

Disclosing Disabilities in College – Podcast Transcript

Opening:

Hi, I'm Bethany Hansen, the program director here at Incight, an organization dedicated to empowering people with disabilities to pursue education and employment. I am here in partnership with the Oregon Student Assistance Commission, also called OSAC for short. Today we are going to discuss how to go about disclosing your disability once you are in college and we will give you a few tips on when to disclose your disability, how to disclose your disability, and what to disclose about your disability.

Body:

Disclosing your disability can be a bit harder to do in college compared to high school, especially if you don't know who to talk to. In high school, a counselor or other staff member may have developed an IEP which will follow you through high school and your school will arrange for your professional assessment. If you have a physical disability, your teachers and parents may have already discussed your disability with each other, and perhaps even with your schoolmates when appropriate, to determine how best to accommodate you. However in college, you must personally seek out your disability documentation, if you choose to do so, by you or your family paying for it. It is also entirely up to you whether you discuss your disability with friends and teachers in college. In fact, it can be a personal choice for each person with regard to where, when and if they do. Here with me are three Incight members, Rob, Katie and Scott, to help discuss this topic. Rob, how do you feel about disclosing your disability?

(Rob) At this point in my life, I almost never feel the need to disclose my having autism to anyone, though I'm happy to explain it to anyone. If I think there's any situation where I need to disclose, it could be during something like a job interview. I realize though that sharing my disability in the the wrong context could perhaps bring out the wrong impression that there are certain things on the job I can't do or handle. If anyone else were to ask me if I had autism, I would gladly tell them about my past struggles and how I've progressed overtime. It's a great way to inform those about aspects of autism they may have previously never considered.

(Mediator) Thanks for sharing for your advice and your unique perspective Rob. Katie, how should someone with a disability disclose their disability? And how did you go about disclosing your disability to teachers and other people?

(Katie) Well, I think the first thing someone should do before disclosing any information is to find someone they trust and practice their disclosure. They should never dwell on the limitations of their disability but rather embrace them to make them a strong person. The Office for Students with Disabilities at your college will require you to discuss your needs while providing practical suggestions for reasonable academic accommodations. If you have an obvious disability, tell them what you do to accomplish tasks both with assistance and without by using examples. Now if your disability isn't as obvious, you need to decide whether you are going to disclose your disability and if so, what

information you are willing to share. As for me, I am more selective in who I tell about my disability. I opt for a comfortable environment.

(Mediator) To tie into Katie's story, I am going to have Scott who currently works at Incight, talk to you about what to disclose about your disability once you have decided to do so. So Scott, what does someone with a disability need to disclose in order to receive the help they need? And what did you choose to disclose in order to succeed in college?

(Scott) You know, because I have a physical disability, I generally start with the assumption that everyone can see that I am a bit different. I freely talk about it and I am comfortable answering most questions. I cannot escape the obvious so I fully embrace it and am not afraid to disclose to anyone. For me, being upfront has always been the best policy. There are a few main things that someone with a disability can consider while disclosing. For starters, it's helpful for you to provide general information about your disability. For me that means sharing more about the muscular dystrophy which confines me to a wheelchair. Along with that you can explain to them—that is, to a friend or a teacher that you are disclosing to—why you are disclosing your disability. I disclosed my disability because I like people to know about me and feel comfortable being around me. I believe disclosing my disability breaks down any barriers that could exist. Another thing that you can do is discuss how your disability affects you, both good and bad, so they can understand your situation a little better. My disability affects me by making my muscles weaker over time. In addition, if you are disclosing in order to get accommodation in school, you may want to explain what accommodations you have received in the past that work and discuss what accommodations you are anticipating for the future. For example, someone with a hard time using their hands may have used a tape recorder during lectures in high school, but then may have found that in college, having someone else take notes worked better for them. Either way it's good to be clear and direct about your expectations regarding how your disability may affect what you need from friends or professors. It's also important to not assume that all of the accommodations you seek are going to be provided. In general, I've found that if a person needs more assistance in creating the right school environment, then he or she should be prepared to disclose more about his or her situation. Either way, no matter what you decide, keep an open mind. What may have worked for you in high school may not work best for you in college.

Conclusion:

(Mediator) Thank you for sharing your thoughts about disclosure Scott. And Rob and Katie, thanks again for taking the time to come in to talk with us. We hope that this podcast has helped you think about disclosing your disability once you are in college. Remember that if, when, and how you disclose your disability is up to you. So make choices that you are comfortable with and that will help you to succeed in college.

Closing:

This podcast is brought to you through the partnership of Incight and the Oregon Student Assistance Commission. For more information on help with education, employment, networking and independence for students with disabilities, please visit www.incight.org. For more podcast topics and

information on access to post-secondary education, please visit www.OregonStudentAid.gov . From all of us here at Incight and the Oregon Student Assistance Commission, this is Rob Thompson. We look forward to helping you again soon.