Elevating the Course Experience for All

00:08–00:32

Andrew Coletti: Hello and welcome to this episode of the T in Teaching. This episode is focused on how to elevate the course experience for all through resources like Disability Resources and Services Office, also known as DRS. In this episode, our host, Kaitlyn Montgomery, interviewed Carrie Snyder, the director of Disability Resources and Services.

00:33–00:42

Andrew Coletti: Carrie previously worked at the University of Albany in New York and earned her doctorate in social work from Millersville University in Pennsylvania in May of 2022.

00:42–00:46

Carrie Snyder: We don't turn students away at any point during the semester to get them set up.

00:46–00:50

Andrew Coletti: Thank you for listening and please enjoy.

00:55–01:08

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Hi, I'm Kaitlyn Montgomery and today we have Carrie Snyder, Director of Disability Resources and Services, joining us on the T in teaching. Welcome and thank you so much for joining us today.

01:08–01:09

Carrie Snyder: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

01:09–01:22

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Of course. It's a pleasure. So, I would like to start off by gaining a little bit more context and asking you to explain what the DRS office is and what services and resources can be provided there.

01:23–01:54

Carrie Snyder: Absolutely. So, the DRS office is basically where students come to gain access to the university experience. So, students who have disabilities come to us mostly for accommodations for their academics, but we also provide access and inclusion for university programs in general. That includes housing. We provide sign language interpreters for general programs, and we basically ensure that students have access to every aspect of the university experience.

01:54–02:08

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Okay, that's awesome. It sounds like you have so many resources there when it comes to preparing for this semester. Can students drop in at any time if they have a need or a question, or do they need to make an appointment prior?

02:08–02:32

Carrie Snyder: They can do either. So, we have the ability for students to stop in. We have someone who's at the front desk who can answer some of the more basic questions that a student might have. Or if one of our coordinators are available, they can meet with one of our coordinators to answer any questions that they might have or they have the ability to go through my desk portal and set up an appointment with one of our coordinators.

02:33–02:48

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Now that's wonderful. There's so much that goes into a semester preparation when it comes to getting their class lists, when it comes to figuring out what their syllabus and their materials need to be. But how early should students register with the office and apply for a request?

02:49–03:12

Carrie Snyder: So, we do recommend that students come to us earlier rather than later, because then we can make sure that their accommodation is in place when classes start. That being said, if a student realizes halfway through the semester that they're struggling or maybe they don't even get a diagnosis until midway through the semester, they can always come to us at any point in the semester and we can help to get them set up.

03:13–03:26

Carrie Snyder: If they come to us just before finals, it may be that the accommodations that are put in place are going to be for the following semester, but we don't turn students away at any point during the semester to get them set up.

03:26–03:49

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Okay, that's great. And is there anyone that they could discuss with if they are unsure if they meet any certain requirements or discuss through? I've been having difficulty with this, but I don't know how to exactly label it or what I need. I just need to talk to somebody to see if these resources are useful for me.

03:49–04:14

Carrie Snyder: Absolutely. If they go onto our web page right on the front of our website, we have virtual drop-in hours so students can come through Zoom, and they can drop in and they can talk to one of our coordinators. Monday through Thursday. And there's different times. So, we hope to catch everybody during their class schedule, and they can just come in and say that, you know, I'm struggling with classes, I think I have a disability, but I'm not sure.

04:15–04:22

Carrie Snyder: I don't know how to sign up for services, any of those kind of questions. The coordinator who's operating the Drop-In Hours can help them.

04:22–04:54

Kaitlyn Montgomery: It's really, really wonderful. And like you said, they can come after the semester begins. I think that's probably a super useful tool for students who don't quite realize that they have a need and then they just get bogged down by something in particular and then they finally have the opportunity to come. I think that's just a wonderful thing to kind of shout out there that there is no right time to send in your request earlier than later, obviously, if possible, so they can get everything in place and be prepared.

04:54–04:58

Kaitlyn Montgomery: But it's really nice to know that you guys are there to catch them when they need you.

04:58–05:24

Carrie Snyder: Absolutely. And we would like for faculty to be aware of that as well, because sometimes faculty think if students don't send in letters at the beginning of the semester and they get the letters later on that there's something shady going on. But there isn't. It's just that sometimes students don't think that they need accommodation and then realize that later, sometimes students again may not get a diagnosis until later in the semester.

