

Accommodating the Disabled in Library One-Shots at York College/CUNY

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Abstract

The library is an academic department at York College of the City University of New York and offers one-shot classes in information literacy at the for all other academic departments at the college. Since these library classes are taught by library faculty rather than by the subject professors, it is quite possible that they would not be aware of, and therefore not accommodate, the disabled students who attend these specific information literacy classes. This article recommends best practices for teaching librarians who may need to make accommodations for the disabled while teaching these library classes, currently used at York's library. The policy background that caused the library to do this is not only based in law but, as discussed here, it is also based in professional library policies put forward by the American Library Association. This article also reviews the history of services for the disabled in libraries.

Keywords: one-shots, City University of New York, librarianship, Library Bill of Rights, disabled patrons

Introduction

The profession of librarianship has served disabled patrons practically since it began as a professional vocation in the nineteenth century. However, libraries and by extension librarians have only been legally required to work with the disabled for over eighty-six years. The Pratt-Smoot Act established in 1931 “the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped through the Library of Congress” (Case et al., 2012, p. 6). This act pre-dated the national movement to help disabled people by about two decades (see below).

If institutions do not accommodate disabled patrons they can be sued and penalized under the law (Pack & Foos, 1992, p. 255). In addition to the legal requirements and their consequences librarians at the college level need to include disabled patrons in their thinking and planning since “[t]he numbers of students with disabilities in post-secondary education is growing and includes diverse populations such as returning veterans” (Case et al., 2012, p. 3). As Kowalsky and Woodruff (2015) have pointed out identifying a patron’s disability and needs is not necessarily easy. This article gives a solution to how York College of the City University of New York [CUNY] handles the problem of properly identifying disabled library patrons and their needs in order to better serve them during information literacy sessions.

Disability and the Profession of librarianship

It is not only necessary that the librarians think about service to the disabled; the profession of librarianship almost makes it an obligation to speak of it. Historically, services to the blind were first professionally discussed at the twentieth meeting of the American Library Association in 1898 (National Library Service for the Blind and

Physically Handicapped, 1983, p. 2). Thirty years earlier, in 1868, the Boston Public Library became the first public library for the disabled when it received eight books meant for blind readers. In 1897, in the newly constructed Library of Congress in Washington, there was a special reading room for the blind (National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, 1983, p. 3). It wasn't until 1966, however, when PL89-522 was signed that physically and visually impaired people who could not use normal printed materials were [made] eligible to borrow recorded books and playback equipment under a Library of Congress program for blind readers (National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, 1983, p. 14).

Contemporaneously the library profession has embedded service to the disabled in some of its core documents. Article five of the *Library Bill of Rights*, explaining about the rights of the general public and the obligations of the library and of librarians, directs that “a person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views” (American Library Association, 1980).

Policies such as the *Library Bill of Rights* have led to a *Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy* which further explains the *Library Bill of Rights* as well as expanding it. This second policy, the *Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy*, mandates that,

Libraries must not discriminate against individuals with disabilities and shall ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to library resources. To ensure such access, libraries may provide individuals with disabilities with services such as extended loan periods, waived late fines, extended reserve periods, library cards for proxies, books by mail,

reference services by fax or email, home delivery service, remote access to the OPAC, remote electronic access to library resources, volunteer readers in the library, volunteer technology assistants in the library, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter or realtime captioning at library programs, and radio reading services (American Library Association, 2001).

Of course, the American Library Association [ALA], the creator of these policies, has no legal authority to enforce them or require all librarians or libraries follow its policies. However, all Library Schools in the United States are accredited by the ALA and so these policies tend to be included as a part of the curriculum of the training for a majority of American librarians. Since all of the librarians at York attended an ALA accredited library school, it can safely be said that they all are familiar with the *Library Bill of Rights* and its provisions

Librarians as Teachers

Librarians, specifically academic librarians, are a part of the ecosystem of tertiary education. They teach students many things, but specifically, information literacy, helping them learn how to find and use information and helping them to do research. However, unlike subject faculty who often teach a single, specific discipline, such as Biology or English over a fifteen-week period (i.e., a semester), librarians sometimes give their lessons in one-shots, a one-time formal session with a librarian.

In general, academic librarians formally teach in a classroom in one of three ways. Since librarians at York College do not teach online, this article will only deal with face-to-face teaching and will not discuss either online instruction or hybrid courses.

