

Jim Springer 0:00

The following podcast is presented by Webster University's Academic Resource Center to provide information on resources and support for students with disabilities, specifically information about how students can set up ADA accommodations and what faculty and staff can do to support. Welcome to Part Two of our podcast series on Student Accessibility and supporting students with disabilities. I'm Jim Singer, student media coordinator for Webster University, and I'm speaking with Nellie Hopmann, Academic ADA Coordinator and today we'll be discussing the process for setting up and implementing ADA accommodations. Nellie, welcome and thanks for your time today.

Nellie Hopmann: Good to be here.

Jim Springer: Can you explain your role at Webster and how you work with students?

Nellie Hopmann: Sure.

Nellie Hopmann 0:43

So my primary role is to support students in setting up their accommodations and then also maintaining those accommodations in their classes and housing and in all campus activities. So a lot of the work I do is the initial setup for students' accommodations, but then also helping them communicate with faculty members and staff about making sure that their accommodations are in place, and that they're able to access them.

Jim Springer 1:05

What are the biggest questions students have about ADA accommodations?

Nellie Hopmann: 1:09

I would say the biggest question that students have is, "Does my disability, or my diagnosis, qualify as a disability?" And so, what students, what I always tell them is, we service a wide range of disabilities and disability diagnoses. Accommodations are meant to provide reasonable support for students' disability related needs. And, also, a disability is any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one life activity, and that can mean walking, sitting, reading, seeing, and communicating. So I always encourage students, if you have a diagnosis, if it's impacting you and your classes or campus activities, come see me. We'll talk about if your needs are disability related, and if the disability is impacting you in one of those major life activities.

Jim Springer 1:56

Are there any questions that students don't know to ask? Because sometimes we don't know what the lay of the land is, so we don't even know what to ask. And are there questions that they should know about?

Nellie Hopmann 2:09

Yeah, I mean, there are several. And I'll just say from the onset, any question is welcome in my office. But I would say that there are like a handful that I, I really encourage students, if you have this question, come see me and we'll talk it out. The first would be "When can I request accommodations?" And the answer is at any point in time. So we do encourage students to get their accommodation set up as soon

as possible, you know, before the start of a semester term. But you can come and request and set up accommodations at any point in a semester term. Now, the thing we have to keep in mind is making sure that those requests are reasonable. So some accommodations may not be able to be provided for, particularly if we're talking about, you know, the last week of a semester. But we could, for sure, get your accommodations set up and ready for you to access in the next semester. So at any point in time students have the right to come and set up accommodations with me. Another question that students might have is, "When can I use my accommodations?" And the answer is, once they're in place, you can use them at will. They, it is really important that students are communicating with their instructors about their accommodations. So, at Webster part of our process is we will send out your letter accommodations to your instructor. We'll also send that letter to you at the beginning of every semester in term. At that point, once you get that letter, we encourage students to reach out to instructors and, not *ask* if you can use your accommodations, but rather start the conversation about how those accommodations are going to be implemented. It's also important that when you do use your accommodations that you communicate that you're going to use them in a timely manner. So if you have a testing accommodation for extended time, asking in the middle of tests for to use that extended time is likely not going to be able to be provided. So ensuring that you're giving all those in your support networks, whether it's faculty, the testing center, myself, a heads up on when you're going to use your accommodations, just to make sure that you have access to it in a timely manner to support your needs. Students also have lots of questions about, or maybe wondering about, health accommodations or modifications that they received in high school are different from those in college. The biggest difference is that in college supports or curriculum content is not modified. So, some students may have had a modification in high school for alternative assignments. And while you may request an alternative assignment from an instructor, it can't come from my office as a disability related need. Students, regardless of ability, are admitted to the university and expected to meet the same academic and behavior expectations. So accommodations for the most part, what we see in high school are also honored at the university level, but modifications are not. And there's also this big discussion around parental rights and responsibilities and student rights and responsibilities and how those differ between high school and college. And lot of times this might not be a question that students have, but it's certainly something that they begin to experience as they come to campus as a first time freshmen. And not only in the realm of accommodations, but at the university level, the student is the individual who the university is working with to support, so it's important to understand that the student has to be the one requesting the accommodations, the student needs to be the one following up with my office and with faculty about their accommodations so that they can best be supported. Next, a lot of students are concerned with disability information and who's going to have an eye on that, and the answer is it's only me. So when you come and you meet with me to set up accommodations, you are required to disclose a disability diagnosis, but that information is kept private. Students have the option to disclose to instructors or whomever really they want to, and I'm happy, and have in the past supported students in disclosure, but students are not required to disclose any disability information to anyone but me, and in their letter of accommodation, the only information that [is] shared is that the student has disclosed to me, and that the forthcoming accommodations have been put in place to support their needs. And then I guess the last question would be, "What should I do, as a student with accommodations, if I don't think my accommodations are being met or provided?" And the answer is, let me know. So I often don't hear from students until, you know, the end of a semester, or, you know, really, really late in the game. And I just encourage students that if an instructor has told you that you cannot have an accommodation that's

in your letter, please let me know. I'm happy to advocate on your behalf. A lot of time, it's just, you know, a lack of communication, a misunderstanding about our processes at Webster for poor accommodation, specifically testing. So, you know, if you're having an issue with accommodations, just let me know.

