

EDUCATION

Disability Studies: Hot Topic on Campus

By MELISSA KORN

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Disability, the subject of new federal hiring guidelines set to take effect this month, is already a hot topic on the campus of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

The school created a formal concentration on disability studies in 2009, but has recently been scrambling to keep up with growing student demand.

It now offers eight courses that draw more than 300 students, up from just one class five years ago.

For the Final Paper

Discuss challenges that may impact employers with returning veterans who have disabilities, and how employers can prepare for these challenges. Include a description of current national initiatives and examples of specific companies' responses.

Choose a particular facet of the employment process—recruitment or performance management—and describe in depth how companies can appropriately measure their success when it comes to the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Source: Prof. Susanne Bruyère

This spring's roster includes classes on disability and employment policies, disability law and even a writing seminar on "intersections of disability identity in the law, workplace and society."

More than one-third of students in the concentration have a family member with a disability, said Thomas P. Golden, associate director of Cornell's Employment and Disability Institute.

"They come with provocative questions like, 'Why did my dad have to leave the workplace?' Or 'How do I help my sibling experience the quality of life that I'm

going to experience as a result of my career?' " Mr. Golden said.

The program isn't all compliance and regulation.

"Disability Considerations in HR Policy and Practice," a course taught by Susanne Bruyère, the school's associate dean of outreach and director of the Employment and Disability Institute, also addresses the strategic advantages of employing people with disabilities, such as helping companies appeal to new markets.

The class features guest speakers from the federal government, Royal Dutch Shell PLC and Merck & Co, among others.

Reading assignments are culled from academic journals and business magazines.

For their final papers, students are asked to discuss topics including the impact of the aging

workforce on employers, how companies can accommodate returning veterans and what challenges multinational firms might face in implementing nondiscrimination regulations across borders.

Outside the classroom, students are sometimes required to interview workers with disabilities to learn how they deal with the daily grind.

The surge in interest is fortuitous, Ms. Bruyère said, as federal contractors will soon have to comply with new guidelines for hiring disabled workers.

The government has set a goal for people with disabilities to make up at least 7% of employees in every job group.

—"On the Syllabus" is an occasional look at new and newly relevant courses at business schools around the world.

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