05:25–05:47

Carrie Snyder: Sometimes students may unfortunately have a little bit of difficulty getting an appointment with us right away, because right now we are a little bit understaffed, as are many departments here at Temple. So, it may take students a little bit longer than normal to get in with us to get their accommodation set up as well. But we ask faculty and students to be patient, we will get to them.

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Of course, of course you will. And it's just once again really good to know that information. So, everyone could be as proactive as possible. But of course, you're there to assist when needed, but perfect that you pivoted towards faculty. I'd like to kind of have you walk us through what exactly the steps are once they receive a DRS request, what do they need to do?

Kaitlyn Montgomery: How can they best help their students?

Carrie Snyder: Absolutely. So once a student registers with us and we set up the accommodation, the student needs to go in and request that letters be sent to faculty. And that doesn't happen automatically because we want to protect the student's confidentiality. And maybe they have a course that they don't want to use their accommodations in. So, the student requests that the letters be sent to the faculty, we go ahead, and we do that, and the faculty will receive an email notification letting them know that the student has sent letters to them.

Carrie Snyder: The faculty is going to click on the link, which will bring them to our home website and they're going to click on the My DRS for instructors, which will bring them into their portal. From there they can see all of the accommodation letters that were sent from students to them. And then we ask that they go in, they review the accommodation letter, and they sign off on it.

Carrie Snyder: If they have any questions at all about the accommodation that a student has, because some accommodations might be a little bit different than they're used to seeing. They'll see the student's coordinator's name and contact information at the bottom, and we encourage them to reach out to that coordinator to discuss the accommodations. Maybe they're not sure how to implement them in their class.

Carrie Snyder: Maybe they're not sure if they're going to work for their class. So, we always encourage faculty members to reach out to the coordinator, or they can always reach out directly to me as well.

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Now, that's super helpful. What would be an example of an accommodation that wouldn't necessarily work for a class? Like, how does that work? I feel like they should have to obviously try that and I'm sure they do obviously try their best to accommodate everything. But in what cases would that showcase?

Carrie Snyder: Sure. So, for example, sometimes students have extensions on assignments and there may be some assignments like a paper that that works really well for. But maybe in this particular course, there's group work. It's hard to do an extension on group work because you can't give an individual an extension. And then if you try to give the group an extension, you're outing the student's disability.

Carrie Snyder: So, we may have to have a discussion with the student about you can have extensions on the individual assignments within that class, but for the group work, it's not going to work as well. So that's one

example of where an accommodation may not work for certain aspects of a course.

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Okay. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And it's also really informative to know that students just don't blanketly send out DRS letters. It would have been my understanding that they would have their accommodation and it just gets blanketly set out and then it's on the professor to really weed through what works for their course and not.

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Yes, of course that still happens, but it's nice to know that they can kind of customize it and recognize where it might fit best.

Carrie Snyder: Absolutely. And we're also working currently with the various departments to look at the fact that certain accommodations that students are receiving may not work, for example, in studio courses or may not work when students have practicum or field work. So, we're working with students and with faculty to discuss how we can better arrange accommodations that are going to work better in those situations.

Kaitlyn Montgomery: That's great. And then what happens if something changes after the letter has been sent? The faculty has received it. They've gone through their questions. They've contacted the coordinator. They do sign it. Is that set in stone? Can they go back and update it.

Carrie Snyder: At any point in time. If a student finds that their situation has changed, they can meet with their coordinator. We may need new documentation or just a new discussion with the student and we may change their accommodations. It may be that there's something they no longer need, or it may be that they need something added. And if that's the case, then there may be a new letter that is sent out and we'll ask faculty to sign off on that new letter.

Carrie Snyder: And again, if the new accommodation doesn't work for that faculty member for that course or if they're just not sure how it's going to be implemented in their class, then that's something that we have a discussion about. For example, there was one situation where a faculty member contacted me because a student had prior access to materials as an accommodation, and the faculty member said, I would be happy to do that.

Carrie Snyder: But in my class, there, there are no materials that I hand out. I write everything on the board. I do it spur of the moment. I come up with the problems in my head and I write them on the board so I don't have something that I can send to the student ahead of time. And it's not something that I could give them afterwards either, because I write it on the board, and I raise it.

Carrie Snyder: And so, I said to the faculty member, would you be okay with the students using their phone to take a picture of what you write on the board? Absolutely. So that was how we came up with a way to kind of work around that accommodation, but in a way that was still agreeable to everybody and got the students what they needed.

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Yeah, no, it's really wonderful how fluid this process really can be. I think that might be part of what potentially intimidates people about the process is there are a lot of unknowns because there's so many different variables and factors when it comes to these things. And in order to help everyone as best as

possible, the conversations just need to be had and they just need to be open and ready to listen and figure out a middle ground.

