Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.

This transcript is being provided in rough-draft format.

ABA-COVID-19: Virtual Classrooms and Institutional Barriers-(Dual Zoom/ST)

American Bar Association - Civil Rights and Social Justice Section

AJ Link: Can someone tell me if they can hear my AC going? Or if there's a ton of feedback on that?

>> Ellie Cowan: I don't hear anything.
>> AJ Link: Blessings!

>> Alli Kielsgard: Can someone else speak, I thought, Ellie, with you, I just heard feedback, can you speak again.

>> Ellie Cowan: Okay.
What would you like me to say.

>> Alli Kielsgard: Okay, no feedback, sorry.
I'm imagining it....

[STAND BY FOR LIVE CAPTIONS].

[STAND BY FOR LIVE CAPTIONS].
AJ Link: Everyone, we'll wait just a couple of minutes, so everyone can get logged in and get they audio working, because I know, sometimes Zoom will let you know, and you can't get your audio to work. So we'll let everyone come in, and then we'll get started.

AJ Link: Great so we'll go ahead and get started.

Hey, I'll I'm A.J., good afternoon, we are thrilled to present a panel called COVID-19 Virtual Classrooms and Institutional Barriers. Please visit Americanbar.org, CRSJ, for updates on these programs. During today's program, we encourage you to ask questions of our panelists through the Q&A feature not the chat function, if you do not see the controls, please ensure your screen is not idle. We will address questions at the end of the panel.

We will be sharing a recording of this program, to everyone who is registered so you can share it widely with your networks and with that, we're thrilled to bring you today's program entitled COVID-19: Virtual classrooms, and institutional barriers.

I would like to introduce the panelists, my name is A.J. like I said, I am AJ Link, one of the copresidents of the National Disabled Law Students.

And our panelists today are Ellie Cowan, associate director of outreach at the National Disabled Law Students association, a rising 2L, at the university of Idaho, school of law.

Ellie just transferred and her experience will focus on her previous Law School, not her experiences at her new institution.
Second panelist is Jeremy Wertz. He's a graduate of Harvard Law School, class of 2020. And he is also a copresident of the National Disabled Law Students Association, our third panelist is Maria Zavaleta. She's a rising 3L at the university of San Francisco school of law. And with that, I will turn it over, to Maria!

>> Maria Zavaleta: Hi, everyone good morning or good afternoon, thank you for having today. Like A.J. mentioned I'm Maria Zavaleta a rising 3L at the university of San Francisco school of law and my preferred pronouns are/her, ella, so kited to be here and thankful to the organizations working to have a more inclusive Law School presentation I was diagnosed with hyperactivity disorder, and what that means is I'm inattentive, and hyperactive and I share this for two reasons when I was considering Law School I was very apprehensive about reporting my condition because I thought somehow my symptoms could be used against me either in Law School or through my legal career and I fear this is a common fear among law students with disabilities, and sometimes this fear might make it difficult for them to speak up about issues especially during this time, and two because my testing accommodations are invaluable in order for me to be in an equal footing with my peers. Now, many of you are here today because you want to know what your institutions can do to change, in order to be more inclusive, to students with disabilities.
And I think that if you target the issues that we'll discuss throughout this webinar, then I'll be working towards that change, and you'll be promoting an environment, where students are more comfortable, about sharing this aspect of their identity, and that prepares them for success, not only through Law School, but in their legal careers, and I want to talk to you about my experiences preCOVID, and through COVID that I hope, may guide your institutional changes so I'll be talking to you about six things, health insurance, no laptop rules, wellness events, MPRE bar exam a need for community and a lack of proper accommodations during COVID.

As for health insurance, the first year of Law School, is particularly challenging trying to figure out how to read a case, how to brief a case, how to prepare for class, how hypo should be written et cetera, amidst all the first year stress students with disabilities how to figure out how to get a new doctor in their new city.

I was so stressed out my first year of Law School it wasn't until I was running out of medication when I started looking at how my health insurance worked.

I think especially now through the virtual learning environment new challenges arise where students are, again, relocating and may need additional support with regards to health insurance, and as for 1Ls I think that health insurance training should be something that's embedded in through the originitation, and is heavily-emphasized.

Now, as for the no laptop rules, many students with disabilities have software in their computers that supports them and no laptop rules do
two things stigmatize students with disabilities in two ways, first of all, it forces you to either sit in the back of the row, in the back of the classroom, in order to actually use your laptop. Or, it outs you to your classmates, who can only guess the reason why you're using a laptop is because you have an accommodation pursuant to a disability. And I think students shouldn't be forced to make this choice between having to sit in the front of the class or having their laptop. I personally like to sit in the very first row because as somebody with ADHD, it helps minimize distractions for myself, and like I said no student with disability should be forced to make the choice. And third thing wellness events, for some reason I feel this distinction between wellness events and disability services my particular Law School actually has a lot of wellness events, where we talk about mental health. And therapy dogs at the law library et cetera, and all of that is amazing and great. But I think that we should focus on promoting both wellness, and disability services, when we talk about resources for students. As to testing accommodations, et cetera. There shouldn't be a distinction between the two. And the third -- the fourth thing is the MPRE and the bar exam, I think we need to acknowledge due to limited family resources and perhaps culture barriers, some students may not have been -- may not have been diagnosed and evaluated for their condition until later in life.
And that means that these students, didn't test with accommodations, for either the SAT, the ACT, and perhaps the LSAT; and so, law schools need to be more supportive to students who may have this, you know,

To whom this may have happened, because the MPRE and bar exam have such a heavy weight on a history of asking for accommodations so I think right now, as we navigate virtual learning and everyone is remote.

