Ending Discrimination in Campus Mental Health

Monica Porter & Alllisa Fernandez
Presenters

Monica Porter

Allilsa Fernandez
Introduction

Monica Porter
Staff Attorney
(she/her/hers)
A note on language

Types of Disabilities

Federal law and the university define a “disability” as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits or restricts the condition, manner, or duration under which an average person in the population can perform a major life activity, such as walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, or taking care of oneself.
Among Higher Ed Students...

- 1 in 5 live with a mental health disability
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death
- ½ who drop out did so because of a mental health disability
• Americans with Disabilities Act
• Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
• Fair Housing Act
• FERPA
• HIPAA
• Case Study: Mental Health & Wellness Coalition, et al. v. Stanford University
Americans with Disabilities Act
ADA: Findings and Purpose

Findings

“[M]ental disabilities in no way diminish a person’s right to fully participate in all aspects of society”

“[H]istorically, society has tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities”

“[D]iscrimination against individuals with disabilities persists in such critical areas as...education”
ADA: Findings and Purpose

Purpose

“[T]o provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities”
“Disability”

“A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities”

MLAs include, but are not limited to, learning, concentrating, thinking, & caring for oneself

“Mental health conditions like major depression, [PTSD], bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and [OCD] should easily qualify”
ADA: Definitions

“Qualified Individual with a Disability”

“[A]n individual who, with or without reasonable modifications, meets the essential eligibility requirements to receive services or participate in programs”
Discrimination: ADA

- Excluded from participation;
- Denied benefits; or
- Discriminated in any way

...in services, programs, or activities
Discrimination: ADA (con’t)

- Using a policy that tends to screen out people with disabilities
- Failing to administer programs in the most integrated setting appropriate
- Imposing a surcharge on a person with a disability for the cost of accommodations
Discrimination: ADA (con’t)

- Failure to make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination

...unless the entity can demonstrate that making the modification would fundamentally alter the service, program, or activity
ADA: Defenses

- Fundamental Alteration
- Undue (financial, administrative) Burden
- Direct Threat
**Fundamental Alteration**

Determined on a case-by-case basis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not a Fundamental Alteration</th>
<th>Fundamental Alteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra time on a test that’s meant to test subject mastery, not reading/processing speed</td>
<td>Chemical sensitivity in a chemistry lab, such that student can’t be in the same room as the chemicals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Undue Burden

Determined on a case-by-case basis

Consider: financial, administrative resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not an Undue Burden</th>
<th>Undue Burden</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School provides lab aide or note-taker to assist student during class</td>
<td>School asked to provide personal aide to assist student bathing, dressing, and getting to/from school</td>
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Direct Threat

- Legitimate Safety Requirements
- Direct Threat: Significant risk to health or safety of others that can’t be eliminated by a reasonable modification
  - Safety req’ts must be based on actual risk; not mere speculation, stereotypes
  - Individualized assessment based on medical knowledge re: nature, duration, severity, likelihood of risk; and whether modification would mitigate the risk
Threat to Self

- Employment: Valid
- School: It’s unclear (text vs. reality)

- What is clear: the determination must be based on an individualized assessment based on current medical knowledge
Fair Housing Act
Fair Housing Act

Prohibits discrimination in the terms, conditions, sale, or rental of housing on the basis of race, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin.
Fair Housing Act: Higher Ed

• Residence halls and dorm rooms are covered
• Discrimination
  • Exclusion
  • Failure to allow Reasonable Accommodation
Fair Housing Act: Reasonable Accommodations

• Discrimination includes refusal to make reasonable accommodations in policies or practices
• Disclosure + Request → Duty → Interactive Process
• Recall: fundamental alteration, undue burden, direct threat
Fair Housing Act: Reasonable Accommodations

- Reassignment (different, single room)
- Emotional Support Animals
Civil Rights Laws in Higher Ed

• Leave of Absence
  • Voluntary
  • Involuntary

• Housing
  • Emotional Support Animals
  • Eviction

• Reasonable Accommodations
  • Academic
  • Housing
  • Administrative, etc.
Privacy Laws in Higher Ed

- FERPA
- HIPAA
FERPA

• You have the right to...
  • Access, Seek to amend, and Control disclosure of educational records
  • File a Complaint with FPCO w/in 180 days
• Exceptions (to disclosure control) include:
  • Parents of “dependent” students (IRC)
  • Parents, if health/safety emergency
• For more info (videos, FAQs), visit
  https://studentprivacy.ed.gov
HIPAA

• You have the right to...
  • Inspect and have copies of your medical information
  • Share your medical information with a third party or mobile application

• This is useful to...
  • Transfer records across medical providers
  • Become more informed about your health

• For more info (videos, infographics, etc.), visit www.healthit.gov/access
Case Study

*Mental Health & Wellness Coalition, et al.*

*v. Stanford University*
Legal Claims

- American with Disabilities Act: Title III
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Fair Housing Act
- (and CA state corollaries)
Rewritten ILOA & Return Policy

• ILOA is a last resort
  • Mandatory consult re: reas. accommodations
  • Significant weight given to student’s doctor
• Notice: Basis, appeal, timeline, resources
• During Leave: May petition for housing
• Return
  • Assessment: Ready to return with or without reasonable accommodations
  • No personal statement requirement
Settlement Agreement

- VLOA revocation period
- Increased staffing and annual staff training
  - LOA process, procedures
  - Reasonable accommodations
- Increased information on disability services website re: reasonable accommodations
- JED Campus
- Monitoring
It Takes a Village
Q&A
Monica Porter
mporter@dralegal.org
510-665-8644

www.dralegal.org/campusmentalhealth
Campus Advocacy for People with Psychological Disabilities

