



HOW TO APPLY FOR
HIGHER EDUCATION CAREERS

A GUIDE
FOR **JOB SEEKERS**
WITH **DISABILITIES**

Forward

Congratulations!

By downloading this ebook, you're on your way to a fulfilling career in higher education.

Maybe you're looking for a mentor and opportunities to advance your career. Perhaps you're searching for a work environment that offers great benefits, work-life balance, and a collaborative culture. Maybe you'd like to influence and inspire the next generation of leaders.

Whatever your reason for transitioning into higher education, HERC is here to help!

Please visit our website, hercjobs.org, for additional resources to advance your career.

Contents

1. Job Hunting with a Disability.....	3
2. Interviewing Tips for Professionals with Disabilities.....	6
3. Disclosing Disability to an Employer.....	9

Job Hunting with a Disability

Landing a professional position in a competitive economy can be challenging for any job seeker, whether you have a disability or not. Yet it can and is done, every day! Here are some tips to help you move from applicant to employee.

Consider Your Options

Before you even start your search, decide what you want in a job. Are you looking for an institute of higher learning that values diversity and has an expressed commitment to disability inclusion? What are your non-negotiables? Are you looking for a long-term position, or will something temporary or part-time be suitable? Starting your search with clearly defined personal criteria will help you decide quickly where to target your applications.

Know Your Rights

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits employers from discriminating against applicants based on disabilities. It also requires employers to provide accommodations for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities. Even so, job seekers with “invisible” disabilities sometimes choose to keep them hidden, not self-identifying when invited to do so on paperwork or disclosing in order to request needed accommodations to interview most effectively or perform to their fullest once on board. For example, Brandy Greenfield (not her real name), a Project

A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Management Professional in higher education with a nonvisible disability, chose not to disclose. “I was treated poorly by employers in the past,” she said. “I’ve never checked the ‘disabled’ box on an application because I’ve always been afraid of discrimination.”

However, it is important to know that if you choose not to self-identify as a person with a disability or disclose in order to request an accommodation, employers are under no obligation to provide one.

Furthermore, because many institutions of higher education are federal contractors, they are covered under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires them to take proactive steps to hire qualified people with disabilities. Thus, all other things being equal, in some circumstances, being open about your disability can provide a competitive edge. However, the decision to disclose is a personal one, and not doing so during the application and interview process doesn’t preclude you from doing so later.

Be Confident in What You Can Do

If you ask for accommodations, be sure to do so in a way that highlights your abilities. For example, you might say, “I can’t wait to come to X University to teach a sample class for communication majors. As a graduate assistant, I won several teaching awards, and I look forward to connecting with the students. Please make

A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

sure ahead of time that I will be able to get my wheelchair into the auditorium where the lecture will be held.” In other words, talk more about what you can do and focus less on what you can’t do, while still providing your potential employer the information they need.

It's frustrating if an interviewer underestimates your abilities or suitability for a job based on a disability. Your goal is to articulate your skills and abilities that make you the right candidate for the job. As part of this, be prepared to explain any gaps in your job history due to medical issues. For example, Juan Perez, an educational product developer, experienced clinical depression during a long-term layoff. “It was hard to formulate an answer when asked about the time I was too sick to work, but I did it,” he says. “I remained composed and focused on my skills and abilities developed since my illness. Guess what? I got the job!”

Entering the job market can create anxiety for even the most seasoned applicant. Adding a disability to the mix can make the process even more stressful, but only if you let it. Projecting a positive attitude can do wonders for your prospects of career success, and employers are bound to be impressed by the skills and assets, some of which your disability may have even helped you hone, such as creativity, and problem-solving skills. As always, the most important thing is to remain focused on your goals and not let your disability limit your expectations, career or otherwise.

Interviewing Tips for Professionals with Disabilities

Congratulations! You made it through the job search, writing the cover letter, and developing the resume. Now, you have an interview at the place you've been dreaming about. The following tips can help calm your nerves and ensure that your interviewers view you as they should—a perfect fit for their organization.

Start with Research

Yes, you surely did some research before you sent off your job application, but it's time to do more. To start, find out where you will be meeting and with whom. Before you disclose any disability or ask for accommodations, discover for yourself (if you can) whether the organization's culture is welcoming and inclusive of people with disabilities. Even if your sense is "no," knowing ahead of time gives you the upper hand.