11:49–12:23
Kaitlyn Montgomery: I think that's really, really wonderful. Now, what would you say is some advice that you'd potentially give a faculty member that sees a student struggling per se that doesn't necessarily have an accommodation or request in place already, but they feel the student could potentially benefit from the resources and services DRS, provide. How would you navigate a conversation like that or partnering these two or the student with this service?

12:23–12:44
Carrie Snyder: Absolutely. So, if the student has revealed that they have a disability and that's the cause for struggling, then absolutely refer them directly to us. You know, you can do a warm handoff where you emailed it, ask the student if they're okay with emailing and, you know, connecting me on the email and then I can walk them through the process of registering, which I've done with several students.

12:44–13:08
Carrie Snyder: It gets a little more tricky if the student hasn't revealed that they have a disability. In that case, I recommend giving the student an array of resources, including the students access center, including us, so that the student doesn't feel that they're being singled out, but that they just know that there's a lot of resources out there and then they can decide if they feel that they have a disability, and we would be able to assist them.

13:09–13:45
Kaitlyn Montgomery: Yeah, no, I think that's a wonderful approach. Providing an array of resources. I think that really allows the students to see what's out there, where they can go and just decide whether or not they need assistance. Any other advice that you would want to showcase to faculty and make them aware of the process or services that they might not be aware of or situations that you've seen that could be helpful for them to enact later on?

13:45–14:06
Carrie Snyder: One of the things I know is many faculty have a syllabus statement about DRS on their syllabus, but I found that it kind of normalizes the use of our services. If when they're going over the syllabus, they actually talk about it. So sometimes when faculty are going over their syllabus, there's certain things that they just kind of skip over and assume that students are going to read.

14:07–14:26
Carrie Snyder: But if they talk about DRS and kind of normalize it and take away the stigma by bringing it up in class, it kind of encourages students and lets students know that faculty are receptive. So, I think really normalizing that in class and bringing it up and letting students know that they're a welcoming faculty to students who have disabilities is helpful.

14:27–14:48
Kaitlyn Montgomery: Yeah, no, definitely any time to create awareness and just highlight certain pieces of the syllabus I think is a great opportunity because as we know, there's a lot of different policies and things that might not stand out quite as much. If you just hand over a piece of paper and have them read it, you really do want to highlight the important pieces like DRS.

14:48–15:11
Kaitlyn Montgomery: Absolutely. Now, I'd like to pivot to something a little bit more fun. So, I would like to know, just like how you and the rest of the DRS office feel about this monumental donation from... Excuse me if I mispronounce this, Jeanne Zweig, that was recently gifted to the university and student Disability Services.

15:11–15:42

Carrie Snyder: This is amazingly exciting. When we heard about this, we were, I mean, absolutely thrilled that, like you said, it's monumental. This is money that can be life changing for some of the students that are registered with DRS, and we have we have lots of scholarships that we're able to offer students. But to have this as an addition to that portfolio of scholarships that we have is incredibly exciting.

15:43–15:50

Carrie Snyder: So, the whole office was very, very excited about it. And we're looking forward to being able to help even more students.

15:50–16:03

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Of course. Of course. So that's kind of the plan and goal with this donation is really to put towards scholarship. Are there any other resources that are going to be funded through this or is that the plan at this time?

16:04–16:37

Carrie Snyder: So, we're going to be partnering with Jobs, which is a local human services agency, and scholarship recipients are going to be able to utilize services through jobs and they can get career counseling, professional advisement, and then also resources that Jobs can assist them with as well, which will help to guide them towards their eventual career. So, it's not to take the place of what we have here at Temple because we have wonderful resources here at Temple, but it's more disability focused.

16:37–16:59

Carrie Snyder: So, the students will have the opportunity to work with people who understand what it's like to look for a job when you have a disability, people who can help them to prepare for the future. Working in the workplace as a person with a disability, just to kind of keep them on track with their goals and things like that.

16:59–17:11

Carrie Snyder: So, it's a really exciting opportunity to be able to partner with them and this money is going to help us to be able to give the students who are recipients of the scholarship the opportunity to utilize their services.

17:11–17:24

Kaitlyn Montgomery: Yeah, really, really wonderful. I think that that money is going to be put to great use and the students are going to flourish because of it. But, Carrie, thank you so much for joining us here today. And I really am excited to continue this conversation.

17:24–17:46

Carrie Snyder: Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me.