Jim Springer 6:48

I think that last one's a really important one because some people may feel intimidated or they're bothering somebody by asking for that. And I think it's really important that students know that they're empowered and that you want them to come to you for this kind of stuff.

Nellie Hopmann 7:04

Right. And I always tell students, you know, this is your right. And I have a lot of students who say, they don't want to, they don't know if they deserve this, or you know, they don't want to ruffle anyone's feathers. And I will say the majority of the conversations I have with students and faculty around accommodations, it's just for clarification sake. It's very respectful, we get it done pretty quickly, and everyone just everyone just needs to be brought onto the same page.

Jim Springer 7:29

I think the key here, the key word is communication.

Nellie Hopmann: Yep, you're right.

Jim Springer: How does a student set up accommodations here at Webster?

Nellie Hopmann 7:36

We have a pretty prescriptive process. Students can reach out to me to set up a meeting, and really, that meeting is the crux of the whole process. So I encourage students who are in the St. Louis area to come meet with me in person. I've got, I'm pretty flexible, [I] have lots of availability. I also work with students who are online, and some at some of our extended sites. So those students I will perhaps meet on the phone with them, but the meetings the first step, and so at that meeting we discuss the student's disability diagnosis, and any related needs [that] are being impacted by their academics, by campus activities, or in housing. Once we've discussed that, we move into talking about accommodations, so we discuss and then determine accommodations that might reasonably support their disability related needs. And I always communicate to students that the documents we create are living, so as their experience with their disability, or with their classes, campus activities and housing change, we can adjust their accommodations as needed. So the conversation's ongoing beyond that initial meeting. Once we have that conversation, and we determine accommodations, the students complete two in-house forms for me, I then will draft their letter of accommodations. And at that point, I kind of take the reins of the process as far as initial communication goes to faculty. So my team then will take the students letter, we email faculty, and the students then, a copy of the letter at the beginning of every semester term, usually about a week or two out. And that's just, you know, giving the faculty a heads up that these students in these classes have accommodations, giving the students a heads up that remember, make sure you're communicating with your faculty about those accommodations. The process is then ongoing, and you know, through the life of their career, Webster's students accommodations are in place until they come to me and say that they don't want to access them. They

can always reactivate them whenever they choose to. In addition, students who may come to us for an undergraduate degree and then graduate, come back as a graduate, you know, even years later, are welcome to come into my office and get their accommodation set up again.

Jim Springer 9:38

There's so much information that we've already covered here that I'm really glad we're doing a podcast on this so that students that want this knowledge can really listen to this as often as need be,

Nellie Hopmann: Yeah,

Jim Springer: so they can absorb all of this because there's so many questions, and I really appreciate the time you're taking to explain all this to this to the students.

Nellie Hopmann 10:00

Yeah, of course. I mean, and I know it's a lot of information so I'll be giving my contact information at the end so I'm happy to answer any questions you know, one off that students or faculty or staff may have after listening so...

Jim Springer 10:11

Great, what documentation are required to set up accommodations at Webster?

Nellie Hopmann 10:16

We require, students will complete two in-house forms for me, we'll have the conversation about accommodations and then the document disability documentation that we require can be any number of things. It can be an IEP, or 504, or student success plan, that's typically those documents that you might have in place in high school. However, many disability diagnoses come, you know, after K-12, high school, or they may never have been serviced in high school. So, any, like a note or any documentation that states a student's ability diagnosis is fine as well. Additionally, we also support students with temporary accommodations. So if you, you know, sustain an injury, such as a concussion, [or] you have to have surgery on your knee, anything like that, just documentation from, you know, your medical doctor, surgeon, [or] who's ever working with you on your treatment plan, and then we can get temporary accommodations set up for you to help you in your needs and your classes, also campus activities, and in housing.

Jim Springer 11:13

What advice do you have for students who have accommodations, or may be thinking about setting up accommodations?