Learning which students need accommodations can vary depending upon what way the librarian is teaching (see below). They teach:

1. Some form of credit-bearing course that meets regularly, often over fifteen-weeks, similar to subject faculty;
2. Workshops;
3. One-shots.

An example of a credit-bearing course that meets regularly during half of the semester is “Lib102 - Beyond Google: Research for College Success” that is taught at the College of Staten Island of the City University of New York. It is described on the college’s website as follows:

The course provides students with foundational research skills needed to succeed in college, including how to develop well thought out research strategies, and effectively use library research tools and new media sources. Students will be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and use appropriate information resources in keeping with academic integrity and ethical standards. Students will partake in in-class exercises, quizzes, and will produce a final project in the form of an annotated bibliography.

LIB 102 is a one-credit seven-and-a-half-week elective course that meets once a week and is open to all students.” (College of Staten Island, Library, n.d.)

Because they meet regularly and students must be registered for this course like any other class the librarians teaching the class gets the same aid in teaching their students that any other professor gets. According to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), part of the US Dept. of Ed – which oversees the implementation of Section 504

(Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and Title II (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) – students must be provided with equal access to classrooms and they may be deemed eligible for accommodations. It is optional for a student to self-disclose their disability status to the college. The student must identify the need for an accommodation and give adequate notice of the need. It is also not required for a post-secondary school to identify the student as having a disability or to assess what accommodations are needed. Knowing what accommodation is needed is very important. Accommodations for a color-blind student would differ from those which are needed by a deaf student, for example.

A workshop is a focused single lesson not necessarily related to any specific course. It could be about any subject that the librarian feels could help their patrons and at any time during the academic semester. An example of a workshop title/subject might be “Using primary sources to research an academic paper,” or “How to format a paper using APA style.”

A one-shot is a one-time lesson taught by the librarian during a regular class period, in which the librarian teaches the class either how to do research in general, or how to successfully complete a specific assignment which has been assigned by the classroom faculty member. Librarians at York College, where the author works, tend to teach using one-shots.

At York College, the library is very specific about what will be taught, as explained on its website:

York College Library’s Information Literacy program utilizes the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards, with the following mission and goals:

- educate students in proper use, evaluation and application of print and electronic resources
- support research assignments and the College's curriculum, academic and special programs by focused library instruction
- teach students the ethical use of information sources
- motivate lifelong learners

[The] Information Literacy sessions . . . are specifically tailored to the research assignment or project [of the class that is coming to the library for an information literacy session] (York College, n.d.b).

York College

York College is one of the senior colleges of CUNY (City University of New York, n.d.). CUNY is the third-largest public university system in the country after the State University of New York [SUNY] and the California system (Milliken, 2014). The City University is also “. . . the nation’s largest urban public university (City University of New York, n.d.). CUNY was originally founded prior to the Civil War, in 1847, by Townsend Harris as the Free Academy (Roff, Cucchiara, & Dunlap, 2000). The Free Academy is now known as City College. Upon its founding, Harris stated that the concept of the Free Academy was to “[o]pen the doors to all . . . Let the children of the rich and the poor take their seats together and know of no distinction save that of industry, good conduct and intellect (City University of New York, n.d.).” In 1961, then-Governor of the State of New York Nelson Rockefeller oversaw the creation of the City University of New York, which melded together public colleges in all of New York

City's five boroughs. The university has grown since its 1961 creation and as of the date of this writing:

The University's 24 institutions include 11 senior colleges (those with baccalaureate programs: Baruch College, Brooklyn College, City College, College of Staten Island, Hunter College, John Jay College, Lehman College, Medgar Evers College, New York City of Technology, Queens College, and York College); seven community colleges (those with associate but not baccalaureate programs: Borough of Manhattan Community College, Bronx Community College, Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, [the Stella and Charles Guttman] Community College, and Queensborough Community College); the William E. Macaulay Honors College; the Graduate School and University Center; the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism; the CUNY School of Law; the CUNY School of Professional Studies; and the CUNY School of Public Health [and Health Policy] (City University of New York, n.d.).

