

Bridging the Great Divide: Exploring the Coexistence of Academic Freedom and Duty to Accommodate

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Project Summary

Higher education institutions are very familiar with their obligation to ensure reasonable and appropriate accommodations are provided to disabled students who may need them. Accommodation processes also rely on other campus constituents, chiefly faculty who have long expressed both a desire to provide reasonable accommodations and rigorously defend their academic freedom. As higher education institutions return to in-person instruction, this question of balancing disability-related accommodations and academic freedom has caused further divide between faculty and Disability Resource Offices. In a climate of increasing numbers of students seeking accommodation, expanding expectations of faculty around teaching and research, and persistent political threats to the sanctity of academic freedom, both faculty and higher education staff are unsure of how to best resolve what is often seen as a philosophical conflict.

The overall goal of this project is to chronicle the many ways in which higher education institutions balance the academic rights of faculty to practice their pedagogy how they see fit with the legal obligation of the institution to accommodate disabled students in an effective manner. Through the development of a podcast, the project will (1) elucidate the different environment, political, and pedagogical factors that influence this balance, and (2) demonstrate how institutional, departmental, and individual values adjust accommodation practices in light of faculty academic rights. Highlighting the real stories and perspectives of faculty, staff, and students

who are a part of the tug-and-pull between academic freedom and duty to accommodate, the podcast will encourage further discussion and exploration about how both constructs can coexist and potentially support each other.

Impact

The project has been on hold mostly due to some factors with executing the outcomes over the past year due to challenges with activity on campus and turnover in the office that required my full attention. With permission, the project will move forward with anticipated completion by the end of the Fall 2024 Quarter. An updated timeline is shared below:

1. End of August: Recording equipment and other tools purchased in anticipation of podcast recording beginning
2. End of September: Scripts/outlines for the podcast episodes along with guest invitation and schedules released
3. Mid-October: Recording begins
4. Mid-to-late November: Podcast episodes begin launching

The project objectives have yet to be met, but we will be working toward those during the Fall 2024 quarter.

Some guests have been recruited so far for the podcast, but planning for audience and such has been minimal with an anticipated launch of the podcast in the Fall 2024 quarter.