There needs to be workshops, where students are informed as to how, to navigate getting testing accommodations, especially, since, you know, the Bar exam, and the MPRE may look different than they have before.

The fifth thing is a need for community.

Does your Law School, have an organization for students with disabilities? Do you offer disability law, or any related course?

Does your career services office talk to students about how to seek accommodations with their employers?

If your answer is no, or I don't know to any of these questions, then you need to start critically-considering how to address those problems, because, it's those resources that make students like myself, feel supported, rather than stigmatized.

And the last thing, is, a lack of proper testing accommodations, during COVID time.

As I mentioned, I have ADHD.

And part of my accommodations consist of testing and distraction-reduced environment.
And this last semester, I was actually told multiple times, that the school was unable to accommodate that because of the shelter-in-place or stay-at-home order, and I think, you know, as we move towards a fall semester that likely will be remote or have some sort of hybrid program, schools need to start looking for solutions, in order to support their students,
And accommodate them completely.
And, you know, if you have a pilot program be careful as to how that's interpreted by your students, because you don't want somebody who requires certain testing accommodations to feel forced to go back to school, just because they may think that's the only way for get their accommodations.
And if you're fully-remote.
Think about alternatives such as seeking testing centers or maybe even outreaching to other law schools that may be open to having students test at their law library.
Or even outreaching to your alumni, that may be willing to host a student through an exam.
And if you're an alumni, be willing to host a student for an exam.
I think that we're at a time, where we shouldn't just hope to go back to normal because normal wasn't working in many different ways and I think this is an opportunity to consider -- to consider positive changes to legal education
But while we navigate this virtual/remote learning environment, you need to do right by students with disabilities.
And find solutions, that will help them succeed.

Thank you.

And now, Jeremy is going to talk to you all.

AJ Link: I think we're pivoting to Ellie next

>> We'll let Ellie with the E speak!

>> Ellie, I think you're on mute.

Ellie Cowan: Sorry about that!

I'm Ellie Cowan.

I'm a rising two L going to be starting at university of Idaho, which I'm very excited about!

pronouns, she and her.

And, I have had an interesting first year of Law School, especially with COVID;

And all that response, along with earthquakes and my Law School closing.

So it's a very unique experience for me.

And -- things that have presented and opportunities that I think we can grow a lot from the COVID experience.

Ellie Cowan: And so one of the first things I wanted to talk about, was, the access to accommodations, at Law School.

Prior to COVID,

The access to accommodations, was -- it's a lot of extra steps and time, there are a lot of extra costs, for different documentation, new documentation,
I had to go get new documentation to prove that I've had hearing loss for the last ten years, and it's not like your hearing is going to come back.

And so these extra steps,

Make it difficult, to -- probably [interruption in Internet connection]

Ellie Cowan:  No. 1, it's an equity issue, not an equality issue, and we're just being raised up to have equal access to the education. It is our work. It is things like that.

So for me, my accommodation, because I have the hearing loss, and an auditory processing disorder, is an ability to have my classes recorded and receive a note-taker.

This was just getting put into place, second semester, prior to COVID. Like, three days before we were dismissed.

And then as we went into the COVID time,

It was great because the professors were recording the Zoom ones, Zoom classes and posting them online.

I didn't have to worry about how to record them and everything else, and that was wonderful, and there was access for everybody. Previously, they said they couldn't provide recordings for me. Because, it would give me an unfair advantage, when we ran into COVID, all of a sudden it was available to everybody, and it was posted up there for everybody.

I've gone back this week and checked with some of my professors to
find out how many people went back and watched the videos afterwards after class that he had posted that were recorded and on average, he said three out of 60 students in the class, went back and accessed them.

So even if it was there, nobody's taking an extra advantage of it, even if they have access.

Along with the access, to the videos, and recorded lectures, there were all sorts of other resources, put out for those dealing with COVID.

There was, you know, Counseling services for those, who were dealing with anxiety, and stress, and financial resources, and medical resources.

And all this, you know, very inclusive, inviting environment, for all students, going through COVID.

However, none of these resources were available, to students with disabilities.

Prior to that.

There was no assigned advisor that you could talk to.

There was nobody they could refer you to, no support group at our school.

One of the things, to me, as I was dealing with some of this, is I spoke with our student success center, and... Ellie Cowan: One of the sad things she said to me was there were so many students with disabilities that come through and she can't point them to anybody.

She can't refer them to anybody, because she can't disclose anything.
And they're isolated. And alone, and discouraged, and anxious and these are the same issues, that they're going out of their way to help, with those dealing with COVID.

So, it is interesting, the dynamics, with the resources and the ideas were already there; it just -- they weren't interested in implementing these for disability services. Only when everybody had the opportunity. For me, this stretches beyond, you know, COVID.

