



DISABILITY TRAINING NETWORK

# Quarterly Update

## Out-of-Class Experiences for Students with Disabilities

Out-of-class experiences have been shown to contribute to positive post-graduation outcomes. For example, out-of-class experiences lead to increased persistence skills, cognitive development, interpersonal skills and leadership skills. This skill set is extremely important for college students with disabilities because they tend to have lower graduation and employment rates than college students without disabilities. Although the benefits of out-of-class experiences are many, university staff may be concerned about the accessibility and provision of accommodations for these types of activities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) require institutions of postsecondary education to provide access and reasonable accommodations; however, these are typically focused on the academic setting or the classroom. Detailed below are strategies that postsecondary institutions can use to facilitate the out-of-class experiences of students with disabilities.

### Internships

Internships are a type of experiential learning that can provide career exploration, opportunities to make job contacts, improved self-esteem, extra spending money and increased self-knowledge. A successful internship on a resume or transcript speaks volumes in a job interview and is especially significant for students with disabilities who face uncertainty in employment opportunities with regard to the increasingly competitive workforce.

#### Strategies

- Actively recruit students with disabilities to participate in internships
- Include disclosure statements regarding the provision of accommodations and use People First language on all informational material
- Ensure that all staff understand the rights and responsibilities of students under the ADA
- Identify accessible (physical, programmatic, informational, attitudinal) internship placements
- Provide technical assistance to internship sites to facilitate the accessibility of the site

### Sports and Recreational Activities

Sports and recreational activities are known to contribute to decreased stress levels, an improved quality of life, better physical fitness, a sense of belonging, increased self-concept, a connection to one's community and opportunities to meet others. This is true for students with and without disabilities, yet there are few colleges and universities that provide specific opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in such programs.

#### Strategies

- Identify accessible programs and promote the use of these facilities
- Advocate for the inclusion of accessible programs and services
- Include disclosure statements regarding the provision of accommodations and use People First language on all informational material
- Conduct a campus recreation facility audit to determine the accessibility of the facilities and to

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develop an improvement plan

- Provide training and technical assistance to staff about disabilities, accommodations, and adaptive equipment

### **Campus Life Activities**

Many colleges and universities have active student life programs and activities that contribute to the personal development of college students. Students with disabilities also benefit from these types of programs, and should not be excluded from participation.

#### **Strategies**

- Ensure that all staff understand the rights and responsibilities of students under the ADA
- Include disclosure statements regarding the provision of accommodations and use People First language on all informational material
- Ensure that activities are held in accessible locations and that accommodations such as sign language interpreters are available as needed
- Create student leader position applications that can be available in alternative formats upon request

### **Study Abroad Programs**

While most colleges and universities are encouraging students to study abroad, students with disabilities are one group that may, in fact, be discouraged. Section 504 and the ADA are often cited as barriers because these laws only pertain to individuals with disabilities in the United States and its territories. However, postsecondary institutions that receive federal financial assistance are still responsible for ensuring that all programs can be equally accessed by all students.

#### **Strategies**

- Encourage students with disabilities to apply for study abroad programs by including examples of students with disabilities in informational materials
- Ensure that staff understand the cultural context of disability so that this can be conveyed to students with disabilities (e.g., in some countries, it is acceptable for someone who uses a wheelchair to be carried up a flight of stairs by classmates)
- Make students aware of the difference between preferred and essential accommodations and that not all accommodations may be made in other countries
- Determine site accessibility and develop an accommodation plan with the student
- Evaluate the study abroad experiences of students upon returning to the United States
- Provide students with disabilities who have participated in a study abroad program the opportunity to mentor other students with disabilities who want to participate in a study abroad program
- Work with the study abroad site/institution to provide materials in alternate formats

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