



# Higher Education Sector Summit on Promoting the Hiring and Retention of Workers with Disabilities

September 2012

## Table of Contents

Overview .....	2
Session 1: The Higher Education Perspective: Successful Practices for Employing and Retaining People with Disabilities .....	3
Session 2: Changing Workforce Demographics: Resources to Meet the Needs of Older Workers and Military Veterans with Disabilities .....	8
Question and Answer Period .....	13

## Overview

As part of its ongoing Sector Summit series, the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and Employment and Training Administration (ETA) , collaborated with and the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR)—an association focusing on higher education workforce issues and the human resource professionals behind them—to convene a Higher Education Summit. CUPA-HR was a key partner in the Summit to explore issues related to the employment and retention of people with disabilities at institutions of higher learning because they provide access to a network of more than **13,000** experts in the field at close to **1,700** institutions around the country and internationally.

The Summit consisted of two sessions that were incorporated into CUPA-HR's 2012 Annual Conference and Exhibition held in Boston, Massachusetts on September 11, 2012. More than 70 CUPA professionals attended the sessions, which were titled and described as follows:

- **The Higher Education Perspective: Successful Practices for Employing and Retaining People with Disabilities** -- From the mailroom to the classroom, the key to innovation is a diverse and inclusive workplace. What can your institution do to expand the potential of its workforce through the employment of people with disabilities? Join us for a panel discussion featuring officials from the Department of Labor sharing their view of the workforce challenges and solutions facing higher education, as well as representatives from two higher education institutions that have developed successful programs for employing and retaining people with disabilities. You'll leave this session with food for thought and new ideas you can tailor for your own campus.
- **Changing Workforce Demographics: Resources to Meet the Needs of Older Workers and Military Veterans with Disabilities** -- Given the growing number of employees postponing retirement and military veterans seeking employment, the likelihood that more employees will be managing a disability is also increasing. This panel discussion will feature resources and support available to accommodate these employees and others with disabilities and keep them productive. Learn about the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), pipeline development and disability employment initiatives, and explore disability plans and services for businesses and organizations. You'll leave this session with practical ideas and details about the many types of support available to employers.

## Session 1 “The Higher Education Perspective: Successful Practices for Employing and Retaining People with Disabilities”

**Moderator: Linda Lulli**, CUPA-HR Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Chair and Associate Vice President for Human Resources, Bryant University.

**Panel: Colet Mitchell**, Lead, Employer Policy Team, ODEP

**Susan Picerno**, Policy Advisor, Employer Policy Team, ODEP

**Timothy Martin**, Director of State Systems, Region One, DOL Employment and Training Administration

**Alan Mittman**, Director, Workforce Policy Labor Relations, Cornell University

**Marci Shaffer**, Disability Specialist, Northeastern University

***“We are issuing a call to action for employers to understand that people with disabilities provide an underutilized and capable workforce.”***

**Colet Mitchell,  
Lead, Employer Policy Team, ODEP**

Ms. Mitchell offered background on the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and thanked CUPA-HR for partnering with ODEP to produce the Higher Education Summit. She noted that the representatives attending the session from ODEP planned to offer information and resources that she hoped would help institutions develop and implement strategic plans to hire and maintain skilled employees with disabilities.

She briefly discussed the importance of teachers and employers mentoring their students and employees and the impact that mentoring can have.

***“Be the visionaries...push forward with social change and put in place best practice strategies to help employ people with disabilities. Human resource managers must stretch their comfort zone when discussing candidates with disabilities with hiring managers and administrators and get local support from groups who can supply qualified applicants.”***

**Susan Picerno,  
Policy Advisor, Employer Policy Team, ODEP**

Ms. Picerno began by noting how the education workforce had progressed over the past 50 years, “Back then teachers and human resource employees were primarily white, heterosexual, middle-aged men, and the women were secretaries,” she said. “In 2012, the human resources field is primarily comprised of women. In fact, the higher education field has opened up to all minorities.” The fact that these institutions are being more inclusive bodes well for the disability community who represent all ethnic backgrounds, she said, but noted that the hiring statistics for people with disabilities still are lagging.