In that, I remember at University, in the 2016 election and when Trump won the presidency, the university that I was at had extra centers and counseling and grief centers for people to deal with the upset over Trump becoming president. And while I understand some people are going to get emotional. This seemed like an inproportionate response when there were people with disabilities, who didn't have access to these things in the first place, and now we're giving credits for absences and everything else, because you didn't like how the election turned out. So this seems like resources are there. They just don't want to acknowledge the needs in the disability students, and put the effort behind it.

There's a disconnect there. They know how to do it. They know it's worked. But it's not seen for everybody.
So, you know, this sets -- sets everybody off on even more, uneven footing.
The other thing that stood out to me, then, is talking about the unfair advantage.
And, this is something that I heard, at my previous Law School, time and time again. You know, you're going to be getting an unfair advantage, that was the first sentence out of my accommodations advisors mouth when I went to meet with him.
The very first thing our primary goal is that you not receive any unfair advantages, but this is a perception we need to work on.
It's a systemic problem, and I am going to give you an absolutely ridiculous example,

   But the ridiculousness of it, is -- will illustrate how we need to change thinking.
So if you're standing at an elevator with a group of people, and an individual, in a wheelchair, the students are not thinking, wow he's getting an unfair advantage because he doesn't have to carry his law books, doesn't have to go up and down the stairs, all over campus, he's not going to be exhausted from all the walking around during class.
So he's going to be better able to pay attention, and everything else.
But, the fact that he gets to sit in the wheelchair all day is an unfair advantage, that's just ridiculous, but it's the same thing, applied to other disabilities.
The guy in the wheelchair probably wants nothing more than to be
able to carry his books up the stairs and be able to be more accessible to different things and not have to deal with the daily adjustments he has to make to his disability to things. And it is pointing out, and making people aware of these misperceptions, in what is and what isn't an advantage. That's, yeah. So, I know it's ridiculous, but, it's something that can be seen, I mean, I -- I also have ADD. I was told, you know, well, if you just try to concentrate harder and it's, like, -- advisor telling me, this I said how about you take off your glasses and you just squint harder and you'll be able to see the board? It doesn't work like that. This is a legitimate disability. You can't take away the aids there. And so part of this is having that discussion, that it's not an unfair advantage, especially when they're willing to put these things in place, when conditions are not ideal for everybody. You know. When it's not ideal for everybody, we've got all these options for you, but when it's just the small minority who has disability issues and access issues, that's not an option, and we really found out that that is not the case. Spring semester: -- or -- so spring semester, everything was online, and stuff, when it came to register for accommodations for summer
semester, my previous recording had been to only use my smart pen. Can't do the smart pen when they require you to wear a headset. The pen can't hear anything to record.

So, then they gave me a comfy walk around in how to hook the pen up to the computer to record, and I had to have my microphone turned off and, like, a 3-to five-minute switchoff so if the teacher calls on me or I wanted to do something, I had to undo all that in order to participate and the teacher said, "It takes too long, you're just going to be off for participation points" and when I talked to accommodations about it, it was a -- well, it's not that maybe many points so don't worry about it which if you don't have access to points, that's not equal access, it doesn't matter how many points there are.

There were easy solutions the previous semester had been reported and posted online.

I suggested this.

That was not an option.

Allow me to record the Zoom, give me permission, and I don't have that issue.

That was not.

It was these extra steps that they had to put in place, that take extra time, and prevent me from having that equal access that the school went with.

And so, it's, like, okay, we can make all these things happen for COVID, and everybody, but now that it's an accommodation issue, and not a COVID issue,
It doesn't matter that there is all these extra things and it's unfair access.

Ellie Cowan: And that's a systemic problem and attitude within this. A lot of times, for those of us who are receiving accommodations, there is so much extra work that is right you have to do everything from doctors' points, to documentation, meetings with the EAC -- and -- it's time-consuming, it takes time out of studying. And there is a lack of support. The staff and faculty, really don't want to hear anything about accommodations for fear of FERPA and HIPAA violations; and it -- causing problems with Anonymity.

In grading and stuff. And so it's all part of this big problem, that relates. And it -- again, we go back to -- it isolates the students and leaves them discouraged and very hopeless, with no place to go, which is something else that we're putting money into, to helping those who are dealing with the COVID, you know, results. And I think from that, the COVID provides us an opportunity, to say hey, these things are all possible! And we can do this. Recognize the groups. Look at the disability and how we can change the mindset to be more inclusive, and not somebody's getting an advantage, or there's an extra thing.
It's -- care about everybody all the time.
Not just in a crisis, situation.
(Ellie Cowan) for me, I really believe that it is a lack of training; and
Knowledge in there.
Not that -- it's a systemic problem, not that somebody has failed to implement something that's already in place.
Sometimes it's just that they don't know what they don't know, and until they experience these things,
There's no motivation behind it on their path.
And so, I think that this is a great time to find an opportunity to have these discussions and move forward, and find ways to accommodate everybody.
It really opens the eyes, and those who are now experiencing some of the things that people with disabilities experience on a daily basis.
So they're better able to relate.
So it's a good -- a ripe type time for us to be have gone these conversations and trying to make a change.
So I will hand the time over to Jeremy now

>> Jeremy Wertz:  Thanks Ellie, and thanks Maria.
I think, you know, listening to both of them has been an eye-opening, inspiring to say the least, experience.
I just graduated Law School and I've been reflecting a lot on my experience.
And I think one of the things that is -- you know, challenging for me to do, even at this point is just to talk that I am disabled when I am on an
event like this and talking to people in the community. And so inspired by Maria opening up and talking about what her disability that is.