Nellie Hopmann 11:20

My advice for students who have accommodations is always like getting back to what you said, it is all about communication. So if you have accommodations, and you [had] access to accommodations in high school or at a previous institution, come see me, let's get them set up whether or not you think you're going to need to access them. You know, a lot of times I see students come to Webster and, you know, they're going to give it a good old try without their accommodations. And many of them are successful. But oftentimes, I see students come to me in a bind. So they've experienced a bad test grade, they're

way behind in their classes, they're overwhelmed and stressed and really, you know, the accommodations really would have benefited them. So I always suggest come get your accommodations set up as soon as possible. Again, you can access them at will, you don't have to access them in all your classes, or even in *any* of them, and just have them there as a cushion of support in case you need it. The hard thing for me to do, too, is we can't step in and accommodate retroactively. So once you get your accommodations set up, we can support moving forward. So getting them set up the very start, you know, before a semester term, is always what's encouraged. [If] you're thinking about setting up accommodations, many students communicate that they're worried about the stigma. Again, the only individuals who know that you have a disability will be myself, and I'll be the only one who has disability information. And then your instructors will know that you have accommodations, so, you know, this is not broadcast out for, you know, everyone to know, you know, and additionally again, come see me, come talk to me if you're having, [or] have had some needs in the past, alright? If you're experiencing any struggles, we'll see what we can do. So that we can make sure that, you know, we can help prevent some of those struggles that you may have been having due to disability.

Jim Springer 13:10

So, students go through all this process and learn what they need to do with you about setting up accommodations. A real key here for the faculty is, how can faculty support students in setting up and assessing their accommodations?

Nellie Hopmann 13:27

Faculty are integral, right? So, and we really, I really rely on support from faculty and they, in my time at Webster I found faculty very accommodating and they're willing to help students. Many things that faculty can do, and that I see our faculty doing, you know, time and again [are] first, it's encouraged [that] students [with] disabilities or students with questions about accommodations to reach out to me, and you know, do this in a private way. So, you know, pulling a student aside before or after class, sending a student an email, you know, if you see someone struggling, or if someone, a student has disclosed a disability to you, you can suggest that they go see Nellie Hopmann in the ARC to see what sort of resources are available. You can use that language, right? Once you receive a student's letter, feel free to privately reach out to that student. I'm, there's this, I think this idea that students have to reach out to faculty. But once you have the student's letter, that is the green light for both parties to engage in communication. And working with faculty, what I've found is many of them find success in, you know, they give students a letter, they'll make an announcement in class and say, you know, any student who has an accommodation, a letter of accommodations, please come see me soon to set up an appointment and we'll chat about how these are going to be implemented in class. Or they'll email a student and say, "Hey, I've got your letter, let me know if you'd like to talk about how we're going to implement these accommodations." Either are perfectly fine. If you have questions about how, or even why, to implement an accommodation, please reach out to me. I'm happy to discuss any situation. Like I've told many faculty, each student situation is unique. So, the reason why students may be accessing an accommodation, and another student isn't, is always tailored to that student's experience, so bear in mind additionally, that disability is an individual experience. So we may have a student who's disclosed a disability and just because this student with that disability is accessing these accommodations does not mean another student with a similar disability is going to access the same combination. So bear in mind that, you know, your course material, the students experience with that is unique to them as an

individual, in addition to unique to their experience with their disability. Also, if a student discloses to you, kind of getting back to I said a bit earlier, point them in my direction, and you know, we can't mandate that students set up accommodations but if a student discloses that they're struggling due to some disability related need, or if you think that, you know, the student has disclosed, but you're not sure, point them in my direction. You can say, "Go see Nellie Hopmann in the ARC, she can discuss the resources that might be beneficial to you." And I'm happy to talk with any student or faculty member about that.

Jim Springer 16:08

I would encourage you listening to review this one or more times to get all this important information so that you absorb it understand your rights and the contact people that you need to talk with. Nellie, thank you so much for this great information. This has been part two of our podcast series on Student Accessibility and supporting students with disabilities. There's more to come. Please stay tuned for that. We've been speaking with Nellie Hopmann, Academic ADA Coordinator here at Webster University. And Nellie, can you give us an email address so that people get could get in touch with you?

Nellie Hopmann 16:43

Of course, I'll give email and phone. So, my, you can reach me at disability@webster.edu, or at my personal account which is chopmann22@webster.edu. You can also reach me in the office at (314) 246-7700. Please reach out.

Jim Springer 17:01

And thank you so much for your time again.

Nellie Hopmann: Thank you.

Jim Springer: Thank you for listening to this podcast. Watch for announcements in Webster Today, and in student newsletters, a forthcoming podcast in the series throughout fall 2019. To find out more information about Webster University's disability supports, go to disability@webster.edu. This has been a presentation of Webster University's accessibility committee in coordination with Webster University's Academic Resource Center.

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