

Ask Me Anything about Employment webinar with Dori Hutchinson

Start at 8:07

David Blair: Well, good afternoon everyone and welcome to Ask Me Anything About Employment with Dori Hutchinson. My name is David Blair, and I'll be your moderator today. This webinar is not a presentation but interactive question and answer period. For the next hour, Dori, will take any questions you have related to returning to school as a pathway to employment. Dori Hutchinson has worked at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation for 34 years. She currently serves as the Director of the Services Division, which there's women, men and young adults who have lived with serious psychiatric illnesses, who may also be homeless, at risk of homelessness, and experiencing significant comorbidities.

I am stumbling all over my words this morning. We just had a fire alarm here, go off and I just about 30 minutes before this event started so I've been scrambling to pull everything together again.

Today's event is jointly funded by the National Institute on Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research and the Center for Mental Health Services within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The content of this webinar does not represent the views or policies with the funding agencies, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government. During registration for the event, you were given the opportunity to submit a question in advance. Over the course of the webinar, we'll alternate between questions submitted in advance and the ones you have today. You can ask your questions now by typing them into the chat box. So welcome to the webinar, and I hope you enjoy the next hour and welcome Dori. Thank you for taking the time.

Dori Hutchinson: Thank you. I'm delighted to be here everyone. And I'm seeing where you're all coming from, and I have to give a personal shout out to the folks from Maine. I'm a Mainer, so delighted to have you on the call. I grew up in Maine myself and went to college in Maine. So I'm a big fan.

David: Where did you go to college, Dori?

Dori: I went to Bowdoin College in Maine way back when in middle, late '70s. So, but, I go back to Maine every summer because I need to get a dose.

David: Oh, yes. And for anyone who's not in Boston, it finally, yesterday, I think it was above 70 for the first time in awhile and the skies were not gray. It was gray here for an entire week solid. And it was a little rough.

So, we're gonna get started here. Anyone who has a question, and hi, let's see the Louise from Pennsylvania, someone from Washington, anyone who has a

question, please just type it in the chat box, and I'll be sure to read it for you. And I have a list of questions that people submitted in advance, Dori. So I'm going to start with some of those until we get some people asking in the room right now.

Dori: Okay, great.

David: So, Joseph, from Connecticut, is a professor, and is asking, "What kind of safety net, wellness plan, and charging work should a student be putting in place before returning to school?" He actually has a series of questions, but I'll start with that one.

Dori: Okay. So great question, and it sounds like you're asking about a student who took a leave of absence because of a mental health reason. And so, you know, this is something that is very individualized, and many schools do it differently. The bottom line is that whatever the school requires from any student who goes out on a leave, it should be the same for a student with a mental health condition. We work with tons of students with mental health conditions from all over the country to help them return to school in my Services Division. And what we do is we sit down with those students to find out what was it that got in the way? What was the obstacle to staying in school? Was it a wellness related issue? Was it that potent intersection between wellness and academic demands? Or was it a wellness and a social issue? And whatever the answer is to that question, then we begin to help that student build a plan for return. You know, treatment for some students works really, really well. And for other students, more holistic, alternative work really, really well. So mandating treatment is not something we can do, but sitting with students and figuring out what is it that got in the way of you staying and finishing, and then what can we plan for so that when you meet those obstacles again, you can navigate them with more resilience and successfully stay in school.

David: Sure. And so then the next follow-up leads nicely into what you just said is, "How would you go about goal setting with that student?"

Dori: How would I go about goal setting? So we do coaching meetings with students, and you know, start with what their goals are for their time in school. Most students want to finish. That's why they're going to school, and they may have a particular path they want to take. And taking a look at that and the kinds of resources and supports they might need to reach those goals. And what's really important to think about is, and I talk about this a lot, is that on college campuses, whether it's a community college or it's a four-year college, we've done a pretty good job of making it accessible to students who have physical challenges. We've done less of a good job for students with psychiatric and mental health challenges. If you look at most college campuses will have doorways and bathroom buttons and ramps for students who are in chairs that makes the place accessible. What we find for students with mental health

conditions, it's often people that can make the difference and are really important supports. So when we sit down and we look at a student's goal, we look at what kind of people do they have helping them to support their journey through their academic career so they can get out and move on and get the kind of work that they want to get.

David: Yeah. You know, you just mentioned a second ago that people, in the cases of these students, who really make the difference. Who are those types of people?