Because it is very challenging coming into the legal community I have ADHD dyslexia yes and dysgraphia, I was very confident talking about my disability.

Every job I had my friends knew about it. Part of me, I've been disabled my whole life and it didn't bother me. When I got into Law School that changed.

When I got to Harvard they -- I went to public school all my life, private school dream everybody was taken care for me. Everything was going to be fine and dandy. And everything went south yet.

My 1L year I didn't get notes and note-taking -- it lilts my ability to write and type effectively. And I didn't get notes through the first seven weeks of Law School, my first semester.

They had, you know, this, that, and the other problem, and, you know, I understand, human error, or -- systems error, but that had a huge impact on me.

The legal community know your first semester of Law School is crucial to your success as a lawyer and in the early part of your career, without notes for the first ten weeks there was no way I was ever going to come back and dig myself out of that hole.

The first professor I went to talk about this problem to troubleshoot
and let me know who else to turn to, told me I shouldn't talk about my disability.

In Law School.

I shouldn't talk about my disability to other professors, because they would treat me differently. They wouldn't write me letters of recommendation if I wanted to get a clerkship, because they would assumed my grades were due to the fact I received time and a half.

I didn't tell them I received accommodations, they assumed that based on my disability.

And it was really challenging, it took me three years, to get out of that hole.

It took me, friends like A.J., and Ellie, and everybody in the disability, to build me back up to have confidence and talk about my disability.

And I want to highlight the stories, and I feel privileged being in my room, to be the president of the NDLSA, to talk to disabled students across the country about their experiences and I want to emphasize these aren't stories about things that went wrong, these are all too common and I hear about these stories all too common, if you're an administrator, and professor, you need to recognize this is probably happening in your environment whether you like it or not.

And active proactive steps you can do to make this problem better for all of us.

And I think one thing to highlight, from Maria, and Ellie and myself, is listen to students with disabilities.
When we come to talk to you, and whatever role you are, listen to our experiences, validate us, and ask how you can help, and listen to our ideas.

I think the thing we don't talk about about being disabled enough is what it does for us and it's an advantage.

I've had to solve problems with one -- in a different way from everyone going back to when I was in kindergarten.

You know, I -- I feel like that has given me a powerful strength to be a really creative problem solver and really understand problems in different ways.

And so when I am problem-solving with you listen to what I am suggesting, because I have thought about this problem for my entire life and I know what I need to be accommodated.

And when you get to Law School -- nowhere else cold calls no one else does all these things in undergrad and it's going to face challenges but administrators need to be there and listen and provide resources, to help us.

One thing that Maria and Ellie and I all, I think, have said at this point is, asking for accommodations, is a time-consuming process.

So when -- think about that for a second. You know, we need our accommodations to be successful in these environments.

We've now achieved our dreams, got to Law School.

