

June 19, 2014

Transcription Carol Clerke

Introduction: A video in which Carol Clerke of NBCC talks about her experiences in accommodating students with physical disabilities.

How did you accommodate a student with a disability in your class?

We've certainly had lots of students with physical disabilities over the years but most recently in our department we had a student with dexterity physical disability, which really significantly impacts the use of office equipment and some of the most routine tasks can become very challenging—a stapler, for example. I instruct in what's considered the live program, which means that the students are on their laptops working in almost every class. The impact of that for someone with a dexterity disability is that even baseline keyboarding speeds are not always achievable, so we were able to allow for extra time for testing purposes. That was less of an impact on assignments that can be taken home to complete simply because they had time at home to work on them. In those cases the deadline still had to be maintained because we still needed to evaluate the assignments and provide feedback to the students before moving on to the next topic. In some cases, we had projects that we had to be a little bit more creative with simply because the student wasn't able to use some of the office equipment. In those projects what we had to do was actually a little bit of trial and error to determine specifically which pieces of equipment that she could use to some degree and/or with some assistive technology. After we determined that, then we actually customized the projects for the student so that she could still meet the competencies of that course.

How was the experience from your perspective?

In a word, challenging. But having said that, like most people in the field of education I love the diversity of working with people—all the differences in personalities, differences in capabilities. I think society in general has really made great strides in that regard, working with diversity and physical disabilities in particular. By that same token, no two students with physical disabilities are going to be the same even if the physical disability is. Some students will be very open about what their limitations are. Others will be a little bit less forthcoming, maybe even sugar coat initially what they can and can't do. Some will be very willing to challenge themselves to push their boundaries, to try new things. Others are going to be more complacent, maybe willing to sit back and quite content to let somebody else do things for them. Now those differences aren't unique to people with physical disabilities. Those differences are, you know, people in general.

What would you say to a colleague who will have a student with a disability in his or her class?

I would offer two pieces of advice, the first one being make certain that it's clear from the start that the student has to drive the bus, so to speak, that they have to take a very active role in identifying what the problem areas are going to be and partner with us in order to come up with solutions to work around

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them, not a sightseer on the bus who might sit back and wait until the day before a test to identify that they can't do something. The second piece of advice I would give would be to certainly go through every individual course with the student and try to identify where those concerns are going to arise. The earlier that we can identify those concerns, the better able we would be to have assistive technology in place to assist with that. The sooner we know what we have to work around, the better the solution we can come up with. It's not a cookie cutter approach, there's no recipe for what we do. Each student who comes to us is very unique and so, too, must the solutions be in order to best meet their needs.