Dori: So, and you know, that can be anyone. I always like to tell people just one person, one caring person can make a difference. And we know that from the research, particularly around children and young adolescents, that one caring adult can make a difference. So when you get pushback from faculty and staff who say, well, I'm not a clinician and it's not my job to be concerned about this student's mental health, I might counter that it is your job to care about that student, and it is your job to know about the resources on your campus. And asking that student if they would be willing to use the campus resources for mental health. And, but there's so many resources. We like to think that there's no wrong door. It could be a chaplain on campus, it could be a behavioral medicine services on campus. It could be a dean of students. It could be an athletic coach that the student is connected to or a RA. We know that the density of that student's social network makes a difference. Isolation is not good for anyone and often leads to students despair and not doing well in school. And the other important thing to know, and I'm sure all of you know this, but I'm just going to set it as sort of foundational information, is that the research is incredibly strong that academic success is tied to positive mental health, not just for students with serious mental health conditions, but all students in general. So there's a real evidence base for making an investment in student mental health on college campuses.

David: Yeah. And what sort of role would the family play in this process here?

Dori: So, so family, this is a tricky one, right? Because of the laws of FERPA and HIPAA. Once a student turns 18, schools do not have to share information with families about their child, which makes many parents really upset. But having had three children go to college myself and three different schools, three different types of schools. When students are entering, there is a box to check. And this is when parents and children need to have this conversation of that schools may share information about me, with my parents; and students can check that box and sign it. They get permission. Parents also always have the right, if they're worried about their young adult to call a student to call the college and say, "I feel worried about my child. I know you can't say anything to me about them, but I need you to know why I feel worried." And schools will do wellness checks, and they will check in with that student. They can't share any information in return, if your child did not check that box. So families can have all sorts of levels of

involvement; and schools, I think more and more recently, realize the importance of having positive family involvement. And so many schools send out information through, you know, websites on college websites, information for parents. Nowadays students bring their parents to college, right? Because of this, they are very attached more so than I certainly was. I called my parents once a week for under three minutes so that my parents wouldn't be charged for a phone call. Nowadays I walk behind students on campus here at BU, and they are on the phone with their moms and dads a lot. So colleges have realized that engaging parents in a positive way is an important activity to do. So that students also realize the importance of that. If you are, if students are from other countries as well, having those conversations about whether or not they want their families to know what's going on is also really important. And there's some cultural considerations, particularly when we're talking about mental health issues.

David: Sure. And for anyone who's listening doesn't know what FERPA is, it is the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Dori: Thank you, David. Yeah, I used an acronym.

David: And then HIPAA is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Both of these kind of FERPA is about the privacy of the student and what the school can disclose to the family, or I believe anyone in general.

Dori: Anyone in general. Yeah.

David: Yeah. And then HIPAA is more medical related. So the next question I have is, "For as someone with, who is a student who already has a therapist back at home, should they try to find new ones at the university?"

Dori: Okay. That's an excellent question. So it depends on the therapist that you have at home and whether or not that therapist is willing to do Skype or Facetime with you. I know a lot of students who had stayed connected to a really supportive therapist that they get along well with when they come to school because that therapist is willing to digitally meet. Some therapists are not willing to do that or can't do that. And then that might, then that would lead to, I need to find someone, where I'm going to school, who can be supportive of me. And most schools nowadays because of resources are referring students out to the local community. Some schools do a really good job of having a list of available therapists and the insurances they take that are in the local community. Some schools provide 24-hour online access to therapists through programs. I've seen this in a lot of community colleges recently. And other schools are just, you know, referring students out to the community, and students are just kind of on their own to do the research. So it covers the gamut in what's out there. And then also what is it that the student's original therapist is willing to do or not to do. But if a

student is going off to college and find therapeutic support really helpful, I would really encourage that person to continue that.

David: And the last one in this series of questions here for you. "Should the students go back to school to learn or train with a specific job in mind, you know, an outcome at the end that they've already planned."

