[MUSIC] You are listening to Tell Me Your Story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level.

Hello everyone. This is Edgar Kley Filho from the HR department at HLS. My pronouns are he, him, his. Today we're talking with Carolyn Hubbard from the Accessibilities group in the HR department. Who will tell us about her life, how long she is in this HLS position and the work she does. Thank you for joining us, Carolyn and please tell us your story.

Oh, happy to join you. [LAUGHTER] Thank you for having me. My path to HLS wasn't so much a direct one. I actually was one of those people who went to college not really knowing what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. My undergrad is actually, I majored in film.

Really.

I majored in film and I minored in theater.

Wow, we worked for so long together. [LAUGHTER] I never knew about that. They shouldn't have explored that may even more. Now I'm curious, tell us more about that.

School for me was always relatively easy for the most part. I enjoyed school, but I didn't have a direction I wanted to go in in terms of college. My mom who is a teacher, always told me I was going to be a teacher. Of course, I avoided that at all costs [LAUGHTER] because you don't want your mom to be right when you're a teenager. I don't know, I was really into creativity, expressing myself but not in an outward way. I love to write stories and things like that. I don't know, I was pretty shy. Growing up I was pretty reserved in high school and when I got to college, I just decided I wanted to push myself a little bit outside of my comfort zone.

That was the reason to join filming?

Yeah. Film actually wasn't a major when I first started there, became one of my last year there. I tagged on an extra year and got the official film as major. But how I really got into the theater part was we had to take an elective or first year of undergrad. I chose it in an Introduction to Theater class and I absolutely loved it.

Any participating place at school?

We learned a little bit about all aspects of production, lighting, costume, set design, acting.

Did you ever thought about doing something bigger? I don't know. Everybody is sometimes when they go towards some filming, acting, singing, some people inside of their minds Oh, I would like to try this or maybe go to make a movie. Have you ever as a child maybe, I don't know?

I used to watch talk shows and pretend that it was the celebrity. [LAUGHTER]

That's awesome.

I had big aspirations. Now I loved all those ward shows and things like that. I was very into the idea of Hollywood and things like that. I found it very glamorous.

But then you're finished college or what happened?

I finished college [LAUGHTER] and I became a teacher.

That's my curiosity. All these aspirations to talk shows and awards, maybe picturing yourself someone, then you decide that, I'm done with that, I'm fine.

What happens is when you graduate with a degree in theater and film, you don't really have a lot of job [LAUGHTER] opportunities when you're in Rhode Island. What ended up happening was, I took a position at a local kindergarten as a teaching assistant at a private school and I loved it. It was an all girls school, so I worked in just in this little kindergarten classroom with all girls. I absolutely loved it. It was a one-year position.

Do you mind if I pause?

Of course.

I need to do your mom's parts right now. [LAUGHTER] I told so. I told you were going to become a teacher.

You know those moms they know some stuff. [LAUGHTER]

They notice something that sometimes you don't know. Don't pay attention that but so go on. Sorry.

Till it's a one-year position. After that, I looked for something along those lines and what I found was a position at a preschool in Providence that primarily assisted with children with autism diagnosis or behavioral challenges, as well as what they called pure role models. The children who had IEPs, the children who needed specialized educational assistance and things like that, that their own districts could not provide the resources for, they would go to this preschool. They would get one-on-one attention for academics. But then there are pure role models would model social behaviors so they will learn how to interact in small social groups and things like that. They were getting the individualized attention they needed for academics at their own pace. But they were also provided with an opportunity to interact with peers who are modeling how to play. [OVERLAPPING]

That's good and nice.

How does speak to each? Just things that didn't come naturally to them given their diagnoses and experience. It was a really incredible experience. I loved it very much and I did that for four years while I got my master's degree in education.

How did you feel the interaction once we were introducing these kids and their needs with the other kids? How was the interaction? How did the kids in the class in general welcome dam on how interacts with them? How they felt?

Well, the beautiful thing about children is [they don’t see anything] they don't see the differences a lot of the time.

