**Kids with Dreams** is a service organization serving youth with disabilities in the wider community.



**Stanford Disability Organization Empowering Students (S-DOES)** is a student group with focus in community, storytelling, resource-sharing.

**A-Hub**

The **Abilities Hub**, also known as the A-Hub, is a community space in concept, sponsored by Power2Act and the Stanford Disability Initiative.

**Medical Students with Disabilities and Chronic Illness (MSDCI)**

**Medical Students with Disabilities and Chronic Illness (MSDCI)** provides support and platform for advocacy for medical students with disabilities and chronic illness.

Access



The **Disability Studies Committee** works to further scholarly research concerning disability issues, and organizes an annual conference.



The **Office of Accessible Education (OAE)** provides services and accommodations tailored to each student's individual disability experience at the undergraduate and graduate level.

**Stanford Diversity and Access Office**

The **Diversity and Access Office** oversees compliance with federal and state civil rights statutes, and provides disability-related access information to faculty, staff, students and visitors in the Stanford community.



Scan here to learn more at [disability.stanford.edu](http://disability.stanford.edu)



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