Dori: Yeah. Another really good question and that's kind of like the question of our culture these days. I think because of the cost of higher education, we feel this enormous anxiety to know what we want to do when we enter higher education. Unfortunately, if you're a young adult, often you don't know, you haven't had enough life experiences. Some people do, right? If you have a particular type of skills and aptitudes that you know you've always been good at math and science and you know you want to be an engineer, and then that's kind of an easy path to follow. But most young adults don't know what they want to do. And so, taking that into consideration when choosing a school and being able to enter into a program that gives you some time to explore and to have more life experiences that will inform those decisions. You know, you don't want to make a career choice based on the one value of money. It's an important factor in what you do for work obviously. And also when you're taking on a lot of loans, like most people have to go to college these days, but people who choose an occupation based solely on income often don't stick with it and are unhappy. And so thinking carefully about do I have enough life experiences to be able to say I really want to be a doctor? Here, at Boston University, we have 17 different colleges on a university campus, and students apply to these particular colleges. Only one of them is a college of Arts and Sciences and Liberal Arts College. The other ones, if you go into the School of Hospitality or Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, and you get through your first year of studies and you decide that's not what you want, those credits may or may not carry over. So it's important to think about where you're going to college and whether or not you have the room to choose later on down the line and make decisions. And I don't think personally, as a person, I'm a big believer in liberal arts, my just personal opinion, that I don't think most 18-, 19-, 20-year-olds really know what they want to do. And I think that's why we're seeing so much angst on college campuses with a lot of unhappy students who have invested an enormous amount of money, and they don't like what they're studying. And they feel trapped.

David: So in the chat, Gail asks, "I wonder how you handle folks who have taken a student loan and do not finish the course they received assistance to pay for."

Dori: Okay. So that's a really important question and that happens a lot. So, it depends on the type of loan that was taken, and who gave it to them. But this does happen to students. You know, some loans, some Federal loans, if you took Federal loans and you never finished college and you now have a pile of money

that you owe through some Federal educational loan program, and you have been determined to be totally disabled, those loans can be discharged. But that is a process. Most people aren't at that place when this happens. Some universities will not take away your financial aid right away, but it will after a semester or two of that happening. So without knowing what the details are, it's hard to be answered that really concretely around what type of loan, and how you handle it. But how, what I always encourage and try to empower students to do is to have conversations with the financial aid office about it. Here at BU, if you leave school for medical leave of absence and you work with this, we have an office that actually helps students do this, they will help with the financial aid office. They will say they're taking a leave for a medical reason and then that doesn't impact their financial aid. So there are paths that you can take so that it doesn't negatively impact you, but you have to make those connections through financial aid or through the school loan program or even, you know, depending upon the terms of if you took a bank loan, whether or not a serious medical condition, which is a mental health condition applies to that, where that falls with that type of loan.

David: So what offices within a university, you know, the general names, should students be looking for?

Dori: Some offices, so at a place, a lot of universities have like a service center where students who are dealing with multiple offices, you know. So for example, if you take a medical leave of absence and you live on campus, this service center, will let the residence life department know, and they'll let your school know. And they'll let financial aid know, and it's like one-stop shopping to remove yourself from campus when you make that decision that one needs to leave. So as a student service center, often embedded in student services or in a financial aid department, would be places to start. Or even if you have no idea where to start something like that, looking at the Dean of Students office is usually a good place to look or to talk to people in those offices.

David: Yeah. You know, one thing that comes up a lot during these conversations because they're generally right employment is disclosure of one's disability. And you know, we talk a lot about how that works on the job, but how does that work within school and getting the help that you need.

Dori: So, that's another in really important topic, David. And so they're really, there's a nuance of self-identification and disclosure. And so when you apply to colleges, you are asked if you'd like to self-disclose. You don't have to, that's a choice, right? Disclosure is a choice. You're not hiding anything if you choose not to disclose, you're not lying if you do not check off that box on, on the accepted students medical information. You can come to school without self-identifying as a person who's living with a mental health condition, and when you get to school

you can figure out that you might decide I really need some reasonable accommodation here. I need to have extra time for exams, or I need to be able to have preferential seating near the door, or when I work in group projects I'm highly anxious and I need to be able to do, have a different format for presenting my information. If that's the case, then you can disclose to the Office of Disability Services that you have a disability, and schools are required to have that process very visible to students. You go on a website, you look for their Office of Disability Services, and there will be forms that you need to fill out and a provider needs to fill out to document and verify that you have a mental health condition and why you need an accommodation that goes back to the school. They determine that this accommodation is reasonable, and then you're granted that accommodation. Schools handle the disclosure of those accommodations differently. Some schools require students to take the letter of accommodation to the particular professor. Other schools may email the letters to the professor, and then all they require is the student and the professor to have a conversation, depending upon the type of disclosure of accommodation that you received. They don't have to be just academic accommodations either. They can be residential. You may know that, say for example, you live with a mental health condition that if you don't get a good night's sleep, it can be really detrimental to your wellness, so you can seek a reasonable accommodation of having a single room. And that happens more and more. You can also seek to bring a therapeutic animal on campus and have a place to live with that animal. If that's something that really is going to level the playing field and allow you to access your educational opportunities that you have on campus. If you have had accommodations in high school and you're going off to college, I would recommend self-identifying with the Office of Disability Services in advance, because sometimes it can take a while to get those accommodations. So if you wait until you arrive on campus in September, you may not get those accommodations till the middle of October, and then by then half the semester gone by, and you may have experienced detrimental effects of not having the accommodation.

