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Now You See Me Now You Don't: Navigating the World with an Invisible Disability

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Now you see me now you don’t: Navigating the world with an invisible disability

Regents Disability Awareness Summit

October 19, 2017, Ames, Iowa

Mark Harris, Director, University of Iowa Student Disability Services
Nathan Stucky, Director, University of Iowa Faculty and Staff Disability Services
Invisible Disabilities Statistics:

Student Disability Services
Of the 1034 Students registered with our office in the last year 969 had invisible disabilities, or a total of 93.7%. Of the 65 students who had visible disabilities 44 of these disabilities were temporary in nature.

Faculty & Staff Disability Services
Of the 446 clients served by our office this past year, 96.6% of the clients had invisible disabilities and 3.4% of the clients had visible disabilities.
Today’s topics and discussion...

1) Introductions
2) Opening discussion: Why did you choose this session and what are you hoping to gain from it?
3) The impact on people with invisible disabilities
4) To disclose or not to disclose?
5) Strategies on obtaining and using medical documentation
6) Best practices in working with individuals with invisible disabilities
2) Opening discussion: Why did you choose this session and what are you hoping to gain from it?
“I feel like no one understands why I’m not able to do the same things anymore...because I look fine!”

-Invisible Disabilities Association webpage
3) **The impact on people with invisible disabilities:**

A. People with visible disabilities may be perceived as more impacted by their disability than they actually are -and-

B. People with invisible disabilities may be perceived as less impacted by their disability than they actually are
“People don’t like me at work because I am always gone for blood tests, treatment, and acupuncture...I just hate for people to judge me, when they themselves cannot see what is happening to me...”

-IDA webpage
4) To disclose or not to disclose?
What is the impact to the individual with an invisible disability who chooses to disclose their disability vs. those who choose not to disclose?

*Is there an impact to others? What? Who?
“I have faculty who are more dismissive of something like bipolar disorder than they would be of something like cerebral palsy…”

-Inside Higher Ed. 4/2/2014

“…it’s hard because you have less credibility when your disability isn’t visible…” “People doubt you, or just think you’re trying to get out of work.”

-USA Today College 10/13/2015
5) Strategies on obtaining and using medical documentation

What are strategies to use when an individual needs documentation of an invisible disability and is having difficulties obtaining it?

What are strategies to use when an individual has a great deal of documentation that is highly specific about accommodations and modifications that may be required?
6) Best practices in working with individuals with invisible disabilities

How do our offices work with individuals with invisible disabilities and in what ways is this work similar and different from those individuals with visible disabilities?
Resources

University of Iowa Student Disability Services
https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu

University of Iowa Faculty & Staff Disability Services
http://hr.uiowa.edu/fsds

Invisible Disabilities Association
https://invisibledisabilities.org
Now you see me now you don’t: Navigating the world with an invisible disability

Thank you!

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