1) **Can you briefly share your journey into librarianship and how your disability identity perspective has shaped that path? (start with Brittni and move to Katie, Brad)**

Hi everyone, this is Brittni speaking. I'm a white woman in my mid-30s with shoulder length wavy brown hair, green bangs, and rose-tinted glasses. I'm joining you today from my home office in Baltimore County, Maryland.

I was in my first year of graduate school, pursuing an MA in English Literature, when I discovered librarianship as a possible career. My background was public middle and high school English teaching, followed by for-profit tutoring, a short stint at a video game development studio, then office administration for a religious non-profit. I left my graduate degree in the College of Liberal Arts because it was proving the stereotypical R1 experience with faculty and peers both presenting as highly competitive, solo researchers who did not value or enjoy teaching appointments. When I went on to work with my English graduate student peers at the end of my first year in library school, as the librarian assigned to support their ENGL 102 students, they often remarked:

Wow, that was so smart to switch. A part of me thinks I should do the same, so I can get a library job and then be paid to finish my PhD and eventually become a professor.

These experiences didn't necessarily have anything to do with my disability identity because I did not yet identify as disabled, but they nonetheless impacted my well-being and my path to the profession. The English program was entirely on-site whereas the MLIS program was hybrid. On-campus courses required me to complete a one-hour commute with a bus switch, whereas online courses… did not. This became super important when I had my first surgery, an emergency surgery, the summer after my first year in library school. I was taking two summer courses and had to take a temporary Incomplete in one of them, to be completed in addition to my other coursework the next semester. Ultimately, that surgery and the subsequent Incomplete were my first official welcome into chronic illness and dynamic disability. When I considered what kind of roles I would pursue post-graduation, I knew telework similar to distance learning would be essential. In fact, I decided to specialize in distance learning! My approach proved successful: When, during Summer 2021, I requested telework as my first official ADA accommodation, my job description duties serving distance teachers and learners was a critical point in my favor.

2) **How does interpersonal and/or internalized ableism or assumptions about what librarian "should" be affect opportunities or perceptions in the field? (start with Brad, Brittni, Katie)**

Let me start with a lighthearted example: We all know librarians are assumed book lovers and avid readers; I am both. However, I read ebooks almost exclusively. I will occasionally read a print book for pleasure, but if I'm reading something academic it has to be electronic. I need to be able to adjust the color scheme, font, and text size, and I don't want to struggle with awkward, heavy print books. I find handwriting notes on print books painful and tiring, not to mention I struggle to keep print papers organized. This personal reality was another factor that

pushed me into distance learning librarianship. The main impact of this assumption is that books given out during book clubs or as rewards are print. However, across all of education, assumptions about active reading or notetaking are far more serious, with professors to this day still enforcing ableist no-laptop requirements in class and teaching that digital reading is inherently inferior to print reading.

More seriously, as a liaison librarian, there is an expectation that successful outreach and marketing of services leads to increased library sessions and consultations. This isn't always the case, for a lot of reasons. It certainly isn't the case for distance learners in asynchronous courses, where a successful module, digital learning object, and / or library guide should allow such learners to help themselves without an additional meeting with the librarian. That said, during my second performance review, after my first on-the-job surgery, my lower numbers—reflecting five weeks of leave and additional weeks with reduced hours—were responsible for my receiving a Meets Expectation versus Exceeds Expectations. When I asked whether my quality of work or prioritization of projects was the reason I met expectations, a supervisor at that time answered simply that I had missed too much work, which kept me from fully supporting my liaison area. Furthermore, if I did the same things next years without needing as much leave, I would get an Exceeds Expectation for sure.

That may have been meant to be encouraging, but as someone who has had a total of four surgeries during my six years of employment, not needing leave is actually an impossible goal to achieve.

3) **Do you feel represented in the library field? Why or why not? How can the profession better support disabled librarians—especially those with intersecting marginalized identities? (start with Katie, Brad, Brittni)**

I was my supervisor's first direct report to request official ADA accommodations. That was in 2021, just four years ago! That's wild to me. Did we really not have any librarians who needed accommodations, or did we just not have a respectful and inclusive enough culture for disabled librarians to even try requesting accommodations? Regardless, in those four years, I do feel more represented in the library than I do in higher education.

I am the co-founder and co-chair of my university's Disability, Neurodivergence, and Chronic Illness Faculty and Staff Association. My library colleagues are some of the most active members of that group, both at the librarian-faculty level and staff level. The library also has an Accessibility Team with members from every department and four—soon to be five—of those members have their IAAP Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies credentials. Regardless of whether these individuals identify as disabled, neurodivergent, or chronically ill, they are members of the disability community and advocates.

