

NIH T32 Grant/MSTP Program Guide for Recruitment and Retention of Students with Disabilities

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Plans for the Recruitment of Students with Disabilities

Medical scientists training program (MSTP) and fellowship directors are required to develop a plan to recruit and retain students with disabilities for their programs. Programs directors strive to create diverse programs, which enrich learning and result in research and clinical practice that reflects the diverse patient population we serve. Currently only 2.7% of students in medical education identify as a person with a disability. Efforts are underway by the AAMC and the Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education, among others, to encourage qualified students with disabilities to apply and matriculate into medical education.

Institutional commitments and programmatic efforts have historically focused on underrepresented groups. These efforts are now extending to students with disabilities. Institutions are under federal obligation to comply with the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA). A representative from the medical school, graduate medical education program, or with the main campus (for those affiliated with an undergraduate institution) will be assigned to assess student's eligibility for services and reasonable accommodations. In addition to internal support, national programs are also available to provide guidance and best practices to programs. This guide was developed in an effort to support programs in meeting NIH requirements.

Efforts to recruit students with disabilities:

One way to ensure applicants with disabilities to apply to your programs is to ensure that information about accommodations and disability support are available throughout the admissions process and in all marketing materials.

At application:

Your program should communicate a desire to be inclusive of persons with disabilities and indicate any history of training people with disabilities through their admissions page. For example, UCSF has the following statement about their commitment to diversity on the School of Medicine website.

Commitment to Diversity:

The School of Medicine welcomes all applicants without discrimination. The School of Medicine has a long-standing commitment to increasing the number of physicians from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic populations. As a result, over the last 35 years, UCSF has had one of the highest enrollment and graduation rates of underrepresented medical students in the U.S. UCSF's commitment to diversifying the physician workforce also includes LGBT populations, socio-economically disadvantaged populations, and individuals with disabilities.

Programs should also provide information about how to make accommodation requests on all communications to applicants and interviewees. As well, your posted technical standards should direct students with disabilities to the appropriate institutional official and include a warm statement for applicants: The UCSF statement is included below as an example:

The University of California, San Francisco community is committed to, and embraces, diversity in all forms. We are committed to providing an accessible and inclusive environment where all learners have access to our programs. [Program] encourages learners with disabilities to access all of the resources available to them, including registration with Medical Student Disability Services (MSDS).

MSDS (<http://meded.ucsf.edu/msds>) provides services to learners with all types of disabilities and collaborates with faculty and program directors to implement approved accommodations. Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis taking into account documented need and student self-report. MSDS is a confidential resource for students to discuss their disability-related needs.

Recruitment Efforts on the Disability Services website

Programs should communicate their commitment to disability inclusion on the student disability website. For example, UCSF’s statement uses welcoming language and encourages students with disabilities to apply.

Welcome to the UCSF School of Medicine and Medical Student Disability Services. You are now part of a community that is committed to, and embraces, diversity in all forms. The Medical Student Education (MSE) team encourages students with disabilities to access all of the resources available to them, including registration with Medical Student Disability Services (MSDS).

To ensure an accessible educational experience, MSE and MSDS work together to provide accommodations and support to students with disabilities. UCSF is committed to protecting the privacy of all learners. Early communication with the relevant course directors and administrators is critical to a successful partnership in arranging accommodations.

To promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities at Disability Services programs can strive to:

1. Provide support and services to students to ensure equal opportunity and access to programs.
2. Provides disability training and education to faculty and staff annually.
3. Offer self-paced training modules for faculty via our faculty support website <http://meded.ucsf.edu/msds/faculty-training-modules>
4. Ensure that physical space and facilities are ADA compliant
5. Actively contribute to developing and promoting best practices through peer networks and organizations.
6. Actively contribute to research and dissemination of best practice in the literature
7. Provide guidance for faculty and staff on confidentiality and communication (see: [Faculty confidentiality guidance appendix: A](#)), communicating services through syllabus statements (see below), and utilizing the detailed disability training via the UCSF [faculty training modules](#).