Allilsa Fernandez
Peer Mental Health Alliance
founded Spring 2017
Visibility Matters

• Stigma is a barrier in obtaining information and resources
• We went outside the box attending basketball games, baseball games, carnivals and dance marathons.
• Normalize speaking about mental health openly in diverse spaces
Advocacy on Campus
Activism/ Medical leave policies
A closer look at Stanford’s leave of absence policies

Students who have faced suicide report that the University defaults to temporary campus withdrawal
Lawsuit against Stanford

*Feeling Suicidal, Students Turned to Their College. They Were Told to Go Home.*

Harrison Fowler is part of a class-action lawsuit against Stanford.
Michael Starghill Jr. for The New York Times
Alumna sues Yale for forced medical leave

JEVER MARIWALA
&
ALICE PARK
2:14 AM, NOV 16, 2018

Lucas Holter

A Yale College alumna is suing Yale and Yale-New Haven Hospital for placing her on mandatory medical leave after she
CUNY settles mental health case

By Ryan Holeywell
Aug 30, 2006 12:00 AM

New York's Hunter College settled a lawsuit last week with a student who alleged that the school barred her from her dormitory after she tried to commit suicide. The student’s suit resembles that of former GW student Jordan Nott, who filed a discrimination lawsuit against the University in October 2005.

The Hunter College student, known as Jane Doe in the suit due to privacy concerns, called 911 and admitted herself to a hospital after taking a large number of Tylenol pills in June.
George Washington

JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY AND THE BAZELON CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH LAW REGARDING THE LAWSUIT BY FORMER STUDENT JORDAN NOTT

The George Washington University and one of its former students, Jordan Nott, today announced that they have reached an agreement to resolve the lawsuit filed by Mr. Nott last fall against the University and several other entities regarding his October 2004 mental health hospitalization, the University’s interim suspension, and his subsequent withdrawal from GW.

“I hope that this difficult experience will result in positive changes in how student mental health issues are handled at campuses across the country,” said Mr. Nott. “And I certainly hope that other universities will not discipline their students for seeking mental health treatment.”

“This was a very difficult situation. We were attempting to serve the best interests of Mr. Nott while also considering the well-being of all of our students,” said Dr. John F. Williams, GW provost and vice president for health affairs. “While we recognize that some steps in the process may not have been perfect, we stand by the result. We appreciate Mr. Nott’s support in resolving this matter, and we wish him continued success.”

“We are pleased that GW is reviewing and revising its policies, and hope that Jordan’s case and others will prompt universities to adopt policies that do not penalize students for seeking mental health treatment and that are not linked to the disciplinary process. It is important that any policy provide for individualized determinations of whether a student can remain on campus based on an objective medical evaluation after discharge from a hospital, without rigid rules based solely upon the fact of hospitalization,” said Karen Bower, from the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, one of Mr. Nott’s attorneys.
HUGE problem!

• Homelessness
• Abusive Household
• Low Income/ Poverty
Findings

• BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of color)
  • LGBQTA+
  • People who identify as women
  • People with Disabilities
Other ADA Problems
Accommodations

Fifth Annual Lavender Graduation

Here at Stony Brook University, LGBTQ* Services hosts our annual Lavender Graduation ceremony. The event takes place during the month of May after finals have concluded and serves to honor all LGBTQ* graduating students.
Student led activism
DRA (Disability Rights Advocates)
Op-ed

Stony Brook has major accessibility issues

BY ALLILSA FERNANDEZ / MARCH 24, 2019

The Student Accessibility Support Center is located inside of the Educational Communications Center. Stony Brook University's policy on the use of campus facilities states...
Protest March
Protest March
Resolution Meeting
Students protest campus ADA violations

Demonstrators march on campus in the Disability March Protest on April 10, 2019. The march was organized by the Disability Rights Coalition, an impromptu alliance of campus activists led by former Peer Mental Health Alliance president and Stony Brook alumna Allissa Fernandez and co-sponsored by the Graduate Student Employees
More News

Stony Brook is segregating its disabled students and needs to be held accountable

BY MIKE ADAMS   APRIL 28, 2019

Students, faculty and staff protest Stony Brook University's Americans with Disabilities Act violations on Wednesday, April 10. A week later, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Richard Gatteau spoke at an Undergraduate Student Government Senate meeting and claimed that every
Students, alumni work toward more accessibility at Stony Brook University

By Rita J. Egan · May 2, 2019

On April 10, approximately 80 students and alumni took to the campus to protest what they felt were Americans with Disabilities Act violations. Photo by Alllisa Fernandez

A student-led rally over handicapped access across campus has opened up a dialogue at Stony Brook University.
Changes to ADA buttons
Changes to announcements

Fifth Annual Lavender Graduation

Here at Stony Brook University, LGBTQ+ Services hosts our annual Lavender Graduation ceremony. The event takes place during the month of May after finals have concluded and serves to honor all LGBTQ+ graduating students, celebrate their time at Stony Brook, and recognize them for their contributions to the University community.

At the ceremony you will receive a rainbow stole that you can wear for the ceremony and for the University Commencement!
Disability trainings
Still Fighting medical leave policies
Conclusion

• Imagine if instead of spending millions of dollars in lawsuits we spend it on accommodations and services for people with psychological disabilities/mental health diagnoses

• Student advocacy/Activism along with lawyers and policy makers can perhaps be the permanent change we long to see
Questions!
Contact Us

📍 Mental Health America
500 Montgomery Street
Suite 820
Alexandria, VA 22314

Facebook.com/mentalhealthamerica
Twitter.com/mentalhealtham
Youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica
THANKS FOR COMING