

# **The Ethics of Accommodations for Social Work Students with Disabilities: Balancing Student, Program & Agency Needs**

**Dawn Hobdy**  
**hobdydm@gmail.com**

**Allan Barsky**  
**allanbarsky@gmail.com**

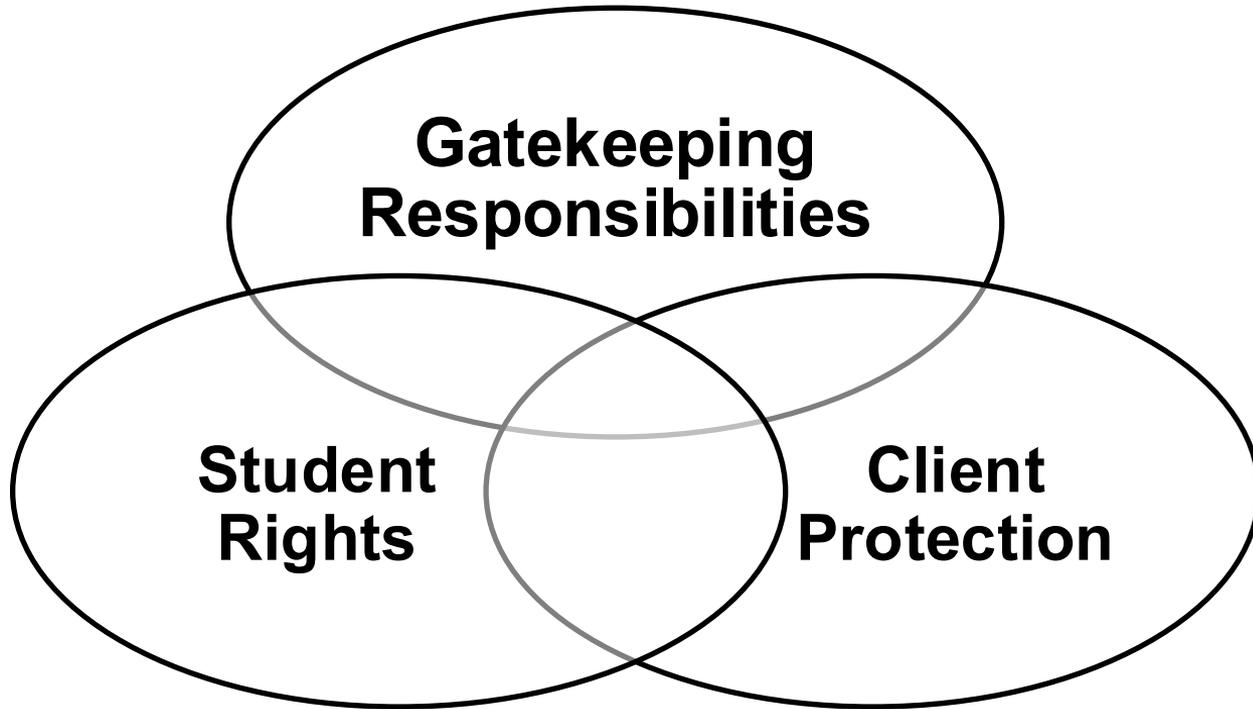
**Friday, February 27, 2026 from 3:15 to 4:30  
PM Room: Oak Alley  
BPD Conference, New Orleans, LA**



# Learning Objectives

- Clarify ethical, legal, and programmatic obligations for students with disabilities
- Manage real-world accommodation dilemmas
- Employ practical strategies for inclusive, respectful, empowering, and competence-based education

# Rationale for Today's Discussion



# Key Concepts

- Disability vs. Ability
- Disability Joy
- Accommodations
- Competency-Based Education
- Professional Readiness
- Inclusivity / Participation
- Equity
- Good Ethics vs. Legal Compliance

# Defining Disability - ADA

ADA defines a person with a disability as someone who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or
- Has a history or record of an impairment (such as cancer that is in remission), or
- Is regarded as having such an impairment by others even if the individual does not actually have a disability (such as a person who has scars from a severe burn that does not limit any major life activity).

## Defining disability - CDC

- any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions).

# Disability Dimensions

Impairment is a loss or abnormality in a body structure or function.

Activity limitation takes place at an individual level

Participation restriction involves a difficulty in engaging in life roles (e.g., employment).

