***Creating the New Narrative: Your Role in the future of Disability Service***

**Panelists Bio’s**

***Abstract:***

As DS providers, our job descriptions rarely speak to our greater commitment for, and role in, equity and inclusion. New and newer service providers can be inspired to become leaders and change agents by beginning the conference with an instructive and motivational discussion around these larger roles. Following a ‘*Call to the Field*," a panel of respected DS leaders will share their thoughts on entering disability services in a reflective, *what I wish I knew then* format, touching on topics such as: advocacy, policy, partnerships, diversity, leadership, and creating your dream career.

**Speaker and Moderator**

**Lisa Meeks, Ph.D.**

Dr. Meeks is on faculty with the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine where she is an Assistant Professor of Medicine and Director for Medical Student Disability Services. She is co-founder and President of the *Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education*and co-editor and an author of *The Guide to Assisting Students with Disabilities: Equal Access in Health Science and Professional Education*, the seminal text on inclusion of individuals with disabilities in health science programs. In addition to her work in Medical Education, Dr. Meeks is well known for her work with the Autism Spectrum Population and her research in popular media’s impact on lay individuals perceptions of disability.

In addition to her work in higher education, Dr. Meeks lends her expertise through trainings and policy development for educational and government organizations including the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the National Security Agency (NSA), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), Association of Academic Physiatrists (AAP), White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and the Association of Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD) where she co-chairs the special interest group on Graduate and Professional Education. Currently she is co-PI on an AAMC/UCSF grant investigating the ‘Lived Experience’ of physicians, residents and medical students with disabilities.

**Panelists: In order**

**Manju Banerjee, Ph.D. Universal Design and Research**

Manju Banerjee, Ph.D. is Vice President of Educational Research and Innovation, and Director of Landmark College Institute for Research and Training (LCIRT. Dr. Banerjee has over 29 years of experience in the field of learning disabilities, ADHD, and postsecondary disability services. She is a certified diagnostician and teacher-consultant on learning disabilities. She has published and presented extensively, both nationally and internationally, on topics such as, disability documentation and accommodations, technological competencies for postsecondary transition, online learning, and universal design. She has been and currently is PI/Co-PI on multiple federal, foundational, and NSF grants. She teaches a graduate level online course on *Universal Design: Principles and Practice*. Manju Banerjee is an editorial board member of the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability; LD: A Multi-Disciplinary Journal,* Professional Advisory Board member to the *Learning Disability Association of America*, and a consultant to *Educational Testing Service*. She received her doctoral degree from the Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut, on the application of universal design to high stakes assessment. See Dr. Banerjee’s clip on UDL at Landmark College: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HHvRzemuHA>

**Elisa Laird-Metke, JD Non-Traditional Route to DS and Publication**

Elisa Laird-Metke, JD is the Director of the Disability Resource Center at Samuel Merritt University in Oakland, CA. Elisa has an extensive background in law, disability, and public health. She has worked first as a university sign language interpreter and deaf services coordinator, and later as a disability rights attorney and public health policy attorney, before subsequently returning to work in higher education.

Elisa has served as a consultant and conducted trainings for AHEAD and multiple programs throughout the country. Her publications include a number of articles and chapters, including several in *The Guide to Assisting Students with Disabilities: Equal Access in Health Science and Professional Education*. Elisa also serves as Legal Advisor for the Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education.

**Michelle Rigler, Ed.D. ASD and Program Development**

Dr. Rigler is Director of the Disability Resource Center at UTC and co-founder of the Mosaic Program, a comprehensive program of support at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga (UTC) focused on the transition to college and career attainment for students on the spectrum. Her career in higher education focuses on creating equal access for students, faculty, staff, and visitors with disabilities. In her role at UTC, Dr. Rigler researches and develops best practices for working with students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

In partnership with colleagues, Dr. Rigler conducts trainings on ASD across the United States for colleges, universities, and private programs and specializes in consulting with Higher Education institutions regarding ASD focused program development and staff trainings. In addition to higher education based trainings, she has also conducted trainings for the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Association of Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD). Dr. Rigler is co-chair of AHEAD’s Special interest group for ASD and author of four part series on transitioning to college for students with ASD (Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

**Melanie Thornton, MA, Change practices/Change perspective**

Melanie Thornton is a trainer and consultant on several projects at UA CURRENTS. She provides professional development on topics related to leadership, disability, diversity, and design. She is very interested in working with organizations to create more accessible environments and to reframe perspectives of disability as an aspect of diversity. Prior to coming to UA CURRENTS, Melanie was the Associate Director of the Disability Resource Center and the Director of Project PACE at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

**Jen Duggar, The intersection of Disability and other diverse populations**

Jen Dugger is a seasoned Disability leader with over a decade of experience in the field. As the Director of the Disability Resource Center at Portland State University Jen is instrumental in ensuring accessibility at PSU. Through her leadership of the department and her work as co-chair of the Accessibility Committee and the Workgroup for Electronic Accessibility and Technology (WEAT), Jen ensures that students at PSU have access to all programs and services. Jen serves the greater disability community through her involvement in the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) as the co-chair of the LGBTQA Special Interest Group and as the co-chair of the Diversity Standing Committee.

Jen presented locally and nationally on topics of diversity, online accessibility, and the intersection of gender, sexuality, and disability. Jen says that the best part of her job is working to increase the capacity of faculty and staff to be able to see and understand disability as a component of diversity and to successfully address issues of accessibility and inclusion before a person with a disability has to request an accommodation.

**Bill Welsh, MA Assistive Technology**

Bill Welsh is a nationally recognized expert in disability services in higher education, with a leadership record that spans over twenty-two years. He is currently the Executive Director in the Office of Disability Services at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. In this position, Bill acts as the main resource on technical standards and issues related to disability matters which includes establishing university-wide policies, processes, procedures, best practices, strategic planning and vision for disability services and initiatives for all Rutgers Universities within the system. Bill also is a member of various university committees related to diversity, accessible facilities, and teaching and learning with technology.

Previously, Bill was the Director of the Office for Disability at Penn State University’s 24-campus system. In addition to his administrative roles, Bill consults with numerous colleges and universities throughout the country, assisting them with policy development and strategic plans for accessibility standards for web accessibility, instructional materials, video and multi-media captioning, online courses, and procurement. Bill also participated and served as an active member on several local, statewide and national advisory boards, including Pennsylvania’s State Leadership Team on Transition and advisor to the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network on Disabilities. He has also provided national presentations as well as national and international webinars on disability services, accessible technology and information, and universal design. Bill has co-authored and edited numerous articles and journals throughout his career.