

Faculty Inquiry Group (FIG) titled "Disability as Diversity - Inclusion in Medicine, Nursing, and the Health Professions." - Summary of Activities

Overview and Purpose

The FIG was established to address the lack of disability representation in the healthcare workforce and the barriers students with disabilities face, such as restrictive technical standards and ableism. The interdisciplinary group included faculty from Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA), Nursing (RN), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and Health Education Simulation. The central guiding question for their investigations was: "What did we learn that might apply to ways students may demonstrate meeting program-specific technical standards?"

Core Activities

The group's work spanned the Spring and Summer terms of 2025, utilizing a mix of academic texts, multimedia resources, and collaborative discussions:

- **Literary Review:** Members collectively read and discussed the second edition of *Equal Access for Students with Disabilities: A Guide for Health Science and Professional Education* by Lisa Meeks et al. This text included a companion of case studies that were discussed throughout the Summer.
- **Multimedia Engagement:** One group listened to and analyzed several episodes from the **DocsWith Disabilities** podcast, to get a better understanding of lived experiences.
- **Case Study Synthesis:** In June, the group held a "Summer FIG Case Study Collaboration" to deconstruct specific barriers and identify accommodations for various conditions, including ADHD, Crohn's Disease, Quadriplegia, Limb Loss, and PTSD.
- **Panel Discussion:** On September 24th, the group hosted a panel during HPHPEA Division Inservice to discuss common myths (e.g., that accommodations provide an "unfair advantage") and strategies for fostering inclusive clinical environments in academic and clinical settings. A resource document for equity guided conversations on disability from the point of view of the student, program, and disability resources professional was provided to all attendees.

Key Findings and Thematic Analysis

Through this collaboration, the FIG identified several critical areas for improvement in health professions.

- **Deconstructing Barriers in Clinical Settings:** We noted that clinical environments are less controlled than classrooms. We identified that Clinical Instructors (CIs) often forget about invisible disabilities or may project a "judgmental vibe," necessitating better faculty education on ADA requirements and inclusivity.
- **Addressing Invisible Disabilities:** A major theme was the stigma of disclosure. Students with conditions like ADHD or Crohn's often fear being perceived as "less capable" or taking "unfair advantage". The FIG emphasized the importance of Universal Design for Education (UDE) to

proactively support students who may not yet be identified as having a disability that affects one or more major life activities.

- **Technical Standards vs. Essential Functions:** The group analyzed the need for programs to differentiate between what is required to pass a course (technical standards) and the requirements of a specific job (essential functions). We found that standards should not require a task to be performed in only one specific way if safe alternatives exist.
- **Psychological Disabilities:** The group highlighted that many students do not realize mental health issues like PTSD or depression may qualify for disability services. They recommended schools encourage the purchase of disability insurance to provide a "life raft" for students needing a leave of absence for mental health.

Outcomes and Next Steps

The FIG's activities have culminated in several long-term goals and dissemination plans:

- **Community of Practice:** The group has evolved into a resource/mentor network for colleagues to develop competencies in **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**.
- **FPD Workshop:** A full-day **Faculty Professional Development Workshop** was conducted with the support of grant funding on October 24, 2025. This workshop for academic and clinical faculty and workforce partners included education on ADA legal responsibilities, inclusive technical standards, and discipline-specific breakout sessions to share best practices for clinical training.
- **Resource Archive:** The group utilized Moodle to create an archive of their responses and shared learning for the broader academic community.