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## Assisting Law Students With Disabilities in the 21st Century

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# ASSISTING LAW STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY\*

## WELCOME REMARKS

### BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

**DAVID JAFFE\*\***: Good morning. Welcome to this rainy March day. My name is David Jaffe. I am Dean of Students at American University Washington College of Law and will be your host for our conference this year.

In 2007, when the Washington College of Law hosted this conference for the second time, I recall a member from the audience suggesting, during an afternoon panel, that we modify the conference title, “Assisting Law Students With Disabilities,” the notion being that it implied in yet another forum that students with disabilities not only require ongoing assistance lest they fail in their mission while in law school, but that we need an entire day full of experts to address their particular challenges and concerns. I have returned to that comment time and again the last couple of years as I do now by way of welcome to each of you this morning. For, as WCL hosts this conference now for the fourth time and we see interest in the area only increasing over time, I am convinced that the comment was both on point and not so much.

I agree that we should not be suggesting that law students with disabilities need extra support and additional care—and if the inference is there, we need to address it. I am equally confident, however, that as I welcome you this morning, a law professor somewhere contemplates a no-laptop policy in his classroom, intending to invite any student who is entitled to a laptop as an accommodation to use it during the ban, thereby invading the privacy of that student. Or that an in-class quiz will be

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\* The transcript of the *Invisible Disabilities* panel has been omitted.

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announced, creating tremendous anxiety for those students who are entitled to receive additional time as they try to figure out what to do on a moment's notice. Or a sign-in/sign-out sheet is going to be monitored during a final exam, leading a professor to ask why John didn't sit for that final. Or a resource is going to be introduced, whether mandatory or optional, that cannot be accessed by certain students due to specific challenges. I am seeing nods. Some of this sounds familiar, I can see, to some of you out there.

And we are talking about fairly well-informed individuals here. Everyone is extremely busy in their comings and goings, and these so-called attentions to detail are often overlooked, even by the best intended. This conference, then, is not to assist law students with their challenges, rather it is to assist us, the frontline folks, with our charge to do the very best we can to level the proverbial playing field and allow each of our students to compete to the best of his or her ability. My hat is off to each of you for taking the time to be here today and to learn what can be done to improve the lives of our students and future attorneys. I thank you for being here as I thank the Dean of the Washington College of Law, Claudio Grossman, who is presently away raising money for a new building that we hope to build in the next couple of years, and sends his regrets. Claudio, year in and year out and without hesitation, allows us the space and the financial support to host this event and to discuss these topics of mutual interest.

Our goal today and going forward beyond today is a modest one: to ensure through the reflections provided by each of our experienced panelists that you leave with at least a bit more information than when you arrived this morning. To that end, I also want to thank Adeen Postar, Pence Law Library Deputy Director—she is in the back—who has once again gathered a terrific collection of resources on our topics that each of you will take with you at the end of the day.

I also would be remiss in not thanking in advance the ease with which our special events, IT, catering, and facilities offices improve our efforts on a daily basis, including today. So I look forward to meeting with many of you throughout the day and beyond. And again, good morning, welcome to the Washington College of Law.

I will now turn the first panel over to Myra Wilder.

**END TRANSCRIPT**