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Ask A Director Making the Library More Accessable

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ASK A DIRECTOR

Making the Library More Accessible

Question: How has your organization implemented workplace accessibility and support for individuals with disabilities?



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My daughter and I have bonded over superhero movies and TV shows. We love watching the good guys use their talents and abilities to help humanity, tirelessly battling villains seeking power, destruction, revenge, equity—wait ... equity?

Yup, equity. Remember this line from *The Incredibles*? “Everyone can be superheroes. Everyone can be super. And when everyone’s super, no one will be.”

That line comes from Syndrome, the wannabe sidekick turned bad guy. And what’s his evil scheme? To create inventions that give everyone superpowers so that natural superheroes no longer possess advantages over everyone else. In other words, to provide everyone access to the resources that they need to succeed. Although I certainly don’t condone his methods, his motivation doesn’t sound so sinister to me. In fact, it’s something that we’re striving to achieve.

At the University of Wisconsin Law Library, we're committed to promoting a healthy learning community for both staff and patrons where individuals feel welcome and supported, and are able to reach their full potential. To foster the development of this healthy environment, we've recently formed a new Community Well-Being Committee to provide leadership in two important areas: mental health and wellness; and equity, inclusion, and diversity.

As part of the committee's charge, we've developed potential action items in both areas that we hope will help our patrons and staff feel welcome and supported by the Law Library. Although the complete list of action items is broadly designed to encompass diverse communities, some, including the following, are especially relevant to individuals with disabilities:

- Assess our physical spaces and signage to provide more accessible and welcoming learning and work environments.
- Investigate and recommend equipment that could assist patrons and staff in performing tasks more easily or comfortably, such as standing desks, chair supports, magnifiers, and headphones. Check out equipment to patrons as possible.
- Review our online presence to improve accessibility for users of all abilities.
- Identify any library policies or practices that impede individuals or groups from reaching their fullest potential.
- Develop partnerships with other law school and campus groups or

individuals that are also committed to promoting a healthy learning community.

While some of these action items are new, others describe services, practices, and materials that we are already engaged with or provide. (For a few examples, read Genevieve Zook's *AALL Spectrum* article at bit.ly/M14Alike.) But by pulling them together under the leadership of our Community Well-Being Committee, we hope to become more attentive and responsive to the needs of our diverse learning community, including patrons and staff with disabilities.

Providing people with the resources that they need to succeed doesn't just help those individuals, it makes our entire community stronger. We can all be super, and that's pretty incredible.



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The library at the Florida A&M University (FAMU) College of Law is relatively new, as we moved into our building in 2007. All of the physical space is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant, including an automatic door button for the main entrance. When we opened, it appeared that we were equipped to assist any patron with their information needs.

Three years ago, we were notified that a visually impaired student would be among the incoming 1L class. We looked at our library and realized that, while we met ADA standards for the physical layout of the library space, much of the collection would not be accessible for a patron with visual disabilities. In rapid order, we obtained two text-to-speech assistive reading cameras, installed

screen-reading software on a computer reserved for those with special needs, and began to work with our school's Center for Disability Access and Resources to obtain a high-speed book scanner that also had optimal character recognition and text-to-speech capability.

When the student arrived, we offered assistance in obtaining electronic copies of his books from the publisher and scanned material he needed on a shorter timetable. We

reserved a reading room for his use with a personal reader, and on one occasion even read aloud to him when his normal reader was unavailable. One of the more time-intensive tasks was working with him on Bluebooking. You don't realize how visual it is until you have to figure out how to determine the typeface when you can't see it!

Our student is on track to graduate this semester, and in a recent paper, mentioned that he knows he would not have gotten this far without the aid of

the law library. It's gratifying to know that we were able to make such a difference in a student's career. We have certainly learned a lot from this experience, and we are in a much better position to aid other visually impaired students who may be considering attending FAMU. ■