David: Sure. In the room Sherletta is asking, "What if I get sick after I enroll? And it's kind of a follow-up, is are there any scholarships for graduate school?" And I'm guessing if you've left for medical reasons.

Dori: Okay. So, what if I get sick after I'm enrolled? So, if I go to college, and I don't have a mental health condition and then a mental health condition emerges while you're at college. So that could take many, many forms. But it happens all the time. The ages of 18 to 24 are the most common times that a mental health condition does emerge. Because often, you know, students are moving away from home, and they have new stressors on them. And so it's that stress vulnerability, the time of life, where students can begin to experience symptoms of a mental health condition for the first time. So what I would recommend is if you recognize it in yourself, and sometimes people do and sometimes people don't, would be

going to the Student Health Services and saying, "This is what's going on for me." And they will, they can help you begin to manage that condition right there on campus. Some students end up being hospitalized, and then they can come back to campus and continue this semester. And a reasonable accommodation for students is if someone has to be hospitalized while they're on campus and in semester and they're in for two or three days and they miss an exam, it is a reasonable accommodation to have that exam given him another time. And that's something that you would work with the Office of Disability Services around, for doing that.

Are there scholarships for graduate school? It depends on the school. So, for example, the School of Social Work here at Boston University does provide scholarships, and they have a program for people who are kind of doing a career shift coming into the career social work at a later age. And so they offer scholarships to people, maybe not full but partial. So it depends upon the school, and the program that you're applying to if their scholarships.

David: Louise has a more general question. "Are there ways to explore a career choice before attending college to best pick a major?"

Dori: Yes. So, there are a couple of strategies that I think are really useful. One is just to work and to work a job. It doesn't even have to be a job that you think will be part of your career. What happens when you work is that you begin to develop your occupational values. Things that are important to you. Like, I don't want to work in a customer-facing role ever, right? I had, I was a waitress and I hated it. It's like, okay, I don't want to ever be in the service industry. I learned that from that job. So any job can help you begin to develop things that are important to you. You might like being in a fast-paced environment, you might like being stimulated all the time. You might like working with people, and you learn that by any sort of job, even negative job experiences help you figure out what you want and don't want. So working is important, right? It helps you figure that out.

Another way to explore careers that is really, really helpful and useful is if you have some idea of like, I think I might like to work in artificial intelligence, or I think I might want to be an event planner, or I might want to be an elementary school teacher, is to arrange through your network of people that you have or through people that you know who have a network is arranged to do what we call an informational interview, and that's, and we do it all the time here with students, is connecting them with people who are already working in a particular career, and then the student goes to interview that person about their career paths. How they got there, what they like about it, what they don't like about it. You know, what sorts of experiences did they think, do they think would be helpful for the students. They're really informative, in terms of making decisions about what to major in, but they also are really informative and beneficial in that

you begin to develop your own little network of people. So for example, I have a student right now who's really interested in artificial intelligence and in the Internet of things. And I know someone who works for a company who does this type of work. And so I've asked this person, can you meet with this student because they're interested in this type of career. And so they're going to meet and have this conversation. And that will help the student figure out, well, do I really want to be a computer science major or do I want to get into data analysis? Do I want to be an engineer? These are the choices he's thinking about. This is a conversation that will help inform that.

So those two strategies, go out and work and then do informational interviews, I think it'd be really, really helpful. And also, I mean, vocational rehabilitation offices will do standardized testing of your values and your interests and your aptitudes, and that can sometimes be informative if you don't really feel like you have a handle on what is it that is important to me, that will give me meaning, and then what am I good at.

David: Thank you. So, the next question is Renee asked, "What are some of the most common challenges or barriers that arise when assisting those with mental health find stable employment or returning to school?"