York College is one of the "younger" of the senior colleges in CUNY, having been founded in 1966, fifty years before the composition of this paper (York College, n.d.a). It is located on a fifty-acre campus in Jamaica, Queens, New York. Jamaica is a neighborhood in Central Queens with a population of approximately 217,000 people. York College has a total of about 8,511 students. (York College, n.d.c). Classes are mainly taught in five buildings:

1. The Academic Core, which houses most of the classrooms and offices;
2. The Milton G. Bassin Performing Arts Center;

3. The Health & Physical Education Building;
4. The Science Building; and the
5. Classroom Building.

York College's Library is located on the second and third floors of the Academic Core. Although anyone with a CUNY ID card has the full use of the library, members of the general public do not have borrowing privileges and can only enter it and sit at the tables to work or stand and use the guest computers. The library has “. . . over a hundred online licensed databases, over 240,000 print books, 250,000 e-books, 765 titles in microfilm, 90,000 microfiche cards, 50 current titles in print periodicals, and tens of thousands of full-text journals online” (York College, Library, n.d.).

Disability and Higher Education in the United States

Starting in the 1960s the United States Government began helping K-12 schools with additional money so that they could better serve students with learning disabilities. By the 1970s these students began to start institutions of higher education and in 1973 “the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, established nondiscrimination requirements for all entities receiving federal funds” (Case et al., 2012, p. 6). This led in 1977 to campus entities which serve the disabled joining together and setting up the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) in order to establish professional and service standards (Case et al., 2012, p. 6).

In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act extended the principle of separate being inherently unequal with respect to disabled people and education (Raue & Lewis, 2011, p. 184). Although this act focuses mainly on children nonetheless combined with Section 504 of the aforementioned 1973 Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (see below), it is a very strong mandate to teach the disabled at college level. Indeed, it has worked and the number of students in “[a]lmost all public 2-year and 4-year institutions (99 percent) and medium and large institutions (100 percent) reported enrolling students with disabilities” (Raue & Lewis, 2011, p. 3).

In 1993 (Crispen, 1993), the ALA published an Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies preconference of the ALA conference. The preconference session held at the San Francisco Marriott Hotel on Friday, June 26, 1992 discussed the Americans with Disabilities Act and libraries (Vasi, 1994). John Vasi, a reviewer of the book, observed that this volume was not a practical guide for implementation of the ADA but rather a set of anecdotal essays. It is hoped that by demonstrating how the ADA is being implemented in an academic library, this article gives a practical way of dealing with the ADA in such a library.

In 1995 ten students at Boston University filed a lawsuit against the university for discrimination. Boston University claimed that it had the right to exclude disabled students from programs based upon “the university’s right to set academic standards.” The students claimed that “the university . . . violated federal law requiring that educational institutions provide ‘reasonable accommodations’ to students with learning disabilities” (Fleischer & Zames, 2011, p. 197). The 1997 decision in the case, *Elizabeth Guckenberger v. Boston University*, established learning disabilities as a valid diagnosis to request accommodations in higher education (Fleischer & Zames, 2011, p. 198).

CUNY

Whatever York College does is controlled not only by its own guidelines and the law but also by the policies of the University to which it is affiliated, CUNY. CUNY is an agency of both the State of New York and the City of New York. Since it is a governmental agency, it is careful to follow the federal laws protecting the disabled. As York's Center for Students with Disabilities' website explains: "Under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the College is required to provide these reasonable accommodations to you, and we are here to help" (York College, Center for Students with Disabilities. n.d.). In order to help faculty teach students with disabilities, the Center for Students with Disabilities provides a link to a document created by the University's "CUNY Council on Student Disability Issues (COSDI)" entitled *Reasonable Accommodations: A Faculty Guide to Teaching College Students with Disabilities* (2014). The document deals with many of the disabilities that a faculty member might encounter in their classroom, specifically:

- Medical Conditions: e.g., asthma, diabetes, fibromyalgia, HIV- AIDS, cancer, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, lupus, heart disease, Charon's Disease, sickle cell anemia, epilepsy
- Psychological Conditions: e.g., anxiety disorder, depression, mania, manic-depression, schizophrenia, recovery from alcoholism and substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Learning Disabilities: i.e., an inability to receive, process, store, or respond to information, or to speak, listen, think, read, write, spell, or compute

- Neurological Impairment: e.g., attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, brain injury, brain tumor, carpal tunnel syndrome, cerebral palsy, Asperger's Syndrome
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Visually Impaired, Legally Blind, and Blind
- Mobility Impairment: e.g., arthritis, polio, spinal cord injuries, scoliosis, and other conditions that cause mobility difficulties or result in the use of a cane or wheelchair
- Temporary Disabilities: i.e., a treatable impairment of mental or physical faculties that may impede the affected person from functioning normally while he or she is under treatment (CUNY Council on Student Disability Issues, 2014).