Ms. Picerno told the group that it is extraordinary that well qualified people with disabilities are not being hired. She said that the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is approximately double the national average and that close to 80 percent of people with disabilities are no longer even in the workforce. “Some have experience, master degrees and PhDs, but still live in poverty on SSI.”

She encouraged the audience to "be the visionaries" and to "push forward" with social change and put in place "best practice" strategies to help employ people with disabilities. She suggested that human resource managers, "...stretch their comfort zone when discussing candidates with disabilities," with hiring managers and administrators and get local support from groups who can supply qualified applicants.

Ms. Picerno told the audience that ODEP and CUPA can help HR professionals with all aspects of creating their strategies -- from tailoring their sales pitch, to discussing business capabilities and accommodations.

Some employer tools she and Ms. Mitchell mentioned were:

1. A printed ODEP Flip Guide for help with developing an inclusion plan (hard copy included in conference packages): <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/20100727.pdf>.
2. A "Business Strategies that Work" document, found on the "Employer Page" of the ODEP website, along with a research compendium: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Employers.htm>.
3. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), which provides assistance with accommodations: <http://AskJAN.org>.
4. The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP), which provides a pre-screened nationwide database of college students with disabilities who are looking for full- or part time jobs: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/wrp>.
5. The Employer Assistance & Resource Network (EARN): <http://www.askearn.org>.
6. The "What can you YOU do?" campaign PSA, from the Campaign for Disability Employment website: <http://whatcanyoudocampaign.org/>.

Following Ms. Picerno's remarks, participants watched a Public Service Announcement (PSA) titled "I Can," created by the ODEP-funded Campaign for Disability Employment (CDE), a collaborative of leading disability and business organizations that works to raise awareness of the skills and talents of people with disabilities. Featuring seven people with disabilities sharing what they "can do" in the workplace when given the opportunity, "I Can" works to challenge misconceptions and elevate expectations about disability employment. It is available online at: <http://whatcanyoudocampaign.org/blog/index.php/i-can-toolkit/>, along with accompanying discussion guides.

***"Many people with disabilities who drop out of the workforce once they apply for SSI benefits are an underutilized pool of talent."***

**Timothy Martin**

**Director of State Systems, Region One, DOL Employment and Training Administration**

Mr. Martin told the audience that nearly 80 percent of the DOL budget goes to the Employment and Training Administration. From this money, grants are created and dispersed to the State Labor agencies and to competitive grantees to support local programs for employers and workers, including people with disabilities. He suggested that now is a good time for employers to tap into the labor pool of people with disabilities to fill vacancies left by retiring Baby Boomers. He described four resources that can assist people with disabilities to enter or re-enter the workforce:

- 1) **American Jobs Center:** Across the country there are currently 3,000 centers that connect job seekers to employment and/or training and services to prepare them for employment. The tool <http://www.servicelocator.org> allows employees to find jobs that match their qualifications.
- 2) **Disability Employment Initiative (DEI):** Sixteen states receive grants to provide assistance to individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment. Each state appoints a coordinator to help individuals connect with employers and move away from benefit dependence. More information is available at <http://www.dei-ideas.org>.
- 3) **Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC):** These are tax credits issued to companies who hire individuals from certain target groups who consistently faced significant barriers to employment, including disabled veterans. For more information on the tax credit visit: <http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax>.
- 4) **Local Workforce Investment Boards:** These are business led groups who influence hiring policy and issues and oversee the American Jobs Centers. Disability community representatives should also look to participate on the State Workforce Investment Board and/or Local Workforce Investment Board because these entities set policy related to the public workforce system in their state/community.

***"Employers need to build a diversity infrastructure based around common understanding and common language about disabilities."***

**Alan Mittman,  
Director, Workforce Policy and Labor Relations, Cornell University**

Mr. Mittman began by pointing out that Cornell University has incorporated disability into its diversity and inclusion efforts over the last decade. He emphasized the need for employers to build a diversity infrastructure based around common understandings about disability.

He went on to say that Cornell has a strong accommodation support system. For example, they help administer medical leave, workers' compensation, and accommodation requests and encourage faculty to come forward and disclose if they need an office accommodation.