Dori: Okay. Returning to school and finding employment. So one, I think both of these issues that the buckets of issues that seem to be most difficult for people, whether they're returning to school or going to work. If we think of the rubric of choosing, getting and keeping; choosing school, getting into school, keeping my status as a student; choosing work, getting work, keeping my role in a company or a place of business, is that most people struggle in the keeping domain. So, wellness at work, wellness at school, what are the daily rhythms I need to do to take care of myself so I can get out of the door on time and get to class on time and finish my projects on time? What are the daily tasks I need to do to stay well so I can get out of my apartment on time and get to work on time and deal with my supervisor who maybe I don't like? So those skills and supports around wellness at work and wellness at school tend to be areas where people really struggle. So talking about very practical strategies around wellness; and remember wellness can be, is personally defined. So it can be your health and mental health and your sleep and your diet and your circle of peers and friends and colleagues and what you like to do for fun. What are the strategies that help you perform your best and making sure that they're part of that student's daily rhythm when they return and making sure that they can be part of your routine when you go back to work. For example, students who are coming back to school after having been away for a while. I had a student who had been out of college for over almost 24 months, and when he was returning all of his friends had already graduated, so he lost his social circle, and he was very worried about being lonely because loneliness is something that would often send him into his

spiral into a sort of paralyzing depression where he stopped going to class, and he didn't want that to happen again. So we sat and talked about how could he build a new set of social connections on campus. So he joined a theater group. He got a part-time job. He signed up to use a common space study areas, so he was around people. A couple of strategies, and then we would meet to make sure, are you getting enough sleep each night? Are you going to the gym? How's it going with making friends kind of thing. Because he knew that that's where he had struggled in the past.

Same thing around work is getting a new job. I'm going off to work. My anxiety is so paralyzing in the morning that I often don't get out of the house on time. All right, so what would help you get out of the house on time? Because you cannot be late. I could use a wake-up call. Okay, let's, what about the night before? Let's take your medications that help you sleep a little bit earlier. Let's lay out your clothes the night before. Let's, I will give you a wake-up call, have that coffee ready to turn on in the morning. Just practical routines that are really, really supportive that people don't always think of and often need support and encouragement around. It can be really helpful in people keeping these valued roles of being a student or being a worker.

David: Yeah. You know, two seconds ago you talked about the choose, get, keep, approach to thinking about these things. If we take a step back and for people who are at the considering stage, you know, they're considering going back to school; what are the major things that they need to think through and the types of resources that they should identify in advance before making that choice?

Dori: Well, that's a great question, and I think in some ways it's the same thing that any students going off to college is going to think about. And it doesn't matter how old you are, but you know, where do I want to go and why? You gotta answer the why question, right? Why do I want to go back? What's important to me? What am I going to need for supports; and supports can be financial aid and it could be a tutor and it could be a quiet place to study or a single dorm room if you're going to live on campus? Where are the resources on campus on knowing about that beforehand can be really helpful. Most of the universities and community colleges have really good websites where you can spend time, looking at and finding out where are people on this campus that can be helpful to me? So, looking at the why and the how of returning to college is really, really important I think before you go.

David: All right. Susan asks, she says, "I am with an ACT (and for anyone, I think she means Assertive Community Treatment team) and have been working closely with the campus wellness director/clinician, and the client and ACT to create a triage and support and open communication between the campus and ACT/Crisis. It is very exciting and a great way to build a network of support. And so I realized

it doesn't end with the question there, but what do you think about those kinds of coordinations and integrations?"

- Dori:** So there, it's great and I think it's happening on a lot of campuses looking at different ways to build different levels of support for students on campus. So obviously there's the Office of Disability Services and Student Health Services. Even if it's a community college, it doesn't have an onsite health center, they often have a public private partnership with someone in the community. But then beyond that, there are relationships with local hospitals. There are student groups on campus, like Active Minds, that do a lot of advocacy around mental health on campuses that can provide support. More and more peer mentoring is being used within colleges. And we actually have a project here at BU where we are training upper-class students who live with mental health conditions to be academic mentors to incoming first- and second-year students who also have mental health conditions. So, you know, really enriched peer support can also be another way of building that network of support. Training faculty and staff and the skills of empathy, so that faculty and staff can feel confident in saying, "I'm a little worried about you and how can I be helpful?" That also extends the network of support. I went to a, I did a presentation yesterday on this very topic, and I had a young woman who said that she was at, had to drop out of college and she had four professors and two TA's. So probably taking some science classes and really, really struggling. And only one professor said to her, "I noticed that you're really struggling." And that was so disheartening to her. So building support that way by empowering faculty and staff to feel comfortable in approaching people to say, "I'm worried about you, you know, you haven't been coming to class or you know, you're falling asleep in class or you're, all of a sudden your grades have changed." All the signs that someone's in distress.
- David:** Yeah. You know, we've been talking here for about 40 minutes about all these different support networks and approaches to return into school. And it'd be remiss of me to not ask you about the program that you're involved in here at Boston University, called NITEO. And for anyone who's listening, can you just give us a quick overview of the program?
- Dori:** Sure. So, we have a program here at BU, called NITEO, which means "thrive" in Latin. And it's been designed specifically for college students who took a medical leave of absence because of a mental health condition. And the aim of the program is to really empower those students to return to school as quickly as possible because we see it as a way of shifting the trajectory away from not returning and having being underemployed or unemployed and having to use disability benefits. Because we know that most students who leave college for a mental health reason do not return. And we also know that in today's world, some form of higher education, it doesn't have to be a college degree, but some form of higher education is indicative of economic self-sufficiency. So a high