Stepping stone to a better, you know, a really -- the career we've all been working superhard for, but we feel like we actually need these things to be successful and, you know, we have to go to these
meetings.
We have to get the paperwork, we have to submit the paperwork, we have to follow up with you, with an e-mail.
We have to send another e-mail to schedule probably another meeting and get another call and come into your office and then talk about if it's being implemented right and hopefully it's being implemented right.
And maybe it works maybe it doesn't work.
That's hours, days, weeks of work.
And think about first semester of Law School. You know, I think many people on this call, either are lawyers or work in the legal industry.
It is an incredibly challenging time.
Hardest academic semester of your life.
I know it was for me.
Those extra hours spent, were taxing, they were....
Almost an insurmountable odds at one point.
When I was in -- Harvard working as the president of the disabled law students association there, we worked with 90 students over my three years to help them figure out that process, the No. 1 thing I can say is administrators need to do a better job of project-managing that task forward.
If they can send that e-mail, and carry that task forward and take that lift of the students, doesn't matter whether it's Covid or -- after this pandemic that's going to make students lives better and see students
stay in the accommodations process longer, by second semester 1L, 2L, students are you know what?
I'm going to do my best and accommodate myself, and that doesn't often go well and impacts students grades.
Jeremy Wertz: The other thing I will say to highlight what Maria and Ellie have already said is COVID a challenging time for everyone, but, particularly for students with disabilities.
And so, I think administrators need to do two things is, you know, open the door, to new accommodations.
Lower the threshold for any documentation, or process you need in order for us to get accommodations.
It is too hard, to -- you know, I just had to apply for accommodations for the Bar, I had to get three doctors' notes, you know how hard it is to call a doctor during a pandemic?
They do not -- they are happy to help, but they have more important things to do right now than answering my phone call, and it is imperative that you become more flexible in how you help students with disabilities on this.
You know, second: Is -- think about it and the fact that this is -- really about universal access, and design.
Jeremy Wertz: Right?
If you build a system that works for everybody -- and including people with disabilities, it's going to -- everyone is going to benefit. You know, I had asked for three years for class recordings at Harvard Law School, and I had -- every excuse, or legitimate reason honestly under
the sun for me, professors don't want to do it it's too hard too expensive too technical, how do we do it?
But I think one thing people forgot is how are people learning?
That's the goal of Law School, right?
Is to learn how to be a lawyer, and everyone, you know, potentially could benefit from watching a lecture, twice.
Or maybe you have something going on on that day and you're not prepared for class, you didn't do the reading, which is a human thing, I know it's impossible to talk about Law School and you might have shown up to class without reading but it happens to the best of us, and you want to watch the lecture again because it's a tough subject, if the goal is to learn the law and become good lawyers, what is the argument for taping class for everyone?
There isn't an argument that really resonates with me.
And we saw that with Zoom. You know, I think that -- it really opened a lot of my peers, abled and disabled's eyes that wow this was superhelpful.
I really liked doing this, being able to watch lecture before the test, double time, or time and a half or go back to that one section because I didn't understand it and when the professor talked about it in week 10, I got to connect to week 2, if that's the goal of all of this, it should be a no-brainer and the last -- the really -- the last thing I want to say, is this ableism effect.
People with disabilities, who are on the call, we need to get better at calling out ableism.
It's tough, it's challenging, it's really uncomfortable to do.
But we have to empower ourselves when we hear -- I wish I could in a
time machine and 1L self and my professors and look at him and say
that was a rude comment and let me take a second to educate you on
your perspectives.
And administrators need to empower that, too, and recognize
we -- myself including we all may have unconscious bias towards this
and might not know the lingo what's safe, might feel uncomfortable.
We just need to get better.
Jeremy Wertz: And this also applies to professors, if you are a
professor who thinks that time and a half or double time, you know,
takes advantage in the test or people cheating it, it's not on me as a
disabled person to make you feel better.
You're the professor design a test in which time doesn't matter.
That's not that hard to do.
The onus is on you, you know, that's -- people can do those things
and if you really think you can do that.
Go ahead and do that and don't put the pressure on me as a person
with a disability to make a change, because that's not where we
should put the onus, that's not how justice works that's not how
anything should work.
That's my comments for the day.
I know we're going to go to the Q&A section but I also one more time
want to highlight Maria and Ellie both in Law School it's important.
We listen to a lot of law students in these events and hear about their
experiences and amplify them and I appreciate them being on this call, and sharing their experiences I learned a lot.
And I'm sure you did too.
A.J., I'm excited to hear what everybody thinks

>> AJ Link: Thank you to all of our panelists and thank you for sharing your stories and being so open about it.
I know that I've talked to Jeremy several times, and we both feel it's really important, for people to just see that disabled Folx, are amazing, and are wonderful, can do things and to have that representation, is so important.
So I really appreciate, all of you sharing.
There are quite a few questions in the chat.
So, the first one -- is, do you have suggestions of how to help students navigate exams such as the LSAT and accommodations in light of COVID-19?
And I'll open that up to anyone.

FROM THE FLOOR:
Jeremy Wertz: I can jump in if Maria or Ellie don't have any thoughts, so I think navigating the LSAT ore MPRE is challenging, I think one these organizations I'll say it are working, you know, LSAT in particular is working with -- and also trying to figure out how to do this, but mixed results, my realistic advice is to start early, apply for accommodations earlier than you think.
Hit the ground running -- is as frustrating to say, I wish you could wait until your peers, are worrying about those things but unfortunately nowadays you need to start it earlier than that to get your accommodations in place, but don't panic, don't let it seem like this overburden that's too high to get.

A lot of people are going through what you're going through. There's a great community of support online. Facebook group, which I think A.J. can post in the chat. Is phenomenal place, to just be -- surrounded by other people with disabilities, going through the same thing, gives some words of encouragement or figure out how to navigate any individual problems, feel free to also e-mail me. I can put my -- my e-mail in the chat, Jeremy.water heaters at NDLSA.org, and we can chat about individual concerns about paperwork or how to navigate.

What to ask and not ask for, but the the one thing I say is you can do it and I know a pandemic is a unique challenge, but I can say being a person with a disability, gives you unique resiliency, we're used to challenges, being able to work for the extra mile, even though we shouldn't.

Now the the pandemic, extra strength comes and it's an inherent haven't, it doesn't seem fair and right, because it's not. But you can do it. I encourage you to go to Law School, become a lawyer, become one of us, so we can fight to make this whole better
Ellie Cowan: My feedback, too, would be make sure you use your resources. I use the educational access center at my undergrad school and my advisor there was superhelpful. The other thing that I would suggest anybody with a disability moving forward into Law School is document, document, document record when you sent the e-mail, when you made the phone call, when you left the message, and you keep everything. That has saved me more often than not, I can't stress that enough, but make sure you're using the resources that you've reached out to and also the Facebook group, our EAC, wherever you can find somebody who has a knowledge of that.

Ellie Cowan: I know that even the -- the educational access Center at my previous Law School, was willing to help the accommodations wasn't as knowledgeable, but there was a person there with masters in special education, and she was also on top of helping that.