He noted that Cornell University's human resource programs address all aspects of diversity:

- 1) The disability aspect
- 2) Compliance issues
- 3) Shared accountability and responsibility
- 4) Outreach – recruitment and retention of people with disabilities
- 5) Bias response

Noting that Cornell is built on a hill with buildings and infrastructure erected in the late 1800s, he said, "It became abundantly clear that we needed to address the way our aging faculty and our students with disabilities could get around." He described an initiative that was created that sent a team to examine the physical campus at Cornell.

Other initiatives focused on:

- 1) Education programs and services
- 2) Communications website access
- 3) Getting a disabilities resource link on homepage of website
- 4) Technology
- 5) Emergency planning

He closed by describing Cornell University's "Toward New Destinations Program," which is committed to diversity goals addressing demographics, engagement, personal, social and professional commitment, inclusion and achievement, and metrics.

***"ODEP's Workforce Recruitment Program offers an awesome database of job candidates with disabilities that have been prescreened and prepared. The work has been done for you."***

***Marci Shaffer,  
Disability Specialist, Northeastern University***

Ms. Shaffer discussed Northeastern University's best practices by highlighting the disability and diversity gap: "70 percent of large businesses have a diversity policy, but only two-thirds of those have a specific disability component in that policy," she noted. She said that this is a particular problem, "...when you consider that the disabilities sector – especially those with psychiatric disorders like ADD or those who fall into the autism spectrum -- are the fastest growing emerging populations." She pointed out that depression accounts for about 10 percent of those psychiatric disorders.

Northeastern has developed its NU Connect program to assist students with disabilities to find employment. This program is a strategic partnership between the campus disability resources, its innovative co-op program and the award winning career services (voted # 1 for two consecutive years by the Princeton Review). Using a wrap-around approach has led to improved employment outcomes for students with disabilities and has served as an opportunity to share knowledge across these business units, she explained.

When working with students on their interviewing and employment skills, Ms. Shaffer finds it important to determine how employers view that student. She can then help them to hone in on what might discourage an employer from hiring them. She also offers workshops for co-op advisors about how to guide a student through the disclosure process and how to teach self-advocacy.

Ms. Shaffer concluded by suggesting resources employers could use to create a pipeline for candidates with disabilities including:

- 1) Partnerships with community colleges and universities
- 2) Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP): <http://www.dol.gov/odep/wrp>
- 3) Asperger's Association of New England (AANE): <http://www.aane.org>
- 4) Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities: <http://www.cosdonline.org>
- 5) Job Accommodation Network (JAN): <http://AskJAN.org>
- 6) Association for Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD): <http://www.ahead.org>
- 7) American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Entry Point: <http://www.aaas.org>
- 8) Careers and the Disabled Magazine: <http://eop.com/mags-CD.php>

## Session 2: Changing Workforce Demographics: Resources to Meet the Needs of Older Workers and Military Veterans with Disabilities

**Moderator:** Paul Pitts, CUPA-HR Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Member and Assistant Chancellor for Institutional Compliance and Equal Employment Opportunity, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

**Panel:** **Robert Jacob**, Director of Health and Productivity, Unum

**Judy Young**, Grant Manager for the National Technical Assistance, Policy and Research Center for Employers on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities and the Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN)

**Anne Hirsh**, JAN Co-Director

**Karl Booksh**, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of Delaware

***"A major challenge relative to an aging workforce is that two-thirds of that workforce does not have disability insurance."***

**Robert Jacob,  
Director of Health and Productivity, Unum**

Launching his presentation on "Disability Trends & the Aging Workforce," Mr. Jacob contended that one of the biggest issues for employers is difficulty following the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The complexity of these laws and overlapping issues are difficult for human resource staff to understand and negotiate, he explained.

"This topic is important in that older employees often do not have insurance and look to employers to help them with their medical costs," he said. "In fact 60 percent of Americans have no savings for emergencies and only one third of people have disability insurance."

He suggested that there is a need to develop resources to address this issue since 76 million Americans are part of an aging workforce. Two changes becoming apparent are a decrease in turnover and an increase in tenure. Because the economy is weak, older workers are staying in the workforce longer and younger employees are staying with one employer longer.

He listed illnesses that are affecting the older workforce and noted that the prevalent cause of disability is tumor cancer. Other illnesses, which create disability and have become more prevalent are muscular and skeletal arthritis, COPD and other respiratory and circulatory problems.