school diploma is not going to be the pathway to economic efficiency for most, maybe for some, but for most it is not. For example, in Boston, if you live in this area, it takes three to four full-time minimum wage jobs to be able to live in the city. And that's true for a lot of places around the country. So, most occupations and career ladders ask people for further education beyond high school. So anyways, that's why NITEO was developed, and it is a one-semester long program. Students can come from all over the country, it doesn't have to be just the Greater Boston area, but we do not provide housing, they have to be able to provide their own housing. So as a result, most of our students are from the Massachusetts/New Hampshire area, and it is a three day a week program. They get assigned a coach, who works individually with them around their plans to return to school. What we talked about earlier, making a really solid plan to return. And then they take a range of classes: a wellness seminar, academic writing, academic remediation. They do a Photovoice class on prejudice and discrimination to help them resist the shame that they feel or that has been put on them because they've experienced a medical leave of absence for a mental health condition. They do a class that helps with public speaking. And so it's a simulated academic environment with 15 or 16 people in the room with you, who all have gone through the same thing. So there's enormous peer support. And we have had really great results. We're seeing about 70% of our students return to school, and then about 90% return to school or work within a semester of attending the program. And we also do college coaching. So we call this kind of at-the-elbow coaching for students in the Greater Boston area who are struggling to stay in school and we help them stay in school. What's happening, what's getting in the way? What are the resources on your campus? Getting students hooked up to those resources. We do a lot of texting is how we communicate, Skyping and Facetiming and Zooming. We help students zoom into their classes. We get permission for them to do that, if they can't get out. So we kind of like roll up our sleeves and say, "What can we do to help you finish your degree?"

And we try to leave no stone unturned around that in our coaching programs as well. And then we offer a class on campus for BU students. We're also offering it at a couple of community colleges. And then a college out in Minnesota, called Lead BU, which is the combination of the first hour is about wellness strategies. Things like empathy, thinking traps, cognitive behavioral types of strategies, wellness rhythms, identity issues that's the first hour. And then the second hour is a supported study hall. And it's a place that we find that students are struggling to stay in their particular colleges. They learn those skills and they gain peer support and they have tutoring around things that they, you know, live tutoring. Okay, I'm struggling to get this paper done and someone right there to help them do it.

David: Thank you for that description, Dori. It's a great program, and I know it's really been growing. Kelly asks, "What are the boundaries of a student advisor at the

university? Should they advise students on skills and abilities and how that relates to a field of study or only stick with advising students on schedules, classes, etc.?"

Dori: So, that's determined by the school and their advising program. So I know some schools that your academic advisor is helping you choose your classes based on the major that you had said you want to major in, my area of study. So they help you figure out your four years or six years, however long it's going to take. These are the sequence of courses you need to take. This will fulfill the degree requirements. Then there are some smaller schools that have kind of a bi-level of advising, where you are advised on that, kind of like what does it mean to be a college student? When do you register? Where do you go to for resources? Here's what you need to take your first couple of years to fulfill your general ed requirements, and then once you make a decision on a field of study, then you're assigned an advisor from that department. So it does depend on the school. I think schools are working hard to make their, at least my experience is that, this is an area that is growing and developing. It's an opportunity for a relationship to really be more robust than they happen in the past for students so that it can be real supportive of students. And not just their academics and their future employment, but kind of their experience in that higher educational environment.

David: Sure. Kathy asks, "What do you recommend for a student who has self-identified? They have a disability and when asking for help or accommodation is told by the professor to get a tutor."

Dori: Okay so that, it could be a violation of the ADA. It depends on how that a reasonable accommodation has been proposed to the professor. So if the student just goes up to a professor and informally discloses that they have a disability and I need extra help, the professor doesn't have to provide that extra help. But if you go through your Office of Disability Services, and it's been determined by the university that this is indeed a reasonable accommodation, and the accommodation is maybe extra time with the professor or access to free tutoring on campus, then then they have to provide it. So it depends on how the student self-identified. So if someone does that and the professor says, "Well, sorry, you have to go get your own tutor." Then I would want to know did that students go through the Office of Disability Services? They could then take that answer and go to the Office of Disability Services, and then have the Office of Disability Services help negotiate with that student, with that professor for the extra help that they need.