Example syllabus statement below:

Suggested Syllabus Statement for SOM Courses

“_____ School of Medicine is committed to providing equal access to students with documented disabilities (e.g. mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical). To ensure your access to this class and to the medical school program, students with disabilities may _____. There you can engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations in the classroom and clinical settings. Accommodations are not provided retroactively. Students are encouraged to register with _____ as soon as they begin the program. More information can be found online at _____ or by contacting_____.”

Recruitment Efforts at application, interview, and thereafter.

Applicants may voluntarily disclose and discuss their disability before they apply to your program, during the admissions process, or after they are admitted. Your program should have a supportive process for receiving requests for accommodations and for ongoing support of students with disabilities. Prospective students will likely contact your disability services program prior to applying to gauge the climate toward disability at your institution. For this reason, it is critical to have a close working relationship with your disability office or representative and to help the disability specialist understand the requirements of your program and the unique challenges therein. Having an understanding of the accommodations process and the services available through your disability office, and the disability offices understanding of your program in return will communicate to students (and applicants) that you anticipate students with disabilities will enter your program and that you are prepared to support their academic career.

Interactions with your disability services office prior to application are beneficial. From the applicant's standpoint, disability services can reassure them that every effort is made to accommodate students with disabilities who are otherwise qualified for admission and the disability services office can share knowledge of how your institution effectively accommodates students and offer examples of student successes using accommodations. From the institution's perspective, these interactions serve as a valuable recruitment tool that communicates the resources available for medical students with disabilities and a highly supportive institutional philosophy.

All applicants to your program should be informed of programs for accommodating students with disabilities when they apply, at interviews, and during revisits. You should also highlight any faculty members with disabilities. Your faculty with disabilities may serve as exceptional mentors and role models for MSTP students and other trainees with disabilities.

Your disability program, in collaboration with faculty, should regularly disseminate information about any creative approaches to accommodation in specific disability-related cases. These articles highlight your institutions commitment to inclusion.

The program director for MSTP and the disability services provider should engage in a continuous dialogue to develop strategies for outreach and recruitment of students with disabilities. The main goal of your outreach strategy should be to work with the institutional offices that guide students with disabilities, and to foster a culture of inclusion and diversity within our program.

With the approaches described in this handbook, you can take a critical first step toward the long-term goal of attracting the most talented and promising young scientists from the community of students with disabilities.

Programs should consider the following in their efforts to recruit students with disabilities into their programs:

I. Join national efforts to increase the number of students with disabilities in medical education.

Programs should consider joining national programs that seek to improve access for students with disabilities in medical education. The coalition for disability access in health science and medical education (the Coalition), the AAMC, and the Association for higher education and disability (AHEAD) are all making efforts to improve inclusion. Memberships information can be obtained directly from each organization.

II. Conduct Outreach to Student Disability Service Providers via List-Servs

Dissemination of information about your program and desire to recruit students with disabilities can be sent to hundreds of disability service providers via six list-servs. The paragraph below is a template example of what you might send to the list servs. In this template the program asks each member of the list-serv to share the notice with their students interested in the health and basic sciences as well as their science department disability champions and undergraduate advisors.

Example of a list-serv post:

“The (Institution)MSTP program is one of the nation’s premier programs focused on (program focus). We seek to recruit talented students with disabilities. The program will work closely with the (institution) office of disability services (link to DS office) to ensure access to all eligible students. For more information about the (program name) program, please visit the website (insert website).”

Potential List-Servs for posting recruitment:

1. Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD; <http://www.ahead.org>)
2. The Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education (<http://meded.ucsf.edu/msds/coalition>)
3. Michigan State University hosts a Pre-Health Professions List-Serv (<http://list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=HLTHPROF>).
4. Disabled Student Services in Higher Education (DSSHE-L) (<https://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=DSSHE-L>).

III. Information sharing with Associations focused on Disability

Programs can solicit information and gain support from several organizations. Membership is required in some of the following organizations, others are open access.

[Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education \(CDAHSME\)](#)

The Coalition is a learning community for health science and medical education program administrators and educators. The mission of the Coalition is to develop, advance and disseminate leading practices to facilitate access and opportunity for people with disabilities in health science education.

[Society of Healthcare Professionals with Disabilities](#)

The Society of Healthcare Professionals with Disabilities provides resources and support for disabled physicians, physician assistants, and students. The mission of the Society is to foster a supportive community and to provide resources and tools for disabled healthcare professionals and students, their family members, and their friends.