Ask for Accommodations While Showing Strengths

Even though applicants and employees with disabilities are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, you should handle accessibility concerns early on. If you will need accommodations to participate in the interview process, ask for them. For instance, you could say, "I am excited to present my theories to the seminar at X College next week. Please make sure I can navigate my wheelchair to the stage where the presentation

A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

will take place. I look forward to meeting with the hiring committee. Thank you.”

The key is to give your potential employers an opportunity to avoid an uncomfortable situation. While they are required to provide any necessary accommodations for you to participate in the interview, making your needs clear in advance will improve the experience for everyone participating in your interview.

Practice Your Technique

Interviewees who practice interview skills with a trusted colleague or friend tend to feel more comfortable in the actual interview session than those who do not. If you haven't interviewed for a while, practice is key. Don't wait until you are in the interview room with the search committee to test a new answer to an important question. Work on your elevator pitch; for instance, be able to answer the question “Why should we hire you?” in three minutes or less.

When you've mastered that, move on to the next potential questions. Use this technique to fortify yourself for biased questions that may be asked out of ignorance. Have your rote answer ready, so you are not tripped up by a well-meaning interviewer who needs to be educated on your abilities instead of focusing elsewhere.

A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Bring a Positive Attitude

Lastly, be sure to show your potential coworkers what a great person they are considering bringing on to the team. Let your best assets shine through and save criticisms of former employers for home. Never trash your previous workplace, even if you had a bad experience there. As you did during the application process, show your potential employer that you will be a positive addition to the team.

Finally, Don't Fear that Upcoming Job Interview.

Career success in higher education can be yours, with or without a disability. Practicing your responses to difficult questions and making sure you are fully prepared before going into your interview can help ensure the best possible outcome for both you and your future employer.

Disclosing Disability to an Employer: Why, When, and How

By Melanie Whetzel, Lead Consultant on JAN's Cognitive / Neurological team at Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted on July 26, 1990, is legislation purposed to improve the lives of people with disabilities by protecting their rights to have access to employment, public entities, transportation, public accommodations, commercial facilities, telecommunications and more. It helps people with disabilities compete equally for employment and receive the accommodations and protection they need to work.

- *Are you in need of accommodations in the workplace due to a disability?*
- *Do you know what steps to take in order to get the process started?*

Disclosure is the first and sometimes the most difficult step. Just thinking about this can often cause anxiety and stress. **So what exactly is disclosure?**

Disclosure is divulging or giving out personal information about a disability. It is important for the employee to provide information about the nature of the disability, the limitations involved, and how the disability affects the ability to learn and /or perform the job effectively.

A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

The employer has a right to know if a disability is involved when an employee asks for accommodations. *Deciding if, when, and how to share disability-related information with a prospective or current employer can be overwhelming.* There is no single right or wrong approach to disclosing a disability.

The disability disclosure decision-making process requires answering a number of personal questions that may be different with each employment experience. Consider the following:

- “Do I have an obligation to disclose?”
- “When is the right time?”
- “How much medical information will I be required to provide?”, and
- “How will disclosing the information affect my employment?”

Let’s look at three reasons why someone may choose to disclose a disability to their employer:

1. To ask for job accommodations

Tina is a student life director at a college, required to log notes into a binder for all of the activities and students who participate. Because of a brain injury, Tina struggles to hand write notes. She requests speech-to-text software that enables her to dictate her notes. She is then able to print them out and place them in the binder.

2. To receive benefits or privileges of employment

The ADA requires employers to provide accommodations so that

A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

employees with disabilities can enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by similarly-situated employees without disabilities. Benefits and privileges of employment include employer-sponsored training, access to cafeterias, lounges, gymnasiums, auditoriums, transportation, and parties or other social functions.

Sean is an employee with Down syndrome who signed up for a nutrition class, but had trouble understanding the information that was presented. His employer asked the instructor to provide pictures of the types of food she was recommending employees eat. Sean was able to use these pictures when making food choices.

3. To explain an unusual circumstance

Della has temperature sensitivities due to multiple sclerosis, but so far has been able to manage them on her own without the need to disclose her condition to her employer. However, when the air conditioner breaks down and is reportedly going to take a week to replace, Della realizes that she will need to work from home as an accommodation, will need to disclose to her employer, and explain her condition and the need for the accommodation.

Disclosure can be quite simple. You can tell your employer that you need to talk about an adjustment or change that is essential for a reason related to a medical condition. You may use plain English to request an accommodation. You do not have to mention the ADA nor

A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

use the phrase “reasonable accommodation.” It can be as easy as what Tina may have said to her supervisor, “I need to talk to you about the difficulty I encounter when I try to hand write notes due to a medical condition.”