They don't see anything. Amazing.

Of course, sometimes if a student was exhibiting difficult challenging behavior, they would pick up on that and things like that. But for the most part they were just excited to play with each other. I think it was great for all of us. You just watch these children not care about differences because they don't even realize it.

That's really beautiful. You stayed there for four years and?

Then I moved up to this area. I moved up to this area and I worked at a preschool program up here in Woburn at a private school for one year. Then I heard about an opportunity here at Harvard.

At Harvard. Then you applied?

I did.

You went and start working where?

I started working in the Dean of Students Office.

Dean of Students Office?

Yeah, I started part-time. I was sharing a position with another person who was going to school. They needed someone else to pick up the hours that he was.

Who was the person at the time?

Louis.

Oh Louis. Oh, interesting. You were helping Louis with the area that he was taking care off? Right. [NOISE] Primarily conversions for students who needed alternate format and they needed their texts in a certain format so they could read visually impaired for blind students.

Our colleague Laurie could tell you much more [LAUGHTER] beautifully about this.

Exactly.

Basically just making their materials accessible so that they had access to the textbooks in the format that worked for them. A little bit of the assistive technology programs like speech to text and things like that. That was the bulk of my job when I started.

How that changed from that position when you started just helping Louis with whatever he was doing in the conversion aspect of it? How did it change? What else did you start increasing your workspace?

To be honest, that wasn't an area that I wanted to focus on long-term. It worked out for me that the coordinator at the time found a new opportunity elsewhere and I applied for that position so I became the Accessibility Services coordinator. [OVERLAPPING]

That would be Stephanie?

Yeah, that was Stephanie. I started in September of 2015 and so by June of 2015, I had received the coordinator role. At that time it was a big shift to primarily interviewing students who are interested in registering, reviewing documentation, and then implementing those accommodations.

Then you were already with that position coordinator for the accessibility in general, right?

Yes.

Tell us a little bit in terms of accessibility. What is accessibility? What services it provides? I know that I'm asking you to many quizzes that you take [LAUGHTER] a while for you. But you're going to find a way there. Let's start with what accessibility does? What's the scope of the work that accessibility and then we start going from there?

Sure. Right now, we are primarily focused on ADA related accommodations. Students with disabilities they can be physical disability and visible disabilities. We have a lot of students who, if it's helpful, I can just give you some of the diagnoses that students who registered with our office have. Sometimes it's ADHD, dyslexia, chronic health impairments, mental health challenges, things like that. There's really a large scope of diagnoses that we work with and we have a variety of accommodations. One of the questions that we receive a lot from students who maybe didn't have accommodations in their past is, here's my diagnosis what can you give me for accommodations? That's not really how we approach it. Just because you have a certain diagnosis doesn't mean that a certain accommodation is going to work well for you. Students who have the same diagnosis might work better with different accommodations. Student might want to sit in the front of the class if they have ADHD to prevent distractions or [OVERLAPPING] things like that. Others may find that more distracting if they're in the front they may prefer to be towards the back or things like that. Some might need assistance with note-taking for one student that might look like a peer note-taker to supplement their own notes. Or it might be, I need to take my own notes for my learning style, but I can't do it with handwriting so can I have permission to use a laptop to take my class? No.

Not all classes are allowed to?

Right. Not all classes permit that. That's an accommodation. Just things like that or with exam accommodations.

Some students might need extra time to take their exams, others might do better if they just have stop clock breaks. So they don't necessarily need time in one-half, but they need a break every hour of testing or so just to step away and clear their mind and then resume their exam. It just depends. So what we do is we talk to the students about how they learn best. Maybe what experiences in the past they've noticed when they're in an academic environment or a testing environment, and then what does their provider recommend, because while we have a good sense of which accommodations can be helpful on specific things, the diagnostic part is really better left to a clinician and their recommendations so we really value the doctors and the provider and their recommendation along with the student narratives. It's not just a accessibility is going to decide which accommodations work for me, it's more of a collaborative effort based on a lot of different information from multiple perspectives.

