Being Intentional in a Changing Disability Services Landscape

AHEAD Equity and Excellence Conference

July 15 - 20, 2024

Ronda Purdy, MA
Lauren Pourian, MSW
Introductions
Session Overview

• Introductions & overview of Anchor Points

• Panel discussion of accommodation decision-making approaches

• Presentation of case examples

• Small group discussion of case examples & accommodation decision-making approaches

• Panel discussion of case examples & accommodation determination process

• Q&A
Why Are Anchor Points Important?
Defining Anchor Points

No matter what your process is, our job is to be: consistent in identifying **functional limitation** and provide **reasonable accommodations** for those functional limitations, especially in the academic/testing environments, to **reduce barriers** for students as they move through systems (i.e., high school to college, college to grad school, college to standardized exams)
Anchor Points

• Evidence of disability
• History
• Functional limitations and how they were determined
• Objective data, clinical observations, clinical data, third-party reporting
• Student self-report
• Specific impacts of the functional limitations on the academic and/or campus environment
• Disability-related rationale linked to functional limitations for the recommended accommodations
Case Presentations
Case 1 - Approach

Social Justice Model

• Civil rights for social justice model
• Grounded in our Guiding Principles
• Student narrative is primary source of information
• Do not require third-party information/documentation
• Team-based review for most requests
• Interactive, individualized process
• UDL is modeled in our process
• Do not require meetings
• "Get to Yes" approach
Case 1 – Student Info & Accommodation Requests

Student information:
• Second semester, first-year student
• College of Arts and Sciences as a Biology Major
• Taking 12 credits – 1st year writing seminar, intro chemistry, intro biology, & general calculus
• Veteran, 28 years old

Accommodation requests:
• Extended time for exams & notetaking support
Case 1 – Information Collected

Third-Party Information:
• Student submitted a brief letter dated 6 months ago, from an outpatient clinic at the Dept of Veteran Affairs

• The psychiatrist indicates the student is “undergoing treatment for mental disabilities” and requires “accommodation & support for quizzes”
Case 1 – Self-Disclosure Form

• ADHD, chronic PTSD, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and chronic shoulder pain
• Unable to obtain any other documentation from providers
• Prescription medication for a shoulder injury PRN
• Referred to SDS by biology professor after his first preliminary exam grade
• Testing environment was “overstimulating”
  • Students coughing & climbing over him when they finished
  • Difficulty writing on the tiny flip desks in the auditorium
Case 1 – Initial Meeting

• Difficulty adjusting and finding support for classes
• Worries he is “not cut out for a college like this one”
• Dropped a course in both first and second semesters in order to have a more manageable workload
• Academic success in high school at small rural school
• No history of accommodations, has not been a student in several years
• Difficulty keeping up with note-taking in classes, reads more slowly than peers
• Attends academic programming at Veterans Resource Center
Case 1 – Initial Meeting (cont'd)

Test Taking

- Writes all over exam
- Observes peers finishing before him, makes him anxious and causes him to rush
- Never finishes tests on time
- Difficulty recalling basic facts and gets stuck on questions
- 1/3 completed when peers have completed their test
- Two exams in one day - almost impossible to sit by end of 2nd exam
Case 2 - Approach

A mixed approach using the medical & social models of disability

- Online Application
- Documentation and/or Verification Form completed by treating professional
- Intake meeting
- Case by case determination
- Accommodation determinations made by individual DS staff review and/or Case Review
Case 2 – Student Info & Accommodation Request

• 25-year-old, 3rd year medical school student
• History of problems with attention, concentration, restlessness, and feeling fidgety
• Academic success in high school & college
• No prior history of accommodations
• History of panic attacks after the sudden death of close friend in 2021, later subsided with therapy & medication
• Panic attacks returned in January 2024, she is currently prescribed Wellbutrin
• After failing two shelf exams between January & March 2024, referred by medical school to DS
Case 2 – Information Collected

Online Application

• Reported ADHD and PTSD diagnoses
• Difficulty concentrating, feeling “crunched” for time on exams, and having intrusive thoughts
• Ongoing fatigue, poor impulse control, depressive & anxiety symptoms
• Difficulty with distractibility, sustaining attention, & listening to others
• Frequent procrastination, poor organization, tendency to misplace things
• Unsure of what to request, looked to the DS advisor to help identify accommodations
Case 2 – Information Collected (cont'd)

Third-Party Information

• Neuropsychological evaluation – March 2024
• WAIS IV: FSIQ 126, VI 132, PI 123, WMI 89, PSI 117
• Relative weaknesses: simple attention & concentration, letter-number sequencing & working memory
• Attention functioning scores were lower than expected given overall abilities
• Tests of memory: borderline range over 5 trials
• Recall: impaired to low average range
• Beck Anxiety Inventory (8): mild anxiety, Beck Depression (20): moderate depressive symptoms
Case 2 – DS Staff Observations

- Engaged in conversation, reserved, hard to draw information even after asking questions in multiple ways
- Thought feeling rushed during exams was normal in medical school
- Reported intrusive thoughts during exams, causing her to lose focus on the exam
- Reported rushing through exams to the point of not reading questions thoroughly & guessing just to finish an exam when time was running out
Case Discussion
Discussion Questions

• If you think information is missing, how would you collect that information?

• How did anchor point information and your disability services determination model inform your decision?

• What accommodations would you approve and why?

• If did not approve some or all accommodations, why? What other information would you request for reconsideration?
Why are Anchor Points Important?

• Shifting of our Standard Operating Procedures

• No matter your process, your accommodation decision-making remains consistent

• Allows for equity and fairness throughout systems

• Support students in being able to articulate their functional limitations
Being Intentional

- Do you have an individual vs. collective decision-making process?
- What information are you seeking regardless of the methods available to gather this information?
- Have you identified a disability model for your office?
- How can you support students in identifying their functional limitations and the impact in various settings?
- Is there a need to re-evaluate your policies & procedures?
Questions/Discussion

Contact Information:

• Ronda Purdy: rpurdy@ets.org

• Lauren Pourian: lpourian@ets.org
Much appreciation to Aggie & Beth!

Thank you for sharing your time and expertise!
Thank you!