The general rule under the ADA is that a person does not have to disclose a disability until an accommodation is needed. Ideally, employees will disclose a disability and request accommodations before performance problems arise, or at least before they become too serious. That can be during the application or interview process, the first day on the job, or years down the road. For someone who needs testing accommodations, disclosure in the application process may be necessary. For another applicant who has great difficulty communicating and thinking on her feet, a request for interview questions ahead of time may be needed. Some employees who have successfully worked for years without accommodations may find it necessary to disclose and ask for accommodations due to changes in their job, or changes in their disability.

Questions about disclosure?

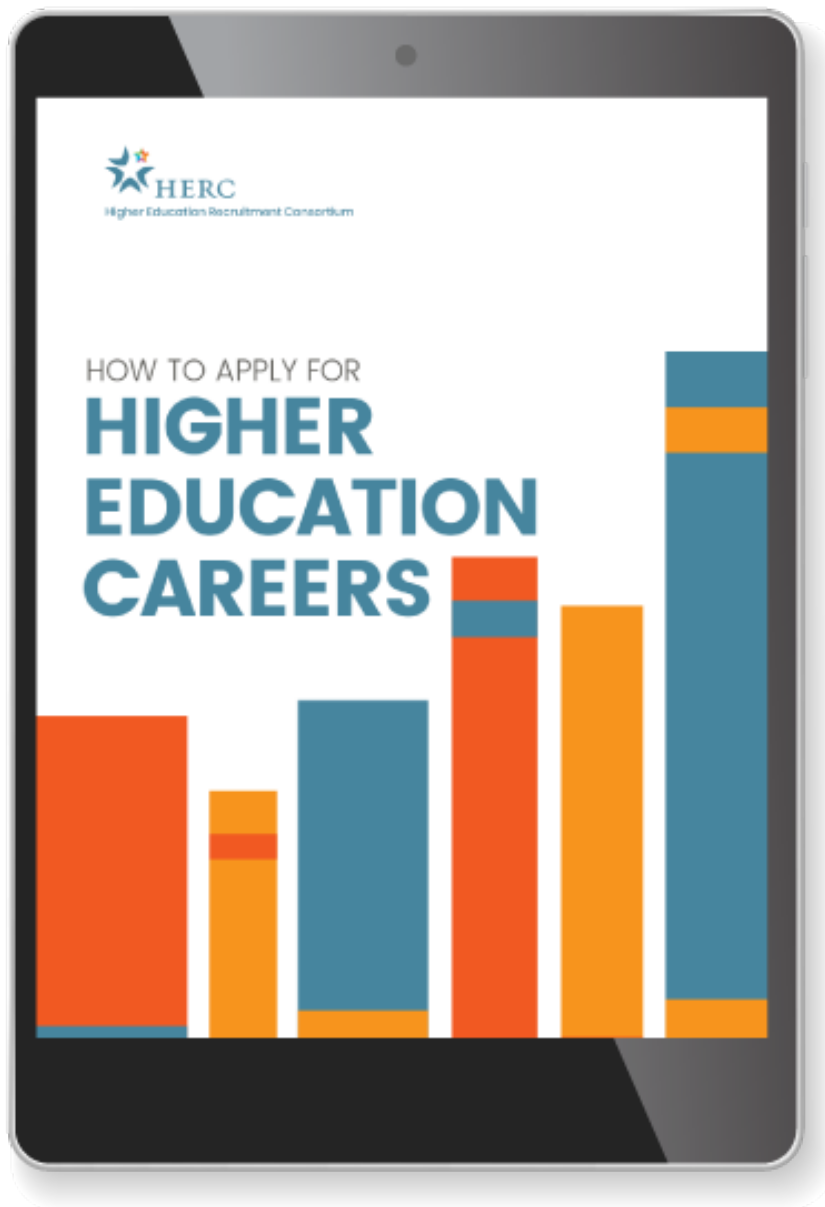
Contact JAN for free information or to discuss an accommodation situation privately with a consultant.

JAN, the Job Accommodation Network, is a program of the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

<https://askjan.org/> • (800) 526-7234 (Voice) • (877) 781-9403 (TTY)

HOW TO APPLY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION CAREERS
A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

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The Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC) is a non-profit coalition of over 700 colleges, universities, hospitals, research labs, government agencies, and related non- and for-profit organizations, committed to diversifying the pipeline of faculty, staff, and executives in academia. HERC supports our member institutions in recruiting and retaining outstanding and diverse employees.