[Society of Physicians with Disabilities](#)

The Society of Physicians with Disabilities is a group within the Society of Healthcare Professionals with Disabilities and shares the goal of providing resources and support for disabled physicians, fostering a supportive community and to providing resources and tools for disabled physicians and students, their family members, and their friends.

[Association of Medical Professionals With Hearing Losses \(AMPHL\)](#) The Association of Medical Professionals With Hearing Losses provides information, promotes advocacy and mentorship, and creates a network for individuals with hearing loss interested in or working in health care fields.

[Association of Higher Education and Disability \(AHEAD\)](#) AHEAD is a professional membership organization for individuals involved in the development of policy and in the provision of quality services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities involved in all areas of higher education.

[Canadian Association of Physicians with Disabilities](#) The Canadian Association of Physicians with Disabilities provides a national forum for discussion of issues of mutual interest and concern to physicians with disabilities.

[Center for Disability Issues in the Health Professions](#)

The Center was established by Western University of Health Sciences in response to the concerns of the disabled community, which is emerging as one of the nation's fastest growing and least understood minority groups.

IV. Attendance at Disability Services Annual Conferences

Attendance at national level annual meetings can raise your programs profile in the disability community. The following organizations host annual or biannual conferences:

The Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) holds an annual conference in July and this is an excellent venue for the institutions to advertise in the program. The AHEAD website also provides opportunities for reasonably priced advertisements, you can use this mechanism to advertise your program in advance of admissions deadlines.

The **Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education** holds an annual symposium each April sponsored in part by a health science campus. This is an excellent opportunity to attend or sponsor the program as part of your commitment to inclusion.

The **Association of Medical Professionals With Hearing Losses (AMPHL)** hosts a biannual conference.

Books available to assist programs in understanding how to effectively work with SWD:

[The Guide to Assisting Students with Disabilities: Equal Access in Health Science and Professional Education \(2015\) Meeks, L. & Jain, N. Springer Publishing.\(link is external\)](#)

This guide describes how to meet the needs of health science students with disabilities. Students with disabilities studying health sciences face unique challenges within their educational environments that require distinct accommodations. This manual is a vital resource for administrators and faculty in health science programs that describes how to create accommodations that meet the needs of students with disabilities in academic health science settings. Grounded in federal disability law, case law, and Office for Civil Rights (OCR) determinations, this highly practical manual is written by experienced disability service providers from some of the most prestigious health science schools in the country. In a clear, well-organized format, they bring their expertise to bear on all aspects of disability and disability law in the health science setting. Citing legal cases and real life scenarios, the manual describes best practices for good decision-making, how to avoid problems by implementing strong accessibility-focused policies, and how to resolve problems in difficult cases, with a focus on providing effective services for students while protecting the institution from potential liability.

Each chapter is replete with illustrative examples, including tips for creative accommodations, advice for troubleshooting, and specific guidance for working with students with all types of disabilities. The book describes the process for determining disability accommodations and provides examples of typical accommodations in didactic as well as clinical and laboratory settings. Tools provided in the text include sample letters and procedures, lists of nationwide professional resources, flowcharts, graphs and worksheets to assist disability service providers with determining and implementing appropriate student accommodations. Additionally, it discusses myths about disability, the importance of professional communication around disability, and how to encourage a culture of disability acceptance within schools. With its concrete framework, this book will help disability service and administrative professionals move away from a mode of "putting out fires" and toward establishing a welcoming environment where students feel safe to disclose their disabilities early and seek the support and accommodations needed to facilitate equal access.

[Medical Students with Disabilities: Resources to Enhance Accessibility\(link is external\)](#)

A publication from the AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) provides medical educators with the resources they need to work with students who have disabilities. Medical Students with Disabilities: Resources to Enhance Accessibility does not replace the technical standards guide published by the AAMC in 2005 (Medical Students with Disabilities: A Generation of Practice) but rather speaks to the current state of resources available to medical schools as they accept and matriculate a growing number of medical students with a wide range of disabilities. Specifically, there is an emphasis in this publication on the assistive technologies available for medical students.