Mr. Jacob noted that once employers understand the value of the older workforce, they can help keep workers productive by creating flexible return-to-work strategies that allow employees recovering from illnesses to transition gradually back to a full-time schedule. He also suggested that employers implement disease management programs that encourage access to preventive medical care and good nutrition. Employers can also use technology to fit the workplace to the worker.

***“For example, [warriors] manage troops, administrate, or order supplies. These skills translate to supervisory skills and supply side management for many private corporations.”***

**Judy Young**

**Grant Manager,**

**The National Technical Assistance, Policy and Research Center for Employers on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, and the Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN)**

Ms. Young opened her remarks on veterans and employment by offering a startling statistic: more U.S. soldiers have committed suicide than have died on the battlefield in the past two years. (“2012 Military Suicides Hit Record High of 349”, Associated Press, January 14, 2013.) “As members of the military are returning home and attempting to enter the civilian workforce, one of the major issues they face is the dramatic change between those two cultures,” she said. “There is a big adjustment period needed and individuals often do not have the luxury of taking the time. They need to find immediate employment and struggle with becoming employed, if they don’t have access to a hiring pipeline. Employers willing to outreach to veterans find they have the hard and soft skills most businesses are looking for if they are given an opportunity to demonstrate that.”

Another concern is that approximately 50,000 veterans have disabilities including traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression – all of which are invisible impairments, she said. Just as many workers in the aging workforce do not see themselves as people with disabilities, veterans often fall into the same category. Even if they have lost a limb, they do not identify with this label, but rather consider themselves “wounded warriors.” Employers can easily address this issue by assuming that some of their employees will have visible and invisible disabilities, and universally designing their workspaces so that every type of employee can be most productive. Businesses may also develop employee resource groups where employees can discuss in a safe environment issues they are having and how they can be resolved to maximize their productivity on the job. EARN can assist you with guidance and other resources and how to develop these groups.

Veterans are also concerned about disclosing an invisible condition like TBI or PTSD, she said. Veterans feel that employers have a poor understanding of TBI and PTSD, but concise information on how to easily address these disabilities in the workplace is readily available on the Internet at the America’s Heroes at Work website located at: [www.americasheroesatwork.gov/forEmployers](http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/forEmployers). It’s vital to create an environment where many reasonable accommodations already have been provided to workers (such as ergonomically designed workspaces that prevent workplace injury) and where veterans and other employees know the process for requesting an accommodation on the job. So many issues can be quickly and easily resolved when you create a workplace environment that inspires trust and mutual collaboration between managers and staff to resolve difficulties as they arise.

Many veterans also have trouble translating military skills into civilian terms, Ms. Young continued. “They may not realize that they actually have hard skill qualifications as well as soft skill abilities. For example, they manage troops, administrate, or order supplies. These skills translate to supervisory skills and supply side management for many private corporations.”

Statistics indicate that larger businesses are better prepared to address veteran hiring efforts and that veteran-owned businesses are better equipped to handle veterans' employment transition needs, she said.

Knowledge gaps, she pointed out, further contribute to a lack of understanding around veteran employment issues, especially when it relates to those who have acquired a disability. For example, many employers are not well-versed in the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) applies to wounded warriors.

Furthermore, employers also incorrectly believe that veterans are required to disclose their disability. Disclosure is a personal decision and most often it is not essential unless an accommodation is needed, Ms. Young said. Again, ensuring employees have access to some accommodations and workplace flexibilities from the start, and then building a relationship that inspires trust and mutual problem solving is how savvy employers address these needs. "Employers need to become more familiar with government support systems that provide tax incentives as well as financial assistance for purchasing accommodations," she urged.

***"In the past most of the calls to the Job Accommodation Network were from a mom or dad concerned about a child with disabilities transitioning into the workforce. Now many of our calls are from a son or daughter concerned about assisting a parent with a disability to remain productive in the workforce."***

**Anne Hirsh,  
Co-Director, DOL's Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**

Ms. Hirsh provided an overview of the services offered by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), which is funded by ODEP and employs 13 consultants and specialized staff to address job accommodation issues for businesses and other stakeholders. "We work with employers to teach them how to hire and maintain talented employees with disabilities." She noted that JAN's audience has changed in the last 10 years with the rise of the aging workforce; previously mothers had been calling about their kids needing accommodations, but now children are calling about their parents needing accommodations.