Ask questions, find out early.

Maria Zavaleta: Yeah, I definitely echo what Jeremy and Ellie are saying use your resources start early.

I remember for the LSAT I actually was told that I had to wait until the next cycle because I guess it was past the date when you're supposed to submit the request for accommodations. So make sure to check, when that deadline is. That way it's not something that -- that will surprise you.

When you -- you know, when you're ready to send your
documentation for the LSAT.
As far as the MPRE for example, I'm trying to seek my accommodations.
There's a section, where they ask for your test scores, for the ACT, the SAT, and -- I took those exams, like, ten years ago, but on the topic of being resourceful, I actually outreached through my undergraduate institution.

Because I thought maybe they would have those test scores, and they did.
So, you know, think outside the box, in that sense, and reach out to your disability services center; and career counselors

AJ Link: Great thank you the next question is a 4-part question so I'll try not to be too confusing the first part is how many of your professors have come out as people with disabilities?
And how important is that to you, as a student?
The second part is: Do you find that other students are open, about being students with disabilities in your institutions?
The third part is, how can professors create a supportive community?
And the last part is students can be powerful lobbyists for disability law curriculum.
Do your law schools have robust programs and if not, how have you advanced this issue?
I'll open that up to anyone

>> Ellie Cowan: To anyone.
Maria Zavaleta: I personally -- sorry, Ellie you can go.

Ellie Cowan: I haven't had any professors at Law School personally disclose to me. I did have some at undergrad.

But, I did have some professors that reached out at the beginning of spring Semester and said, "If you didn't do as good as you should have done, and -- is there a disability that you should have disclosed and gotten accommodations for, please do that."

It was not all of my professors, but it was more of a -- this is an acceptable thing, don't be afraid of it. However, if you went to have an individual talk with them regarding it, they were much more standoffish. They're very afraid of that, like, I spoke earlier, the FERPA and the violation of anonymity for grading purposes and everything else and so that's still not dealt well.

My university did not have any kind of student organization, or anything like that to go to.

Ellie Cowan: (Continuing), I think how the professors and stuff could be more supportive in the community: Is -- is, being able to have some resources, to understand where that FERPA, HIPAA, line is, to be able to talk.

And disclose.

I think for me it feels very ridiculous that you wouldn't be able to acknowledge some things that might come up in class, you know, if you're going to have ticks or something else or seizures the teacher
might want to know that so they're not as shocked if something happens.
There are good disclosures, I did disclose to one of my professors saying ADD I'm focusing on class, so I may not raise my hand as much.
Can I come after class to ask sections and they said, let's set up a meeting.
Some of them are receptive.
Digest depends on their overall experience, for me I find that's what's missing, until you have an experience with a disability or you know somebody with it, you don't understand all the things they're going through, and so they're unable to relate and they just kind of blow it off, especially if it's an invisible disability.

>> Maria Zavaleta:
   -- sorry.
   >> Ellie Cowan:  What was the fourth one, A.J.?
   >> A.J. Link:  (On mute).
   >> You're on mute, A.J.
   >> A.J. Link:  I almost made it through the whole thing without doing thereat that.
The fourth part is students can be powerful lobbyists for a curriculum, does your Law School have a robust program and if not how have you tried to advance, this issue.
   >> Ellie Cowan:  Even educating about it at my last Law School program, was seen as confrontational and disrespectful.
But they were teaching us to be advocates, so that is complicated there.

However, I'm getting ready to start. They reached out to me this morning to tell me good luck with this conference and everything else, and they are much more supportive and open, they have a disability rights class.

I'm not sure about all the curriculum because I'm new, but they have some different pieces there, that they're willing to work with certain opportunities, based on my interest to provide opportunities for me.

AJ Link: I will allow, the speakers to answer that if they want to

>> Jeremy Wertz: Sorry, I think Ellie crushed it entirely. I want to add two or three quick things, one representation is incredibly important.

I think hiring professors with disabilities, also administrators with disabilities in the -- in the disability advocacy office is incredibly important.

But for professors, who are not disabled, you know, I challenge you to bring disability as a perspective in the classroom. You know, for three years in Law School, you know, if we had a -- a case that dealt with race.

Gender. You know, any of these other issues, and negative or positive ways, that was a center theme of the discussion.

I cannot tell you once, about a time when a professor talked about when disability -- talked about a case, a negative or positive
way that brought that into the discussion, think about torts, torts is an entire area of law, where we're valuing, oftentimes monetarily, about how their life is made worse because they became disabled. And some of the cases are so horribly written and not a single time did a professor ever go hey, lest take a step back and think about this. What does this mean for the disabled community, ableism, is this an ableist opinion, and I think professors can challenge students notions and maybe students who have not thought about this before can think about it for the first time and make students feel comfortable to talk about their own experience, and bring their own insights and I think that's what the Socratic method is supposed to do. And professors need to take the onus in doing that. The other thing I will say, is how many students, feel comfortable being open about their disability on campus? No. I think -- when I was at Harvard one program that we started, really encouraged every administrator to duplicate, is when you have to request, the accommodations it can feel incredibly adversarial, you often have to go to a room, at our school it could go all the way to the dean of students, the person who makes the decision, if you got an accommodation, you you don't have to prove that you are disabled and you deserve the accommodation, it's framed in the rights, in the conversation, it can feel very tough to do that. We don't expect -- if I'm going to pass the bar, and become a lawyer if I ever have any issue, I don't ever expect to represent myself at court,
because you’re never your best advocate when you’re having to articulate these things.

