

AHEAD Final Report

Thank you for supporting me with Faculty PD funds for my AHEAD training! This helped launch me into my role as Disability Services Counselor at UH Maui College.

The AHEAD Start Academy was held in October 2022 virtually and is organized by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), the primary professional organization for individuals serving people with disabilities in higher education. As a new professional in disability services, the Academy provided a great foundation of basic knowledge to help me get started in this position including disability history and disability culture, disability as a civil right, legal principles from the ADA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and best practices for documentation, the interactive process, and reasonable accommodations.

Some key takeaways:

- Disability is not a bad word.
- While higher education systems change in response to societal forces like laws/wars, our practices in disability services (DS) also reflect higher education and society's response to disability. There is a synergy which we in DS are a part of, which is at the intersection of higher education and the disability community.
- In DS we are a partner for students and instructors to ensure equal access not necessarily to ensure success. We are required to provide the opportunity to participate in an equitable and equally effective manner and personal effort of the student. Being visible and creating trust through a community of allies is crucial.
- Consistency is found in the internal office process, not in the presence of third party documentation. It is critical for the Maui office to review accommodations (last 2 years) to determine common academic modifications and write up procedures for each.

One of the highlights of this professional development is the mentorship from Rick Gubash, Accessibility Support Center Director at Cabrillo College in Aptos California. We have a small group of new professionals that meet monthly to discuss issues, explore fundamental areas of disability services, share best practices and problem solve across institutions with the goal of increasing equity at our campuses. This opportunity to network and be part of a community outside of the UH System has provided new relationships and connections for support to sustain my work in disability services.

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