That brings me, you are talking and my mind is going everywhere and it is interesting, because maybe people feel like accessibility, it's okay we have the Office of Accessibility that's going to provide accommodations, it depends on these students need. But if you're going to talk to your office and I say, oh, I have anxiety or I have ADHD, the way that you would describe me is not something that we know what the symptoms are or what the person go through, but it will depend a lot in each individual and how the personality is really so what works for one will not work for the other one.

Right.

You have a base on what you can afford or can provide.

Right.

But you still need, so probably if I'm a student and I contact your office, I'm going to say, oh, I have this need for my classes. You probably are going to say, okay, come here and let's talk about even though we know what it is and is not something, oh, no, I will give you this. So it's necessary to have that conversation that would it be right to say a triage in a sense or first contact in the conversation.

Yeah, and some students come with a long history of accommodations. They were diagnosed early. They've had it since they were in elementary school and all throughout up until they get here. Other students have a recent diagnosis and they've never applied for accommodations before and that's a challenge because not only do they not know what to ask for or what's available, but also the law school classroom is so different than most other academic environments that these students have been in, so it's really hard to predict what's going to work well for a student even if they've had a history of accommodations. This is a different style of learning here. So what's worked for them in the past might not work here in this classroom setting. So what we'd like to make clear is, even if we decide on accommodations before the semester starts, if you get to class and you're in class for a few weeks and it's not working, we can modify the accommodation.

And have another conversation.

Yeah, it's nothing has to be decided and implemented and they have to wait till next year to change it, it's always an ongoing conversation and can always be modified if things are not working.

When you say that because of the level of academic learning here at HLS, I would say in terms of law or as a graduate student, can you see or have you noticed a difference in terms of types of accommodation? If someone was diagnosed with anxiety, for example or ADHD from earlier years, what kind of accommodation they received in high school, in college, and if it increased as they went to a graduate school, for example, is that a common thing or have you noticed that. Is that something that happen?

Well, a lot of times what happens is students are informally accommodated throughout their academic history and what that means is they may have a diagnosis or not, but teachers just gave them the things that they knew the student would need to succeed without the students didn't necessarily have a formal evaluation and recommendations, but the teacher recognized this student knows the material, they just need a little bit of extra time so they would grant them extra time to complete assignments or tests.

Because they're allowed to.

Because the teacher had full power to make that determination. Or a lot of students don't think that they can perform well on exams and tests so they choose an undergraduate major that relies heavily on writing papers instead of testing so then they haven't been in a testing environment like this before, and when they realize, especially in one L year, my entire grade might be based off of one exam for each course they feel like that's a lot of pressure so those anxieties can be exacerbate.

They also come with their own expectation or projection of what HLS is what Harvard is and put too much pressure on themselves as well on top of the academic environment that they're going to face and whatever they need to deal with, right?

Yes.

So there is a combination of things that can make it. You mentioned ADA, what is it, and how it works or how do you describe ADA?

The Americans with Disability Act. It just ensures that students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities. Are there barriers that currently exist that are preventing students with disabilities to access their educational opportunities, and if so, can we provide an accommodation that will equal the playing field, will enable them to access their education in the same way that their peers do. It depends on what the student needs, what the diagnosis is, and things like that. Does the student who use a wheelchair, do they have access to all the classrooms spaces, and building spaces that they need to have a full educational experience, or are there barriers existing and how do we address that? Do we need to install lift? Are their ramps that needs to be installed? Can they open the entrances and exits and things like that independently, things like that.

The ADA have a set of instructions or information that would allow the students to receive an accommodation, but then you also needed to talk to let me see if I'm phrasing this properly because you have the ADA that grant a set of rules and instructions for your students to receive accommodations. But based on what you have just said, the school sometimes depends on each student will come to that year. Never dealt with some accommodation that was not requested before. Then the school also the administration needs to make some improvements in terms of like a ramp or a lift or even doors to be accessed depending on the student's needs to make that change as well. You have to follow ADA but also meet with administration in general to reach out to that.