So we would provide student allies we would call them. Going into the meetings and articulate on the student's behalf, and carry that conversation forward, and be able push, actually had much better outcomes on both sides when we had the advocates in place, I only mention this because during my years there, I personally represented the student advocate for 92, 93 students. And I would see them in the halls and we both knew we were both disabled and I would say of that, maybe 10 were comfortable acknowledging their disability, and even showing up to a disabled law students meeting or to meet outside of those rooms, but as soon as, you know -- and incredibly vital those resources existed, but I think it talks about how much more we have to go that students feel comfortable being themselves on campus, and I would always talk about that to professors, deans in Law School because I don't think people understand that delta and how challenging that is. Right?

Like, imagine being an environment like Law School, talking about these issues, being challenged, you know, to think things broadly and you don't even feel comfortable amongst your peers about this core identity of yourself, and to me it is a challenge to all of us in the community, that people feel comfortable being themselves on campus.

>> Ellie Cowan: I think just knowing there is a support there, even if you don't access it, there's somebody to talk to.
The other point that I would make for that, I see as an issue, there are the people making the decisions like the dean of students, or the dean of accommodations who have no training, in any of this area, there's nothing, that is systemically required.

To have that role.

And they're making decisions, based on their limited experience, that may be contrary to what the doctors are saying.

And, that's a discussion, that needs to happen.

As well.

Maria Zavaleta: I was just going to add that, on my particular campus, it took me being tired of the status quo, and starting an organization, with other students, I reached out to -- some Folx that I knew, would be, you know, in -- willing to do it with me, and, you know, in the process of starting an organization, for students, with disabilities.

But, you know, I feel like -- yes, it's difficult to open up about that aspect of your identity, when there's such a big stigma.

And I think that, you know, like, the -- that rule where you can't disclose anything to professors, makes it difficult for students, to just be more, yes, we're resourceful, but it just cuts our wings when we can't even speak to our professors about certain things.

I remember there was an instance, where we had quizzes, in a particular class, and I -- the professor, thought that by making it untimed it was going to accommodate for everybody.

Maria Zavaleta: And, you know, just extended time is not the only
accommodation that students require, and so, you know, eventually, I -- I was able to speak to the professor and they accommodated me, and I was able to test by myself per my accommodations, but, you know, some other student, who also has ADHD or any other disability, may not have done that.

And I don't think that it should be, an individual student, getting -- you know, who is -- more open about themselves -- this aspect of their identity speaking up and them getting accommodations. I think it should be more established and everybody had access to have their accommodations so, yeah, as far as the student -- students being advocates amongst each other, I think that sometimes, yeah, it takes, you know, maybe the school should have an organization, and if they fear that there's not going to be enough members, then that also tells them something about their outreaching.

You know, like, you need to be recruiting more students with disabilities.

And then, there's going to be people that are going to be on these, you know, organizations.

So, yeah, there's -- it's a very holistic approach that needs to be taken.

>> AJ Link: I think that's a great way to end that question, Maria, because the next question, is -- do you think law schools when they're talking about diversity, need to be making more of an emphasis on students with disabilities, and do you think it would be
good to do that?
But also, before we get into that question, that's for all the panelists, I would say if you're a student on this call, the National Disabled Law Students association does have resources for folks. So I'll look into that too.

>> Jeremy Wertz: I can jump in here real quick, I think it is important for every lawyer, or administrator or law professor on this call, to recognize, and educate yourself why this is such a problem. You know, I am surprised, you know, that this isn't more common knowledge, so I figured this out the hard way, so when I was applying for Law School, and in undergrad the first thing, I ever heard of you have a disability from Berkeley's disabled student office, and you want to go to Law School I hate to be the one to bear the bad news because you should pick a different career because the LSAT is a huge barrier and they don't provide accommodations and if they do provide accommodations, they flag your test score and it's not going to be looked at the same.
It was a very difficult thing to hear as a 19-year-old in undergrad when I really wanted to go to Law School my whole life.
And in turn the Department of Justice, civil rights section when they were suing the LSAC, and finally settled and all that got changed. Those changes didn't get implemented until 2015, 2016, really me and A.J.'s year, to be able to graduate represented the first wave of students, who were finally past this bar, the barrier placed by the LSAC, and I think it's really important for law schools to recognize the
systemic injustice that was going on for decades, with the LSAT, that prevented people like me, and -- our panelists here from getting to Law School.

It wasn't anything -- less studious, we didn't want to be lawyers. It was a barrier in place, and law schools need to recognize their role in it, validating the LSAT as your ticket to get to Law School and need to make sure they're providing new resources and extra, you know, recruitment efforts to make sure that refilling those numbers and making sure we get equal representation in the legal community and make up for the years of being behind, and I had -- a lot of law schools, wrote what I thought was a great letter, application, essay, worked three months, told all the story -- and I got on the first call with a Law School that won't be named and, like, this didn't happen.

