Advocating for Students
Advocate, Communicate, Educate: ACE It!

AccessATE

The *ACE It!* series is designed to help you "ACE" any conversations you may have with potential employers by knowing how best to Advocate for your students, inform the employer how to effectively Communicate with employees with disabilities, and Educate the employer about workplace accommodations.

A: Advocate

As a faculty member, you play a valuable role in helping your students with disabilities gain employment. Your endorsement of a student carries weight with employers – that's why they are coming to you for a referral. Employers can have a variety of misconceptions or concerns about hiring an individual with a disability, so your ability to advocate effectively for your students is vital.

Preparing to Talk with Employers

Before you enter any conversation with an industry partner about hiring your student, be sure to prepare to focus on that student's successes, both in and out of the classroom.

- Be specific about your student's skills, qualifications, and potential as they relate to the job and what the employer is seeking.
- Explain how you have worked successfully with the student.
- Talk about how the student successfully navigated other work environments.
- Share the success stories of other students with similar disabilities (while maintaining confidentiality).

Remember that you are not alone in preparing for these conversations. Talk to both your student and your institution's career center or disabilities services center to gather all the information you need.

Clarifying Student Identity

The focus of conversation with your industry partner should be the student's identity as a capable, successful individual, not their disability. Before talking to a potential employer, ask your student if they want to disclose their disability to that employer. If so, you need to ask the student:

- How would they like to be represented to the employer?
- How do they identify?
- What terms do they prefer to use?

Remember that if your student decides they do not wish to disclose, you must respect their decision.

Supporting the Student

Any student being considered for a position will need to go through an interview process. Be prepared to help facilitate the best interviewing environment for your student and the employer by:

- Explaining to the employer what process or communication has worked for the student in the past.
- Suggesting that the employer ask all candidates if they desire any accommodation(s). This ensures they do not single anyone out.
- Encouraging your student to practice good self-advocacy by requesting accommodation(s), and to not assume an employer will offer to do so.

If you or your student have concerns about accommodations during the interview, reach out to your institution's career center or disability services center. Some will provide accommodations, such as an interpreter, for student interviews.

Additional Resources

- Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE): https://apse.org
- World Institute on Disability's (WID) Access to Assets program: https://wid.org/wid-e3/economic-empowerment (https://tinyurl.com/aaAssets)
- RespectAbility's employer resources: https://www.respectability.org/resources/Employers-Embracing-Employees-Disabilities (https://tinyurl.com/aarespectability)
- The National Youth Transitions Center (NYTC): https://thenytc.org
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) - https://askjan.org
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) - https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html (https://tinyurl.com/aaferpa)

RIT | National Technical Institute for the Deaf | DeafTEC — Developed in conjunction with DeafTEC, part of the Rochester Institute of Technology: https://deaftec.org/

AccessATE — For more accessibility resources like this, please visit the AccessATE website at http://accessate.net