David: Sure. So the next question comes from Becky, and Becky asks, "How was funding coordinated for a student who comes from another state and needs services while in school, like Peer Support Act, etc?"

Dori: So, that's a good question. So peer support usually doesn't cost anything unless that you're looking for a personal care attendant. Peer support is usually free. ACT being Assertive Community Treatment. I'm not sure how that would work if you are receiving like Department of Mental Health Assertive Community Treatment services in one state, and you move to another state if you were a, Every state has different eligibility requirements to be a recipient of public mental health funding. So I think it would require some research to know whether or not you could transfer that eligibility to another state. So if that's what you're asking, that's what I think would need to happen. We haven't had to do that for students. Students who have been receiving publicly-funded mental health services who have used our services here, or are at a community college or state college, and then they come here and they still are receiving those services.

David: Who do you ask maybe? In the new state?

Dori: So if you are receiving that kind of service through your mental health department in your state, I would start with your care manager because if you're, you will have someone on your team who should be able to do the research for you on that question.

David: Okay. I think that the starting place is probably the most important thing, and then following up from there because it certainly sounds like it'll depend.

Dori: Yup. Yup.

David: So we have another question, and this one isn't formed as a question, but I know there's a question in there. And it says, "I'm interested in apprenticeship opportunities that encourage future schooling later on. Being able to secure and succeed in apprenticeship first, help our participants to know more about what they need to study versus taking classes that may not apply or be necessary for advancement in their apprenticeship."

Dori: Right. So when you're talking about an apprenticeship, my immediate thought is that you're talking about some sort of skilled trade. And I think that the world makes the distinction between apprenticeships and internships. So if you're seeking apprenticeships for the folks that you're serving, then knowing what it is that they want to do first and foremost, what are the skilled areas that they think they might want to get into? And then having to develop those relationships with people where they can sponsor those apprenticeships. Much like an internship, is the work that maybe up a supported employment person would do. For example, we have here in Massachusetts, we have a furniture restoration group that provides apprenticeships for people who are interested in that, right? You have to have a very particular interest and to want to do that work. So, but we do have a group that provides those apprenticeships to students. We also have programs that, through some of the clubhouses in Massachusetts that are called, Cooking

for a Career, and they provide short-term career education, and then they go out and they work in the service industry around cooking, which then can help them further decide, "Okay, I want to go off and get certified in this, or I want to go to cooking school and do this." So they're really valuable opportunities as you're making the point where people can solidify their interest in doing this or not.

And the same thing with internships. There are some great websites that you can get notified around all the different internships that are available. Many of them are unpaid, which can be hard for some folks, but internships again are another way to decide, "Do I really like this or not? Is this something I want to pursue?" And I know a lot of people who take an internship, and they decide that they don't want to pursue that career afterwards. They learn a lot in those experiences. So they're really important, and a lot of people are willing to do unpaid internships. So connecting with employers, and some bigger companies do pay for internships. They tend to be reserved for undergraduates and graduate students. It can be hard to find them for high school students, but they're out there.

David: Right. So I'm going to, we're, we're running short on time, so I'm going to try to lump some questions together here to get at kind of themes that people are asking. And one theme that I see showing up, is gaps in employment. You know, that it's been some of these gaps of 13 years since they last worked, and they volunteer between those times, but they don't know how to approach their resume or what they should do. And, I want to add that, for they say this person says in particular considering switching to a skills-based resume rather than chronological.

Dori: Yeah.

David: And yeah, from my perspective, I think that's a bad choice. You know, it only points out that there is something to look for in terms of being wrong, instead of showing what really happened in chronological order and adding that volunteer experience in. But I'd like to hear what you think about both gaps in employment and the

Dori: Right. So they're really important questions because it's a reality. But people stop working for all sorts of reasons, right? People stop working because they're parenting. People stop working because they have health conditions. People stop working because they had the opportunity to travel and see part of the country and they didn't work for two and a half years. So given that, what we recommend is that you do a skills resume, but you also have timelines down, but you don't go. Instead of saying from August, 2018 to October, 2018, we just say, put the year down. So here's what I did in that time. And then if there is a gap where you weren't working or volunteering or taking classes in that time, then being coached on how do I have the conversation to address that time off? I know a lot

of people who take time off for reasons unrelated to a mental health condition, and you're not required to disclose that you have a mental health condition in an interview. So finding a way to come up with a narrative that you feel comfortable with that maybe is, "I could, I last worked three and a half years ago, and I had the opportunity to take some time off, and I'm getting back into the job market now." kind of statement or, "While I took time off, I volunteered and did these things." Or "I took time off, then I experienced a health condition or I was taking care of an elderly parent." Sometimes those things come in tandem. So, everyone has a personal story. So working with people to craft that personal story in a way that they feel comfortable with and they can share in an interview.