Yeah. There's a lot of interaction here with physical space, we're in touch with facilities and things like that. If it's an accommodation related to an academic course that the faculty member needs to be aware of, there's a lot of conversations that happen there. Say a student is deaf and they need sign language interpreters present in class, we have to bring in those interpreters so that the student can access the information that's being presented in lectures and things like that. If they need captioning of media because there's media being shown in the classroom, we need to ensure that the media is captioned so that they can follow along with the rest of their peers and beginning the same information at the same time. Things like that.

That's really interesting. I think two questions in a way. What a students should do when they are preparing their requests for accommodation? What they shouldn't be considering, that would be the easiest not the easiest path, but would facilitate a lot in terms of reaching out to your officer to having that conversation, what students should be preparing before they go to talk to you, and on the other hand, what's the most challenging part to provide an accommodation? What's the most difficult that you face in terms of oh, you'd like to do this, but we need that?

Students can feel free. They don't need to have anything submitted or formally put together to come have the conversation about accommodations here. They can email us and schedule an appointment. They can drop by Houser and meet with us if we're available, things like that. But we do have on our website so the Accessibility Resources page provides general guidance as to which forms we tend to use as a starting point so there's a registration form and a release form that the student can fill out, and there's a statement from a medical provider forum that their provider can fill out. We also accept different documentation or additional documentation so like I said, if a student has a long history of accommodations and they have documents related to that that they think would be helpful for us to see, we're happy to review those. If they've had a full neuropsychological eval or a psychoeducational eval we can review those. Those provide a lot of information.

We really meet the student wherever they are in the process of registering for accommodations. Some students are easily able to obtain all their documentation or have a provider fill out a current form and submit it to our office. Others are having a tremendous amount of difficulty scheduling appointments with providers because of the pandemic and things like that, places are backed up, appointments aren't as easily available, so sometimes there's a challenge getting current documentation and I would like to just stress that should not be a deterrent for students to come ask about our accommodations process because we can work with them and help them navigate the process and hopefully point them in a direction where they can get what they need, and in turn, we can provide them with the accommodations that they are eligible for.

That's really interesting. But another thing that I keep thinking, this is all in the process in a regular conversations, when the students that starting to go to class and watch,

how much does it increase in terms of anxiety level for a student and also in terms of a work level for the accessibility office during the exam. I think that's a different ballpark there.

Yeah [LAUGHTER] Like I said, there are many students who've had accommodations in the past and like to get everything settled either before the semester starts or right at the beginning. Others tend to approach it differently, so maybe they don't think they'll need it here so they don't apply or register, and others just may not know what to do and what's available and things like that. Yes, a lot of times when the registrar's office will send out information closer to the exam period about exam processes and which offices to be in touch with for whichever reasons, that's when we'll get an influx of requests. We try to do the best that we can to accommodate those requests quickly as possible so that things are settled before the exam period, but it can be quite a busy 2-3 weeks. [OVERLAPPING]

Challenge you know it [OVERLAPPING]

Leading up to it.

Fascinating is that all this happens, and in general, the community doesn't even notice much.

No.

We don't see how much going around the communication between the accessibility, the faculty department with the registrar's office, with facilities to provide all sorts of things that needs to be managed in the background that so everything, the exams that I know that brings a lot of anxiety level for everyone.

Sure.

Not just the students who need, but also for everybody that's working because you have a scheduling, you have everything organized, but depends on the accommodation that can change everything based on the request so everything that was planned needs to be reorganized. I imagine that involves a lot of work.

The registrar's office is unbelievable. The team and the registrar's office and how they administer exams, they're absolutely phenomenal at what they do and they make our job so [LAUGHTER] much easier because they're just ready to go, and of course, there are hiccups along the way that we might present to them and they just help us figure it out and they're just there.

That is important of having a good relationship with these departments and everybody that's involved because that's how it makes everything flow well.

Exactly.