# Types of Disabilities



PHYSICAL



COGNITIVE



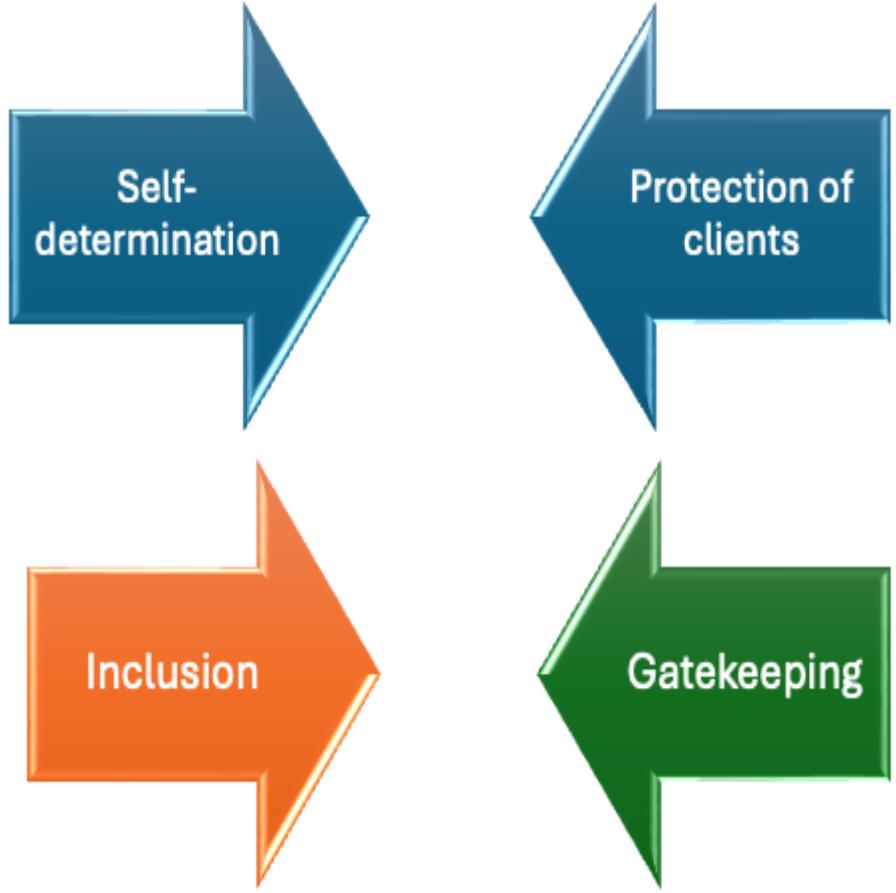
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
- EMOTIONAL



TEMPORARY-  
PERMANENT

# Relevant Ethical Standards and Tensions

- Dignity and worth of the person
- Cultural competence and humility
- Non-discrimination
- Professional competence
- Social Justice (inclusivity)



# Cultural Humility



Treating students as experts in their own lives, including how they can succeed in the classroom and in practice.



Being aware of our own assumptions, biases, and power



Modeling good practice

# Legal & Programmatic Frameworks

ADA

Reasonable accommodations

Essential functions

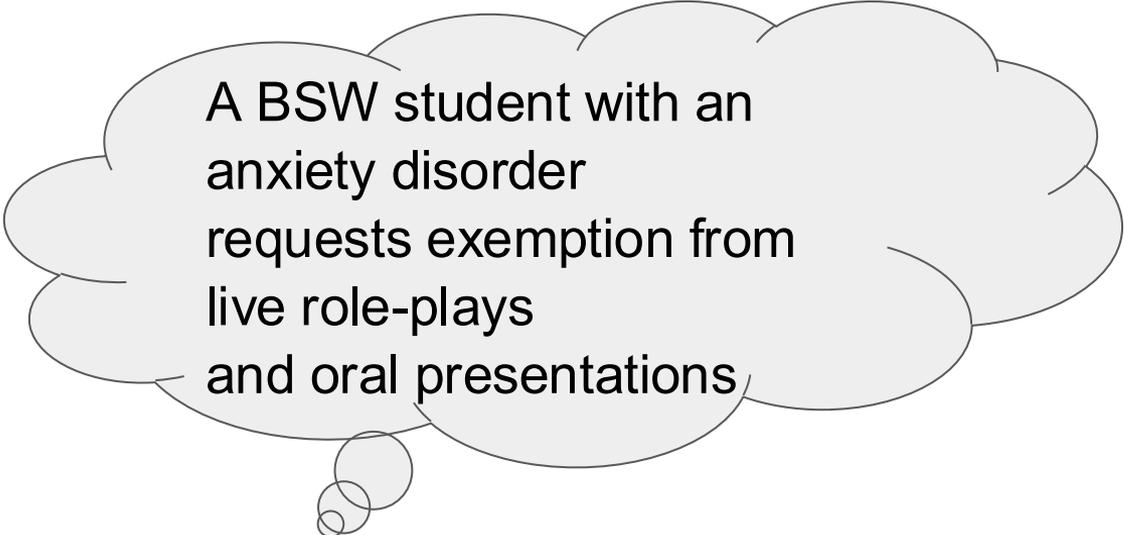
- Coursework
- Practicum

Undue hardship & safety

## Managing risks to...

- Clients
- Students
- Practicum Agencies
- BSW Programs
- Faculty

# Situation 1: Classroom Accommodations vs. Professional Expectations



A BSW student with an anxiety disorder requests exemption from live role-plays and oral presentations

## Situation 2: Accommodations and Client Safety

Gloria is a BSW student at a child protection agency for her placement

Agency is concerned that Gloria will be unsafe because she is Blind and may not know when there is danger entering a home

## **Situation 3: AI-Assisted Documentation as Accommodation**

- Hugo has an accommodation from SAS to record classes
- Hugo enters the recording into AI which creates notes for him
- What ethical issues does this situation raise?

