

The Essential Functions of the Position

**Investigating Collegiality and Productivity
for Faculty with Mental Disabilities**

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Mental disabilities in college (U.S.)

- Nearly half (46%) of college students in 2008 reported having experienced some psychiatric disorder in the previous year.
 - Alcohol use disorders
 - Personality disorders
 - Anxiety disorders
 - Mood disorders
- This study does not include disorders such as autism, AD/HD, or learning disabilities.

(Blanco et al.)

The dropout rate of students in college with diagnosed psychiatric disorders is 86%.

Reliable numbers are not available for faculty.

(Collins & Mowbray)

Terminology

- Psychiatric disability
- Mental illness
- Cognitive disability
- Intellectual disability
- Mental retardation
- Mental health service user / consumer
- Neurodiversity / neuroatypical
- Psychiatric system survivor
- Mad

“Mental disability” as an umbrella term denoting rhetorical disability

“Despite the varieties of and differences among mental impairments, this collective category focuses attention on the problem of gaining **rhetoricity** to the mentally disabled: that is, rhetoric’s received tradition of emphasis on the individual rhetor who produces speech/writing, which in turn confirms the existence of a fixed, core self, imagined to be located in the mind.”

Even within disability studies, rhetoricity is generally granted only to persons who can “meet the tests of liberal subjectivity.” (Lewiecki-Wilson)

Academic culture

Your mind is your instrument

Agile minds

Able minds

Kairos

- “The opportune or appropriate time” (general translation).
- May include not only timing, but other contextual features such as physical space, attitude, and ethics (Sheard).

Infrastructure

“Infrastructure means something more than a static, installed base. ... To ignore infrastructure is to miss key moments when meaning and value become stabilized (if even for a moment), and therefore to miss moments when possibilities and identities are established.” (Grabill)

A classroom’s infrastructure comprises not only its technologies (tables, chairs, computers), but also the beliefs, discourses, and unspoken norms that prevail there.

Kairotic space

Characterized by **all or most** of these criteria:

- Real-time unfolding of events
- Impromptu communication required or encouraged
- In-person contact
- Strong social element
- High stakes

The key element is the pairing of spontaneity with high levels of professional/academic impact.

Characteristic kairotic spaces in academe

- Meetings
- Conferences
- Colloquia and other presentations
- Classrooms
- Job search interviews
- Job search campus visits

Kairotic spaces tend to be under-studied, especially by those who navigate them with relative ease.

Common *topoi* that emerged from this study of kairotic spaces

- Rationality
- Criticality
- Presence
- Participation
- Resistance
- Productivity
- Collegiality
- Security
- Coherence
- Truth
- Independence

The essential functions of the employment position

A “qualified individual with a disability” is one who “with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position that such individual holds or desires.”

(Americans with Disabilities Act)

“Reasonable” accommodations

- A. “Making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities; and
- B. “Job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position, acquisition or modification of equipment or devices, appropriate adjustment or modification of examinations, training materials or policies, the provision of qualified readers or interpreters, and other similar accommodations”

(Americans with Disabilities Act)

**Is it possible that fluency in
kairotic space *is* an essential
function of an academic
position?**

Collegiality

Is collegiality a fourth category, to be added to scholarship/teaching/service? Or is it, as the AAUP argues, evidenced through the “successful execution” of one’s obligations in scholarship, teaching, and service?

Collegiality may be used as a means to ostracize or eliminate minoritized faculty members—i.e., as “an excuse, code, for prejudices of various sorts” (Dubrow).

“Difficult” faculty members

“We aren’t therapists (or saints) and cannot solve serious personal troubles. And we need skilled professional help if our colleagues’ problems include **addiction, mental illness, or violent behavior**. But we are entrusted with the public life of our departments; we can and should enforce collegial norms there. Mentoring, supporting productive teachers or researchers, and troubleshooting for faculty members in crisis are all more important than managing difficult faculty members.” (Wells)

Collegiality is a social and hence kairotic phenomenon

- Eat together
- Social events
- Potlucks
- Social time in department meetings
- Prom

(“Collegiality: Statements”)

Interviews and campus visits

It is important to appear both “charming” and “calm” (Rose)

Behaviors that may attend mental disability include

- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty making eye contact
- Stimming (i.e., self-soothing repetitive behaviors such as tapping)
- Difficulty processing oral/aural information
- Difficulty attaching faces to names

“A meeting can be a disaster for someone on the [autism] spectrum.”

(Avinger et al.)

Studies of job candidates' performance tend to count kairotic fluency as a primary or determining factor

- Performance in interviews, colloquia and teaching demonstrations
- “Personality”
- “Candidate’s ability to get along with other faculty”
- “Interpersonal interactions”

(Sheehan et al.; Broughton & Conlogue)

What indeed are the “essential functions” of the position of faculty member in higher education?

Are we happy with our established systems for measuring these functions?

If not, how might we begin to create change?

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