I remember seeing Megan Markov early in the morning [LAUGHTER] coming through all the hallways like putting signs on those, please be quiet because there is exams going on, about really early in the morning doing everything. It's really interesting how everything goes.

Her phone number was one of the first [LAUGHTER] that I memorized [LAUGHTER] when I started here.

I can only imagine. You also work for, there are request for because two important events that happen in the fall and then in the spring, the orientation and commencement, graduation time, there are a lot of requests for that. How does that work?

Orientation is a little bit different than commencement because for orientation, it's primarily students that we're dealing with accommodations for and commencement, it's guests. It's a lot of [LAUGHTER] different moving pieces, but orientation is, it tends to be students who have a history of accommodations and know what they need to know what they're looking for, and they like to get that set before they arrive here. That actually tends to happen middle of summer, beginning of August that they reach out, we do our best to anticipate what they will need and we get everything in place. Like I said, if things need to be tweaked once they've started classes or once they arrive on campus and are actually physically present, we can tweak those along the way. Orientation tends to go really smoothly. For the most part, students are excited to be here. They're excited to meet their classmates, and it's just a really fun time and it's nice to see everybody actually back on campus and get to interact with each other, so that's a lot of fun. Commencement, what if a student who's graduating does need accommodations, we will facilitate that process. But what the primary demographic there are the guests that are attending commencements. Do they need accessible seating? Do they need a wheelchair? Do they need interpreters? Things like that. It's a lot of 90-year-old grandparents are coming and things like that.

But also folks with mobility

Yeah. Mobility, so do they need parking spaces so that they don't have to go as far, things like that. Are there visual impairments, so they need a different format of the materials that are available in print? Things like that. We usually post a link probably beginning in March for attendees to register for accommodations if they're going to be visiting, and we do our best to take care of them as well.

To help.

Yeah.

Another question, once the students, well, the one that have a history of accommodations that is much easier to follow with all the documentation from high school all the way to HLS, but the ones that recently started notice that they need accommodations, they're diagnosed with anxiety or whatever is, ADHD, that they didn't notice before but notice now, the accommodations that they get from HLS documented in everything, will you help them with the bar exam and a NPRE or they were completely independent?

I always think it's a good idea if students are interested in applying for accommodations on the MPRE or the bar exam to start documenting their history as early as possible. If we're the first institution to formally provide accommodations, that's great. What we do is when they're ready to apply for those, we provide them with a letter just stating the accommodations they've received while they're here so that they can include those with their applications. The tricky thing is the bar exam requirements for each state are different, so we encourage students to look at the state that they're going to sit for the bar exam and look at their specific documentation guidelines so that there are no surprises when they're getting ready to apply and get all their documentation together well ahead of time so that they're not trying to obtain things at the same time they're trying to get their application materials together.

That's really interesting. The whole process in how much work is involved is really fascinating. What about you? How you handle all this, how you manage everything?

How do you feel about the whole process?

I really enjoy being part of the team that helps support students through challenging times. Even if students have a history of accommodations and they're used to going through a process like that, or things like that, It's always nice to make the connection when they start here, that we're here to support them and we're available to talk anytime, and it doesn't just have to be about accommodations. If they have questions and they don't know where to go, we're happy to just have that conversation with them and help them get to where they need to be. Sometimes it can be hard because not only do we deal with students with maybe a learning disability or a physical disability, sometimes they're going through really difficult points in their life that may or may not have to do with their disability. But we're working with them to provide supports in some way, whether it's just our team or we're working in conjunction with the Dean of Students Office or things like that. I really feel privileged to be a part of the team who helps them through those difficult times. It's very important to me to help students get to where they need to be. Like I said, I started in pre-school, so I've seen the educational journey of students with disabilities, and what it looks like when they're really young. It's really fun for me to see how successful these students can be. There at Harvard Law School, and despite all the challenges they've been through they've already made it to Harvard Law and that's an incredible achievement, and they're going to go on and continue to do incredible things. I feel really lucky to be able to see this side of these students. Oftentimes they don't realize how phenomenal they are and how much extra work that they've done.