## Situation 4: Verbal Processing

- Harmony, a BSW student, has challenges with verbal processing
- After every class, she meets with Professor X to discuss what she missed in the lecture that day
- With this accommodation, Harmony is passing the course
- Professor X is concerned that Harmony will not be able to work effectively with clients once she graduates

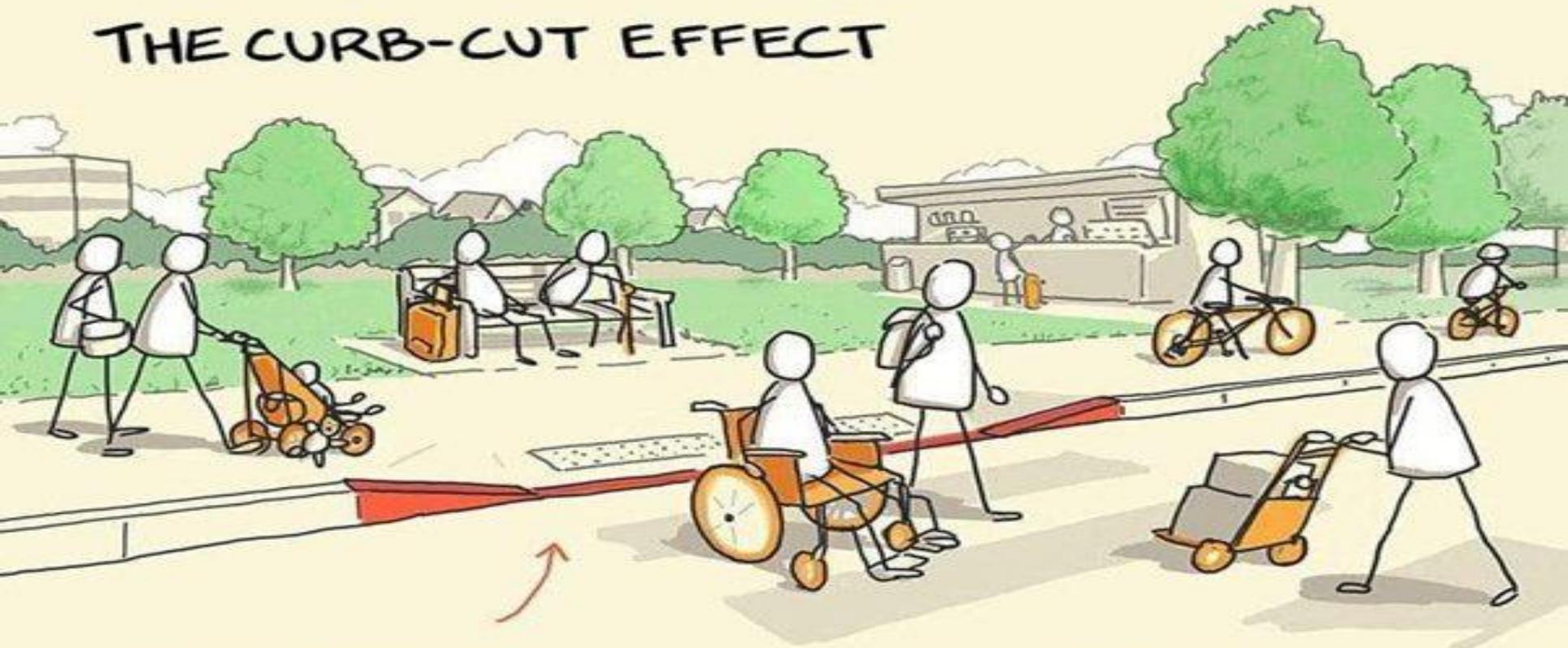
# **Beyond Individual Accommodations: Systems & Structures**

- What types of supports, policies, and practices, do you think you and your BSW program could use from the university?
- What has been useful to you?
- What problems or concerns have you encountered?

# Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Social Work Education

- Accessible presentation slides and online learning modules
- Multiple methods for communication and completion of assignments
- ADA-compliant buildings and rooms
- Incremental improvements (may not be perfect, but heading that way)
- Use of technology (accessibility tool on CANVAS)
- Tolerance for error

# THE CURB-CUT EFFECT



WHEN WE DESIGN  
FOR DISABILITIES

... WE MAKE THINGS  
BETTER FOR EVERYONE

# Assistive Technologies & Inclusive Tools

- Text-to-voice translation
- Voice-to-text translation
- Online exams (quiet, own pace)
- AI-assisted learning modules
- Other?

# Advocacy & Policy-Level Strategies

- Being proactive - having systems in place for all
- Advocating on student-by-student basis
- Securing funding for tech and other accommodations
- Practicum-oriented advocacy
- Ensuring policies are put into practice

# Closing Reflections and Takeaways

Be a good SW!

- Honest
- Respectful
- Accountable
- Inclusive
- Strengths-based
- Competence and continuing professional development

# Resources & References

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