

Student Life and Development Department (SLDD)  
Division of Student Services and Development  
The University of the West Indies  
Navigating the Job Search with (Dis)abilities  
2019

## Workshop Summary Report

Date: Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2019

Presenters:

Mr. Curtis Mike, Manager Student Activities Centre and Facilities Manager

Ms. Salome Jordan, Final Year Student

Dr. Beverly Beckles, CEO National Centre for Persons with Disabilities

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### Summary of the session

The first of its kind on the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies, “Navigating the Job Search with (Dis)abilities”, this workshop focussed on students with disabilities in navigating the world of work. It was specifically coordinated to address the anxieties of these final year students surrounding the issue of disclosure and strategies for success as a person with a disability on the job market. The session placed high priority on students who currently use the services of the SLDD, and who required assistance in the job search process.

The welcome address presented by Dr. Jacqueline Huggins, Manager of the Student Life and Development Department grounded the discussions and communicated the rationale for the workshop, in her focus on student empowerment and well-being. Mr. Anil Maharaj, chaired the session as he opened the meeting charging the audience to “Feel competent” and closed with his personal story and the call to “Shine!” in the workplace. As Mr. Curtis Mike, Manager Student Activities Centre and Facilities Manager, brought greetings on behalf of Dr. Deirdre Charles, Director, Division of Student Services and Development, he considered “the internal penchant that we have as human beings for classification”, emphasizing norms. He expressed his gratitude to Dr. Huggins for “pushing the envelope” in meeting the needs for this cohort of students with disabilities.

Ms. Salome Jordan, a final year Biochemistry/Chemistry student with a disability, articulated her experiences in her job placement at the SLDD. While recognizing that she did not have a lot of advocating to do in that supportive environment, she was a bit sceptical about how she would have been received. Recognizing that her motor skills and speech are affected, Ms. Jordan developed alternative strategies to perform and complete her tasks, transforming her limitations into strengths. Despite the temporality of her movements, in that she took “a longer time” to complete

assignments of scanning or filing, she was not afraid to request assistance when necessary. Her confidence in her abilities and her agency as a self-advocate were most evident as she communicated that although her disability may “affect” her work, it will never “prevent” her from meaningful participation in employment and in life.

Dr. Huggins then invited workshop participants to practice think-pair-share, a collaborative learning strategy, in response to three questions:

- What is disclosure?
- What are your anxieties regarding the disclosure process?
- What might disclosure look like in the job search process?

The apprehensions voiced and the immediate responses to these concerns as addressed by Dr. Beverly Beckles, CEO of the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities are highlighted in the following section.

In her feature address titled “The Employment Process”, Dr. Beverly Beckles challenged all workshop participants to redefine our perception of persons with disabilities (PwDs). She noted that the negative attributes of fear, stigma and neglect have impacted PwD employment opportunities resulting in the notion that this cohort can contribute little or no value to the nation. Instead, she discussed three winning strategies that would make them successful in the employment process. These approaches are also discussed in the next section of this report.

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## Key messages/Lessons learnt

### Greatest anxieties concerning disclosure

Issues surrounding disclosure were varied among the students. Responses included concerns about:

- Acceptance at the job site/ feeling judged
- Others doubting their ability to perform/questioning capability
- I had to disclose in a workplace and it broke me down
- None! I know who I am and it’s the other person’s loss (if they discriminate)
- I’m a bit of a blunt person...I was raised to speak my mind...

### Key attributes for facing the job market

Do demonstrate the following attributes to successfully pass a job interview:

- Enthusiasm
- Confidence
- Passion
- Emotional Intelligence
- Positivity
- Ambition

Dr. Beverly Beckles reminded the attendees that to be a great employee takes courage. Considering that our society can be an uncaring one, she noted that there are some important points to consider if one chooses not to disclose.

- Don't fear. However, do indicate if you have some limitations.
- Do know that your potential employer is not doing you a favour. You are qualified to be there.
- Don't self-disclose before the interview. However, be aware that reasonable accommodation is a right to PWDs.
- Do be on time for your interview (15-30 minutes ahead of time) especially if requesting any special accommodation on the day of the interview.

The three winning strategies that Dr. Beckles walked through with the workshop participants included:

1. *Preparation*

- All documents are to be well organized with references in order.
- Walk with copies of originals

2. *Presentation*

- Your dress code is critical. Wear that business suit!
- Wear your confidence well.
- Know who you are.

3. *Pay Attention*

- Listen carefully and answer the questions asked in clear tones.
- Effectively convey your strengths. Don't speak too fast.

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## Next Steps

All the final year students were encouraged to submit their resumes to Dr. Huggins for summer internship opportunities.

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## Appendices

List of participants