They are so focused on their own. Achieving what they need to finalize, what they need to get to. Do you think that HLS Accessibility Services has a level of accommodations that other schools can learn from or you take from other schools or you search in other school what process that they have that would be beneficial here as well.

I think from the conversations I've had with colleagues, at conferences and things like that, the offerings are similar across the board. I have had students comment, ''Wow, that was easier than I thought'', when we go through- [OVERLAPPING]

Nice.

The process with them or,

''Thank you so much for explaining that while you've answered all my questions, you answered questions I didn't even know I had.''

That's great.

Those conversations are really rewarding, and that's the thing, like just hearing that we've made someone's process a little bit easier than they anticipated it was going to be, it means a lot.

Now I'm curious to tie this up. When you say that the girl that went to [LAUGHTER] learn filming in theater and drama, do you think that learning that process somehow helped you? First with the students, the children that you taught in the four years, five years that prior to HLS and even later with working with the environment that you have. Because even that being regardless of teaching, like your mom said, you ended up in an environment about teaching and providing service in that sense that involve the students. Did that somehow gave you base, gave you confidence or a process that you take advantage of too?

I think in a lot of different ways it did, so for example theater and film, putting yourself because this will blow your mind. [LAUGHTER] Not only did I study it, but I auditioned for a traveling improv group.

Wow.

I made it. I was one of six students who was in this and we would travel to the high schools and perform. We would write our own material and perform for high schools, and that was a huge push [LAUGHTER] out of my comfort zone. But that's what I mean about understanding what these students are coming to me. It's not a comfortable situation for a lot of them. It's not something they talk about with each other so there are very few people that they disclose this information to, so they're out of their comfort zone, and I like to be the person who can welcome them in and hopefully make them feel safe and secure and comfortable and all that stuff. And with the educational piece that mom of mine, she's just [LAUGHTER]

She got it. She knew what was coming.

From the educational perspective as a learner up until junior high, I was really good at academics. It came easily to me and then junior high in high school, math and sciences, all that stuff became really difficult for me and I just didn't get it, just didn't click. I don't know if it was the way we were taught it or or whatever, but I felt suddenly there was something wrong with me and I had difficulties and struggles. I remember what that feels like. I imagine on some level students running into that same feeling when they're not learning in the same way that their peers are able to. It can be really frustrating and challenging to figure out.

Going through the needs that they already have, and then have to ask for help, and feel like it's not being understood or not having the response that they expected.

I think until I got my degree in education, I didn't realize how much of academics isn't necessarily that certain students just don't get certain material, it's they just learn it in a different way.

Yes. Everyone.

That's what really interests me about education and learning, disabilities and things like that. Is everyone can learn something, you just have to find the right way to teach it, and sometimes the accommodations can really assist with that process so I think it all ties in loosely together. [OVERLAPPING].

It helps. One thing that I can say, I think empathy is one of the biggest things that you always talk about and is necessary in any environment. But in the work that we do here at HLS, I think, is even more important because you are receiving these kids from all over the country and then internationally as well, we need to have some connection with them to understand. I on my end, whatever I have noticed what you, Sasha, Laurie, and Jon, the way that you talk to students, the way that you connect with them, the way that you listen to them. I think it is an amazing job. I think any student coming to talk to any of you feels that they are being heard, that you all care that much and something is going to be done. They are going to find a way to minimize that stress level that they feel, the projection, the expectation that they have in terms of HLS, and then having a group of people that can understand that and provide some relief or sense of security. It is an immense help, and the four of you working with them, do that. I really appreciate to witness that and see what you do. So we're getting to the end of our conversation, which I loved very much. Thank you, Carolyn for participating too, accepting to come. Now that I know I should even ask an autograph because [LAUGHTER] now that I know that you have been.

I'm very well accomplished. [MUSIC].

Thank you very much for being with us. That was lovely.

Thank you for having me.

For everybody until our next episode and talk to someone in HLS, that would be fantastic as well. Thank you. [MUSIC]