JAN, a comprehensive resource, may provide help via e-mail, e-chat, or telephone calls. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace. Ms. Hirsh pointed out that 57 percent of accommodations made for employees with disabilities have no cost and, of those that do have a cost; the typical one-time cost is \$500.00. JAN found that few companies have on-going annual costs for providing accommodations, and 76 percent of the accommodations are very effective in helping with employee productivity. "In addition, the benefits of providing accommodations were two fold; employees feel good about their caring employer and in return offer retention and loyalty to the company," she added.

Ms. Hirsh offered examples of unique and low-cost accommodations, including a call center employee who developed a heart/circulatory condition and was told by her doctor that she should take frequent breaks and move her legs. The job, however, required employees to stay at their desks unless they were on scheduled breaks. After clearing it with the Occupational Health Nurse, the employer purchased an under-the-desk exercise pedal device that enabled the employee to exercise her legs while remaining at her desk. "This was a simple and inexpensive solution to a problem that may have resulted in the employee having to leave," Ms. Hirsh said.

Ms. Hirsh concluded with a recommended list of DOL resources and supports for employers and employees with disabilities:

- Job Accommodation Network: <http://AskJAN.org/>
- America's Heroes at Work: <http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/>
- The Campaign for Disability Employment: <http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org/>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network: <http://askearn.org/>

***"We have met the enemy and he is us."***

**Karl Booksh,  
Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of Delaware**

Discussing "An Insider's View of Disabilities in Academia," Dr. Booksh, with "tongue firmly in cheek," said it often is "schema," an organized pattern of thought, which results in hiring strategies that discourage diversity such as: "Since I am perfect I should only hire people who are like me." He also described the "Matthew Effect," named for the biblical passage, Matthew 13:12: "For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance." This is reflected at universities, he said, by the fact that they usually only want to hire scientists who have received awards and only reward those who have a track record of receiving awards so it is hard for a new scientist to establish himself/herself.

Dr. Booksh offered some solutions to these HR problems:

1. Implement training programs to help remove hidden biases from hiring decisions.
2. Encourage academic units to mine for talent and build programs that are attractive to people with disabilities.
3. Educate the institution that it needs to "play the long game" so even if diversity equity and inclusion is not currently applied to people with disabilities, it must be crafted at the institutional and national levels.

## Question and Answer Period

Following the presentations, a brief question and answer period was held:

### **A member of the audience described her personal situation:**

She works in human resources and has an unpredictable disease which may become costly. She wonders, as a person equipped with this knowledge, should she be hesitant to hire jobseekers who disclose they have the same illness, because she believes they would have an impact on her institution's health insurance costs? "How do we address this?" she asked.

Judy Young responded: "The cost of medical insurance depends on all employees and they, overall, would affect the cost of the insurance, more than just one employee."

Susan Picerno responded: "Insurance is based on a pool of participants. A perfectly healthy employee who is hired could be diagnosed with multiple sclerosis three months later." Susan went on to say that because we can't control many unexpected medical problems that could happen to anyone, as a society we need to have "a bigger picture view" and not worry so much about individual circumstance. Disability is a normal part of human existence, and promoting inclusive, overall wellness programs for all employees can have a major impact

### **An audience member asked about the need for full disclosure of disabilities by job applicants as it relates to the impact on insurance.**

Judy Young responded: "Disclosure fear does not equate to the actual problems about insurance. Often the fears are greater than the actual reality of the insurance cost. There are plenty of disabilities that are not expensive or extensive. They don't qualify as a catastrophic illness. Human resources could be more proactive in helping the employment communities understand this."

### **Another observation from the audience was that an individual's disclosures to a recruiter may not even be communicated to the person in Human Resources who was in charge of the hiring.**

**During the final part of the question and answer segment an audience member voiced the opinion that the Human Resources staff could be more proactive in helping the employment community to understand "about all of this."**

The participant felt that it would be valuable if educators and other human resources directors openly discussed this issue with the community. That way, insurance carriers would understand that people are concerned and being proactive.