However, the same cannot be said of other colleges or support offices. Faculty participation in the Disability+ FSA significantly lags behind staff participation, and I know based on direct communication with faculty that they do not see any benefit to being associated with the group let alone pursuing disability scholarship or service. One colleague, who IS a member of the group, recently published a piece on slow scholarship in which they discuss their experiences

as a disabled academic. However, that brilliant, 15-page piece doesn't contribute to their application for promotion and tenure because writing on lived experience doesn't qualify as scholarship.

Admittedly, none of this addresses the additional difficulties of getting, keeping, and moving up in a job that are faced by those with multiple non-dominant identities. As a white librarian with more economic stability than the rest of my family, I take seriously the call to use my privilege to shine a light on inequalities in librarianship and academia. This includes disclosing, presenting on, and writing about my disability identity despite having non-apparent disabilities. I encourage other gallery, library, archives, and museum workers, especially those at the manager and administrator level, who have similar privileges to do the same. In this way, we can normalize sharing access needs and discussing barriers while helping all librarians thrive.

4) **What advice would you give to new or aspiring librarians and library workers with disabilities charting their course in this field? Any initiatives, tools, or networks that you've found particularly helpful? (start with Brittni, Katie, Brad)**

My single most important bit of advice is to find your people. Start in your library. If you're lucky, you were hired as one of a cohort and those cohort members will be your first community. You'll connect on any variety of issues, from hobbies and onboarding difficulties to identities and professional goals.

You can also connect with your library's inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility or IDEA committee; assuming membership on those committees is determined by interest or volunteer appointment, they should share similar values and are the most likely colleagues to be future collaborators, allies, and advocates.

Then move to looking for your people on campus. My most successful strategy at the campus level is to join or launch your institution's affinity group or employee resource group on disability. Founding the Disability, Neurodivergence, and Chronic Illness Faculty and Staff Association is my greatest achievement and my sincerest wish for fellow disabled, neurodivergent, and chronically ill employees. These groups strengthen recruitment and retention, helping potential employees make more informed decisions as well as supporting current employees while laying the groundwork for deeper policy change. And for those seeking to make change in a care-full and sustainable way, forming or joining an affinity group can be quite the catalyst, building solidarity, amplifying marginalized voices, and creating momentum for lasting institutional shifts.

Finally, look for your people in this profession across the country. Especially for folks in functional roles, you may be the only person doing what you do, so finding colleagues who understand the job will go a long way in helping your address positional difficulties. This is where ALA Divisions, such as ACRL and RUSA, can help. Beyond providing practical guidance, these colleagues will be essential contacts if / when you are searching for your next job. The main reason anyone leaves a job is because of culture, and that is especially true for employees with non-dominant identities: You don't want to leave one place because it was exclusionary only to move to a place that is just as, if not even more, exclusionary. That is where your

colleagues across the country can be beneficial, because you can ask them for the honest truth about what it's like to work at their library.

5) **What can library leadership do to move beyond the "fear of getting it wrong" and towards systemic support for disabled library workers? (start with Katie, Brad, Brittni)**

Everyone needs to start by celebrating their humanity. We are humans and we will get it wrong, and that's ok because: Mistakes are proof you're trying. As educators—and all gallery, library, archives, and museum workers are a kind of educator—we know that growing our edges and learning something new, is uncomfortable, so a little discomfort (within that zone of proximal development, right?) is in fact a good thing. But you can minimize the severity and number of mistakes by educating yourself through ongoing participation in workshops like this one. In this way, you can unlearn ableism and the larger system of imperialist white supremacist heteropatriarchy that we all struggle against.

Something else worth keeping in mind: Accommodations aren't inclusion, and compliance with legal requirements isn't accessibility. Accommodations are exceptions in the environment, schedule, or policies that allow a disabled person to participate, but those accommodations are reactive: The disabled person has to ask for them. And although legal requirements expressed in the ADA help ensure physical and digital spaces are open to disabled people, they aren't always specific enough, current enough, or enforced enough to facilitate full or equitable participation. For library leadership, this means perhaps moving toward a documentation free model of accommodation. Yes, there are state-wide or enterprise-wide hurdles like ever-changing government policies and offices of human resources guidelines. At my university, for instance, approved ADA accommodations like a sit-to-stand desk or ergonomic office chair are paid for by a special budget line, separate from the library's budget. But I challenge budget decisionmakers and managers to ask themselves: What are the things in your control that you can do to move the needle away from that approach?

In practice: All new employees should be asked, what do you need to participate fully and succeed at work? This might include having an ergonomics staff person visit a new employee at their desk and see how they move around in the space, facilitating questions around speech-to-text software if someone has a limb difference, under-desk footrests if a person is short, and so forth. Making conversations about access needs commonplace creates space for disabled and non-disabled workers to ask for the equipment they want and the workflows they need.