This Law School -- LSAT provided accommodations and -- I had to Google, like, the Law School and send it to this interviewer in the middle of my Law School application interview to confirm I wasn't just making up the story, and I think it's something I've told to professors, administrators and deans, I think they're just not aware this was going on.

Which, again, is surprising to me, but I think it's important we all recognize.

The role we all played in getting where we're at.

And how we need to fix that, but I think, I'll pass it to Ellie and Maria, to provide better resources on how you actually get that recruitment done.
Ellie Cowan: You want to go first, Maria?

>> Maria Zavaleta: You know, I think that, you know, schools will make the argument that they can't straight-up ask somebody, right? About a disability.

Which is -- you know, true but if somebody comes to you, to your table, and tells you, I have this disability.

What does your -- what resources does your school have? For me?

As a prospective student, that is thinking about attending your school. You know, you should -- you know, that tells you that the student is seeking support as a prospective applicant.

And, you know,

Also, if you don't have any resources for them, then that also -- you need to critically start considering changes to your school. You know, but, you know, I think that, there's this other part of stigma, to -- to outreaching students, where for some reason, some people say that,

If you have a disability, it's not -- it's not part of diversity, which, I think, is ridiculous.

The first time I heard that argument, I was, like, what are you talking about?

And, you know, that's something else, that needs to be changed in people's perspectives, Lucas it's not true. You know, so,

I think, people need -- people who are in these admissions, outreach committees, need to be better-trained.
As to how to, you know, talk to students who have disabilities, how to outreach, for students with disabilities, even the schools, themselves, need to, like, have the resources that -- in order to, actually, be able to support students, once they are at their institutions

And I think they're only doing themselves a disservice if they don't outreach to students, who have disabilities.

>> Ellie Cowan: I would just add to that, as -- as a disabled students, we need to make sure we are presenting ourselves not as a victim or not as somebody looking for a handout. But as an Advocate for equity and access to Education. And, that we're trying to promote knowledgeable resources, and expand everybody's knowledge and experience, when dealing with these things.

If you come off as a victim, and angry, it -- it just diminishes everything you're moving forward. And that's not to say there's not going to be 100 times that you're going to want to quit and that you're going to cry and stomp your feet and need a gallon of ice cream. It happens to all of us, but the attitude, with which you present yourself, and that you are who you are, and you're just moving this forward,

Is -- makes a difference, and how you feel about yourself, and present yourself, because you're not -- you don't need somebody to feel sorry for you and do this, this is a legitimate issue,
That would be the part, that we have to be responsible for and while you can advocate, you don't have to be combative.

(AJ Link.) great!

Thank you so much.

There are so many wonderful questions and I'm so sorry, if I can't get to -- get to all of them, so...

It's really hard.

AJ Link: Yeah, I don't know, I'm so sorry that I'm not prepared to pick one. This is just a comment that turns into a question, I find it discouraging of students, of the requirement of needing to have an up to date evaluation to show proof of disability.

It is not, A, it's not possible, oftentimes, with COVID-19, cannot be done online; and C, it goes against the ADA Section 504, definition of disability. A person should not have to prove, again, that they have a disability.

I guess maybe if you could talk more about the battle of trying to prove that you're disabled.

Kind of obstacles you face in person.

Ellie Cowan: Do you want me to take that one?

I don't want to keep jumping in here, but I know for me, my disabilities are invisible, and so it's very hard.

I -- I assume others have similar experiences that when you're dealing with anxiety and auditory processing, learning disabilities -- and such -- that they assume that everybody has these.

They're just made-up thing.

And so, finding a support person at the school that does not have a bias
against it, in the first place,
And will believe the documentation.
Is -- is really hard.
Ellie Cowan: And... that's -- it's just a struggle.
I know that my doctors were getting really irritated with how many times I was having to come back for additional documentation.
And they -- eventually, told the school that it seems like there's a discrimination issue going on here, with you not applying accommodations and we have a duty to report.
And so -- and after that things started to move a little bit better; but it's a battle with -- with knowledge, and stigma of what people believe are a true disability, and what needs help and what doesn't.
AJ Link: Thank you so much.
I think that's -- we're getting close to time.
So, we will try to wrap this up.
I just want to thank, all the panelists, for sharing their stories,
And for being on here.
And I really appreciate it.
Also thank you to everyone who tuned in, just know that, I personally -- I posted the links to some resources in the chat, if you want to check at out.
If you're looking for community or any other kind of resources, so thank you for joining us for this free webinar, we would also like to express our gratitude to the esteemed group of panelists, you can tell I'm reading the thing now, because I already said that.
You are all doing such critical work, and we thank you to taking the time out
of your schedule to share your experiences, the section of civil rights, and social justice provides free webinars and resources, to legal professionals and advocates nationwide.

We hope this helps you and your work, and, again, if you can please consider joining and becoming active in the ABA.

You may do so at AMBAR.org/CRSJ, you can find information on other free programs on the CRSJ Web Page.

Best of luck to everyone and your work, and please stay safe!

Thank you for tuning in!

(AJ Link)