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Webinars for use in Training

These Webinars can be found on the AAMC website at:

<https://www.aamc.org/members/gsa/pdopportunities/427068/archivedwebinars.html>

Webinar #1 Helping Medical Schools Assist Students with Disabilities: An Introduction to The Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education

Lisa Meeks, PhD, University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine

Tim Montgomery, MA, Northwestern University

Elisa Laird-Metke, JD, University of California, San Francisco (Moderator)

The Coalition for Disability Access in Graduate Health Science and Medical Education consists of disability providers from some of the most prestigious medical schools in the country. Hosted by UCSF, the Coalition facilitates a list-serv to assist disability service providers and administrators with disability related questions. The coalition also hosts a yearly symposium addressing the unique needs of disability providers in the health sciences. This webinar, first in a series, introduces medical schools to the coalition and provides an overview about the prevalence of SWD in medical education, legally mandated services, effective collaboration, the need for disability expertise in medical education, the mission and initiatives of the coalition, as well as information about joining the list-serv.

Webinar three disability law what faculty need to know.

Webinar #2 Disability Law 101: What Faculty Need to Know About Student Accommodations

Elisa Laird-Metke, JD, University of California, San Francisco

Jonathon McGough, MEd, The University of Washington

Lisa M. Meeks, PhD, University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine (Moderator)

This webinar will provide a practical overview of the disability laws that apply to medical schools, with particular attention to the role of faculty in the accommodation process, how disability laws affect technical standards, and balancing disability accommodations with patient safety concerns. Relevant OCR decisions and court cases will be discussed, and plenty of time for Q&A will be provided.

Webinar #3 Separating Fact From Fiction: Debunking Disability Myths and Addressing Legitimate Concerns

Joan Bisagno, PhD, Stanford University

Barbara Hammer, MEd, University of Missouri

Neera R. Jain, MS, CRC, University of California, San Francisco, Auckland Disability Law Centre

Tim Montgomery, MA, Northwestern University

Elisa Laird-Metke, UCSF (Moderator)

This webinar focuses on some prevailing myths regarding students with disabilities in health science and medical education programs. It addresses five of the most common myths including concerns about patient safety, requirements and standards, preparation for the real world of work. We will expose these myths as “false notions,” while discussing the legitimate concerns that underlie them. Through this discussion, we will explain how medical school policy, procedure, and disability accommodations can be created that will provide access without diminishing the outcomes for students or patients.

Webinar #4 Clinical Accommodations: Upholding Standards While Creating Equal Access

Neera R. Jain, M.S., C.R.C., University of California, San Francisco

Lisa M. Meeks, Ph.D., University of California San Francisco, School of Medicine

Jan Serrantino, Ed.D. University of California, Irvine

Elisa Laird-Metke, J.D., University of California, San Francisco (Moderator)

Medical schools are often unsure whether accommodations in performance-based settings (such as clerkships, preceptorships, OSCEs, and other standardized patient activities) are appropriate. This session will explore the interactive process that occurs between DS, faculty, staff, and the student when determining reasonable accommodations in the clinical environment. Administrators and DS providers will leave the session with greater understanding about how to develop a process for determining and implementing accommodations, and how to identify when a potential accommodation affects the integrity of the learning outcomes, compromises patient safety, or challenges technical standards. As well, the presenters will provide examples of complex accommodation requests and models for decision-making and implementation.

Webinar #5 Putting it in Writing: The Value of Creating Clear and Effective Policies for Students with Disabilities

Pheadra Bell, Ph.D., University of California San Francisco, School of Medicine

Barbara Blacklock MA, LISW University of Minnesota

Elisa Laird-Metke, J.D. University of California, San Francisco

Lisa Meeks, PhD (Moderator)

This webinar will describe the importance—to students and medical schools—of having clear, written policies and procedures available to prospective students, as well as recently admitted and currently enrolled students. The practical advice offered will include how to create and effectively publicize procedures for students to obtain and use disability accommodations, as well as tips for developing clear processes for medical school faculty and staff to ensure students feel welcomed and receive appropriate, reasonable accommodations in both didactic and clinical settings. The presenters will highlight how these best practices benefit all medical students and contribute to the school's overall diversity.

