A Guiding Framework for Decision Making
A 3-Question Process for Simple to Complex Situations

Emily J. Helft, Landmark College
Paul Harwell, Dartmouth College
AHEAD Conference, 2022, Cleveland, OH

Objectives

1. Understand the basic legal requirements of (and suggested approach to) our work
2. Recognize the importance of identifying personal and professional guiding values in decision-making
3. Learn the 3 guiding questions and connect them to consistent decision-making
4. Apply working knowledge of the guiding questions to a scenario
Ultimately...

We want for you to have a consistent framework for decision making that *you* are confident using.

Being *confident* in your decisions *frees up time and mental space* to directly *support your community* ...

...the things you probably imagined yourself doing when you joined this profession!

Your Turn!

What are some muddy situations you've found yourself in?

Why did we make this presentation?

- We noticed that many people on the AHEAD forum ask questions about unclear situations (i.e. are looking for guidance)
- There is a clear legal expectation to have a process and to follow it consistently (whether for approvals "or" deferrals)

Why did we make this presentation? (cont.)

- We believe this process is a good way to incorporate a balance of documentation requirements in a way that allows us to be thoughtful, analytical, and not overly permissive
  - We must weigh each question holistically and consistently
  - Making "wrong" decisions either way hurts credibility

Ground Rules

Let's get on the same page

1. This is a safe space to explore, learn, be curious, and grow!
2. We are sharing principles, but it's up to you decide how to map this onto your school's unique setup and culture
3. We "really" would like for people to participate :)
Foundations

Some Anchor Points to Keep in Mind (1)

- The ADA doesn’t dictate exactly what we do
- AHEAD is also guidance, not a requirement
- Case law and professional best practices are what has led to “The Interactive Process”
- The social model loses the individual—the interactive process is about the uniqueness of individuals and their circumstances

Some Anchor Points to Keep in Mind (2)

We recommend keeping these things in mind when mapping this session onto your school’s personality, culture, and General Counsel methodology
The Existence of Conflict

- Our job is about access, not success
- No one gets into this field to be the "bad guy"
- Conflict and/or disagreement is not all bad
- College isn’t meant/guaranteed to be a 100% easy, carefree, positive experience

Your Process

It's important.
...seriously.

Have you thought about your process?
1. What is it?
2. Do you use it consistently?
3. Is it documented somewhere?

Your Values

They're also important.

Think about...
1. The hats you wear
2. Your school's values and personality(ies)
3. Your concerns that you keep to yourself
4. Why you got into this line of work
Values Matrix: A Basis in ACT

- ACT: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Developed by Steven Hayes)
- As it applies in this context is an approach to helping individuals identify their values so that they can live their lives/behave in ways that are consistent with these values

Values Matrix

- By identifying your institution's values, you can have a compass in your decision-making process
- Acts as a homebase where you can always return to check in with yourself

Parthenos, C., (2022, June 8). Resolving Faculty-Student Conflict and Promoting Advocacy Using the ACT Matrix [Conference Presentation]. PTI 2022, Baltimore, MD, United States.
Your Turn!

What values do you hold around the work you do as a DRO professional making accommodation decisions? What goals do you have for your students?

The Big 3

Disclaimer

We are presenting a "framework" of foundational basics as a starting point. Your school’s personality/culture further inform how you personally apply this model.

The Big 3 Questions

1. Does this person have a disability?
2. What barrier(s) is present as a result of the disability?
3. What accommodations can be implemented to remove/circumvent this/these barrier(s)?
1. Does this person have a disability?

*Definition*: A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual

2. What is the barrier that is present as a result of the disability?

Things to ponder:
1. What are the impacts of this disability? (Think back to why the answer to Question 1 was “yes”)
2. How does this manifest in everyday life?
   Be thoughtful when teasing apart preferences versus barriers.

3. What accommodations can be implemented to remove/circumvent these barriers?

Remember:
- These accommodations cannot fundamentally alter an experience, program, or goal
- We need to honor the goal/experience without creating shortcuts
3. (Cont. 1)
What accommodations can be implemented to remove/circumvent these barriers?
- Experiences, programs, and goals extend beyond the classroom—think Housing, Student Affairs, etc.
- Accommodations don’t always have to be the student’s preference
- Keep in mind “secondary side effects” of various accommodations

3. (Cont. 2)
What accommodations can be implemented to remove/circumvent these barriers?
- We still need to hold students to expectations that are comparable to their peers
- Aim for the minimum amount of accommodation in order to create access

Let’s Go Back In Time
What do you think about our earlier examples?