To help faculty teach disabled students at York College, the college, like all other CUNY colleges, houses a CUNY-wide program called CUNY LEADS. CUNY LEADS stands for “CUNY Linking Employment, Academics and Disability Services.” At York, CUNY LEADS is housed in the offices of the Center for Students with Disabilities. The brochure *Know Where You're Going . . .* (n.d.) gives the mission of CUNY LEADS as “a unique program designed to prepare CUNY students with disabilities to make realistic academic and career choices and develop the skills that will result in successful career outcomes.”

Students with disabilities at York who need accommodations register for classes through either the CUNY LEADS specialist or through one of the Disability Accommodations Specialists who work in the office of the Center for Students with

Disabilities. It is through these offices, CUNY LEADS and the Center for Students with Disabilities, that faculty learn of any and all accommodations which must be made for disabled students in their classes. The process is fairly simple: the student first of all must be registered with the Center, in other words, in accordance with the law, they must be self-identified (Leiter, 2012). Once this has happened, they are eligible to register for classes at the office with the help of the staff there.

After the student has been registered the Center's staff members send an individual notification, on paper, concerning each student, to the faculty member who is teaching the class. This notification identifies the student, the class, its section, and the accommodation which the student will need in the class. The way this is done at York differs from Leiter's explanation of how she found it is done normally in her study. The norm, according to Leiter (2014), is that ". . . students must actually pick up their rights, explain and document their needs, negotiate with disability services staff, and *then notify each of their professors individually of their approved accommodations at the beginning of each semester* [italics added]." The reason for the difference between York's practice where the Center for Students with Disabilities notifies the faculty about needed accommodations and Leiter's norm where the student notifies the faculty about needed accommodations may be due to the fact that Leiter studied residential colleges and York, like most of CUNY, is a commuter college.

Additionally, if the York faculty member doesn't understand the accommodation, then they are welcomed and encouraged to contact the Center for Students with Disabilities for further clarification (L. Maycock, personal communication, December 21, 2016). Obviously both of these processes work very well for formal fifteen-week courses

but the library one-shot happens only once during the semester and, at York College, it usually only happens for no more than one hour. Although it is usual for the professor to have the one-shot given set out in the course's syllabus, the Center for Students with Disabilities does not review the syllabus and, therefore, has no way to know in advance that it is scheduled. It is important for the York librarians to know of any impending need for an accommodation so that they may plan for it in their lessons.

Thus, in order for the librarians at York to find out in advance about needed accommodations of students who will attend information literacy sessions, a rather simple solution was devised: the librarians just ask. As can be seen in Figure 1, a question was added to the "information literacy class request" form, the form used by York faculty to request a one-shot, on the library's website asking if any accommodations are needed, whether for the faculty member or student(s), with a text box to allow for elaboration.

Beginning time of IL session required

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Ending time of IL session required

(Maximum length for an IL session is one hour.)

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Number of students required

Research Assignment required

Specify information library faculty can use to plan your class' instruction session (e.g., assignment, syllabus, student topics, etc.). Please list any databases or resources you would like demonstrated.

Accommodations Needed

If you or any of your students need an accommodation due to a disability please provide a description of accommodations needed.

Any Additional Information

Figure 1: Screen capture of a section of the Information Literacy reservation form from the York College Library's website with the pertinent section circled in red (York College, n.d.b). (<https://www.york.cuny.edu/library/information-literacy/information-literacy-class-request>) © 2016 York College/The City University of New York.

Conclusion

Through the simple and straightforward method of asking for anonymous information about anyone in a class who might need an accommodation due to a disability, whether a faculty member or a student, as part of the on-line form that is used at the college to schedule a library one-shot lesson (see Figure 1), the library and the librarians at York College/CUNY are able to offer needed accommodations to both the students and the faculty. In this manner, the library is also able to comply with the laws, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the ADA, that set “contemporary [American] disability policy (Leiter, 2012).” In addition to complying with the legal requirements of the law, the librarians abide by the policies in relation to the disabled as promulgated by the ALA. As observed York only has one-shots. But as already outlined, library lessons could also come in other colleges in the form of workshops or fifteen-week for credit courses. In the case of fifteen-week for credit courses, the school’s Office of Disabled Students (or Services) would send a form or a letter to the teacher identifying who needs accommodation in the class and what accommodation is needed. In the case of workshops the librarian could either design the registration form for the workshop to have a field as York has in Figure 1 or make certain it is a multiple part workshop so that the student could self-identify their disability to the teacher in private after the first part of the workshop.

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