Webinar #6: Creating a Balance: Professionalism, Communication, and Students with Disabilities

Neera R. Jain, M.S., C.R.C., University of California, San Francisco

Lisa M. Meeks, Ph.D. University of California, San Francisco

Maxine Papadaxis, M.D., University of California San Francisco, School of Medicine

Elisa Laird-Metke, JD (Moderator)

Professionalism in communication between university personnel and students is critical when addressing disability related needs and implementing accommodations. Students often struggle with how (and how much) to discuss their disabilities with faculty and supervisors. This can be especially difficult for students with disabilities that might impact their communication (e.g., Autism, Asperger's, non-verbal learning disorder, psychological disability). As well, faculty and administrators may unwittingly complicate matters by slipping into their role as a provider, further blurring the lines of communication.

This webinar addresses the importance of establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries and provides numerous examples of positive and appropriate communication for various types of conversations (e.g., disclosure, requests, scheduling an accommodation). This guidance helps aid DS

providers, faculty, and administrators who work with students with disabilities to understand the principles of professional communication.

Q&A Webinar #7 : Disabilities Webinar Questions and Answers from the Series

Neera Jain, MS CRC, UCSF

Elisa Laird-Metke, JD, Samuel Merritt University

Jon McGough, MEd-c, University of Washington

Tim Montgomery, MA (Moderator)

The AAMC together with UCSF and the Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education are excited to bring you an additional bonus webinar titled, Q & A. We've recorded your questions throughout the webinar series and want to ensure we address the most pressing questions from each event. As well, we invite all previous participants to submit NEW questions to an expert panel specifically chosen to address individual questions.

Webinar #8 Accommodating Students with Psychological Disabilities

Lisa Meeks, PhD, UCSF School of Medicine

Joseph Murray, MD, Weill Cornell School of Medicine

Maxine Papadakis, MD, UCSF School of Medicine

People with disabilities represent an important part of the diversity of students. As a community, we need discourse that combats misperceptions, stereotypes, and stigma and creates an environment that advances outcomes for all persons with disabilities. As a follow up to the national meeting, Dr's Meeks, Murray and Papadakis will continue the conversation started at the AAMC LSL Annual Meeting in Baltimore about serving students with psychological disabilities in medical education, best practices, common issues and discuss creating healthy, positive discourse around mental health for all students.

Webinar #9 Disclosure at all points, UME and GME: Guidance on disability disclosure for learners

Dan Giang, MD, Loma Linda School of Medicine

Lisa M. Meeks, PhD, UCSF School of Medicine

Learners who require accommodations to meet essential functions of a program must disclose their status as a person with a disability to request accommodations at multiple points during their training.

Programs at the UME, GME level want to support learners with disabilities within their programs, when applying for licensure and into employment; however, knowing when a disability should be disclosed, to whom and how much detail is appropriate can differ depending on the level of education. This issue has caused some disconnect between the various settings. Adding to the confusion, three separate sources of guidance govern these levels including 1) educational law, 2) employment law and 3) medical credentialing/licensure.

This webinar brings together stakeholders at all levels to discuss appropriate disclosure and how to support the transition for learners with disabilities. In addition, The Medical Licensure process will be discussed, as will one primary goal of residency programs (to get their resident licensed). Finally, all stakeholders will discuss professionalism and its role in shaping how transparent learners should be around their disability related needs.

Webinar #10 Supporting your students' request for accommodations on high stakes exams

Neera Jain, MS CRC, UCSF

Lisa M. Meeks, Ph.D., UCSF School of Medicine

Medical students must take USMLE Step exams in order to progress in their education and later in their careers to become licensed physicians. For students with disabilities, the additional step of requesting accommodations requires vigilant attention to timing, documentation, and a lengthy personal statement.

Students must make these requests for accommodations directly to the National Board of Medical Examiners. The process for requesting accommodations, standards and timelines for requests, and associated disability documentation requirements are often more stringent than those required to access accommodations in medical school.

Disability Service professionals, Dean's or other assigned administrators have a responsibility understand the process and educate their students about the policies and processes for application. DS providers, deans, and other support staff and play a key role in supporting students through the application process.

This webinar will offer straightforward guidance on assisting students through the USMLE accommodation requests process including the appeals process.