



Promoting Disability Awareness Among Clerks of the Court: A collaboration between an AUCD and the Supreme Court of Virginia

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Introduction

This poster presents evaluative findings from work that occurred in partnership between the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD) member at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) at the Supreme Court of Virginia, directed by the I-CAN! Accessibility Project of Virginia (I-CAN!). Partners worked to develop a module for VA Clerks of the Court designed to support the process of arranging accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), to be presented to Clerks by the I-CAN! Project Director during a regularly scheduled OES training event. An evaluation strategy was designed to ensure effectiveness.

Methods

- Community/academic -engaged curriculum development ensures:
 - ✓ Evidence-informed content and instructional methodology
 - ✓ Module is relevant and feasible for use, consisting of:
 - 1) PowerPoint slides with integrated evaluation strategy
 - 2) Speaker script with legalese approved by all partners
 - 3) The *Accommodations and Services Resource Information Guide*.
- Clerk-engagement uses audience response handheld clickers to:
 - ✓ Present information in an engaging way
 - ✓ Collect demographic info about those attending the session
 - ✓ Administer evaluation questions aligned with content.
- Evaluation plan assesses change in comfort and empowerment:
 - ✓ Pre/post survey design integrated into the curriculum
 - ✓ OES data provided to VCU academic partners for analysis
 - ✓ Independent groups *t* tests to assess average change to preferred responses from pre to post participation.

Key Components of the Program

- Social model of disability asserts that impairments only become disabling when the physical and social environments do not accommodate the diverse needs of people.
- Empowerment model seeks to equip Clerks of the Court with adaptable skills and tangible resources so they can best ensure equitable access to the courts for the disability community.
- Elaboration likelihood model guides instructional methodology to present emotion-evoking messages that contain factual information, delivered by a credible source, thus engaging peripheral cognitive processes toward agreeing with program messages; as well as a formal resource and info guide to promote further self-directed investigation and central processing.

Table 1: Module Outline	
Section	Contents
Understanding disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability in the US population Conceptualizing the diversity of disability
Disability, abuse, and the courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding abuse among the disability community Issues and concerns in accessing the courts unique to the disability community
How to ID supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodations to expect Community resources and service providers
Communicating Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ways to think about accommodations People First Language Etiquette & communication tips
Americans w/ Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADA statement What the ADA guarantees & requires Responsibility for accommodations

Example Content:

How would you best describe this person?

Handicapped
Crippled
Disabled
Mobility impaired person
✓ **Person who uses a wheelchair**

Message: Use People First language please.

Which Barbie has a disability? It's a paradox...

Barbie A has a visible physical impairment, however may not feel very disabled when in a wheelchair accessible environment.

Barbie B has an invisible cognitive impairment, however may not feel very disabled when in an environment where attitudes are accommodative.

Message: Clerks of the Court can reduce the impact of a disability by recognizing the diversity of impairments and the importance of physical and social accommodations.

Sample

346 total participants in the training program; 284 (78%) response rate:
 ✓ Deputy Clerks 115 (42.59%), Clerks of the Court 140 (51.85%), Other government officials and advocates 15 (5.56%)
 ✓ 273 (96.47%) knew someone with a disability
 ✓ 223 (78.52%) knew someone who had been a victim of violence.

Findings

Table 2: Improvements in evaluative criteria from pre to post						
Evaluation Criteria	Pre Frequency	Pre Percentage	Post Frequency	Post Percentage	Mean Difference Percentage	Statistical Significance
Feels comfortable accommodating people with disabilities	246	88.49	267	97.8	+9.31	p<.05
Feels VERY comfortable accommodating people with disabilities	107	38.49	156	57.14	+18.7	p<.05
Feels comfortable communicating with and about people with disabilities	246	90.44	253	96.57	+6.13	p<.05
Feels VERY comfortable communicating with and about people with disabilities	95	34.93	184	70.23	+35.3	p<.05
Feels a Clerk of the Court can reduce the impact of a person's impairment by ensuring effective accommodations	247	93.92	259	97.74	+3.82	p<.001
Feels that attitudinal accommodations are most important for people with disabilities in accessing courts	82	35.04	198	75.86	+40.8	p<.001

Conclusions

- Virginia Clerks of the Court:
 - ✓ Want to provide effective accommodations
 - ✓ Recognize the social model of disability
 - ✓ Accept their power to provide support
 - ✓ Appreciate the importance of operating in an environment designed to promote accommodations.
- Very simple training and tangible connection to resources can increase Clerks of the Court's sense of:
 - ✓ Comfort in providing accommodations
 - ✓ Empowerment to provide accommodations effectively.

Implications

- States should work to ensure regular disability awareness training for incoming Clerks of the Court.
- States should continually evaluate these programs for short term changes in comfort and empowerment.
- States should work to investigate if people with disabilities are more satisfied with accommodations when Clerks of the Court have received this training.
- States should work to identify aspects of the environment that may promote or hinder a Clerk of the Court's actual ability to provide equitable access to the courts for people with disabilities.
- Methodology designed to transfer for use by other state Courts; and to other agents required to ensure ADA compliant accommodations.