Skills-based resumes are the way to go, even if you don't have a mental health condition. If you look at any college career office, they are helping students build skills-based resume because they don't have a lot of experiences, right? They only have a college degree and maybe a few summer jobs. And today's students often don't have very many jobs behind them. So focusing on your skills is really important in the resume. And that means using very discreet active verbs to describe the tasks that you did and the skill set you have.

David: Off the top of your head, do you know where people might go to look for guidance on crafting that sort of resume?

Dori: Yeah. So I mean, you can Google anything. You can go to LinkedIn has great examples. You can go to Glass Door, all the work websites, Indeed. They have resources where you can see examples of these types of resumes.

David: Yep. All right. The next question, we have in, this is another grouping, but I think this one kind of gets at, **How do you address help people who think or afraid they have nothing to offer? That this gap that there, they bring nothing to the table at this point.**

Dori: Right. So that they may really feel left out of it, maybe left out or lacking in confidence that they can contribute to a particular work environment or to a work role. And so often what I do with people who come and have been out of the workforce for a while, and we focus also on people's personal qualities and some of the personal characteristics that they have. And that takes time to help people be able to take a personal strengths-oriented sort of assessment of yourself, being able to say with confidence, "Well, I'm good at problem solving and I'm a really good listener and I have a really flexible mindset. So when someone asks me to change what I'm doing at 1:30, when I thought at 1:15 I was doing something else, I'm pretty unflappable. And that's a really good quality to have in a workplace." And so teasing out those qualities and those personal characteristics, coming at it from, "These are my strengths, this is what I contribute." That's something that's important to do with if you work with someone who's helping you go back to work, or even a therapist can really help

you do that. If you don't have someone who's helping you go back to work, but you have a therapist is, you know, focusing on what are my qualities?

Because at the end of the day, and I say this with personal experience and also as someone who hires people with disabilities, and I hired people from really eclectic backgrounds and people who've been out of work for a long time, is I feel pretty confident that I can train this person to do the job that I'm hiring them for. So when they come in for the interview, I want to know about who they are as a human being and as a person. And so I look for that. You know, I tell people I need, I need someone who's really flexible and adaptable. Tell me a little bit about how you describe yourself with those qualities. Because we deliver services here, and every plan becomes unplanned in a quick moment, and people need to be able to deal with that. So those kinds of conversations help tease out what you can bring to the workplace because everyone has something to contribute. But if we have been beaten down by our experiences, or we haven't had people pointing it out to us, it can be hard to articulate it. So finding someone who can help you articulate it and discover it again because you have it. Everyone has it. Everyone has strengths. Even if you haven't worked, and if you think about the newbies graduating from college, I just had a family member graduate from college with a liberal arts degree who had very little work experience and he got a job. And he's being, he's learning on-the-job some hard skills, but he brings a lot of personal qualities to the environment and that's how he sold himself to get the job, that's his personal qualities.

David: Well, thank you, Dori, for taking your time in this past hour with us to answer everyone's questions. And thank you, everyone, who has joined us this afternoon and taking the time to learn something.

Dori: And I liked that offer just one last sources, as I see people are sharing some resource, and I think it's great, is that you're sharing resources. Another really excellent resource if you're looking for work and you are a person with a disability, and you live in the New England area, but I think it is a program called, Work Without Limits. They are a job site for both employers and people seeking to work, who live with disabilities, and they have an enormous number of resources on their website. So there's a good place to start and look.

David: All right. Thank you. Sorry about, I should have asked if there was any one last thing you wanted to share. The next, Ask Me Anything About Employment session is coming soon. And because you signed up for this, you'll receive an announcement by email. In the next few days, you should also get a survey about your experience today, and we'd love your feedback about this event. Thank you again, and we look forward to having you join us. And again, thank you for your time, Dori.

Dori: And thank you, everyone. And if you want to reach out personally, I'm happy to respond. So I know when someone actually did reach out the other day, so feel free to reach out.

David: And how would they get ahold of you?

Dori: dorih@bu.edu.

David: Perfect. Thanks, Dori. Have a great day. Bye.

Dori: Bye.